

THE SECRET BATTLE OF IDEAS ABOUT GOD

OVERCOMING THE OUTBREAK
OF FIVE FATAL WORLDVIEWS

DR. JEFF MYERS

David©Cook®
transforming lives together

© 2017 Summit Ministries. Published by David C Cook. All rights reserved.
This copy has not been fully copyedited, proofed, or formatted, and is for review purposes only.

THE SECRET BATTLE OF IDEAS ABOUT GOD

Published by David C Cook
4050 Lee Vance Drive
Colorado Springs, CO 80918 U.S.A.

David C Cook U.K., Kingsway Communications
Eastbourne, East Sussex BN23 6NT, England

The graphic circle C logo is a registered trademark of David C Cook.

All rights reserved. Except for brief excerpts for review purposes,
no part of this book may be reproduced or used in any form
without written permission from the publisher.

The website addresses recommended throughout this book are offered as a
resource to you. These websites are not intended in any way to be or imply an
endorsement on the part of David C Cook, nor do we vouch for their content.

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the ESV®
Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001
by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by
permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken
from the New American Standard Bible®, copyright © 1960, 1995 by The
Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org); NLT are
taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996,
2007 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House
Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

LCCN 2017931378
ISBN 978-1-4347-0965-3
eISBN 978-0-7814-1412-8

© 2017 Summit Ministries

The Team: Tim Peterson, Ron Lee, Cara Iverson,
Abby DeBenedittis, Susan Murdock
Cover Design: Jon Middel
Cover Photo: Getty Images

Printed in the United States of America
First Edition 2017

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

051517

CHAPTER 1

INVISIBLE WARFARE

The Hidden Forces That Shape Our Lives

Deanna Williamson has said she never heard the explosion. She just saw paper floating through the air outside, like a ticker-tape parade.

A stockbroker from California, Deanna was in Manhattan attending a training conference for employees of the investment firm Morgan Stanley. As attendees gathered in the south tower of the World Trade Center, in a conference room on the sixty-first floor, Deanna slipped out to get a cup of coffee. That's when green paper fluttering down outside a window caught her attention.

Soon Deanna and her coworkers saw desks falling from upper stories of the other high-rise and balls of fire erupting. Later they saw people plummeting to their deaths from the north tower.

This isn't happening.

Several minutes passed as the Morgan Stanley employees stared in disbelief. At last, security guards rushed down the hallway and broke the spell, directing the group to the nearest exit. They

descended flight after flight of stairs. Deanna's anxiety grew when she started smelling smoke. *Is our building on fire too? Will we all die of suffocation before we reach the street?*

They were sixty floors from safety. With thousands of people being evacuated from the 110-story tower, progress was painfully slow. It was a New York pedestrian traffic jam on a relatively narrow stairwell. Shuffle. Wait. Repeat.

Deanna's thoughts turned to her husband, who just then was halfway around the world in Australia. She found herself longing for the family they hoped to have. And now it might never happen.

Suddenly the building lurched hard. It felt as though they were being shaken by a major earthquake, which Deanna had experienced in California. That's when she began talking to God.

God, I want to thank you ...

The lights went out, emergency lights went on, and searing heat engulfed the stairwell.

... that this is happening to me and not to my family, my parents, my husband.

As she prayed, her attention was drawn to a woman sitting on the stairs, crying. "I'm a single mom. I'll never see my baby again."

"It's okay," Deanna said, taking the woman's hand and pulling her up. "Let's get out of here."

As they descended seemingly endless flights of stairs, word came that their building had been hit by a jet. Unknowingly, the workers fleeing for their lives had become frontline troops in a secret battle. A catastrophic idea had been released in the world, and now it was spreading, virus-like, claiming victims without remorse.

This was the end, Deanna sensed. Then she realized she had left her purse—along with her ID card—in the conference room. *When they find my body, she realized, the searchers won't know who I am.*

Rick Rescorla, Morgan Stanley's head of security, *had* heard the first explosion that came from the north tower. He knew instinctively it was the opening salvo of a new kind of war. A decorated military hero, Rick had spent the past few years studying ideas that were multiplying while remaining largely hidden. In many regions of the world, there was growing resentment toward the United States, he sensed, but Americans for the most part were oblivious to the danger.

Having heard the blast from the adjacent tower, Rick knew he needed to act. He picked up the phone and called the Port Authority office in Midtown Manhattan. He was told to stay calm and keep people in their offices. It's safer in the building, the official said. Slamming down the receiver, Rick pulled out his cell phone and dialed his best friend, Dan Hill, a war veteran like himself.

"You watching TV?"

"Yes," Dan said, instantly connecting the dots. *Rick was at the World Trade Center.*

Exploding in colorful language, Rick rumbled, "They told me not to evacuate. They said it's just Building One. I told them I'm getting my people out of here."¹

Rick jabbed the "End" button and grabbed two pieces of equipment. A photo taken that day shows Rick as a heavyset man

holding a bullhorn in one hand and a walkie-talkie in the other, directing the evacuation of Morgan Stanley's World Trade Center employees.

The ideas that had shaped Rick's life came together that day. He became a hero, saving thousands of lives. The people he saved said he was singing the whole time. And in that seemingly random fact—that a hero acted quickly and with great foresight, while singing—we find a clue to how to win the battle that rages around us.

WE'RE IN A SECRET BATTLE

We live in a time of war. There are no soldiers in this battle. There are no landing craft, no bombers flying in formation, no artillery emplacements. Yet attacks occur every minute of every day.

The battle we're in is a battle of ideas. Ideas are thoughts and suggestions about what we ought to do. Our ideas largely determine our understanding of life's meaning and guide us in the way we live. Everyone forms ideas about questions such as:

- **Am I loved?** If I were to disappear, would anyone miss me?
- **Why do I hurt?** Bad things have happened to me. Can I overcome them and find joy?
- **Does my life have meaning?** Is it possible for me to find direction in life?
- **Why can't we just get along?** What will it take for us to stop fighting and find harmony?

- **Is there any hope for the world?** So many things seem to be going wrong. Are we doomed?

The set of ideas that we form in answer to these questions is called a worldview. A worldview monitors the ideas we are exposed to and isolates the ones that appear to be destructive. But it's possible to have a worldview that is porous, letting through some of the most damaging ideas. Or a worldview might be skewed in some way, welcoming ideas bent on doing us harm.

The battle of ideas never lets up, so how can we remain standing against such an onslaught? We need a healthy worldview that accurately identifies the ideas that come at us from every direction. We catch ideas from church, from culture, from family, and from friends. Billboards, speeches, songs, video clips, memes, pictures, Facebook posts, and lines from movie dialogue all present us with fragments of ideas that assemble themselves in our minds. If we are to live whole, satisfying lives, we need to do two things. First, we have to catch good ideas, and second, we have to avoid catching bad ones.

Unfortunately, bad ideas are easy to catch because they share a distinguishing characteristic with one of the deadliest things in the physical world.

BAD IDEAS ARE LIKE VIRUSES

The battles we face are more like germ warfare than like military warfare. That's because bad ideas are like viruses. A virus is genetic

material coated by protein. Genetic material is common and ordinarily not harmful. Proteins are necessary for the body to do its work. Separately they're harmless. When combined, however, they can be deadly.

Bad ideas can multiply out of control, like the spread of a virus that becomes a pandemic. And even though idea viruses cause mass destruction, the battle we face is a secret battle because it's hard to accurately identify bad ideas until after they have struck.²

Idea viruses hover around us like secret agents waiting to infiltrate. Is there anything we can do to prevent them from sickening our souls and ruining our lives? I believe there is. That's what *The Secret Battle of Ideas* is about. We'll learn how to identify the bad ideas that target us. We'll learn how to immunize ourselves with good ideas that assure us we are loved, enable us to be patient in suffering, help us find our callings, bring us into peaceful community with others, and replace despair with hope.

Yes, bad ideas are highly contagious. But they can be defeated if we keep one simple thing in mind.

HOW BAD IDEAS ARE DEFEATED

The key to achieving victory in the battle of ideas is to develop a worldview we can affirm and embrace every day until it becomes a habit. As Aristotle said, habit is what brings virtue to completion.³ We become the thoughts we habitually have chiseled into the granite of daily practice.

This is how Rick Rescorla became a hero. He cultivated a worldview of standing strong and never leaving anyone behind. “I don’t believe in being a soft man,” he said. “I believe in being a tough guy.”⁴ This single idea formed a pattern that he consciously followed, whether as a unit commander in the Vietnam War or as head of security for a major investment firm.

Being tough is a virtue where Rick grew up in Cornwall, England, a rural county that, on a map, looks like a dragon’s tail jutting out into the Atlantic. Throngs of tourists visit the area each summer, and a few hardy ones straggle in to watch the winter waves batter the coast. But most Cornish people are there to work and work hard. They’re quarry workers, fishermen, and farmers—tough people who refuse to give in to difficulty.

Cornwallians express their worldview through songs such as this historic battle hymn:

Men of Cornwall, stop your dreaming;
Can’t you see their spearpoints gleaming?
See their warriors’ pennants streaming
To this battlefield.

Men of Cornwall, stand ye steady;
It cannot be ever said ye
For the battle were not ready;
Stand and never yield!⁵

Much of the Cornwallian worldview is wrapped up in this hymn. Bad people exist: stop pretending they don't. Get ready and never give in. Through song, Cornwallians express what is true about the world and give one another courage to face it.

Rick loved to sing songs such as this one. Often he would sneak a beer to a lonely blind resident at a nursing home, wrapping his arm around the frail man and belting out Cornish songs until tears streamed down both their faces. Rick's worldview told him that tough guys don't leave anyone behind.

Rick's valor saved many lives in Vietnam. When death seemed certain at Ia Drang, a horrifying military engagement later recounted in the book *We Were Soldiers Once ... and Young*,⁶ Rick sang battle hymns to his fellow warriors as they repulsed multiple enemy attacks. Later, those men described Rick as a hero, a label he rejected. "The real heroes are dead," he said simply.⁷ Rick's worldview said that tough guys just do what's right; they don't need credit.

But although Rick did not consider himself a hero, he never stopped protecting those under his care. Ultimately, he rose to become vice president of security for Morgan Stanley. His office was on the forty-fourth floor of the south tower of the World Trade Center. Rick implemented strict safety procedures after the company refused his recommendation to relocate its headquarters. He conducted surprise evacuation drills, timing them with a stopwatch and confronting senior executives who griped about the interruptions.

So when Mohamed Atta steered a hijacked 767 into the ninety-third to ninety-ninth floors of the neighboring tower on September 11, 2001, the Morgan Stanley employees knew what to do. Floor wardens organized their areas. Stronger employees assisted the disabled. As they moved down a dark and smoky stairwell, Rick serenaded them, just as he had done to his troops in Vietnam. “Men of Cornwall, stand ye steady,” he sang through his bullhorn. “Stand and never yield!”

The events of 9/11 made Rick a hero. All but six of Morgan Stanley’s nearly twenty-seven hundred employees based in the World Trade Center complex survived, including Deanna Williamson. And though she doesn’t know for certain, Deanna believes that the woman she assisted in descending the stairway also made it.

Once his evacuees were safe, Rick called his wife, Susan. “If something should happen to me, I want you to know I’ve never been happier. You made my life.”⁸ Those were the final words he spoke to her. Rick was last seen in the tower’s stairwell at the tenth floor, heading back *up* to rescue more people. A few minutes after he was spotted climbing the stairs, the skyscraper collapsed. Rick’s body was never recovered.

Journalist Michael Grunwald described Rick’s death as “one of those inspirational hero-tales that have sprouted like wildflowers from the Twin Towers rubble.”⁹ But this telling misses a crucial part of the story. Rick’s heroism was a lifetime in the making. The ideas he had cultivated his whole life had formed into habit. Lifesaving action became a reflex.

Like Rick, we can develop a worldview that gives us something to live by—and something to live for. A worldview also helps us ward off bad ideas that make us miserable. It functions like an immune system for ideas. This is important because bad viruses can't be conquered with good viruses. There is no "good" cold that combats the virus that causes a bad cold. Preachers and politicians and philosophers can't live out our worldviews for us. It's time for each of us to step up.

FIVE DECLARATIONS OF FREEDOM IN THE SECRET BATTLE OF IDEAS ABOUT GOD

Through decades of military service and security work, Rick had learned to spot threats. When the first jet struck the north tower, many at first assumed it was the tragic result of mechanical or navigational failure. But Rick knew better. His worldview was straightforward. America's enemies wanted to destroy the World Trade Center, and now they had done it. This was the new normal. As a tough guy, Rick was determined to help as many people as possible survive the attack.

My life revolves around boosting the power of good ideas and blunting the effects of bad ones. Through a program called the Summit, I help prepare people of all ages to strengthen their Christian worldview and become leaders. Once my students tune in to the world of ideas, they can see the way bad ideas fill their hearts and minds with wrong answers to life's biggest questions. In the end, most of them learn to trust what God has revealed

about himself, the world, and humanity. I have seen it change thousands of lives.

As a graduate of the Summit myself, and now as its CEO, I have lived in the world of ideas, receiving bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees from leading universities. In decades of reading, studying, and interacting with others, some of the ideas to which I have been exposed are true. Some are counterfeit. I have studied secularism, Marxism, postmodernism, new spirituality, and Islam, among other worldviews. I learned that some idea viruses are crafted in primitive training camps. Others are assembled on prestigious college campuses, in distinguished-looking legislative chambers, in libraries, or even in buildings covered with religious symbols.

Knowing a little about how viruses work has helped me prepare students to develop a simple set of good ideas based on what Jesus taught and deftly counter the attacks of bad ideas. Long experience shows me that our deepest heart questions revolve around love, hurt, meaning, peace, and hope. Here's a simple set of "declarations of freedom"—five truths that release us from the grip of idea viruses that intend to do us harm. These declarations help us get a proper view *of* the world and *for* the world and resist the bad ideas trying to penetrate our defenses:

- **I am loved.** Deep, unconditional love exists, and I can have it.
- **My suffering will be overcome.** Hurt will not win. Indeed, it already has lost.

- **I have an incredible calling.** My life has meaning. I bear God's image.
- **I am meant for community.** I can overcome conflict and live at peace with those around me.
- **There is hope for the world.** I am not doomed. What is right and just and true will win.

In *The Secret Battle of Ideas*, we'll see that these declarations of freedom are not just positive self-talk. They have deep roots in the teachings of Jesus and his culture. Nor are they theological platitudes. They're very practical and livable. That's the good news.

But the bad news is that these declarations are under attack. Bad ideas flood our minds and hearts every day, trying to convince us that love isn't real, that suffering is meaningless, that our lives have no purpose, that we are all alone, and that despair is our lot. Bad ideas are on the attack. We need a strong worldview to keep them at bay.

Keeping viruses at bay is what researchers do at places such as the United States Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID; pronounced u-SAM-rid) at Fort Detrick, near Frederick, Maryland. It was there on November 17, 1989, that two researchers working in a biohazard lab peered into a microscope. They stared at what could have been the worst disaster to ever land on American soil.

Curious about why so many monkeys had been dying at a nearby medical-research facility, the researchers had ground up

one of the deceased primates' spleens and let it sit over the week. This Friday before Thanksgiving, they couldn't resist coming in for a look before their break.

They instantly regretted their choice.

©
Copyrighted Material

©
Copyrighted Material

NOTES

CHAPTER 1: INVISIBLE WARFARE

1. Michael Grunwald, "A Tower of Courage," *Washington Post*, October 28, 2001, www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/2001/10/28/a-tower-of-courage/c53e8244-3754-440f-84f8-51f841aff6c8/?utm_term=.87a8eb84810a.
2. Atheist author Richard Dawkins has written extensively about what he calls "mind viruses," a metaphor that is closely related to his concept of the meme, a word he coined in his book *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976, 2016). For more on these concepts, see Mark Jordan, "What's in a Meme?," Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason & Science, February 4, 2014, <https://richarddawkins.net/2014/02/whats-in-a-meme/>.
3. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2014), 21.
4. Rick Rescorla, "Lt. Rick Rescorla, B Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Calvary Air Mobile," YouTube video, 8:02, "The Voice of the Prophet" interview on July 28, 1998, posted by "CVL23USSPRINCETON," November 20, 2011, www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGXjgMLQVs.
5. James B. Stewart, "The Real Heroes Are Dead: A Love Story," *New Yorker*, February 11, 2002, www.newyorker.com/magazine/2002/02/11/the-real-heroes-are-dead.
6. H. G. Moore and Joseph L. Galloway, *We Were Soldiers Once ... and Young: We Were Soldiers Once ... and Young: Ia Drang—The Battle That Changed the War in Vietnam* (New York: Presidio, 2004), 201.
7. Stewart, "Real Heroes."
8. Stewart, "Real Heroes."
9. Grunwald, "Tower of Courage"