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PREFACE

The apostle Paul said that in the last days “perilous times shall come” (2 Timothy 3:1). I believe we are living in those perilous—dangerous—days. These are days of great uncertainty. We face uncertainty in the financial realms of our country. Corporate scandal and increased government programs are costly to everyone. We face uncertainty in the job and financial markets. We face concerns about terrorism and its staggering global economic and military implications.

These are days of social unrest. The homosexual agenda is making inroads into the fabric of our society, and we still face much racial unrest. The family unit continues to disintegrate. We witness a continuing moral decline with a tidal wave of pornography sweeping away the strength of our nation’s men and women—both young and old. Divorce, extramarital affairs, premarital affairs, and unmarried couples living together are commonplace. Entertainment is increasingly laced with sensuality, violence, and materialism.

How are people dealing with these “perilous times?” Some are turning to suicide. Others are turning to alcohol, illegal drugs, and psychiatric medications. Others lash out in road rage, drive-by shootings, and killing sprees. Still others distract themselves with a constant bombardment of entertainment, sports, and other activities. We are a culture of people with noisy souls. This book is designed to help you face that noise and become useful to Christ as light and salt in this unstable world, and thereby glorify our great God (Matthew 5:16).

LOOKING AHEAD

This book is divided into two parts.

“Part One—The Way Down” describes how our souls become noisy in the first place.

“Part Two—The Way Back” outlines the major truths about our great God and His gospel, which must be a part of a believer’s thinking processes to reverse the noise in our souls.

GOD IS MORE THAN ENOUGH

This book you are reading is an overview of the foundational truths that form the core of the first eleven and the final sessions of *Quieting a Noisy Soul Counseling Program*. This multimedia program contains video and audio sessions of the material in this book along with twelve sessions not covered here. *Quieting a Noisy Soul* also features a study guide, *Taking Time to Quiet Your Soul*, and a meditation/relaxation CD that is of special help to those struggling with anxiety, depression, and other destructive issues. For a full description of the counseling program, see pages 132–33 or go to www.QuietingaNoisySoul.com.

God Is More than Enough can serve as a ready review and reference tool for your own growth in Christ and for your ministry to others. It is useful as an introductory text to biblical counseling as well. Those using this book in small groups or Sunday school programs will find the Take Time to Reflect section at the end of each chapter helpful to stimulate application and group discussion.

Consider this book a roadmap of how to quiet your soul. The twenty-four-week personal counseling program actually takes you on the journey. With this understanding behind us, we can spread out the roadmap and look at the highways we need to travel.

Chapter One

NOTICING THE NOISE IN YOUR SOUL

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy [tailor-made], and my burden is light. (Matthew 11:28–30)

Have you ever stood on the bank of a slow moving river or a still pond and thrown a rock into its tranquil surface? If you have, you saw concentric circles of waves move away from the place where the stone entered the water. Noise in the physical realm consists of similar waves though they are invisible.

Noise in the soul, however, consists of *thoughts*. If we are going to quiet the noise in our souls, we will have to examine our thoughts. Most people can immediately tell you how they *feel* about something, but they are not very aware of their thoughts. If we are going to quiet the noise in our souls, *we will have to track our thinking not our feelings*, and then we must evaluate those thoughts against the Word of God. Where our thoughts are wrong, we must repent of them and replace them with thoughts that honor God. We must know, therefore, what the wrong kind of thoughts look like and face them biblically.

WHAT DOES NOISE IN THE SOUL SOUND LIKE?

Jesus gave us some clues about what noise in the soul sounds like in Matthew 11:28–30—the passage printed at the top of this page. These verses are the prototype of peace. This passage tells us how to have peace *with* God and how to have the peace *of* God.

The congregation Jesus was addressing was probably broader than just His disciples. Perhaps the assembly was made up of Pharisees and other

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religious leaders who had come to listen to Him. The crowd probably also consisted of many people who had been listening to the Pharisees tell them that they had to do all sorts of things to be at peace with God. They had noisy souls trying to obtain salvation. Jesus' call to His followers was to come and learn from Him how to have lasting rest and peace. If you are not sure that you possess eternal life yourself, please go to appendix A to find out "How to Become a Christian."

Jesus said to them all, "Come unto me, all ye that labour." The word *labour* means "to grow weary, to be beaten out." The root word means to take a beating.¹ Most of us identify with that. We have at times felt overwhelmed as if we were in a hurricane with the winds pounding unceasingly against our souls. It is to us in those times that Jesus says, "Come to Me; I can help people like that."

The words *heavy laden* mean burdened down like a ship loaded with cargo.² We all know what it is like to feel that we cannot take the pressure any longer; we feel as though we are about to go under. Again, Jesus says, "Come to Me; I can help people like that." What a wonderful invitation He extends to us! He wants us to come to Him; He wants to help!

I want you to take an inventory of the noises in your soul—the things that rob you of rest and peace. Before you do that, however, notice a passage written by David in Psalm 40:1–2. He says, "I waited patiently for the Lord; and *he inclined unto me, and heard my cry*" (emphasis mine).

Notice carefully the words in italics in that verse. Did you know that God's inclination is to hear you? You might say, "I've got so many problems, God doesn't want to listen to me." No, if you have many problems, He *wants* to listen to you. David said further, "He heard my cry." He will hear your cry too.

David goes on to say, "He brought me up also out of an horrible pit." The words *horrible pit* literally mean "a pit of noise." Maybe you, too, feel as though you are in a pit of noise. Do you know what God wants to do? Listen to David in Psalm 40:2–3.

[He] set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord.

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God wants to set your feet on a rock. He wants to give you stability. He wants to “establish your goings.” That is, He wants to direct your ways so that when others look at your life they see what God is doing and want the same thing for themselves.

So, let’s get started inventorying your thoughts—noticing the noise in your soul.

Are there sounds of anxiety and fear in your soul?

Anxious thoughts are thoughts of worry: “What if this happens, and what if that happens?” These are thoughts of vulnerability and uncertainty: “I can’t lose control of this, and so-and-so is doing that, and I can’t let that happen either.” “This is going on over there, and I have to be sure that turns out right. I must not let anything go out of control.”

Are there sounds of discouragement and despair in your soul?

These are thoughts of hopelessness: “What’s the use? I may as well give up. There is no hope. It will not get any better. It will always be this way.” What about thoughts of defeat? “I blew it again. I’ll never get on top of this. I’m always failing. I never can have lasting victory.” Despair thrives on thoughts of self-pity: “This always happens to me. Nobody else goes through this. I always get the short end of the stick. I never get any breaks.”

Are there sounds of anger and frustration in your soul?

Anger is generally fueled by frustration, hurt, or fear. Check your thoughts. Are you thinking things like “I can’t believe that happened again. That should have been straightened out the last time. Is it too much to ask that these things get solved once and for all?” These are frustrated, agitated thoughts. Angry thoughts rise up when someone hurts us by something he has said or done or when we are put into a vulnerable position.

Are there sounds of bitterness and hatred in your soul?

These are thoughts of injustice, mistreatment, and unfairness: “I’ve poured my life into this job/marriage, and I get treated like dirt! That’s not fair!” Sometimes these are thoughts of contempt or revenge: “I won’t let that happen again. I’ll get him back some way. Nobody is going to get away with that.”

Are there sounds of lust and greed in your soul?

Is your mind filled with thoughts of illicit pleasure and experiences—things that you know you should not be indulging in and lusting for? You create noise in your soul when you plan to get the pleasure you want and then plan its cover-up. Is your mind filled with covetous thoughts? You look at what the world has to offer and you can't seem to stop thinking about some new fashion, gadget, automobile, house, or some other item you think you must have to be happy. The more time you spend comparing prices and comparing yourself with others, the more discontent—and noisy—your soul becomes.

Are there sounds of guilt and shame in your soul?

Anytime you practice the kinds of thoughts we have been discussing above, you will generate thoughts of guilt and shame because God never intended you to think that way. He has marvelous provisions for us to deal with these matters. He weighs our conscience down with great burdens when we sin. In fact, the noise of a guilty conscience is the loudest noise you can have because of the danger of being out of fellowship with God. This is the noise of sinfulness, remorse, and embarrassment.

Are there sounds of possessions and positions in your soul?

Our souls can get very noisy with the daily responsibilities of being a husband or wife, parent, employee, employer, church leader, and so forth. Our minds can be filled with thoughts of our to-do lists and strategies we are planning. Some of the noise might be from thoughts of ambition, trying to get ahead, be on top, get the latest and greatest possessions, or simply trying to get it all done or to maintain the possessions we have.

Are there sounds of obsessions and addictions in your soul?

These thoughts lead a person into drugs, alcohol, bingeing and purging, self-starvation, self-mutilation, pornography, theft, illicit affairs, lying, sexual abuse, and so forth. In addition to the guilt, the planning, cover-up, rationalization, rituals, and self-imposed demands generate an enormous amount of noise.

Are there sounds of entertainment and recreation in your soul?

These are thoughts of movies and TV programs, of music and news, of sports and electronic games, of travels and adventures. In our connected age we have the opportunity to fill our minds with distractions 24/7, at lightening speed, and over hundreds of channels and unlimited texts and posts. How many times have we come home from a strenuous day, and rather than spending some time reflecting upon what God wants to do in our lives through our difficulties that day, we do something to escape the responsibility for our poor responses of the day? We find something that will make us feel good. We watch a movie and fill our minds with more noise for three hours. When it is over, we replay in our minds certain scenes and think about how the plot unfolded. We have just succeeded in generating more noise!

If we've had a difficult day, it would be better if we sat down quietly and asked, "God, why was this day so joyless for me?" This is not the time to fill our minds with more noise. It is the time to reflect: "God what is so wrong with my heart that I missed what You are trying to do in me today?"

As you can see, the collective noise from these thoughts is deafening! How different these scenes are from the way the Master wants His disciples to handle life. Jesus had much to do on the earth, but His soul wasn't noisy. He wasn't irritated and saying, "Now, Peter, did you get that done? John, did you check on that? Andrew—oh, where is Andrew? He's never around when I need him. What on earth am I doing to do with Andrew? Has anyone seen Andrew?" His soul wasn't agitated; it wasn't noisy.

Here is what Jesus told His disciples—and us—in John 14:27 just before He left the scene and put them in charge of propagating His teachings:

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you [the kind of peace you have seen in Me]: not as the world giveth, give I unto you [You won't get My peace the same way the world tries to get peace]. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

This is instructive to us. Are you trying to get peace the same way the world tries to get it? The world tries to get peace by filling life with distractions, possessions, adventures, and people. They try all sorts of

things as anesthesia to dull the pain of their emptiness. But the Master says, “Not as the world giveth, give I unto you.”

All this self-imposed agitation—all this noise—is a sign of spiritual dysfunction and sinful responses. God-centered souls are not noisy. *God-centered souls are at rest.*

WHAT ARE THE DANGERS OF NOISE IN THE SOUL?

First of all, a noisy soul is destructive to the body. It is interesting how many times in Proverbs God talks about how our heart affects our body.³ Stress-related illnesses and stress-induced complications to physical diseases are the result of noisy souls. Unrestrained and unbiblical thoughts keep the autonomic nervous system activated. Keeping our bodies in emergency mode imposes an enormous strain on them. *Adrenaline is a wonderful friend in a real emergency, but it is a deadly foe as a way of life.* Many of God’s people live with high levels of adrenaline because they are always pushing. *Push* is a bad four-letter word when it comes to health. *Rest* is a good four-letter word. Many gastrointestinal disorders, cardiac difficulties, autoimmune system and endocrine dysfunctions, and sleep disorders are related directly to wrongly handled pressure.

Noisy souls also suffer spiritually since noise reflects alienation from God because of sinful responses. We have lost our God-ward gaze. We no longer look at God and seek His direction. We do not see Him as our Savior; we are trying to save ourselves—trying to work out our own problems without His wisdom. This independence from God is not merely a matter of poor judgment that results in ineffectiveness and unrest. It is, rather, mutinous for created beings to turn to themselves for solutions when they were created to depend upon God Himself.⁴

When I was in junior high in South Dakota, a couple of friends and I would ride our bicycles to Joe Foss Field in Sioux Falls, a few miles from my house. It was the municipal airport but had been an air force base during WWII. It housed a squadron of Air National Guard planes. We loved watching those F-102 jets take off and land. We would go home and try to carve model jets out of wood. This was before the days of concern about noise abatement, and the chainlink fence we stood behind wasn’t very far from the runway. It was thrilling to watch a jet take off. It was also deafening! We could not even hear each other talk.

That is what noise in the soul can be like. It can be so deafening that we no longer hear the voice of God.

WHAT IS GOD'S CURE FOR NOISE IN THE SOUL?

Matthew 11:28–30 teaches a very wonderful cure. The One we have sinned against—the One Who went to a cross to die for us—says, “Come unto Me.” It is a call to fellowship. He says, “I want you to be back in fellowship with Me. I want there to be much going on between us. Come back to Me.”

You and I can have a heart that is oriented to God. This is a call to a God-ward gaze, which is the essence of faith whereby we turn away from ourselves and our homemade strategies and look to God for strength, wisdom, deliverance, and hope. It is the opposite of a self-dependent focus.

Listen to His invitation in John 15:4–5. “I want you back. I want to produce fruit in you.”

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

Proverbs 3:5–8 warns us of forsaking the Lord to go our own way.

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil. It shall be health to thy navel [your whole body], and marrow [medicine, refreshment] to thy bones.

When we depart from God and break fellowship with Him, we experience the noise we have been talking about because of our sinful responses to life's challenges. We can think of it this way:

Avoid Me all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will deny you rest. Refuse My yoke of fellowship and abiding, and refuse to learn what I am like in order to become like Me, and you shall find noise in your soul. (Matthew 11:28–30 Reversed Standard Version)

Instead, the Master says, “Come to Me” for fellowship, and then, “Come and be like Me.” This is a call to discipleship. He says, “Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart.”

We cannot cure the noise in our souls by distractions or by recreations or by medications. Jesus said the cure is meditation. “Come unto Me, and learn of Me.” A focused, deliberate gaze upon Christ and His ways is the solution. He says, “Come learn of Me, for I am meek. I want you to be like Me—willing to be governed.” Meekness strikes at the heart of our pride. We do not want to be governed.

The godfather of noisemakers is pride. Most of our noise is created when we try to gain control of our lives, or regain control when it has been taken away. We are constantly fighting our limitations and our restrictions. This is not meekness; this is not a willingness to be governed. This fight for control is a major source of noise and pressure.

Pride whines and pouts; pride shouts and demands; pride argues and debates; pride covets and grasps; pride screams and retaliates; pride shifts blame and points fingers; pride lusts and indulges; pride manipulates and schemes; pride drives and obsesses; pride worries and frets. That is a lot of noise!

Pride is full of self-assertion, self-protection, self-promotion, self-confidence, and self-esteem. Pride cries out, “I will not! I must have! I don’t have to . . . ! I won’t let that happen! I can’t take any more of . . . ! I don’t like this!” This is not meekness; these are the sounds of a noisy soul!

Self is a relentless noisemaker, like a hungry unweaned child on his mother’s lap. Psalm 131 is a beautiful picture. David declares, “I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me” (Psalm 131:2 ESV).

When a hungry, nursing child gets anywhere near his mother, he is squirming and nudging. He is fussy; he is restless because he wants to nurse. David says, “I’ve learned to quiet my soul. I’m satisfied; I’m not fussy.”

Are you willing to repent of the responses that leave God out and generate noise in your soul? Are you willing to be content with what God is doing in your life? Are you willing to be meek—to be governed by

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God? Matthew 11 tells us that Jesus is “meek.” You must learn meekness from Him.

Jesus also says, “I want you to be lowly in heart like Me.” He wants us to be humble. This humility is at the heart of the meekness. Jesus’ life was not about Himself. He said, “Learn from Me; I am your pattern.”

If you read through John’s Gospel, you will see Jesus saying things such as “I did not come down here to do My own will, but the will of My Father. I came to accomplish His work” (5:30; 9:4). He said to His disciples, “What shall I say? That I shouldn’t suffer? No! This is why I came” (12:27). He was willing to be humble and do what His Father wanted Him to do.

Our fussiness and agitation exist because we have our own agenda, and other people aren’t getting into step with it. But we are not here on this earth to do our own work; we are here, just like Jesus, to do the work of our Father. If we are humble, we will have a constant spirit of repentance and dependence in us. We will have a continual spirit of deference and service to others.

What about you? Do you have a noisy soul? What sounds—what thoughts—fill your soul? Do you hear the voice of the Lord Jesus calling you to come to Him?

You may say, “But my life is such a mess. I’ve been this way twenty years. I don’t know if I can be helped.” You are the one Jesus is talking about when He says, “Come unto Me all of you who are laboring and heavily loaded down.”

What I want you to notice in this first chapter is the extent to which your soul is filled with noise, and the amazing disposition our Lord has toward you. He wants you to come back.

Are you willing to say to God, “I’m willing to lay down my noisemakers. I’m willing to lay down my pride, repent of my sinful responses, and I’m coming back to You”? Are you willing to learn from Him? I hope that is your prayer as we go through this study.

I would ask you to pray something like this every time you come to this study: “Lord, show me anything You want me to do and with Your help—Your grace—I’ll do it.” *You must come to Christ and purpose to be like Him to quiet the noise in your soul.*

Take Time to Reflect

In Matthew 11:28 Jesus says, “Come unto me, all ye that labour [are beaten down] and are heavy laden [burdened down], and I will give you rest.” Take a few moments to reflect upon your life. What comes to your mind under these two categories? How do they describe your situation currently or recently?

1. “Beaten down” [i.e., to take a beating; to be weary]

2. “Burdened down” [i.e., like a heavily loaded ship]

3. Is the heart of the Lord Jesus, revealed in Matthew 11:28, what you have envisioned His heart toward you? If not, what is different about what He says is His heart toward you and what you think it is?