

FUNNY &  
FRIGHTFUL  
LESSONS  
ABOUT MOTH  
EATING AND  
MOVING  
TO THE  
NEXT LEVEL



# BROKEN ESCAL ATORS



FOREWORD BY CHRIS HODGES  
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HAAS

*lightbulb lessons about  
and moving to*



# BROKEN ESCALATORS

*Funny & Frightful Lessons on Moth Eating  
and Getting to the Next Level*

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**SALUBRIS<sup>SM</sup>**  
R E S O U R C E S

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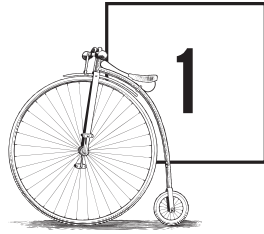
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# WHO'S YOUR DADDY?

*The Strange Science of Anxiety and How Various Religions Deal With It*

I'll never forget the first time I prayed in public. I was a fresh believer in a charismatic church, and everyone else at the prayer meeting seemed like a prayer-ninja. They would flip and kick through the prayer list with the most fluid and poetic prayers I had ever heard, quoting Scriptures and Hebrew names of God I had never heard before. Then, the worst of all things happened. One of the leaders asked me to pray.

"Me? Out loud?" I asked in horror. It was like being asked to free-style dance after a professional just flipped off the stage. I'm pretty sure I prayed like a caveman, "God . . . uh, me no pray good."

So in that first month, I picked up a few tricks to spice up my prayer-ninja-dance routine and discovered that people are certain to be impressed by your super-spiritual sounding prayers if you do the following:

## **1. SHOUT AND CAST SOMETHING OUT WHEN YOU PRAY.**

If little Emily needs you to pray for her boo-boo, your job is to yell the Devil out of her . . . just in case.

**2. USE LOTS OF FIRE METAPHORS.**

(“Consume us with your flaming smoke of fire!”) Alternate these with water analogies. (“Flood us with your dripping river of rain, O God.”) And follow the general rule: Shout during the fire; whisper during the rain. When you run out of words, simply exhale loudly as if you’re giving birth. (No offense to those of you who have actually delivered a baby.)

**3. QUOTE AN OBSCURE BIBLE VERSE.**

It doesn’t even have to make sense. A weird verse from Leviticus about cloven hooves and oxen will do fine. Just quote it passionately and talk your way into a metaphor about the marriage supper of the Lamb. When other people in the room hear this, their confusion will quickly morph into a deep respect over your spiritual insight—assuming you make this transition confidently. Act like everyone should know what you’re talking about.

**4. SALT YOUR PRAYERS WITH OBSCURE NAMES OF GOD.**

My favorite deep-in-the-Spirit-sounding names are Jehovah Tsidkenu or Mekaddishkem. (Make sure you hack out the guttural sounds like a native Hebrew speaker.) You also might try quoting Amy Grant’s song “El Shaddai” in the middle of your prayer as if you’re spontaneously making it up. (Be careful. Many young people these days don’t know the song and may be so impressed that they’ll want you to mentor them after doing this; then your pretentious jig is truly history.)

**5. ADD A COOL ACCENT.**

Americans love it when British or Australian people pray. After trying it for a month, though, I was harshly told that “you actually have to be from there in order to do it.” So use this technique sparingly, like when you’re visiting a new church.

Bear in mind that I'm not saying God actually likes these techniques. If you want God to actually hear your prayers, you may want to apply different advice.

But seriously . . . our prayers do reveal a lot about our theology. Jesus pointed out that, if our prayer lives are dominated with anxiety and asking God for things, then we probably don't have an authentic relationship with God the Father.

Don't misunderstand me. It's okay to "ask God for things." Jesus repeatedly encouraged this (Matt. 7:7; John 15:7). However, God "knows what we need even before we ask" (Matt. 6:8), so if we spend an inordinate amount of time asking Him for things, it's a symptom of a greater disease: *spiritual Fatherlessness*. Allow me to explain.

It's interesting to note that, of all the names of God that Jesus used when He prayed, He used the name Father the most. Why? The answer to this question can revolutionize your relationship with God. By the end of this chapter, we'll discover that, relating to God as Father can literally alter your brain's chemistry and reduce your odds of being anxious. I realize that sounds like a sensational claim. But after a bizarre mix of stories on drugs, chopping up brains, and other fun facts, I'm going to show you why Christianity has a scientifically different effect on our bodies compared to other religions. By the end, you'll be able to answer the question: Am I even experiencing these benefits?

## WHO'S YOUR DADDY?

Although praying to "the Father" may sound routine to modern believers, to first-century Jews, it was an astounding novelty. According to scholars, Jews have never commonly referred to God as "Father."<sup>1</sup> And yet, Old Testament prophecies hinted that when the Messiah came, His Father would be of a divine origin.<sup>2</sup> Jesus stated

that His purpose was to “reveal the Father” (Matt. 11:27). He constantly implored people to go beyond knowing God as “Lord” and instead call Him “Father” (Matt. 7:21). Jesus, for instance, emphasized the Father’s desire to be generous: “If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” (Matt. 7:11). That’s why, in John 17:6, Jesus prayed “Father, I have manifested your name to the men you gave me.” To be clear: who’s name did Jesus manifest? *The Father’s*.

The idea of fatherhood has somewhat lost its meaning in our culture. For the past fifty years or so, fathers have too often been stereotyped as clueless breadwinners. One in three Americans now grow up in single-parent homes—most of them with only a mother. And remember that until the 1700s, people generally didn’t commute to work. Most kids were apprenticed into Dad’s trade—separation from Dad and segmentation of children by age is a relatively modern idea. All these things contribute to a concept of fatherhood

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that’s far weaker than the way most people in other periods of history would have understood it.

There’s been a huge amount of research on the power fathers have on child-outcomes, and if you make a list of fifty negative behaviors—from drug abuse to domestic violence, from suicide to sexual confusion—almost every one of them skyrockets where there has been an absentee father. Studies have even found a direct correlation between chronic anxiety and fatherlessness.<sup>3</sup> So it’s not a stretch to believe that spiritual

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fatherlessness has a profound effect on anxiety too. Quite simply, if you truly know God as your Father, you'll live completely differently, and this will rid you of spiritual anxiety as well.

## LEARNING FATHERHOOD FROM A DAUGHTER

My wife lost her father to suicide just before her seventeenth birthday. She lived through a devastating tragedy. Yet, she learned early on to trust God to be a “father to the fatherless” (Ps. 68:5), and she has never been afraid to ask her heavenly Father for practical things. This ability has always been inspiring to me.

For example, one time she noticed that our two young girls were completely outgrowing their clothes, so in her prayer journal, she wrote: “Father, you see that our girls need more clothes. And you see that we don’t have the money. I trust you to completely take care of our girls.” Then she wrote the exact date and time next to this entry. A few days later, we got a gift card in the mail. A farmer in the area had been praying, and with the card, he wrote a note: “I just sensed that God wanted to bless your daughters today; so I bought you a gift card.” Of course, it happened to be a gift card for a super-hip clothing store. (And it’s a miracle that a farmer in central Wisconsin even knew about this store.) But, get this—the receipt showed that he bought the gift card online at the *exact same moment* my wife journaled her prayer. Is that a coincidence?

Later that month our lawn mower died, and I was totally irritated. After all, there were a million other things I wanted to spend money on—and we didn’t have money for more than one or two of them. That same day, Carolyn and I had to go to a wedding, so as we jumped in the car, I started whining about our lawn mower. Immediately, Carolyn responded, “Well, let’s trust God for one.”



When she said that I have to admit I was a little annoyed. Here I was having a great moan session about my lawn equipment, and she went hyper-spiritual on me. I almost said back, “That’s ridiculous!” But a small part of my heart agreed, and I thought, *Well, why not? What have we got to lose?* As we drove off to the wedding, Carolyn prayed, “Father, you see that we need a lawn mower. You’ve been faithful in the past, and You’ll be faithful in the future. Amen.”

In light of earlier prayer guidelines, you’ll agree that my wife’s prayer wasn’t very impressive. No shouting. No demon-casting. No obscure Bible promises or strange names. Her prayer was short, simple, and full of thanksgiving.

When we came home from the wedding three hours later, there was a new lawn mower sitting in front of our garage! I looked at my wife thinking, *Did you call someone or borrow someone’s lawn mower just to impress me? But she looked as surprised as I did.*

“I didn’t tell anyone anything!” she promised.

A note taped to the handle explained:

Dear pastor,

My mom sold her house. She had this brand new lawn mower and needs to get rid of it. I figured that you’ll know someone in our church who could use this! Call me if you don’t, and I’ll pick it up.

Carolyn smiled at me and said simply, “God is good.”

In that moment, I remember thinking, *I truly don’t know God like she does.* At least, I didn’t trust Him like she did. Despite all my theological training, I didn’t have a heavenly “Dad.” But from that point on, I made it my goal to start talking to God about practical things.

The same month as my lawn mower lesson, our church built a half-

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pipe skate ramp for our youth ministry. I grew up riding freestyle BMX on a big half-pipe ramp in my backyard, so I was excited to finish our church ramp. Whenever the skaters came over, I'd usually skate with them instead of bike. The only problem was, I needed a new skateboard deck. So I thought, *Here's my opportunity: God, I could use a new skateboard.* And, no exaggeration, later that very day, one of the new guys in our youth ministry asked me, "Pastor,

would you have any use for an extra skateboard? I just got a brand new deck." In the weeks that followed, it felt like every time I asked God for a favor, He supernaturally provided.

While this was happening, I couldn't help but think what Jesus said in Matthew 6:8, "Your Father knows what you need before you ask him." And later in chapter 6, verse 31 continues, "Do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them." In the same sermon, Jesus also said, "If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" (Matt. 7:11).

In other words, you don't have to worry about stuff! You don't merely have a God—you have a Father! Jesus said we don't need to pray lengthy or hyper-spiritual prayers—He already knows what we need. Indeed, we don't even need to waste much time asking for things. Instead, Jesus argued, spend your time "*hallowing His name.*" And what name is that? "Our *Father* in heaven."

## WE'RE IN CHARGE HERE!

In the book *Stumbling on Happiness* (which inspired numerous chapters of this book), Harvard psychologist Daniel Gilbert says “the human being is the only animal that truly thinks about the future.”<sup>4</sup> He continues, “The greatest achievement of the human brain is its ability to imagine objects and episodes that do not exist in the realm of the real.”<sup>5</sup>

Now, it's true that most mammals instinctively anticipate the future, but none of them have the capacity to strategically analyze it. By contrast, when humans imagine themselves living in outer space, we figure out a way to do it—even if it requires us to create a hundred new technologies to make it work. Creative strategizing is one of the attributes that sets us apart from everything else God has made.

When the Bible says that we are distinctly made in the “image and likeness of God,” it raises the question *how*? After pondering a little more science and Scripture, I'd like to make a few suggestions I think you'll find intriguing.

When Adam and Eve were placed in the garden of Eden, their job was to “rule and subdue” creation. God gave human beings the power of *creative governance*. Their job was to name animals, to organize and maintain the things the Creator made. We almost get the sense that God was planning on creating millions of more planets just like ours. He told them to “be fruitful and multiply,” so He would have an ever-expanding team of helpers to assist in governing His endless creation projects. But the main point is this: Unlike any other animal, we can use our imaginations to see into the future. We can conceive things that don't exist and then create them. We are like God in that we are creative about the future.

The Bible seems to imply that before sin entered the world our creative powers were effortless. But after sin, Genesis 3:17–19 says

that from now on, “cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. . . . By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food.”

The text implies that up until this point, tending the garden had never required sweat; it was never painful. There was never any *toil*. However, that observation brings up the question: How, then, did they tend the garden without toilsome work?

Some believe God originally designed people to “work through speaking”—much the way God created the world. He spoke, “Let there be light,” and there was light (Gen. 1:3).

Since we were created in the image and likeness of God, some people think two of the attributes that make us “like God” compared to all other animals are:

- 1. WE HAVE AN UNPARALLELED ABILITY TO THINK CREATIVELY ABOUT THE FUTURE.**
- 2. JUST LIKE GOD, OUR WORDS HAVE CREATIVE POWER.**

So it appears that, when Adam and Eve sinned, God essentially said, “I’m going to take some of this power away. From now on, you’ll have to work for what you need. Or, at the very least, you’ll have to restore your faith in Me.” Interestingly, Jesus also said, “By your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matt. 12:27). There are many Bible accounts where God was particularly harsh on believers who used their words poorly (see Num. 11:1–3; Luke 1:18–20; 1:59–64).

Thankfully, however, we can reclaim portions of this remarkable power. Jesus said, “If you have faith and don’t doubt,” you can curse this fig tree or tell that mountain to move (Matt. 21:21). Or as Paul put it, we can produce work through faith rather than sweat (1 Thess. 1:3).

After God started providing me with gift cards, lawn mowers, and skateboards, I started to wonder if my prayers and intimacy with the Father were more important than I had previously understood.

But how does relating to God as a Father alter your brain's chemistry—not to mention your anxiety? After a horrifying history lesson, we're going to learn about a part of your brain called the "prefrontal cortex." And once you understand what that part of your brain does, it may change the way you interpret some of Christ's most famous words.

## CHOPPING UP BRAINS AND THE SCIENCE OF ANXIETY

Over the last few decades, scientists have discovered that the part of the brain responsible for "thinking ahead" is called the prefrontal cortex.<sup>6</sup> And unfortunately, doctors figured this out the hard way.

Back in 1940s and '50s, there was a popular surgery called a lobotomy, in which doctors would strategically sever that part of the brain in people who suffered with extreme anxiety. After severing the connection in the brain with a surgical knife, these people would become super-relaxed. (Some of you are thinking, *Sign me up!* But hold that thought.)

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Ironically, the medical experts didn't foresee a significant side effect of the operation. Once surgeons disconnected this part of the brain, none of the same patients could plan for the future. Sure, they worried less, but, if you asked them, "What do you want to do tomorrow?" they would go blank. It's like someone telling someone to think about infinity. Human beings simply don't have the capacity to imagine the infinite. In the same

way, when lobotomy patients were asked to plan their vacation next week, they simply couldn't wrap their minds around it.

So the gruesome yet powerful revelation was this: Anxiety comes from the same part of the brain that helps us think about the future. When we think about the future and feel out of control, it causes us to feel anxious.

In other words, the ability that makes us unique among all other creatures is the same brain function that causes us to feel anxious. Or, to frame this in a biblical context: to imagine the future without the complete security of our heavenly Father is terrifying. After sin entered the world, we lost that intimacy—which means the very organ that enabled us to dream can now also torture us.

In the introduction, I explained that I would reveal the myths about happiness or promotion. So, our first one is:

## MYTH

### THE ANXIETY MYTH:

*If I don't worry, my dreams won't stay on track.*

Although anxiety comes from thinking about the future, God the Father doesn't want us to be anxious—unless, of course, we deny Him. But before exploring Christ's unique way of dealing with anxiety, let's explore how other religions try to solve this.

## TRY A LITTLE DENIAL

Those of you who've studied Hinduism (or other forms of Eastern Yoga) know that Eastern meditation obsesses over "being present

in the *now*”—not the past or the future. In other words, Hindus achieve peace by *living in the present*. If we think about this from a scientific standpoint, the associated meditations are basically a clever technique for ignoring the part of our brain that’s driving us nuts, the prefrontal cortex.

However, the Bible teaches a completely different way of achieving peace. I’ll reduce the process down to three simple steps:

**1. GET A HEAVENLY FATHER.**

**2. USE PRAYER AND PETITION TO COMMUNICATE WITH GOD—**  
which reinforces both your relationship to the Father and your sense of security.

**3. GIVE THANKS WHEN PRESENTING YOUR REQUESTS TO GOD.**

In doing so, the Bible promises that, “the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6–7).

By contrast, Hinduism and Eastern Yoga reason that if your lack of control is what causes anxiety, then simply ignore your need to have control! But Jesus says, “No! Don’t ignore your need to control. Rather, get a Father who can control it. Don’t stop thinking about the future because, frankly, you need to think about it. Heaven and hell are real.” Indeed, Jesus points out, “I want you to think about

it so much that you actually ‘store up treasure in heaven’” (Matt. 6:20). Yet at the same time, He argues, “Don’t worry about it. You have a Father who will help you.”

In other words, if we have a heavenly Father, we don’t need to live in denial of our future or fear of our lack

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**GOD WANTS TO  
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DREAM!**

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of control. And in doing the three disciplines noted above, God literally redeems our prefrontal cortex—the uniquely human part of our brains.

To put this in less nerdy terms: God wants to restore our capacity to dream! He wants us to look to the future and speak things into existence with awe-inspiring confidence and creativity. We speak forth passion into our marriages, clarity to our children's callings, peace into our workplaces, joy into our friendships, and richness into every area of our lives.

## **CAN I DO WEED AND LOVE JESUS?**

So far we've talked about how some people turn to Hinduism for peace, but other people turn to a different "religion" to solve the anxiety problem: drugs.

In our church filled with newly saved people, I'm regularly asked, "Can I get drunk or do weed and still love Jesus? After all, didn't Stephen, the disciple get 'stoned'?" (At least they've read their Bibles, kind of). Stephen was under the influence of a different kind of spirit, the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:55).

The Bible offers a spiritual alternative to drugs called the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18). Strangely enough, the biblical manifestations of the Holy Spirit can sometimes be confused with drunkenness or joy (Acts 2:13–15; 1 Cor. 14:23).

Not all drugs are bad. If you've been diagnosed with certain illnesses, God has inspired many marvelous medications to help with that. But drugs like marijuana have terrible side effects—especially in young people whose brains are still developing. After all, guess what part of the brain is most affected by pot? Yep. The prefrontal cortex—and the dreams it produces about the future.

Long-term marijuana use is the chemical equivalent of a lobotomy.



That's why people who regularly smoke pot lose their ability to do long-term planning. Studies show that when kids under sixteen do marijuana, they're especially susceptible to this type of brain damage.<sup>7</sup> That means they lose their ability to dream, to feel, to anticipate the future, and to speak creatively towards it. And not only that, it decreases the user's IQ, life-expectancy, and ability to problem-solve.<sup>8</sup>

Thankfully, our heavenly Father offers a better solution. The apostle Peter wrote, "The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray" (1 Peter 5:7). In other words, we don't need to ignore the future or fill our minds with haze. We can look forward to the "end of all things" as we pray. And, again, to whom should we pray? The Father.

## THE BIG REVELATION

As we conclude this first leg of our ride up the escalator, let's think about Jesus on the night He was betrayed by Judas. You might think Jesus would have been a mess! (And in some ways, He probably felt like a mess before He prayed in the garden of Gethsemane.) Yet, when the betrayal actually happened, Jesus showed incredible poise. He was so connected to His heavenly Father that He was capable of whipping out a miracle that saved Peter's life (see Luke 22:50–51).

Why was Jesus at peace? Because He connected with His Father through prayer. He used the three steps I told you about earlier: (1) acknowledged His Father; (2) used prayer and petition; and (3) gave thanks. So when the crazy stuff went down—when Peter swung his sword—notice what Jesus told him: "Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matt. 26:53).

Twelve legions is roughly equivalent to 72,000 angels, and keep in mind, it only took one angel in the Old Testament to put 185,000 men to death (2 Kings 19:35). Jesus was saying to Peter: “Do you realize how much power we have? Do you realize how much love comes from our Father? We don’t need to flail around using our carnal strength! The Father and I are purposefully allowing this to happen!”

Ultimately, God wants us to live with towering levels of confidence, even in the midst of betrayal. He wants us to be optimistic about the future. Our ability to plan was meant to be bathed in *divine optimism*, even when we take up crosses. We were meant to live, dripping in the Father’s love, saturated in the confidence of His faithfulness. To lack these attributes is to miss the whole point of being “born again,” to be a child *again* who doesn’t need to worry about anything except obedience.

This raises the question: Do you have that kind of relationship? Have you welcomed Him into your current circumstances? If you’re interested, read this paraphrase of the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6:9–13:

*Father, we acknowledge, You are not some detached and impersonal God. You are our Father in heaven. We make Your name hallowed, sacred, and special—which means, we celebrate this intimate attribute in You. We ask for Your heavenly plan to manifest in our lives knowing You provide daily bread for us. We will live innocently today—free of grudges and unforgiveness in response to Your gift of forgiveness. Help us to avoid all alternative ways of living, and deliver us from traps of evil, through Your infinite power, that we will forever revel in. Amen.*

## KEY IDEAS

1. The way we pray is often an indicator of many things such as the myths we believe and the way we view God.
2. Of all the names Jesus used to refer to God, Father was the most common. There's a large amount of theological significance that can be attached to this.
3. When you understand what it means to have God as a Father, it alters how you live.
4. Unlike any other animal, humans can use our imaginations to see into the future, conceive things that don't exist, and then create them. We are like God in that we are creative about the future.
5. After sin entered the world, our creative powers were severely impaired, along with our intimacy and security with our Creator.
6. Scriptures indicate that our words were once an infinitely greater source of power.
7. Science shows that anxiety comes from the same part of the brain that thinks about the future.
8. Some religions, such as Hinduism, attempt to bring about peace by avoiding thoughts of the future—by living in the “now.” But this bypasses the very ability that makes humans exceptional.
9. Drugs, such as marijuana, decrease anxiety but simultaneously destroy the part of our brains that thinks and dreams about the future. This, too, destroys the very gift that makes humans exceptional.
10. Rather than bypassing this part of our brains, Jesus taught us to redeem our humanity by getting a heavenly Father—which enables us to look to the future and speak things into existence with awe-inspiring creativity and confidence—free of the anxiety that comes from spiritual fatherlessness.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. If you could speak in a different cool accent, which would you pick?
2. How would you describe your relationship with your earthly father? Close, distant, nonexistent?
3. How might your relationship with your earthly father affect how you perceive the heavenly Father?
4. Do you ever pray? Have you ever experienced a miraculous answer to prayer?
5. Have you ever had a season when your prayer life was dominated by asking God for things? In light of this chapter, what do you think might change?
6. What are you most anxious about right now? If you were fully convinced your heavenly Father was taking care of you, how would it change things?
7. After learning about our creativity and the power of our words, does it change the way you think about complaining or cursing? Why or why not?
8. What are some of the ways—good and bad—that you cope with anxiety?
9. What was the most interesting factoid or takeaway out of this chapter and why?
10. If you knew God would help you achieve your dreams, what would you dare to accomplish over the next twenty years or a lifetime?