

LifeWord Summaries

Live No Lies

John Mark Comer

A Chapter Summary

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Introduction to LifeWord Summaries

LifeWord Book Summaries are founded on two key beliefs. Firstly, many books, especially those grounded in Christian truth, have the potential to transform and shape lives. Secondly, many Christians are not reading them.

While I always recommend reading the full books and I direct readers to explore them further, I recognise that not everyone has the time or opportunity to do so. These summaries aim to provide access to the key truths, insights, and principles contained in these works. Think of it as sharing a handful of gems from a vast treasure chest. I hope that readers will both benefit and then feel inspired to explore more of this treasure in these and other valuable books.

You can therefore use LifeWord Summaries in three ways:

1. **A Taster** - With countless excellent books available and limited time, a concise summary helps you decide which are worth your attention. (You can also visit my book reviews at www.differentkingdom.com).
2. **A Refresher** - Recall key insights from a book you read long ago without re-reading it in full.
3. **A Digest** - If time, inclination, or challenges with reading make finishing the full book unlikely, a summary offers the next best thing.

The summary of this current book, **Live No Lies** by John Mark Comer, should take 20 minutes to read. If you prefer to listen, there will soon be an audio recording of the summary at www.differentkingdom.com which will take 15-20 mins to listen to.

Trevor Lloyd January 2025

Live No Lies

By John Mark Comer

Main Message

This book is about what it means to be a real disciple of Jesus in our age. The call to be a follower of Jesus is a call into battle. But our fight is not against people. It is against the world, the flesh and the devil. We have to resist the deceptive ideas that play to our disordered desires which then become normalised in society. We fight these enemies of the soul with spiritual disciplines such as prayer, fasting, biblical meditation, confession and participation in a local church. But ultimately we defeat them by denying ourselves and by dying to live the true life of God's kingdom.

Chapter Summaries

The war on lies

Comer opens with the fascinating story of Orson Welles' *War of the Worlds* hoax in 1938 to illustrate how even intelligent people can be swept up in deception. This serves as a metaphor for the spiritual battle we are all engaged in—a war against lies.

A manifesto for exile

We are feeling battered and our souls feel they are in a tug of war. This is because we really are at war and in a place of exile. Comer provides an overview of the idea of warfare in the New Testament to show the reality of the Christian life as warfare (despite the actual pacifism of early Christians). This may strike us modern people as odd, and yet it is vital to understand. To be a follower of Jesus is to be a soldier in a war. He introduces the traditionally understood enemies of the soul - *the world, the flesh and the devil*. He aims to interpret these ancient ideas to the modern age because he believes they are '*wreaking havoc in our souls and in society*.' He shows that the strategy of the enemy is to use *deceptive ideas* (from the devil, the father of lies) that appeal to our *disordered desires* (the flesh) which have become

normalised in society (the world). He reflects on the idea of exile which has felt increasingly real to us because Christians in the West have moved from the majority to the minority, from a place of honour to a place of shame, and from general tolerance to rising hostility. We are in 'a digital Babylon' as the world is at our fingertips. But the trauma of exile could actually be good for us if it brings us together and helps us to recover our souls. Then exile becomes something we don't have to fear even if there are lies we have to fight.

What if exile is something to fight but not to fear? What if instead of coming apart, we came together? What if instead of losing our souls, we discovered them?

Part 1 - The Devil

The Truth About Lies

Comer introduces us to a fourth-century monk called Evagrius who, ahead of his time, expressed truths about spiritual warfare. He shows that the main fight is the battle for our minds, liberating them from lies. He outlines a basic biblical theology of the devil, with John 8 as the central chapter, showing what Jesus taught: the devil is real, he's seeking to spread death, and his main strategy is lies. Our primary battle with the devil is one of truth over lies.

Jesus sees our primary war against the devil as a fight to believe truth over lies.

Ideas, weaponised

Truth is reality and reality is what you run into when you are wrong. We all have mental maps of reality, which are the coalescing of all our ideas and assumptions about reality. Flourishing requires living by truth that corresponds with reality. Comer relates this to the example of sexuality, challenging some of the assumptions of the sexual revolution. Ideas can be weaponised and they can enslave our souls. Our societies are being ruined by ideologies that have partial truths in them but are based on ideas (lies) which do not correspond with reality. We must confront them with a knowledge of the truth rather than with just private 'faith' as if that is the opposite of knowledge.

...the best definition of reality I know is “what you run into when you are wrong”...reality does not conform itself to our desires, feelings, or incorrect thinking.

‘Dezinformatsiya’

The Russians coined this word (meaning disinformation) during the Cold War when they flooded the world with lies as propaganda. The spiritual war we are in is not one with two armies ranged against each other. It is more like the asymmetric warfare or dirty wars we see now, which use such disinformation. *‘It’s a war between truth and lies.’* The undermining of truth in our post-truth world, beginning in universities decades ago, is now wreaking havoc in the political realm, especially in the US. But the lies we tell ourselves in our heads every day can also wreck our personal lives. The Bible calls this deception, and it is what ensnares us in sin. This is why we need truth to set us free. And experts have shown that human beings are very poor at detecting lies. It all began with the lie behind all lies that is represented for us in Genesis 3. This involved not trusting in God’s goodness, but demanding autonomy, and then redefining good and evil to suit our desires, rather than trusting God and his truth for what is best for us. The lies current in our secular society are that there is no God, that we are our own gods and that we should just be ourselves and do what we want. The effects of these lies have been disastrous.

...the devil’s primary stratagem to drive the soul and society into ruin is deceptive ideas that play to disordered desires, which are normalised in a sinful society

‘And having done all, to stand’

It’s not enough to know something in our minds. Ideas must get into our hearts and even into our bodies. We are all being formed by and into something. If we are to be formed into the image of Jesus, we need both truth and relationship. The Spirit (God’s relational presence) gets the truth (ideas consistent with reality) deep inside us. That is why isolation and lies are the devil’s strategy. As we see in the story of Eve’s temptation, he isolates us and then he lies to us with something that appeals to our disordered desires. Therefore, we need community and relational presence.

Contemporary society's obsession with individualism and autonomy makes isolating us so much easier. Jesus, in Luke 4, shows us how to withstand this strategy of the devil. And we see that spiritual practices are at the heart of it. He practises solitude, fasting, prayer, and Scripture. Spiritual disciplines are his weapons of spiritual warfare, especially quiet prayer and the use of Scripture. He defeats the specific thoughts/lies of the enemy with the scriptures that are within him. Our minds can literally rewire our brains by filling them with the truth of Scripture. We should also be careful what we allow into our minds and note that our disordered desires have been normalised in secular society so they seem normal and acceptable. But just as we are careful what we put into our bodies, we should be careful what we let into our minds. And when attacked by lies, like Jesus we just quietly stand against the enemy and speak the truth of Scripture.

...this is how we, as apprentices of Jesus, fight the devil. Not via some emotional or spiritual frenzy. We simply stand in quiet confidence in God's truth via the practices of Jesus ... spiritual disciplines are spiritual warfare.

Part 2 - The Flesh

The slavery of freedom

Comer challenges the common use of the saying '*the heart wants what the heart wants*' as an excuse for following our basest desires. He shows from Ephesians 2:1-3 how these three enemies operate together, starting with the devil's *deceptive ideas* playing to our *disordered desires*. These desires are called 'the flesh' in the New Testament when used to denote the animalistic cravings of the body, our corrupted appetites that feel natural but are actually sinful. The flesh is our base desire for sensual and other kinds of gratification. This idea of baser desires that need to be controlled is not just biblical but is a common idea across different cultures and thinkers. It has been called the animal self. Wise people have realised that we should not just follow our desires, that pleasure is not the same thing as happiness, and that happiness comes from '*disciplined desire*'. But in the modern Western world, we have moved from a culture of following external authority to a culture of internal authenticity, of being ourselves. Augustine taught that the basic problem of humanity was disordered desires and that we had to learn from external

authorities (like the Bible) to restrain those desires. But in the modern world, since Freud, we have believed that the worst thing is to repress our desires and that we should be our *'authentic selves.'* Being true to self becomes everything. But which self are we to be true to? We have competing and conflicting desires. And we must realise that *'our strongest desires are not our deepest desires.'* Our deepest desire is to become good and loving people. That desire is sabotaged by some of our strongest desires. So, *'be true to yourself'* is the worst advice and can actually lead to slavery.

...what's easy to miss in the modern view of things is that our strongest desires are not actually our deepest desires.

"Their passions forge their fetters"

Americans place great value on liberty or freedom but it is based on a view of freedom - the freedom to do whatever we want - that is not biblical. Comer uses Galatians 5 to explain biblical freedom. It is, in fact, the freedom to constrain what we want to do out of love for others. We don't indulge our flesh but, instead, we love our neighbour. It is this ability to choose our actions from higher motives than just base desires that distinguish us from animals. To love is to will the good of another and to do that we must know what is good. Just because something feels good does not mean that it *is* good. But in our postmodern age, we have abandoned external authorities (like God and the Bible) to define the good. For Christians, as well as the strong desires of the flesh, we have the Spirit within us appealing to our deepest desires for love and goodness. This requires a different idea of freedom as *'freedom from'* all constraints which is the idea that dominates in the Western world. Rather, it requires *'freedom for'* choosing the good - and this requires a higher power to overcome our strong desires and fulfil our deepest desires. Because we are slaves to whatever 'masters' us, it is our strong disordered desires that we need to be set free from. There is a place for external authorities (parents, the law) restraining those who cannot restrain themselves, but Christians are those who choose constraint from the external authorities of God and Scripture. Freedom is not about the lack of constraints but about choosing the right constraints for the sake of love.

... freedom without self-mastery is a disaster waiting to happen.

The law of returns

Addiction is a common human condition and is effectively what the Bible calls slavery to our desires. We can either be enslaved by the flesh or set free by the Spirit. Paul, in Galatians 6:7-8, reminds us that this is determined by the principle of sowing and reaping or 'the law of returns'. Our daily acts have greater consequences than we realise. It's like the way compound interest can grow a little into a lot. What we invest in life, we get back with interest. This is biblical, but also just ancient, truth. It's the human condition. Modern neuroscience is revealing the same principle - what we do and think becomes part of our muscle memory, becoming automatic to us. This is true of sin, of living by the flesh, as well as of formation into Christlike character. Psychology shows this truth. Our actions form habits which form a character. *'We make our decisions and then our decisions make us.'* Philosophy shows this truth. We have self-determining freedom but that freedom can shrink as we make decisions that shape us so that it becomes more difficult to choose to change. And theology shows this truth. By the choices we make, we are becoming the people we will be forever, fit either for heaven or for hell. Character is destiny.

This simple mechanism—of mind to thought to action to habit to character to either slavery or eternal life—is at the very heart of apprenticeship to Jesus.

So I say live by the Spirit

It is good for us at times to feel guilt. Guilt is about what we have done whereas shame (rarely helpful) is about who we are. When we feel guilt we should pay attention. It is to the soul what pain is to the body. It tells us something is wrong. We can learn how to fight the flesh by looking at Galatians 5 again. Firstly, *we crucify the flesh* - we starve it rather than feed it. When we give in to the appetites of the flesh we become like animals (2 Peter 2:10, 12). Secondly, *we keep in step with the Spirit*. We fight the flesh not with willpower but with Spirit power. Willpower is not bad (we should make good choices) but it's not enough. We need a power beyond us

and we access this power through spiritual practices. We make decisions of the will to do these practices which then position us to receive the power to do things we can't do by willpower alone. The spiritual practices are the counterhabits to those of the flesh. Two especially helpful practices are *fasting*, which is to go without food for some time. It reveals what is controlling us. It helps to break the power of sin in our lives. The other is *confession*. We need to drag our sin into the light. To name our sin to people we know we can trust. It is a true part of a community. We can't always control our desires, but we can begin to change what we can control - our habits of mind and body. They in turn influence what we can't control, our flesh. If we don't become weary of this battle with the flesh, we will reap a harvest of Christlike character.

The key to spiritual formation is to change what we can control (our habits) to influence what we can't control (our flesh).

Part 3 - The World

The brutal honesty about normal

In various ways, society often blurs moral lines because of popular opinion or desire. And we all come under pressure to conform. This is just one way in which the world influences us. The idea of a world which is ruled by the evil one, which tempts us away from the way of Jesus and which is hostile to God and us as Christians, is a clear theme of the New Testament. Bear in mind that the word used for the world in the NT can just mean i) the earth; ii) our humanity (the object of God's love); and also iii) a social and cultural system that is anti-God. It is where people give in to their flesh and their base desires become normalised. The world is a society which tries to live independently from God and which redefines good and evil based on disordered desires. It is the sin of Adam and Eve 'gone viral.' And it spreads like a virus. It operates as a social contagion, spreading by the herd instinct in society. The socially accepted becomes 'true'. But '*crowds lie*.' The apostle John, in 1 John 2:16, lays out the three lusts that are intrinsic to the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. These distorted desires are not just tolerated but celebrated in our time. But the wisdom of the world is foolishness to God. This does not mean that we are against everything society values but the early church grew

because of its difference from the world. Our way of being different will not fit with either the right or the left, as politics becomes the new religion, with each side locked into a kind of holy war. Much of what we call culture is what Jesus called the world and it is an enemy to the soul. We are not against the *people* of the world. We are for them by being against the *system* of the world.

We become like the relationships we cultivate and the culture to which we belong.

‘A remnant’

For decades the church has failed to warn of the dangers of the world. But the pull of the world is even greater now in our ‘*post-Christian world*.’ This age wants some of the fruits of Christianity in the West without acknowledging God. There is a danger of us getting ideologically colonized by the world, through the influence of ‘*soft power*.’ By persuasion rather than coercion e.g. by Hollywood and advertising. We have to ask ourselves where are we being assimilated into the culture. The biggest danger is when our faith gets blended or mixed with cultural values. This worldliness then becomes self-justifying - an ‘*echo chamber for the flesh*.’ Our spiritual disciplines are the weapons against this and a most basic discipline is participation in a church community as a counterculture to the world, ‘*an alternative society*’. The church needs to be fine about not fitting in with the culture. Being part of a church includes the Sunday meeting - as a deprogramming from the culture - but is much more than that. It needs to be ‘*a thick web of interdependent relationships between resilient disciples of Jesus*’. In our time, churches must be communities of deep *relational ties*, of *holiness* (especially concerning sexuality) and of *order and stability* in a culture of chaos and anxiety. We do this by together developing a rule of life and by consciously joining a remnant, or creative minority, that lives as exiles in this world and offers a beautiful resistance to the world.

There’s a tremendous opportunity in our cultural moment for the church to come back to her roots as a counter-anticulture

Epilogue

This has been a book about fighting and yet Jesus taught enemy love and non-violence. We must understand that this is a spiritual war against demonic powers or otherwise we will end up demonising people. We are called not to pick up a sword but to pick up a cross - and lay down our lives for others. To be a disciple involves dying to self, denying ourselves. We *'crucify the flesh'*, dying to our own desires. It is this death that is the way into life in God's kingdom. When we refuse to die, we remain open to the enemy. To die in this way means saying no to the self many times each day. Each choice involves a death. But to lose our life is to find it in Christ. We have just two choices - deny Jesus and follow self, or deny self and follow Jesus. And it ends up costing us more *not* to follow him. To deny ourselves requires a deep trust in Jesus. We fear we will lose something by denying ourselves. So we have to be willing to surrender to him in obedient faith. We have to trust that he desires our happiness and flourishing. And then we die to live.

For Jesus, the cross is the entry point into the life "to the full" of the kingdom. It is how we step into life - we die.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Are we, as Christians, taking seriously our battle against the world, the flesh and the devil? How can we be vigilant without becoming paranoid?
2. What are some of the 'deceptive ideas', or lies, that the devil has sown into our culture and what damage are they doing? What is the most effective way for Christians to counter them?
3. What 'disordered desires' do you personally struggle with and what steps are you taking - or need to take - to pursue true freedom from them?
4. How are you actively participating in your church community as a counter-culture to the values of the world system?

More About the Author



John Mark Comer is an author and former pastor of Bridgetown Church in Portland, Oregon. He now leads [Practicing the Way](#), a non-profit organization dedicated to creating resources for the body of Christ on spiritual formation. In addition, he serves as a teacher at Vintage Church in Los Angeles, California. To learn more about his work, visit johnmarkcomer.com While I plan to read more of his books, I can already highly recommend [Practicing the Way](#) and [The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry](#).

Disclaimer:

This is an unofficial, personal summary that reflects my own interpretation of the original book. While I have sought to convey its core ideas faithfully, I cannot guarantee that the author or publisher would endorse its accuracy. If you have not yet read the original book, I strongly encourage you to do so. This summary is intended as a complementary introduction and guide, written as a tribute to the value and insights of the original work.