

The Real War Is Inside My Heart, and Yours

“For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals Zand crawling creatures. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.” (Romans 1:21–25, italics mine)

From the beginning of this book, we have been telling the story of two different realities, truly, of two different *worlds*. The Creator made the first world out of nothing, a paradise with creatures made in His image. He filled them to overflowing with the utter conviction of His unconditional love in their hearts, and the peace, rest, and joy this brings. They would never be His equal, yet they partook of His truth and glory.

Yet somehow, incomprehensibly, they chose to exchange the first world for another, the truth for a lie. To believe the world of created people and things, in and of themselves, had the greater value. To leave behind and forget this Creator, who had given them everything, including their very breath.

They didn't know it; they couldn't have. For who would ever choose bondage over freedom, and torment and misery over peace, rest, and joy? They must have been under a spell.

Saddest of all, this is not just a story but a love story, the first and greatest of *all* love stories. And so, the choice to live in the second world was not just a bad choice, but a very painful betrayal. But because of this very truth, there will always be hope, for the Creator does not only love, He *is* love; unconditional, covenantal, faithful, perfect love.

And perfect love, thank God, is patient, kind, and not jealous; it does not brag and is not arrogant; it does not act unbecomingly or seek its own; it is not provoked nor takes into account a wrong suffered; it does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but with the truth (1 Corinthians 13:4–6).

Let me ask you this. How long were you able to read those words before you realized they were *not* describing you? Did you even get past “patient” to “kind”? I didn't. And if that isn't enough, there is more. Perfect love “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13:7).

Do you mind if I say that again? It simply takes my breath away. Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. *All* things. Can you feel it? These are the very things, the very hope we lost. These are the very things that the world of people and things in and of themselves are not, but our Creator is. His love bears, believes, hopes, and endures all things, *no matter what*. He loves us perfectly, no matter how great our betrayal has been.

And so, God comes looking for us, just like Iris in *The Natural*. He can't help himself, for He has lost His most precious possession, His bride, and He desperately wants her back. But He will not force. He can't. For that is not the way of perfect love.

Ever since the very beginning, we have been lost, like Prince Rilian. We have no conscious memory of the first world and the life that was meant for us as sons and daughters of the King. We have been under the heaviest of enchantments that have kept us blind to the real story, our past, and have instead fabricated for us a different world, a world that looks good and true but could not be further from it.

This is a world in which we are relentlessly driven to find our contentment and security in people and things, in and of themselves, when there is no goodness, contentment, or security to be found there, only addiction. A world that is here to serve *us*, to gratify and glorify self.

Even though we have no real memory of the original paradise for which we were intended, and we struggle to have any great conviction about it, deep in our hearts, every single one of us has always known the truth of the perfect love we first knew and believed and the great God who is Perfect Love.

Our only hope is to wake up somehow, for God to rouse us, and for us to begin to remember what we knew long, long ago. He wants to woo us back from the second world that somehow looked so much better to us, a world in which all we seek is our own; even though we have become so exquisitely skilled at pretending differently, and that the lives we have chosen are somehow honorable.

In this chapter, we will tell the story of a great battle or war, and again, by using a very

secular movie, I will make the case that the most significant war this world has ever known has never been fought on a real battlefield, but inside my heart and yours, each and every day. All of those other wars that took place on real battlefields came about because the real war had already been lost inside of men's hearts. The struggle is over which of these two very different realities or worlds will predominate in our lives: our love of God and our faithfulness to Him, or our love of the world and our promiscuousness with it.

I have come to believe that the totality of the Christian life is just this simple. Which world at any given point in time will we choose to live in? For these are truly two different worlds. I am not just using a word picture to make a point. They are two different realities defined by two completely different value systems.

In the garden, we only lived in the first world; no other world existed. The second world came about as a consequence of the Fall, and for the next four thousand years, all of humanity lived within its constraints, with the exception of a few people chosen by God. And then, two thousand years ago, Christ died on the cross to provide a way for all of us to re-enter the first world. In this life, we will never be able to exit the second world completely, nor completely re-enter the first, but it was the greatest blessing we have ever known.

As Christians, we will continue to live in both worlds. The enchantment of the world is so strong, however, that if we don't make an intentional effort to resist it, we will still live in the second world the great majority of the time, hardly aware that God and His perfect love even exist.

On the other hand, if we pursue God, and especially if we intentionally lay our other lovers on the altar with a humble and heavy heart, we will more and more live in the first world with perfect love filling our heart.

The What-Would-Jesus-Do (WWJD) fad a number of years ago might have seemed too trite and even disrespectful to some, but I think it might have caught on because it cuts right to the core of our dilemma. Jesus always chose for God, and God only values perfect love.

We live in this fallen world with fallen hearts, but we are expected to seek God's will and obey it, just as Jesus did when He lived on earth. We are living in this world, but we are to live according to His will. We are to bring heaven to earth, as Matthew 6:10 says, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

In God's eyes, everything is seen through the lens of perfect love. It is the single, foundational principle in the universe. It is the reason for *everything*. God's highest motive is to love us perfectly, and our highest purpose is to believe and receive His love, and to reciprocate by perfectly loving Him and others.

This is how Jesus saw and, therefore, interpreted everything He experienced during His time on earth. A life lived in obedience to perfect love is the only thing that matters to God. Perfect love is the only thing which really "exists." Perfect love *is* the real world. It was supposed to be the only world.

Now, on the surface, the movie *The Matrix* does not seem that different than many other futuristic movies. (We have discussed this movie in previous chapters, but will now consider it more fully. I apologize in advance for repeating some of the details, but believe it will read better if I do.)

It seems we have begun to think we are so intelligent, and especially with the complexity of commands our computers can execute and their processing speed, that we have also become fascinated with artificial intelligence. Computers have come a long way in a short time, but they are still very sophisticated calculators, machines that follow a protocol that was laid out for them one "choice" at a time. That is a great deal different from something that actually "comes to life" and makes independent decisions, that is, has a will and volition of its own.

How a machine could bridge this gap, jumping from following a sequenced protocol that was created for it, to both creating protocols of its own *and* having preferences for one over the other based on a set of values, I don't see. But I do have to admit it makes for a great story. What's really fascinating is how much this mirrors *our* story.

Somehow our great God created matter out of nothing. He then breathed life into it, creating the first living cell, bridging the gap from the inanimate to the animate. And then, in His crowning achievement, He created us, who not only live and breathe but have the ability to both prefer and choose.

And guess what? We made the same exact decision the machines made in *The Matrix*. Just having life basking in the glory and truth of our Creator wasn't good enough. We decided to rebel, to reject our Creator, and put Him to death because we wanted to be in charge.

The main character in *The Matrix* is a man named Thomas Anderson, who works for a

computer software firm. As the story begins, the world, in most respects, is just like our world. It is a contemporary time, and life in the big city looks exactly as it looks today—busy and rushed, but most things in order. Mr. Anderson goes to work every day like most others, but also has a private life as a computer hacker and is known by the alias of Neo.

Neo is mysteriously contacted by a woman named Trinity. She is loyal to a man named Morpheus. In Greek mythology, Morpheus was the god of dreams or sleep. The Greek word *morphe*, means “form,” and the god Morpheus received his name because of the forms he caused to appear to people in their dreams.¹ In the movie, Morpheus wastes no time being true to his name.

He asks Neo, “You ever have that feeling where you're not sure if you're awake or still dreaming?”² And then he tells him:

“Let me tell you why you are here. You are here because you know something. What you know you can't explain, but you feel it. You've felt it your entire life. That there's something wrong with the world. You don't know what it is, but it's there, like a splinter in your mind, driving you mad. It is this feeling that has brought you to me. Do you know what I am talking about?”

“The Matrix?” Neo asks.

“Do you want to know what it is?”

Neo nods affirmatively.

Morpheus continues. “The matrix is everywhere, it is all around us, even now in this very room. You can see it when you look out your window, or when you turn on your television. You can feel it when you go to work, when you go to church, when you pay your taxes. It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth.”

“What truth?” Neo asks.

“That you are a slave, Neo. Like everyone else you were born into bondage, born into a prison that you cannot smell or taste or touch. A prison for your mind. Unfortunately, no one can

¹ The Matrix. Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 1999.

² Ibid.

be told what the Matrix is. You have to see it for yourself.”

Morpheus presents two pills, a red one and a blue one, and continues. “This is your last chance, after this there is no turning back. You take the blue pill, the story ends, you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill, you stay in Wonderland and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes.”

Neo, of course, takes the red pill and learns the most startling of truths. He really *had been* dreaming. It turns out that everything he has ever known: the life he has lived, the places he has been, the people he has loved, even the very air he has breathed . . . has always been just a dream. None of it has *ever even existed*. Not really.

In truth, it is about two hundred years or so into the future; no one knows for sure. At some point in the past, the machines that man created came to life and decided history should take a different course. They very much had the upper hand, wiped out the great majority of humanity, and the only humans who escaped are now living deep in the earth in a city named Zion.

The reality Neo consciously experienced every minute of his waking life was, in fact, a virtual computer program created by the machines. The Matrix *was* this computer program and the pseudo-reality it created. The Matrix made it appear that the world still existed just as it always had in the year 1999 before it was ever destroyed, still at peace, before there was ever any threat from the machines.

Even more unbelievable was the truth that Neo, and all the rest of humanity who lived in this computer-generated world, had not been born by natural means, but had been “grown” by the machines. You see, the energy the human body creates is quite impressive, and the machines decided to grow humans for an energy source.

Everyone who had been “living” in the Matrix, like Neo, had been artificially conceived and had then grown and matured and lived every day of their lives in an unconscious state, submerged in some sort of amniotic fluid. They were hooked up to wires that extracted all the energy their bodies created. Besides the few who had escaped, everyone else had been conceived by the machines and had lived their whole lives, unconscious, like an unborn child in its mother's womb. They had never been awake one moment in their whole lives.

Evidently, the machines figured out that they needed to come up with something to

preoccupy the minds and hearts of their “crop” so they would be content just to lay there. Their solution was to create the Matrix, a virtual reality that mimicked life as it was in 1999, although it was only a dream. Morpheus and his companions had discovered a chemical way to interfere with the Matrix program in a person's mind, synthesizing it into a red pill.

Taking this pill allowed Neo to wake up, truly, for the first time in his life. And when he did, he didn't rise up out of a bed as he had thought he had every other morning of his life; instead, he rose up out of the fluid in an artificial womb and physically opened his eyes for the very first time.

Now, from what I've read, I don't think it's likely the producers of this movie, the Wachowski brothers, go to church or believe in the God of the Bible. I doubt they would say that when they wrote this script, it was on their hearts to communicate to a lost world that everyone needs to be saved, not because of the evil “out there” in the world, but because of the evil inside each and every one of our hearts.

I doubt they would say that even though we chose the love of the world over the love of God, God's desire has always been for a complete reconciliation in which one day He will literally walk among His children in Zion as He did in the garden.

I doubt they would say they wanted to communicate that the great majority of the world has never been able to comprehend these truths because they have been lost in a dream their whole lives. Not because of machines that took over and created a virtual reality, but because we all fell into a heavy dream and enchantment when Adam and Eve chose the world instead of God. A dream that tells us that everything is perfectly okay when things could hardly be worse.

I doubt they would say we were all supposed to live a life of freedom, full of abundance and joy, but instead have been born into bondage. But, nevertheless, God saw to it His divine imprint was irrevocably stamped on our hearts.

And so, we all know the truth deep down. We all know the different life and reality for which we were intended, and our hearts yearn for its freedom. Just like Prince Rilian, we are the child of the King. This is our true identity. In a way, it's just as if we had lived that better life once upon a time but then forgot, just like our friend, the prince.

And so, is it just coincidence these gospel themes are so clearly represented in this movie in such detail?

I think you know *my* answer. And we're just getting started. This movie doesn't only proclaim our diagnosis, but our treatment plan as well. Deep down, we all know something is desperately wrong with this life and with this world.

And so, Morpheus tells Neo that he has been searching because he knows something. "What you know you can't explain, but you feel it. You've felt it your entire life. There's something wrong with the world. You don't know what it is, but it's there, like a splinter in your mind, driving you mad."

Once upon a time, the world was not only okay but good. Very good. Even so, the creation lost its perspective and thought it needed "more," causing a violent separation that changed the course of history. We fell into an enchantment, a dream. And every man and woman born after Adam and Eve were born into this dream, born into a false reality for which they were not intended, just like Neo.

And just like Neo's dream, our dream has the most malicious of intentions. It desperately wants to keep us blind to the real story of who we are and what happened to us. Keep us blind to the abundant life for which we were intended, so that we will remain satisfied, or so we think, with the counterfeit satisfaction the dream portrays to us.

A dream whose greatest goal is to convey it is not a dream at all, but simply reality. The only reality. A dream that wants to convey this so convincingly that the only possible response of the dreamer is to just lie back and dream, to remain passive and docile, to never suspect anything is wrong at all.

Because if you never suspect anything is wrong, you will never discover something *is* wrong. You will never think of fighting back. And if you never fight back, you will never break free. For you are, in fact, a captive, whether you are ever able to see this or not.

"Like everyone else you were born into bondage. Born into a prison that you cannot see or smell or touch." It is *the dream* that is our enemy because it keeps us completely in the dark and helpless. It is the dream we have to fight back against, and anyone or anything that's responsible for creating and perpetuating this dream. *The Matrix* is about these battle lines and this fight. But first, we have to *wake up*.

And so, Morpheus asks Neo, "You ever have that feeling where you're not sure if you're awake or still dreaming?" "Have you ever had a dream, Neo, that you were sure was real? What

if you were unable to wake from that dream, how would you know the difference between the dream world, and the real world?"

I bet you've had the experience, many times, when you were a little stunned when you first woke up from a dream because it seemed so real. It was only your waking up which shocked you into the realization that the dream wasn't real. You had to leave the reality of the dream and enter another before you were able to gain any perspective on the dream.

What if you never left that first reality? What if you never woke up? How would you know the difference between the dream, the false reality, and the real world? And what if it turned out for us, as it did for Neo, that this wasn't just a question about one dream and one night? It was a question about our whole life.

What if we had always been asleep and dreaming and had never known it? What if we had never awakened, even for the first time? How would we know that everything we had ever experienced was a dream? We wouldn't.

This is a very disconcerting thought, is it not? We all misinterpret particular situations from time to time. We can easily misinterpret another person's thoughts and feelings, and especially their motives, only to find out later we were wrong. And I don't believe it is an accident we so often misinterpret on the side of being slighted or disregarded, for this is how much the lies of self-contempt in our hearts color our perceptions.

But what if we could be more wrong than just a situation from time to time? And even worse, what if we did not have the capacity to be able to tell one way or the other? What if we were so honed into the reality before us, so consumed with it, that it never even occurred to us there could be anything else? Being wrong is one thing. But it never even occurring to you that you could be wrong is another. You would just believe in that false reality, indefinitely, maybe even forever, would you not?

Morpheus's question very purposely provoked Neo. Neo had never entertained the idea his perception of reality could be wrong. I had never entertained this idea either for my first forty-five years. Not really.

Wrong about little things? Of course. Wrong from time to time about bigger things and embarrass myself? Of course. But wrong about something so foundational, that I was really wrong about everything? Never.

But this turned out to be my exact experience when the Holy Spirit opened up my eyes, and I saw the true gospel. And I am sure it has been the experience of many of you as well.

Neo had his salvation experience when he woke from his sleep for the first time after believing he had been living in a world that had not existed for two hundred years. He woke for the first time, only to realize he had been lying unconscious his whole life, submerged in fluid.

I woke up for the first time from a dream that lasted for forty-five years. It was a waking dream in which I was convinced all the things of this world had the greatest value, the only value. And every single thing I thought, felt, and did was driven by this belief system. When I opened my eyes each day, the people and things I saw were completely colored by the values of the world that were so embedded in my heart. This was the way I interpreted reality. It was the only way I knew to interpret reality.

But it was all a lie. I lived every day of my life in that reality or world but was so enchanted, it never even occurred to me I believed in anything particular at all. It never occurred to me I had somehow made a choice to believe in a very particular set of values, that there were other values, or that my choice could be wrong.

Neo meets Trinity, and she tells him he was looking for answers; this had compelled him to seek Morpheus, like her. “The answer is out there, Neo. It's looking for you, and it will find you if you want it to.” Now, I have to say, she just represented the sovereignty of God and free will in one statement as well as anyone I’ve ever heard.

We know we don't come to the Lord unless He draws us, for Jesus said these very words (John 6:44). But we also know that we have to believe in our heart and confess with our mouth or we are not saved, as it says in Romans 10:9. So, which is it?

Was God looking for Neo, and He found him? Or did God only find Neo because Neo wanted Him to? Or somehow . . . was it *both*? I bet many Christians would have difficulty verbalizing the irreconcilable tension between the sovereignty of God and free will, but the Wachowski brothers didn't. They know the real story. They just don't know they know it.

Neo's life with God began when he chose to take the red pill. He had been drawn, but there was something within him that couldn't be content with the status quo. He couldn't verbalize it, but he knew something was desperately wrong with the way things were. He knew this life was supposed to be better. Much better. This was why he decided to take the red pill and

wake up.

If you are a child of God, you were drawn too, or you would have never become His. But at some point, there had to be something stirring within you, something that wouldn't allow you to be satisfied with the status quo, something that told you the world and its values were terribly wrong, and there had to be something better. Much better.

In many cases, it was a crisis that did the stirring, like the one that occurred in my life. God wants you to see you've always believed in a specific set of values; you just never knew it. He is using the crisis to make clear to you that those values have always been wrong, and the things those values have always driven you to seek can never satisfy the heart He gave you. You were just not able to realize any of this until the wheels completely came off.

It is a blessing when you are brought to the Lord as a child and work out the details for yourself as you mature. Or somehow by His grace, the scales fall off your eyes through some of life's kinder circumstances. But either way, the Holy Spirit draws us and then begins to infuse us with His wisdom when we accept Christ in our heart. From that point on, we have the ultimate Guide living within us, teaching us, instructing us.

In *The Matrix*, Morpheus represents God the Father, Christ the Redeemer, and Holy Spirit, the Teacher, all wrapped into one. Neo is told ahead of time that Morpheus will choose to die in order to save him, and he will have a choice. He can accept this and live. Or he can die, in order to save Morpheus.

When the time comes, Neo is willing to die to save Morpheus, and because of his willingness to put his very life on the altar, both Morpheus and he live for another day.

Sound familiar? This was the same scenario rehearsed by Abraham and Isaac and made perfect by Christ on the cross for all of us. Neo was touched beyond words by Morpheus's devotion and living sacrifice for him, just as God and His Son hope each of us will be touched beyond words by their perfect and loving sacrifice for us. And we will then be willing to do the very thing that to self would be unthinkable—to die. Then we can live the rest of our lives loving sacrificially. To bear, to believe, to hope, to endure . . . all things.

Neo chose to take the red pill, wake up, and commit himself to the cause of Morpheus and his companions. If you are a child of God, you chose to wake up and commit yourself to the cause of Jesus Christ.

You woke up and were stunned by just how blind and deaf and dumb you had been your whole life. You had been trapped living in the reality of the world and never even knew there was another reality, much less one that was so much grander and attractive. The world of perfect love caused your heart to sing, and it was only the singing itself, and how good it felt, that caused you to realize your heart had been broken your whole life. You just didn't know it, or why.

But waking up is only the first step. The majority of *The Matrix* is about what happens after you wake up. It is about learning how to fight, about the nature of the enemy, and about what it will take to even begin to have a chance against it.

In another mind-bending sequence, Morpheus gives Neo combat training. It is not real, but a virtual simulation. Morpheus explains to Neo that it is “similar to the programmed reality of the Matrix. It has the same basic rules, rules like gravity. What you must learn is that these rules are no different than the rules of a computer system. Some of them can be bent, others can be broken. Understand? Then hit me, if you can.”

This virtual reality is similar to a video game in which two people are fighting, each one controlling one combatant on the screen. But in this new and improved version, you *are* the combatant. You have lost all awareness of yourself outside of the screen.

In the movie, Morpheus is purposely explaining all of this to Neo to show him one reality versus the other. This is the key. Remember, the great majority of humanity is still asleep in the Matrix. They always have been. They don't even know there is another reality, the true one, a good one, that runs on the fuel of perfect love.

The only way you can ever break free is to wake up and understand that you were lost in a dream, but to then do whatever you can to not fall back to sleep. You have to maintain your perspective of both realities, to more and more refuse the first one, and more and more grab hold of the better one.

The dream will always continue to influence you in this life; it will be calling to you like the sirens on the rocky shore. But you can learn to remember that even though it is very alluring, it is only a dream and a bad one at that. You want to become so aware that you realize at all times you are *both* the combatant on the screen and the guy working the controls.

For if you can remember this, you will know as consuming as the reality on the screen might be, it is just a computer program. A false reality. Its rules can be bent, and in some cases,

broken. The enchantment of the world is strong, but Christ is stronger.

The longer we have lived the gospel, the more it should make sense. The real truth is that the gospel makes more sense over time because we have increasingly woken up from the false reality of the world. Just a little bit humbling, huh?

God looks down from heaven at the great majority of humanity and sees that they are still asleep. They might as well be completely unconscious in some sort of fluid, for this is how blind and deaf they are to the real reality of God and perfect love.

But far too much of the time, He looks down at those who have become His children through His Son and sees that we are sleeping too. In regard to the things of this world that have become our idols, our hearts and minds are still stuck in a false reality, believing only those things can make us happy, not God. They have the greater value, not Him. They are real. He is not.

In the movie, there are very few left whose minds are free and still fighting the machines. The sheer power and capability of the machines are so great, it is hard to understand how anyone has been spared or will be much longer. The machines have no heart or compassion; they just dominate and feed off of their prey.

A politically liberal interpretation of this story might say humanity's saddest chapters have been the result of tyrants that rise to power in this world. Tyrants that feed off their prey, like Hitler or Stalin. Man can become so obsessed with power that he wants to possess the whole world or at least a large part of it. And that is true.

But it is shortsighted to think our greatest challenge is to find a way to control the rogues that rise from time to time, whether they arise at home or somewhere else. To think, if we can just control the bad apples that arise from time to time, the rest of us will live peaceful lives because the rest of us know how.

The greater truth is that Christ came to this earth to tell every one of us there is a rogue that lives inside our heart. The rogue isn't just threatening to rise up; it did the moment you were conceived and has been in control ever since. You have just never known this because you have always been lost in a dream that told you something different.

If you came to know the Lord, the Holy Spirit has enabled you to recapture some control,

but regarding the things your fallen heart holds most dear, you have just continued to dream. Our fallen hearts are just as formidable an opponent as the machines in *The Matrix* movie. Too bad we can't say the enemy is someone else.

This is what makes it all so hard, so confusing, so difficult. We are complicit in every bit of it. Everything in our fallen and divided hearts wants us to stay asleep, wants just to let our fallen heart have its way in the world, for it believes it will find its greater happiness there. It is *ourselves* we are fighting.

And so, how do we do this thing? How can we maintain our perspective? How can we learn to be aware more of the time that we are both the combatant on the screen and the guy at the controls? Aware the screen may look real, but it is just a dream, a false reality? We exist outside of the screen, and we can manipulate it. We can bend the rules and sometimes break them.

To win complete freedom, Morpheus and his followers will one day have to defeat the machines themselves, but for the time being, their primary enemy is virtual agents with superhuman strength who appear in the Matrix reality. In explaining to Neo just how formidable and insidious the agents are, Morpheus tells him:

“They are guarding all the doors, they are holding all the keys, which means that sooner or later someone is going to have to fight them . . . I won't lie to you, Neo. Every single man or woman who has stood their ground, everyone who has fought an agent, has died. But where they have failed you will succeed . . . I have seen an agent punch through a concrete wall, men have emptied entire clips into them and hit nothing but air.”

But then, Morpheus reminds Neo again of the one most important truth:

“Yet their strength and their speed are still based in a world that is built on rules. Because of that, they will never be as strong or as fast as you can be.” Confused, Neo asks, “What are you trying to tell me, that I can dodge bullets?” “No, Neo,” Morpheus responds, “I’m trying to tell you that when you're ready, you won't have to.”

Morpheus explains to Neo that since the agents are virtual creations of the machines, they have to abide by the rules of the software that created them, no different than the word processing program I’m using right now to type out these words has to abide by the software behind it. Although the program the machines wrote gave the agents greater fighting ability than

Neo could ever have in that virtual reality, there is a greater truth.

The agents have to abide by the rules of the Matrix, but Neo does not. It will not be easy; to date, no one has ever learned how to break free of the false reality of the Matrix. But Morpheus is convinced that Neo is the One, the savior, who will be the first to succeed, and whose example will teach others. *Like Christ did for us.*

Morpheus is telling Neo there is a way to so completely break free of the reality of the Matrix that nothing that occurs to him in that reality will affect him. In essence, it won't occur. No matter how real anything in that reality has always seemed, how real it has seemed up to that very moment, it will not seem real any longer. Neo can learn to refuse to be bound by the constraints of that false world.

But to begin with, Neo does exactly what we as believers do most of the time. He does everything he can to learn how to fight in his own strength. It does seem reasonable, does it not, that after we have embraced the truth of the gospel, after we have come to understand we have been enchanted by the world our whole lives, that is, after we have been through basic training, we should be able to set out on our own with our M16 and take out some of the enemy. Shouldn't be that hard, should it?

But it is, and deep down, you know why. Deep down, you know your heart is divided, and so you know the enemy you're trying to put to death is yourself, at least in part. The enemy out there, whatever it is in the world, is only the enemy it is because it calls so seductively to your fallen heart. The root of the problem is *inside*, not outside.

What are you going to do, turn the gun on yourself? This is why Neo should have never tried to fight the agents on their own terms, doing whatever he could to outwit and outfight them within the Matrix reality. We will never be able to outwit and outfight the world on our own living within the context and reality of the world. Why?

Because there is far too much in our fallen hearts that secretly wants the world to win! Very sad, but true. Somehow, someday, we will not fight as hard as we can; we will lay down our arms without realizing it. As long as you live on this earth, you will be infiltrated with double agents. You will never be able to squeeze them all out.

There is only one way to win this war. It is to bow your head and call on the help of your great Commander.

Neo bravely, but stubbornly, persists on his own. He is convinced if he just keeps trying, he'll finally get it right and be victorious. And he does do better for a while, better than anyone has ever done. But all the courage and confidence in the world won't matter if you're just wrong.

Neo runs out of options, and the agents kill him. I tried to fight everything in my fallen heart for the better part of ten years and ended up on my knees, broken and convulsively weeping, because I had run out of options. I finally realized I had no clue what I was doing. I had to die to my belief that I could save myself.

And even then, I didn't call out to God because I realized He was the solution. I only called out to Him because I didn't know what else to do. But when I did call out, and by His grace, was able to confess the truth that my idol had always been more precious to me than Him, confess my adulterous heart, He was able to rush in and save. My great God rushed in and infused my heart with His perfect love, and my life has never been the same since.

Amazingly (or should we really be amazed at this point?), the Wachowski brothers saw to it that it was love that saved Neo too. And not just any love, but romantic love. It turns out Trinity was in love with Neo. She kisses him after he dies, and he miraculously comes back to life. Interestingly, there is no explanation for this in the script, no reason given for why love conquered death.

But this shouldn't surprise us as children of God, for it was only because of love that Christ went to the cross for each of us. He died so that we could be reborn. We were dead in our trespasses, and only through His loving sacrifice, His kiss, did any of us ever open our spiritual eyes for the very first time. Interesting too, that in the movie it was “Trinity” whose love conquered death.

Brought back to life by perfect love's kiss, Neo faces the agents again. This time, however, as he looks at them, he is able to see them for what they are—digital pieces of information, nothing more. His mind has learned to supersede the Matrix, to see beyond it, not to be completely consumed and constrained by the images it conveys.

Before, it was compelling, so much so that nothing else existed. Now, he looks and sees the agents, but also sees they are just images. They are not real. And there is nothing they can do in their reality that is real either.

Or put it this way. They can do whatever they want to, and will. But Neo can also ignore

it, or see it as harmless, and it will be. They fire bullets at him, the same bullets they fired at him just minutes earlier that had killed him, and he just makes them stop in midair. There is nothing they can do that he can't countermand. He is finally the guy at the controls, and they are just combatants on the screen. The rules can be bent, and some can be broken.

I began to have the exact same experience in my life as soon as I was able to sacrifice my idol, and have continued to ever since. With my obedience complete, God took His hand and wiped away a great deal of the idol's enchanting influence on me. For the first time, I was able to "look" and see the idol for exactly what it was, as just one way of looking at the world, something you could value and believe in if you chose, but not something absolutely true. Not at all.

And most importantly, I could look at it and see its true nature, just how insidious it was if you worshiped it and believed in it as a god. If you chose to worship and serve it, it would simply use you up. It didn't know anything else. This was just its nature, no different than a vicious animal.

More importantly, I finally had the will to not walk into its cage. I was able to look at it and refuse it. Not that it wouldn't ever affect me again, not that it wasn't still affecting me to some degree at any given moment. But a shift in power had occurred, a great one. It had run in me my whole life, so much that I never had a clue. I was in charge now and will be going forward. From now on, I am going to strive to make the right choice in refusing it the great majority of the time, even though it will still continue to be an irritant. Even though, it will still have me torn up emotionally at times. Even though, from time to time, it will squarely land a right cross on my chin that wobbles my knees and briefly transports me back in time to the days of its dominance.

Conceptually, this shift in perspective shouldn't be hard to grasp. For instance, how unbelievably good does some of your favorite food look to you when you are hungry and just sitting down to eat, as opposed to how it looks as soon as you are full? Or, if you're really hungry, just any food for that matter?

What happened? It didn't change, only your desire for it. But it sure made a difference, did it not? When you first sat down, and you were so drawn to it, did its value and allure not seem like a quality or characteristic that resided in the food itself? And did it not seem like it had the upper hand, that it had power over you?

Now, let's take something more substantial, like a job when you don't have one and no prospects as well. It's like being in the desert without a well in sight. And then several years later, after you've had a good position at a good company for some time and felt very secure in it, you think back, and the memories are still painful, but you probably don't feel the panic you did then, the despair or the feelings of helplessness. And it is very different years later after you've retired and the last thing in the world you want is a job. What happened? Your perspective changed. Again.

Or what about something more intense, like the death of someone very close to you, like a spouse? The grieving process can go from shock and numbness to being angry for them “leaving” you, to being depressed, to finally more and more accepting it. At the worst point, you might have felt such acute pain you were convinced your life would never be the same, that *you* would never be the same. That might be true to some extent, for relationships are so very important and supposed to be. And your life may have permanently changed in so many practical ways. But after you have gone through the whole grieving process, you regain your equilibrium. You did survive it, although you may have thought you never would.

Let's take something a little more relevant. Did you ever have someone bully you when you were a child? If they tormented you for some period of time, you may have been convinced they were just that powerful. And they were if you believed they were. Now, if they were bigger and really wanted to hurt you, they could, and you may have been able to do nothing about it, at least right then. You should have worried about being hurt; that's a good thing.

But even if your concern over physical harm was reasonable, it is possible to arrive at a place in your mind and heart that you just don't care anymore. Soldiers, police, and firefighters know this place. They have to find it, or they may lose their minds.

But you can find it too, and if you do, the difference is simply amazing. Strength can grow in your heart as it did in David's, and it didn't matter how big Goliath was. He was going to see it through, no matter what. Goliath was unaffected by David's confidence, but he should have been; he just may have kept his head.

A normal person, on the other hand, will usually be very affected if you stand your ground with confidence versus trembling with fear. The whole situation can change dramatically if instead of being hesitant or fearful, you just look at them and essentially say, “Go ahead; give it your best shot.”

Again, what happened? What changed? Did all the power truly reside in them, as it had seemed? Or did you not, in fact, *give them* some of this power, maybe all of it, and just never realized it? Eleanor Roosevelt once said, “No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.”³

Idols have become just this important to us. As Tozer said, “The roots of our hearts have grown down into things, and we dare not pull up one rootlet lest we die. Things have become necessary to us, a development never originally intended.”⁴

We must reverse the process. We must find our way back to the garden if we are ever to experience victory in this life. And I have come to believe that there is only one way to do this. It is to become Neo.

Haven't you ever wanted to *be* Neo, to be the superhero? Could the story of a hero, faced with overwhelming odds, perfectly describe the real, unfinished business of our lives?

Could there be caves in our lives? Caves we need to find with God's help, and conquer what has been living there in the darkness? And does all of this seem even more overwhelming because deep in our hearts, we fear we don't have what it will take to succeed? Is this not why we are so interested in these stories, why we so badly want the good guy to win, for he is us?

There is a battle to be fought in every one of our hearts, and God wants to help us, just as Morpheus helped Neo. But we have to decide to step up. We first have to decide to take the red pill, wake up, and have Morpheus as our teacher and guide, have the Holy Spirit, and draw from His divine power. But we also have to decide to fight in earnest, to come face to face with the agents that have tormented us the most.

Neo is only a vessel, and victory can only be his if he aligns himself with the One true power—through return, through confession, through repentance. Like Neo, with the help of our teacher, the Holy Spirit, we can wake up and come to see the things in our lives that have become our idols. And with the help of our one true love, Christ, our Bridegroom, we can finally have the power to very consciously place them on the altar.

And when we do, we will be able to look at these idols again, just as Neo looked again at

³ https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/eleanor_roosevelt_161321

⁴ A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1982), 22.

the agents, and for the first time in our lives, we will see something different. Not because *they* changed, but because *we* did. All the allure and power they have always had over us, which always seemed like inherent characteristics they possessed, that “just was,” will finally look different.

All of a sudden, you will be able to see your idol *never had* any of that power or allure, not really. Your fallen heart only *gave* it that power. Now, as you stand there and “look” at it, as Neo looked at the agents after love's kiss, with perfect love more filling your heart, you will be able to see both realities at the same time: the real one, God's perfect love; and the false one, the enchantment of the world.

And you will be able to see there is a choice to be made as well: faithfulness to One, or to the other. And finally, thank God, you will have the power residing in you to choose God and perfect love, whatever that might be in that moment, and to refuse the world, whatever that has been. And to do so, over and over and over again, for the rest of your life.