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Prologue

The lobby of the QL headquarters was filled with reporters, cameramen, and their entourage, which usually comprised an ad hoc press conference. A makeshift podium had been set up near the center of the room, and microphones from the attending news outlets vied for proximity to the dignified gentleman as he approached to speak.

“Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Gordon Jonson, and I am the CEO of Quality Life. I’d like to read a prepared statement after which I’ll be happy to answer your questions.

Over the last 24 hours, accusations have been made suggesting that Quality Life is involved in brainwashing and cult-like behavior. I am here to categorically deny those accusations. By definition, brainwashing involves forcible indoctrination, often against the will of the subject. All our programs are completely voluntary, and we have never forced anyone to do anything. These charges are completely fabricated, and we will not be drawn into a manufactured conflict. I apologize for having to waste your valuable time with such an insignificant issue, but I felt it necessary to respond to your questions and hopefully put this to rest quickly.”

Pointing to a local reporter, Gordon said, “Mr. Jackson?”

“Thank you, Sir. So why would these people accuse you of brainwashing if there is no evidence to prove it?” the reporter asked.

“I have no idea, and I’m not going to speculate,” Gordon responded and quickly pointed at another reporter.

“Have any of your clients filed charges or made complaints to your staff?” asked the reporter.

“Not to my knowledge,” Gordon answered tersely.

A TV anchor jumped in. “The published article claims you are teaching heresy and causing people to abandon their churches. How do you respond?”

“If by heresy they mean anything contrary to their traditional beliefs, then I would suggest they might be correct. However, even church history will clearly show that diversity of beliefs has been around since the days of Jesus. Saying something is heretical is simply name-calling and identifying differences without offering any specifics. And the label heretic is simply a derogatory attempt to diminish an opposing viewpoint. We will ignore it,” Gordon reacted.

Watching this from the sidelines, Doug was having second thoughts about his last few days visiting Quality Life headquarters. He had stumbled on this new operation quite by accident after investigating who had taken over the building where he used to work. And he was actually very impressed with what he had learned so far and was looking forward to pursuing it further.

That was until this morning when all this happened. Now he wasn't sure, but he hoped this unexpected wrinkle wouldn't spoil the new outlook he had on his life and his faith. It would really be a shame if this turned out to be a scam and he ended up back where he started, questioning most of what he had been taught all his life and what had led to his current crisis of frustration with anything related to church or faith.

Doug had attended church most of his life and considered himself a decent person, but he never seemed able to live up to the standards set by the pastors he had encountered. They all talked about defeating sin and surrendering to God, and made it sound like that was the norm for people of faith. And while on the outside his life seemed to meet that standard, on the inside he knew better. He was tired of being constantly reminded that he didn't measure up, and the proposed solutions just didn't seem to work for him. His inability to live up to such high expectations led him to the frustrating conclusion that he would never be what God supposedly demanded of him. That is, until he was exposed to the Quality Life philosophy, which actually gave him some hope that it was possible. Now he was uncertain. "Please God," he thought, "don't let this be another spiritual dead end."

CHAPTER 3

The Next Step- Wednesday

Doug found himself hurrying through his breakfast, anxious to get back to QL and his meeting. Lauren sat across from him and suddenly blurted out, “Doug, who is Leah?”

He almost choked on his food. Quickly swallowing his mouthful and wiping his lips with a napkin, he looked up at the quizzical look on her face. He realized he had never mentioned Leah by name to Lauren in his descriptions of the meetings at QL, so the question really caught him off guard.

“Leah? Why do you ask?” he responded, half curious and half defensive.

“Because last night you were tossing and turning more than usual, and you kept calling for Leah in your sleep!”

Now totally embarrassed, Doug looked directly at Lauren and said very deliberately, “Leah is one of the people I have been meeting with at QL. She and a guy

named Mark have been explaining all about their company. Actually, these discussions have generated a lot of questions in my mind, and I guess I was still looking for answers, and she's the one who has been providing them! I'm sorry, my Dear, if I made you think something funny was going on. I can assure you this is nothing like that. In fact, if you're interested, I'd love for you to come with me and meet her and see what QL is all about."

Lauren looked back at him and spoke reassuringly, "No, that won't be necessary, and I'm sorry if I doubted you. It was just so unusual for you, and I was curious, that's all. Now finish your breakfast, or you'll be late for your meeting." She got up and began taking dishes to the sink.

Doug took a final sip of his coffee, got up, and came over to give her a hug. "You're the best, Lauren, and I love you. I should be back by noon. See you then," as he kissed her and headed for the car.

As he drove, he thought he should have given Lauren more information about his meetings, but he wasn't completely clear on everything and wasn't sure he could articulate everything he had heard. Maybe today would put all the pieces together for him so he could better explain it to Lauren.

Entering the revolving door was becoming a habit for him again, and he saw Mark and Leah already at the coffee bar. They stood as he approached and greeted him warmly.

“So, what’s on the agenda for today?” he asked.

Leah responded first. “Doug, we think we’d like to start in my office area so we can give you a visual of what we have in mind, and maybe then we can go for another walk in the garden and talk some more. How does that sound?”

“Works for me,” Doug replied. “You guys know what you’re doing, so lead the way.”

Mark motioned to the small hallway, and they made their way into the seating area outside Leah’s office. She and Mark took seats across from Doug, and she began her presentation.

“So by way of review, we agree that contemporary church life doesn’t seem to be getting the job done in terms of providing people with effective strategies that result in quality of life. They talk a lot about what not to do, divide people into groups and isolate them from those with a different point of view, use a lot of guilt and condemnation to enforce behavioral control, and pretty much leave you on your own to figure out how to make positive change happen. Or, worse yet, give you strategies that are ineffective and lead to frustration. Good so far?” she asked.

“Agree,” said Doug.

“So for us here at QL, we think that’s not only unfortunate but unnecessary. We believe that God intended better than that, and we want to help people experience the kind of real life that Jesus promised. The

question is- how can that happen, right? So here's where a little visual will hopefully shed some light on it," offered Leah.

"Let me illustrate what I mean by that," she continued. "We believe that God created us in His image and as such, we share the concept of a trinity. Meaning that we are a body, a soul, and a spirit. And here's what that looks like."

Pressing a button on the arm of her chair, a holographic image appeared in the space between her and Doug, hovering about eye level as they remained seated. Doug was caught off guard by the technology.

Sensing his surprise, she offered, "It's perfectly harmless, Doug, just a hologram to give a visible representation of what we're talking about." He nodded in agreement.

"So here's what we're looking at," she continued, pointing to the image between them. "You see here three concentric circles that form what looks like a target with a bullseye. The outer circle represents your body, the next circle represents your spirit, and the third center circle represents your soul."

With her finger, Leah enlarged the middle circle and continued, "Within the soul, you see three smaller circles. They represent the essence of your identity- your heart, your mind, and your will. Your heart is your emotions; your mind is your intellect; and your will is your decision-making ability or your choices. That's how we believe we are created. Good so far?" she asked.

Leah jumped back in. “You could not be more accurate, Doug, and that is why we are so passionate about our mission. Because it is that very new spirit that makes possible the quality of life we have been talking about, and very few people understand it. It seems organized religion is too preoccupied with convincing people that they have to work hard to overcome their faults when all of that was settled a long time ago. And once you realize that there isn’t anything separating you from God and that He’s not mad at you and He’s not micromanaging your life, looking for every defect He can identify and punish, it changes your view of your relationship to Him and the possibility of a meaningful future.”

“Are you serious?” Doug responded. “Are you telling me that all the guilt and condemnation that is preached and all the behavioral intimidation that churches inflict is totally off base and unnecessary?”

“Doug, that’s the unfortunate message that has characterized most religions, particularly Christianity, for centuries, and we’re telling you that God has designed a better way for us to experience quality life now,” Mark responded.

As they approached the next set of benches, Doug said, “I think I’d better sit down. This is a bit overwhelming.”

As they took their seats, Leah conceded, “I’m sorry if we’ve made this difficult for you, Doug. It’s just that when you’ve experienced the freedom and excitement of a life of true significance and ultimate love, it’s hard to keep it to yourself.”

“Oh no, it’s not that you’ve made it hard,” Doug continued. “It’s just that it sounds almost too good to be true when you’ve been conditioned to believe that you have to earn God’s favor by the way you live your life.”

“Understood,” added Mark. “And believe me, we get it. We’ve been where you are, and we know how exciting this can sound, as well as a little hard to believe. For me personally, I fought an unnecessary battle for years because I was taught that I remained a flawed sinner, no matter how good I became. And that distorted my identity and kept me in perpetual bondage.

Once I got past the first hurdle of believing in a different quality of life, things really began to change. I know that sounds radically different from what is generally understood, and it may sound counterintuitive, but real life comes from expressing that new freedom in the context of serving your fellow man rather than earning God’s favor. Once you accept your new identity and realize exactly who you are and the freedom God has given you, it changes your view of people and motivates you to express God’s love to them, just like He expressed it to you. It is literally a whole new perspective of life, a true quality of life.”

Doug just sat there shaking his head. “This is amazing. But as you probably expect, I have more questions.”

“Fire away,” said Mark.

“OK, so let’s see if I’ve got this right,” replied Doug. “All accounts with God are settled, and He places His Spirit

DEDICATION

To Kristen-Holmes Hall- Your creative advice and helpful feedback made this book come to life. I especially love the Quality Life sign you crocheted for me. You are a treasured gift to our family.

Love,
Grandpa



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