



God's
eye view on

TENSION

Matt Rawlins^{PhD}

A little book that's yours to give away.



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Hi, My name is Matt.

Do you hate tension as much as I do?

Can I say again, I don't like



tension.

In me,
my family.

My friendships,
work, finances
or community.

I don't like it anywhere in the world...

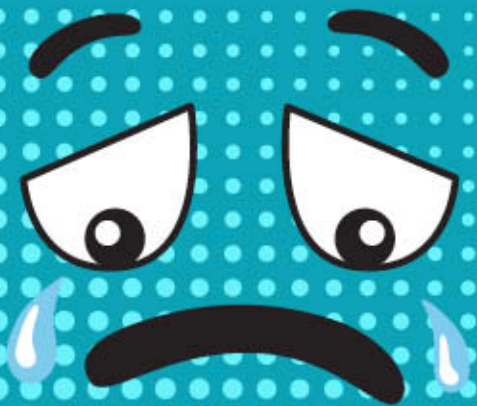
URG

It's everywhere, and there's
just no way to avoid it.



My first reaction is to hide.
I'm not really proud of it.

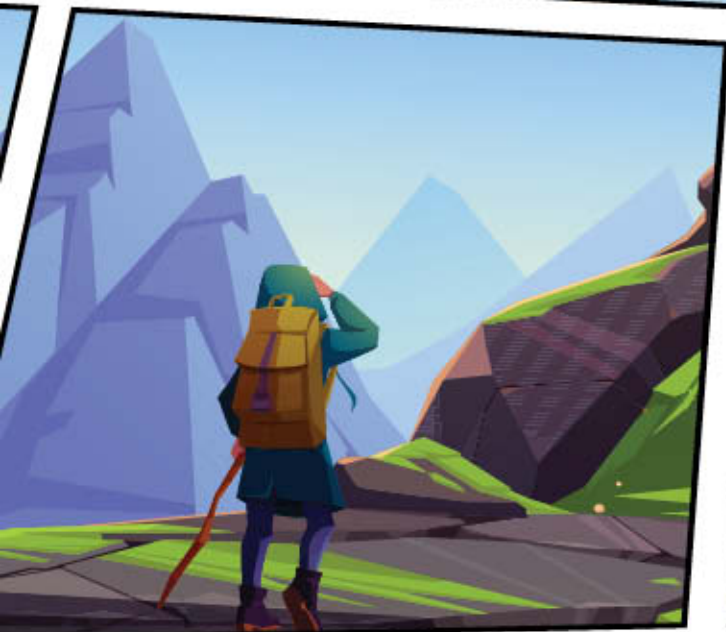
Okay, I have said it.
I have put my position on the table.
If that was the end of the story
rather than the beginning,
it would be sad.



But it's not...

This is my journey
in learning how to
deal with it

and seeing it
from God's
perspective.



How does the dictionary define it?

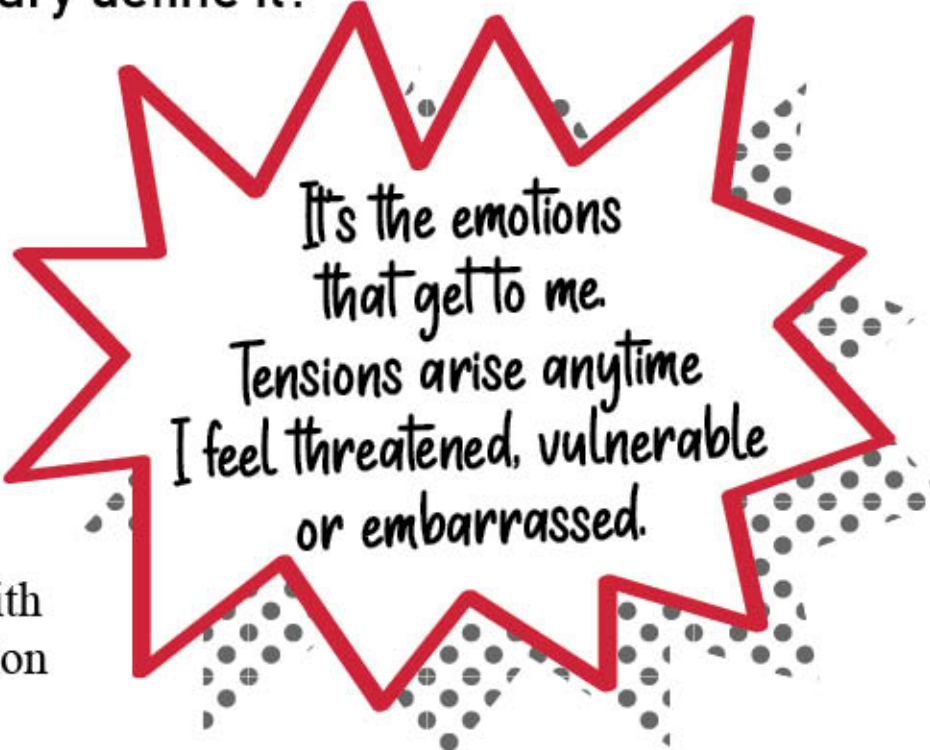


tension *noun*

ten·sion

Definition of *tension*

1 a : inner striving, unrest,
or imbalance often with
physiological indication
of emotion



It's the emotions
that get to me.
Tensions arise anytime
I feel threatened, vulnerable
or embarrassed.

(This is not God's perspective.)

It's when:

'I feel I am
wrong.'



Things appear
out of control

It seems I don't
know what I am
talking about.

I don't feel respected
or I am ignored.



Expectations
are not met.

The most common
feeling is some
level of shame.



How about you?

- ? What are the tensions in your life ?
- ? How is it affecting you ?
- ? How are you dealing with them ?
- ? What emotions does tension stir up in you ?

For me, when I'm defensive, I know there is tension at work.

Roots

So where does all this struggle with tension come from?

It usually can be traced a long way back in our life. Here is how it happened to me. You might see some similarities to your own struggle.

I'm the baby in my family.

My older sister, brother and my dad were raging extroverts.

They sucked all the emotional energy out of the room when I was growing up.

There was no space to show up.

So, I learned to disappear.

What I thought or
felt didn't matter.

I didn't matter.



I loved my family dearly, and they loved me.

I had a mostly “normal” childhood.

But all families are broken in some ways.

Mine didn't know how to deal with a kid who was so different.

**Growing up in a
superconservative
church didn't
help matters.**



**I got the idea that
God was old
fashioned,
out of touch,
and didn't really
care about life as
I experienced it.**

As a young person - I assumed religion was about

BAM!



removing the tension

and God was not meeting His end of the bargain.

I spent the first 20 years
of my life avoiding tension.

That just means
I didn't show up in life.

Maybe you're like me.



Maybe you're like Bear...

I really admire my brother-in-law, 'Bear.'

Just last week he went to a doctor's appointment for a very painful foot problem.

The short version of it was the Doctor forgot and just put Bear off as if it didn't matter.

Bear stood up to him and gave him a mouthful and walked out. The Doctor came running down the hall after him and was yelling at him. Bear stood toe-to-toe with him and gave it right back.

Bear is 72 and tenacious.
I have struggled to say
what I think my whole life.



I'm not like Bear.

I don't demand answers.

However, Just before I turned 21
I started to push harder to find them.

My parents talked about God like
He was real, but He wasn't to me.

I had to know for myself. Otherwise I was done with all the fear of religion, the rules of church and a God I assumed was distant and removed.

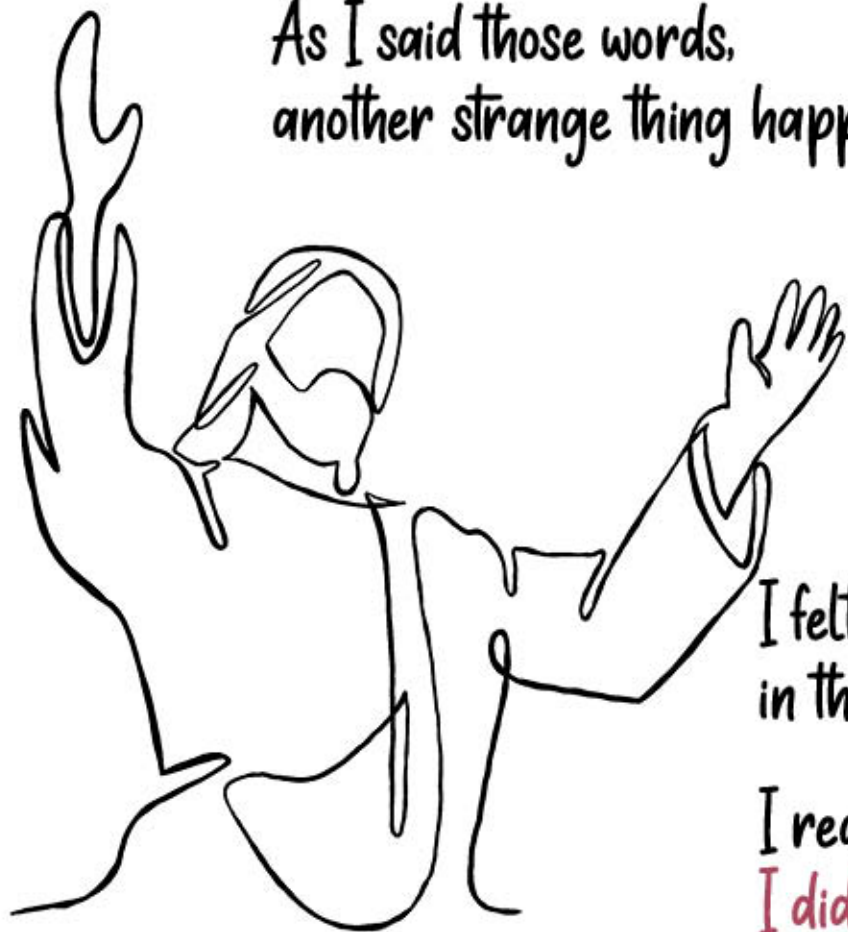
To get the answer, I enrolled in a discipleship course.

As I sat in class one day, I burst into tears and the first words out of my mouth were,



“I’m so lonely.”

As I said those words,
another strange thing happened.



I felt God's love for me
in that moment.

I realised I was lonely because
I didn't know Him.



In simple terms,
I fell in **LOVE**
with God.



It's a risky thing
to love God.

Something in me awakened,
and I took this very seriously.

It confronted
my fears.

It pulled me out of
my comfort zone.



GOD

With this new found love, I knew I couldn't go home as I would just go back to my old ways, so I went overseas to discover what God was doing in the nations.

That is where I was confronted with
TENSION in many new ways.

I spent the first three years in Saipan. Then a year in Hong Kong where I met my wife. Then five years in Singapore leading the local missions work there.

Fish eyes and chicken feet were on the dinner table.

A little Indian girl carrying a malnourished child begging for money.

A very poor family in a rural village in the Philippines killed their last chicken to honour my coming to their home.

I didn't have answers and there was tension everywhere.

A lot of time has now slipped past.

I am now 64 and have lived in Singapore for over twenty years.

I studied leadership here.

I even got a Ph.d in it, traveling to 35 countries to learn more about how tension relates to leadership.

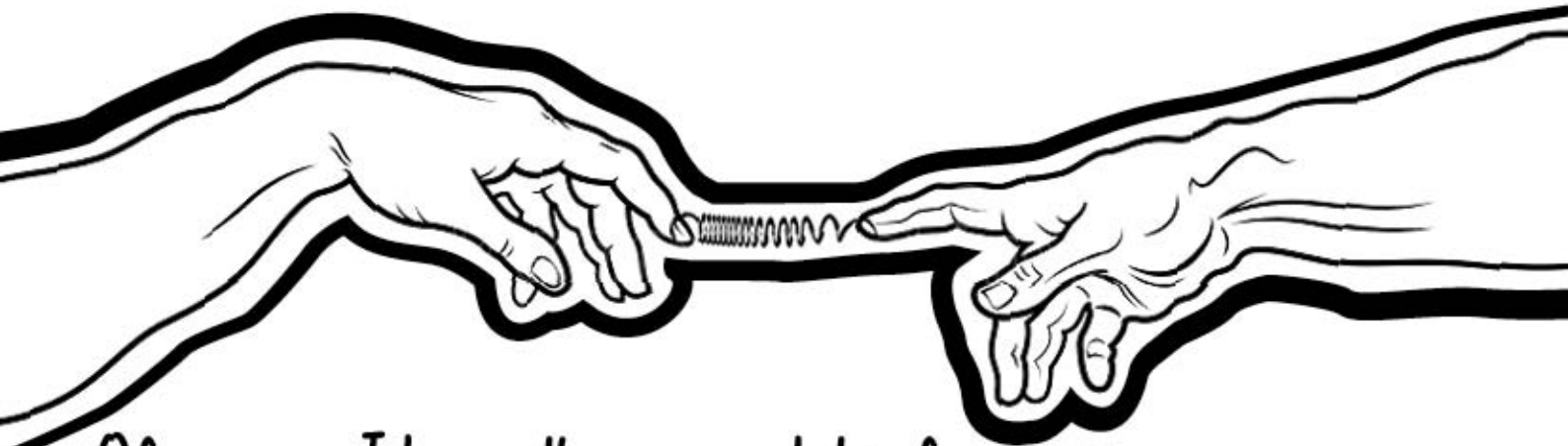
I discovered that tension is the new norm. Those who succeed will have to learn to lead in the midst of it.

As you might guess, I needed personal answers as my own way of dealing with it didn't work.

As my love for God grew,
I became more interested in how
He viewed tension.

I have to admit, I still don't like
tension, but that is not my
starting place anymore.

What is God's view on tension?



Of course, I know there are lots of stories about conflict in the Bible. But that's different than tension.

Let's take a look.

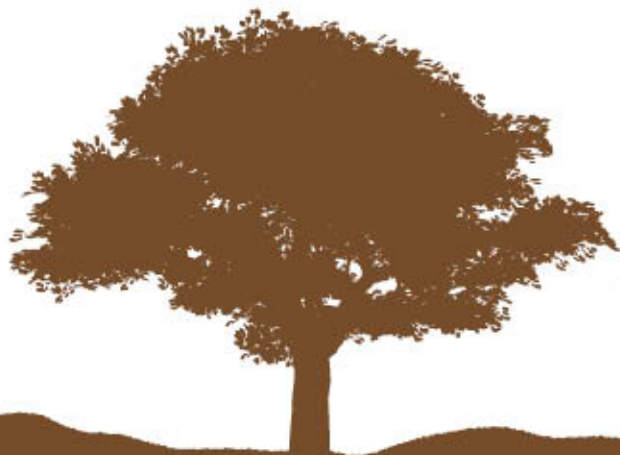
In the Bible's book of beginnings, it says God placed the first man and woman in a vast garden. They could eat fruit from thousands of trees, but one (the tree of the knowledge of good and evil) was forbidden to them.

Why would God place this tree in His beautiful garden?



A TREE

It wasn't a magical or mystical tree,
but it was put there with a warning:



“...in the day
that you eat
from it you will
surely die.”
Genesis 2:17

Yes, God defines boundaries that creates tension.

Important Reminder:

This is before our rebellion.
It's happening in an unspoiled world.



In this perfect world,
God makes space for tension to exist.

Dare I even say



God created
tension?

I think 99.9% of us assume that tension is the result of sin.
Get rid of the tension and there will be no sin.



In this perfect world. God creates tension by putting a tree in the garden and says,

DO NOT EAT
from it



Creation is
God is

Tension is a part of a morally perfect world.

What is God's view of tension in this relationship?

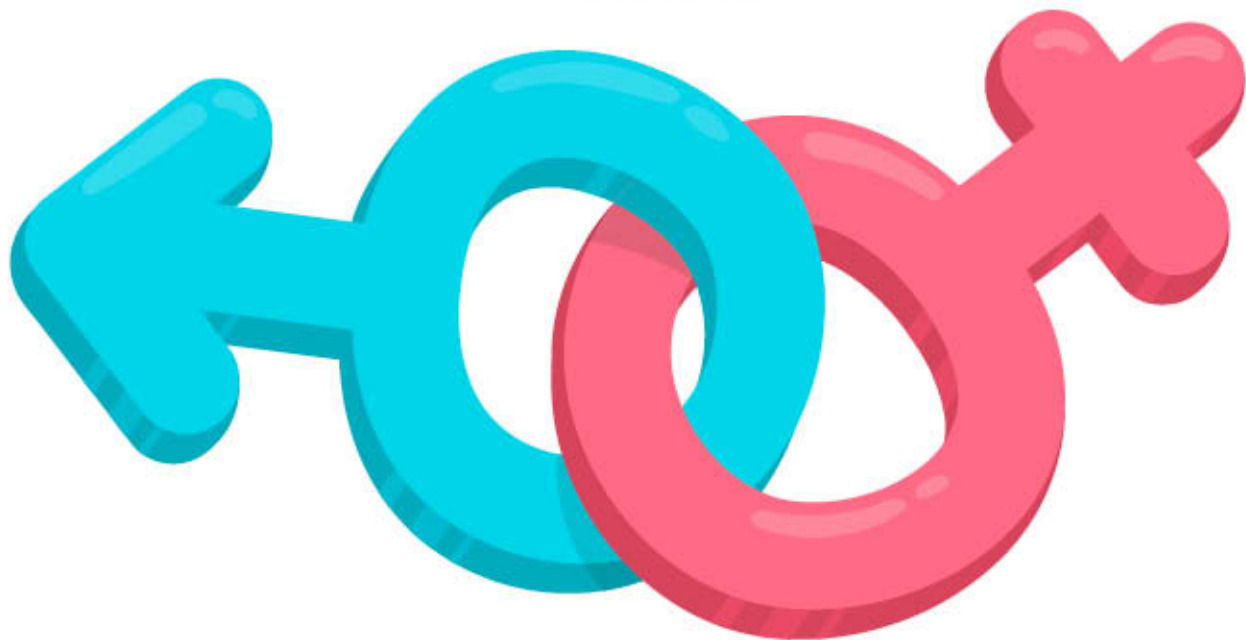
Surely I'm not going to say there was tension
between them before our rebellion?



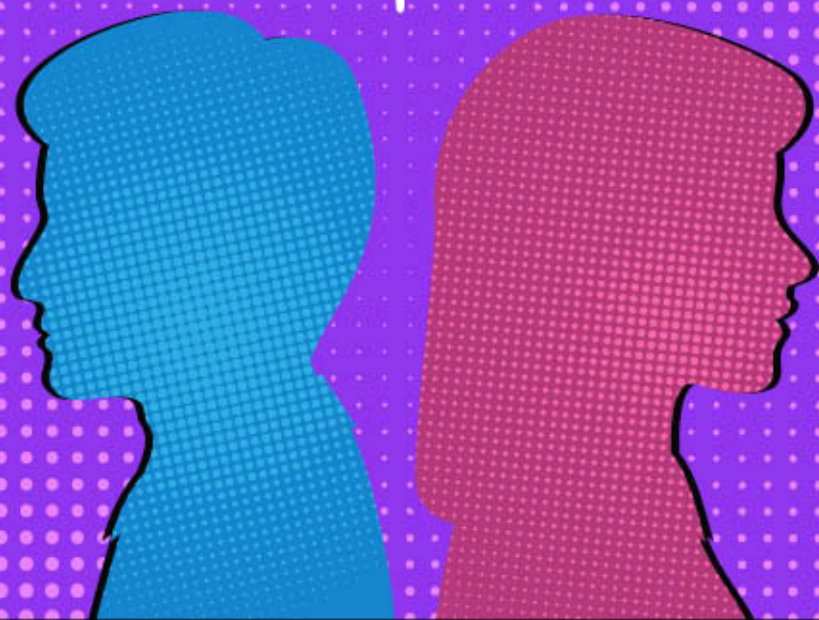
Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper who is suitable for him... So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. The Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man.

Genesis 2:18-22

The one has now become
two.



They are now complete in themselves,
but incomplete alone.



For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother,
and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. Genesis 2:24

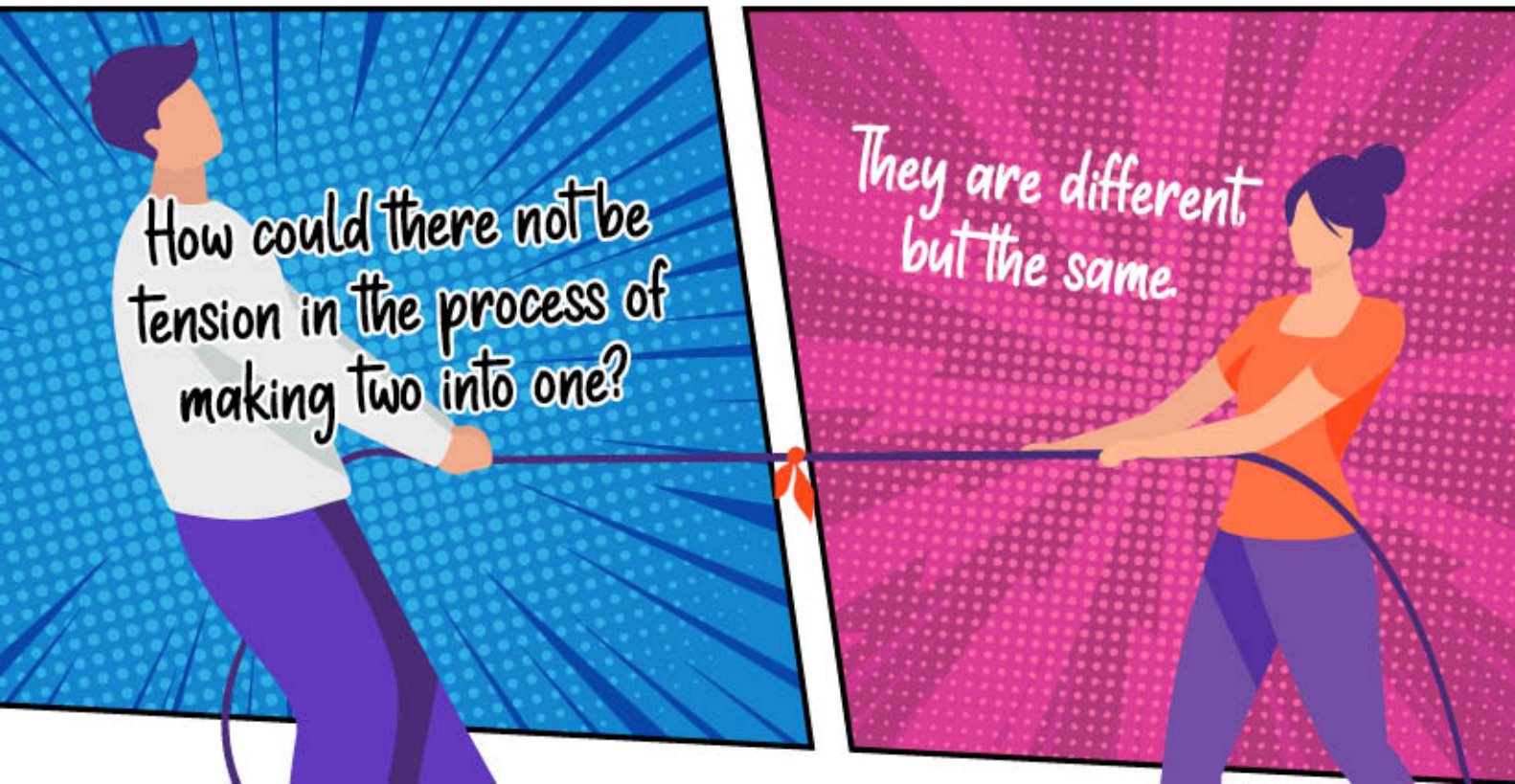
TENSION



They now have to put themselves back together in order to be "one."

Remember:
they are in
a perfect world.

There is a unique wholeness, a perfect tension between a man and a woman.



They are to learn
to love each other and
tension
(boundaries)
will be a guide to them.



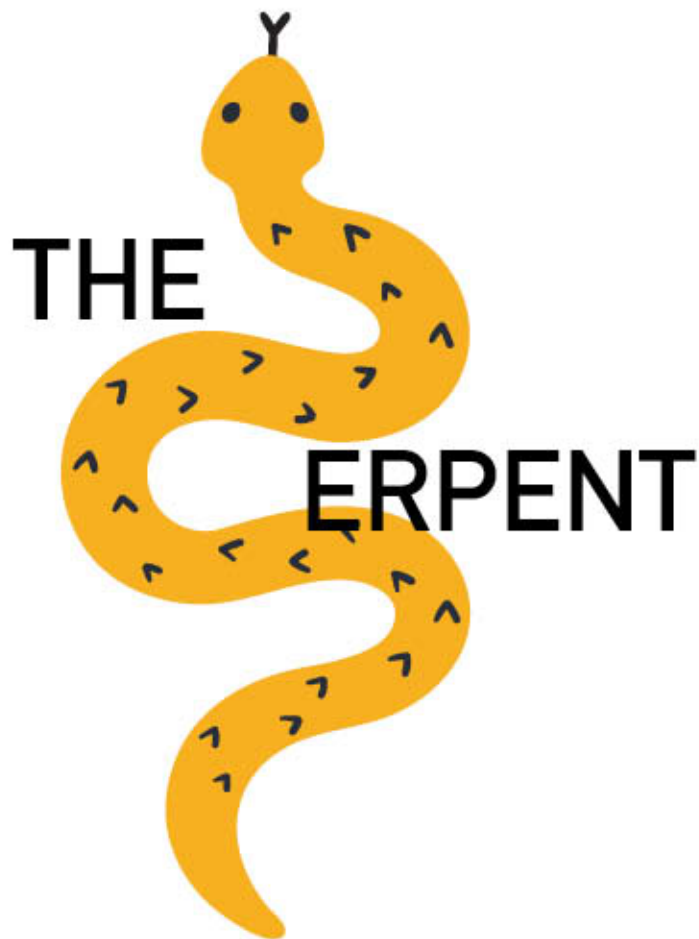
Adam and Eve are image bearers of God.

They live in a perfect world.

Yet there is tension in that perfect world.



*Betcha didn't think of that!
I sure didn't until I went on this journey.*



Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?"
Genesis 3:1



The enemy of
God is in
the garden.

The Accuser of
our brethren

Destroying
Angel

Lucifer

Satan

The Deceiver

Father of Lies

The Devil

I can hear people asking...

What is God thinking?

He allows the Serpent
to come into the garden?



This shocking realisation often
triggers anger towards God
and an unspoken assumption.

If there was no Serpent,
there would be no evil.

Tension rises dramatically as the Serpent casts doubts about God's goodness.

Adam and Eve believe the Serpent's lie and rebel against God.

NOW

We can see how Adam and Eve will react to tension.

First, they both HIDE

Then

Adam **blames** God,
“The woman YOU gave
to me...”

Eve **blames** the devil,
“The devil made me do it.”

*A norm has been established
for humanity. To this day we still
react in much the same way.*



Like Adam and Eve,
when I get frustrated
by tension and make
bad choices, I want
to hide or blame
"someone out there."



Sometimes I blame
God. After all, if
there was no devil
and tension in my
world, everything
would be okay.

Right?



How can I blame God when He's been so good and loving to me?

But I don't see it.

Tension seems to be an unrelenting force in my life.

IT'S TENSION'S FAULT

At this point in my research my own tension is high.

I stand back and start to catch a glimpse of the condition of my own heart and how differently I view tension from God.

In creating us in His image, God gave us the power to create with our own choices.

With this power to create comes a natural tension.

I am struck by the power God gave in
allowing us to choose.

By the capacity within my heart.

By the power of my choice.

I may not like the results of my choices.

I may try to hide from them.
But they are MY choices.



Tension exists.
It is not 'good' or 'bad.'
It just is.



It's like fire, wind, or a thousand different things in the world around us. Evil is not in the tension, but it can be a tool to release it.



**God views tension as
an opportunity to get**

our hearts right.

Jesus showed us the way.



Jesus

Mark 7

There is tension
between Jesus and
the religious leaders.

They are angry with Jesus.

He's challenging their rules
and creating tension.

They don't like it.

The Pharisees' see their
job is to remove the tension
through creating rules.





THE CLASH

They travel 100 miles to pick a fight with Jesus.

They complain that His disciples don't wash their hands before eating.

That's a violation of their law and they are enforcers of the law.

Tension is high. And the Pharisees hate tension.

A stylized illustration of a person with brown hair, wearing a blue blazer over a white shirt. They are covering their face with their right hand, suggesting embarrassment or shame. The background is a vibrant green with a radial pattern of lines and dots, creating a sense of intensity or focus.

I hate to admit it,

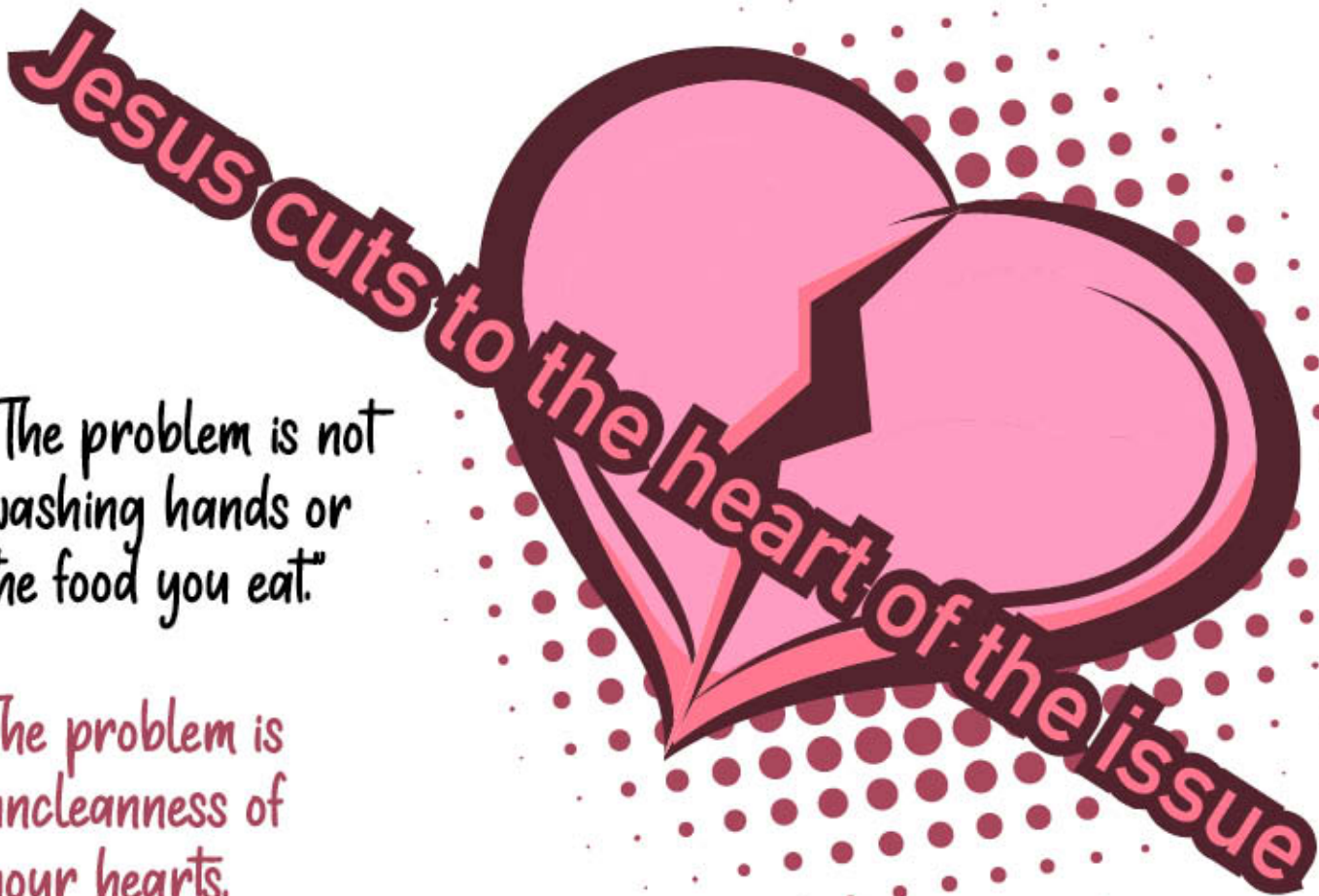
I can identify
with their view
of tension.

Picture them shouting at Jesus.

Who do you think you are?

Rules are the only way they want to deal with the tension.

The problem is 'out there' and we create rules to protect us from 'it.'



Jesus cuts to the heart of the issue

"The problem is not washing hands or the food you eat."

The problem is uncleanness of your hearts.

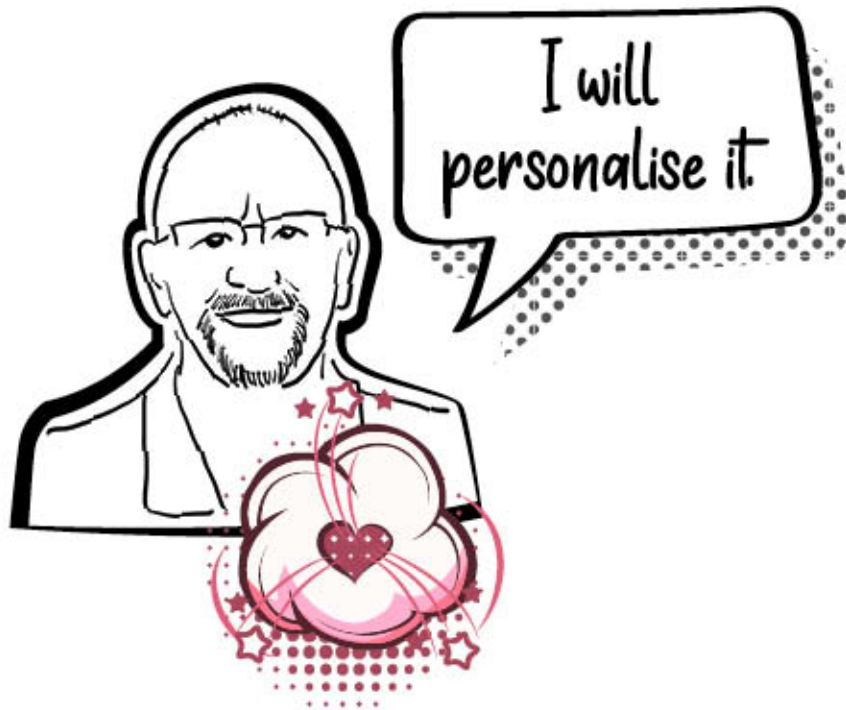
Mark 7: 15 - there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man

Mark 7:21-23 “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness.
“All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.”



The tension
they are feeling
and needing to
deal with is not
'out there.'


It is in their heart.



Tension exposes my heart,
it doesn't cause what is in my heart.

Jesus didn't come to 'solve' the tension and make it go away, he came to restore our relationship with the Father.





So what do
You want from
me, Lord?

It was time to slow down and apply what God was showing me in my research.

I loved God and He loved me.

The tension I was feeling was born out of love, but it was still scary.

It was exposing the condition of my heart.

The issue is:



We want power so that we can be in control.

Control will give us certainty.

Certainty will remove the tension.

But does it really?

In addition to being certain
and in control, we also
want to be **RIGHT**.

When being **RIGHT**
becomes our focus, we
become selfrighteous.

Sort of like the Pharisees.





The Pharisees never felt 'safe' with Jesus.
He didn't accept their rules and
focused on issues of the heart.

We sometimes feel that way too.
He allows tension, but if we deal with
the issues of the heart, tension isn't an issue.

God wants Faith

There is a 'right' God and a 'right' relationship with God through Jesus.

But in many of our choices there is no single 'right' way to do it. Life is not a problem to be solved. It is a love to be discovered and expressed.

We discover and express that love through faith in God.

The way I thought about tension
was the problem in my life.

I had to change my thinking
if I was going to grow in my love for God.

I was not thinking Biblically,
with the Mind of Christ.

**Remember:
Evil may escalate tension,
but tension does not cause evil.**

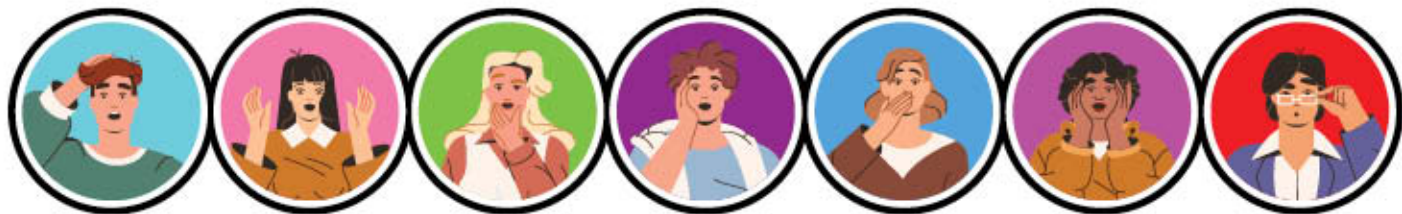
**We are afraid of tension
because of what it will expose in us.**

Want to learn how to deal with tension?

Do your heart work.

By now some of you may be thinking
this is a bit confusing.

On the one hand I say tension exists in a perfect world,
so the idea is don't stress over it.



On the other hand, tension also results from sin
so we have to deal with it.

We adjust **tension**.
We work with **tension**.
We need **tension**.

Imagine tension is like a muscle.
It serves great good at times and
there are other times
you need to give it a rest.

(If you read my 3D leadership book
you will see you are framing it as a 1D issue.)



The Bible

You can't read and understand the Bible without embracing tension intrinsic to it.



God's Word is not a doctrinal problem to be solved. It is a love letter rich with examples of principles that seem to be in tension but reveal great truths about God.

Here are just a few:

Freedom of man and a Sovereign God

Faith and works

One individual and One body

Saved and working
out that salvation

Jesus is 100% God
and 100% man.



Jesus answered a big question about His purpose for us in John 17:43. He said,

I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.

God's reason for creating tension is so that love would have a chance to appear.

Unity is not the absence of tension. You need tension for love to be manifest.



God embraces tension as a requirement for a relationship.

He is not afraid of it in any way, shape or form.





The great I AM is
ENOUGH.

In light of Him, we have
nothing to fear from tension.

It is an opportunity for love
to manifest itself in a new way.

No matter what tension
exposes in us.

HE is ENOUGH.

He has all the resources
we need to deal with it.

Practical points for dealing with **tension**

Awareness:

Identify the tension you are facing.

The Root:

Name the feelings involved.

Be as specific as you can be.

What issue of the heart is at the root of it?

The Approach:

Bring it to God. Ask Him to show you the tension from His view.

Engage:

If you feel the tension in a relationship, engage that person and work together toward common goals of understanding.





I have an online course if this stirs you.
Please come and check it out and hang out with us.

Online training: www.matthewrawlins.com (It's on Thinkific)

Ministry: www.brokentopleadership.com

Marketplace work: www.thegreenbench.com

email: mrawlins@mac.com

Devotions for
your mobile phone.
It has daily devotions
that will help you go
deeper with God.

It is called:
Broken Top



[Click here to download](#)

Other books I wrote to help Christians deepen their relationship with God.

Rediscovering Reverence

The path to intimacy

The Question

Is God good to all?

The Namer

How do I find my true identity?

Emails from Hell

Evil schemes to undermine a leader

Walked Naked into the Land of Uncertainty

5 keys for leadership into the unknown

Guardian

A journey to the heart

Humility

Emails from Heaven

An angels advice to his young apprentice.

The Long Sacred Journey:

Volume One

Reflections along the way

These are some I wrote to help leaders in the business world.

Finding the Pain in your @ss-umptions

A leadership tale

The Green Bench

A dialogue about leadership and change

The Green Bench II

More dialogue about leadership and communication

There's an Elephant in the Room

Discover the single most powerful tool for growth

The Lottery

A question can change a life.

The Race

How do you prepare yourself for the unknown?

Effective Leadership

In uncertain times

Courageous Leadership

In uncertain times

A Line Drawn in the Sand

3D Leadership

Leading well in tension and uncertainty

Available in [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

