

**Levi Lusko**  
**Think Like a Wolf**

Why do I need to declare war? That seems aggressive. That seems hostile. That seems forceful. Why, why, why? And here's the easy answer. Because you're in one, whether you want to admit it or not. The Bible presents actually a number of different verses that help us to see that life is not a playground. Life is a battleground. And I think you feel that. I think it tugs at you from a number of different areas. But scripture presents us with three different sources of conflict. And source number one is the devil, the devil. The Bible presents us as being people, if we're going to follow Jesus, who had this adversary, the devil, who wants to attack us. And he has backup. He's got a crew. He rolls deep. He's got a bunch of fallen angels that we know of as demons. And so they oppose us. That's a spiritual dimension to the battle that we face.

**And then the second area that we find conflict coming at us from is the world. When I say the world, I don't mean the world like you watch on Nat Geo or Discovery Channel, you know, where you're seeing the oceans and the likes. I'm not saying the planet Earth that we live on. I'm using the world in the sense the Bible does when it talks about "love not the world or the things in it". And it is talking about kind of like a worldview really, a worldview that's hostile to God's reign, a worldview that's hostile to God's rule. And the Bible presents God as being the one who created us. Therefore, he's the one who's in charge of us. And our rightful response should be to bow a knee and say, thy will be done. You're God. We're on Earth.**

And I'm not going to defiantly, stubbornly put myself above him, because that was the first sin. Satan put himself up above God. And that's how he became Satan. And us choosing to not do the one thing God told us to do in the Garden of Eden is what got us into the mess of sin in the first place. And so in that sense, the worldview that's hostile to the gospel, the choice to follow Jesus, invites conflict and complexity into your life. Sometimes people make the decision to turn their life around and maybe turn over a new leaf and start making better decisions. And instead of fighting the conscience and dueling the conscience, which is often what we do.

I was reading a book this week written by an atheist who talked about how he finally came to a head when he really began to have strong sexual desires and strong desires. And then he said, it was the exact same time that I decided that I would be an atheist because it was much easier to say there is no God. Because if there is no God, I can pretend like there's no guilt. But he said it wore on him to feel like he was living out a lie because he did feel guilty. And then eventually the day came where C. S. Lewis came to give his life to Jesus. So anyhow, basically the world brings complexity. Why? Because when we choose to follow Jesus, there's opposition from our old crew. There's opposition from the old way of thinking we used to live in. And oftentimes it'll show up in the form of, you think you're better than us. You don't do what we used to do anymore.

And so pushback comes because we became a holy roller. No, truth is, we realize we're not a holy roller. And that's why we need Jesus, right? Christians are some of the most messed up people there are. We're not better than anybody. We actually know we're worse. That's why we went to God, right? And then the world brings difficulty. And so don't be surprised if you're new

to this whole thing of following Jesus. And as you do, life gets a little bit weirder. Don't ask what went wrong. Maybe ask what went right. LeBron gets guarded aggressively for a reason. He's a threat. And as you follow Jesus, enemy sees you as a threat. So he'll mobilize and makes your life gets difficult. The third area of attack is to use a theological term, comes from our fleshly nature, our fleshly nature.

**And that's, of course, just saying, you, inside you, there's this old nature that used to be in charge before you followed Jesus. And you used to do everything you felt like doing. But then the day came when you gave your life to Christ. And the Bible says it's a new birth. God gave you a new spirit on the inside. And there's a new man. There's an old man and a new man, an old woman and a new woman, and an old you and a new you. So you've got the new you. And the new you can listen to God and can do things like that he wants you to do. But the problem is that old nature is still there. And it will still be there till heaven. And the Christian life is all about learning to live in the spirit and not in the flesh, to live as that new man and not as that old man. And so that's the rub. That's the difficulty. And honestly, what this book's all about is, that's the most difficult part of all. I believe there's a devil.**

What kind of a pastor would I be if I didn't? I believe that the world can bring blowback into your life. I've lived it out. But I think honestly if I'm being real for a second, I am my own worst enemy. And I suspect I'm not the only one. Why? Because we are masters of self-sabotage. In fall of 2018, the art world and really the whole world was shocked by this elaborate prank by street artist Banksy, who had masterminded the sale of one of his paintings, one of his most popular paintings, Girl with Balloon. And the auction house Sotheby's in London had it hanging on the wall with this gilded edge, romantic golden frame around it. And as people sipped champagne and nibbled on caviar, the painting went up on auction to the highest bidder. Someone anonymously gave the highest bid. In American currency it was \$1.4 million before the gavel slammed down, sold!

And precisely at that moment, Banksy had arranged for a button to be depressed, which activated a shredder, like a paper shredder he had installed into the bottom of this beautiful frame that caused the canvas to go down into the frame in front of the shocked British audience. And it looked a little something like this. In the last moment you can see the security guards rushing to take the painting away. To what end, I don't know. We gotta get this thing out of here and save it. Why was there security there that day? There was security there that day to protect the painting from the people. What nobody knew was that the painting needed protection from the painting. Why? Because it had this own self-sabotage built in, just at the critical moment. \$1.4 million, this is your time to shine. No extra charge for any of that.

I'll be here all week. We, like that painting, I think, are masters of getting in our own way. We talk a lot on social media about treating ourselves, right? Treat yo' self, treat yo' self, Donna. And treat yo' self, right? But I think the truth is, we are pretty good at treating ourselves poorly. And I don't know on what front you resonate with this idea of conflict. Paul, who wrote a bunch of books of the Bible, by the way, he said, even as a Jesus follower, even as someone who God did a lot in his life, he preached all over the place. He started churches like crazy. And yet here's how he described this old-man, new-man conflict. He said, the stuff I want to do, that's never the stuff

I do. And the stuff that I've written down, I will never do this again, is the stuff I'm constantly doing. He said, I feel like I'm experiencing my own personal civil war. I normally have you during my sermons shove your neighbor.

**If you're watching at a different church with us, that's not your norm, just feel free, well just screw it. I'm in charge for the next four weeks. Shove your, no, no, don't shove your neighbor. Shove yourself. And say, traitor. Traitor. Traitor. That's the problem. We got the shredder. We got the shredder right there. We brought it in with us. And oftentimes at critical moments, we shred ourselves. Now, I don't know what your war is or wars are. I don't know what the battles that you currently are facing against yourself. There's so many we could talk about moodiness, or as I call it in the book, being held hostage by the version of yourself you don't want to be. Or whether it's anxiety or suicidal thoughts like so many face today, or numbing, numbing. Numbing takes many forms, many shapes, numbing through overeating, numbing through medicating, whether prescription or otherwise, numbing through shopping and spending, numbing through the validation that comes from, in a low moment, posting something that will get you likes, that will cause you to feel happy and lovable and lovely.**

There are so many different things that cause us to feel like we're in this war, because the things we want to do, we don't do. We know deep down it's doing things for others, not doing things for ourselves that are actually going to lift us up. And the things that are our go-to to feel happy, oftentimes those are like the empty carbs that we shove into our mouths that only feel good for a few minutes, but then leave us just feeling bloated and sick and lousy. We're good at doing things that aren't good. And this is even true when it comes to the medical help that we have in this day and age.

I read a book in the annals, it was an article published in the Annals of Internal Medicine. And it was about the rates of success when people are given prescriptions that they need after procedures and after doctor's visits and well visits. And they said, astoundingly, if 100 people walk away from their doctor with a prescription in their hand, one-third of them will never fill it. It'll never get filled. They'll mean to. Then things will get crazy. They'll never go and fill that prescription their doctor said, you need this. Of the 67 remaining who will fill it, half of those, so half of 67, will not follow the orders on the bottle correctly, meaning they'll either take them at the wrong intervals, they'll quit taking it too soon, oftentimes when they feel better. I don't need that anymore, not knowing they need it in their system to build up or whatever. Or they'll take it and fill it, but never take any of them at all.

Astoundingly, this is even true when it comes to medication that fight off organ transplant rejection. And to think about someone who's been on a list and waited and gone through all the hardship and difficulty and has had to face the horrors of dialysis, and then now finally got this organ at the greatest expense there is, the expense of someone else who's had to sacrifice in order for this to exist or someone tragically has died, but the beauty of this coming out of it, that the same rates ring true of failure to take the medicine properly when it comes to those sorts of crisis and crazy life-or-death opportunities. There is one instance, though, when this defies the odds, where prescriptions are filled, astoundingly, at higher rates and utilized and to the tee followed. And that's when the Rx comes from a vet for your pet.

**What does it say about our self loathing as a people that we take better care of our animals than we take care of ourselves? There is a war within going on, no doubt. And that's why I say, it's high time to declare war. I think, we will never be able to be at our best if we're treating ourselves the worst. And I think we need to really come to terms with this and to declare war, because, you know, that's an aggressive statement. It's a gloves-on kind of thing to say, or maybe gloves-off kind of thing to say, to say declare war. But it just changes your mindset when you do so, when those words come out of your mouth. I declare war. It puts you in a different frame of mind. And what I would really hope you do, everybody would do this week is, in the book you'll find just a few pages in, right after the introduction, there's a declaration of war that I want you to take some time and prayerfully fill out.**

And be honest because, you know what, you sanitize this list and say, I just need to be a kind, you're not helping anybody by giving your sanitized list. You need to really put in there what's holding you back. And you need to sign it. And you need to date it. And then lastly, I would say, you need to find someone in your life who loves Jesus and loves you. And you need to tell them what you wrote down here so there can be some accountability, so you have someone with you in the trenches, so you have someone with you. Come on, a brother in arms, a sister in arms who's going to go to blows with you. Anybody with me on the time for half measures being over? Now, whatever ends up on this piece of paper for you, here's what I know. If you choose to declare war, the wolf will rise in your heart.

You weren't as excited about that as I meant you to be. I'm just quoting Teddy Roosevelt. Teddy Roosevelt's my second favorite US president. And he was the youngest person ever to hold the office of president. He was the first president ever to ride in a submarine while in the office, the first president to ever ride in an airplane while in the office of president. He was the first president of the United States ever to own a car or to have a telephone in his home. He was the first American president ever to win the Nobel Prize and the first American ever to win the Nobel Prize. And most, you know, interestingly enough for our discussion today, he was the first president ever to receive the Medal of Honor, which he was nominated for while he was alive, but didn't receive until posthumously after he died. And it was all for his involvement in the Spanish-American War. He was the Secretary Assistant to the Navy. And he was so passionate about battle. He always loved the idea of being a soldier.

As a little kid he just dreamed about G. I. Roosevelt, kind of a thing. All right, he was a sickly little kid, asthmatic, and 90 pounds soaking wet as a freshman. I can relate so much. Any of you late bloomers in the house? Right, yeah. Thank you, genetics. And I finished puberty 15 minutes ago. And so there was always in his mind this like manly man thing. And that's what led him to South Dakota, well, that and the fact that his mother and wife died on the same day in the same house. And the grief caused him to push away his daughter. He never spoke about his wife ever. He never spoke about his mom, never spoke about his grief, hid all pictures, because that was the way you grieved back then. You shoved it out, wore black for a week, and then that was that. You never spoke of it again. And not healthy.

**Someone say, not healthy. But he found relief in South Dakota, where he took up ranching**

**and punching mountain lions in the mouth. I mean, just the whole deal, it's amazing. And eventually, the opportunity came for him to go to actual war. And he did so in Cuba. The Battle of San Juan Hill was the deciding moment where he and the Rough Riders brought this ragtag group of cowboys, Indians, and those who graduated from Harvard, true story, were all now going to be a part of this volunteer cavalry that were going to take the hill. And he had outfits designed for them. I mean, this is ridiculous. But it's awesome. And he has a sombrero on with a handkerchief he tied to the back of it, backup spectacles inside of his hat for when they, and that one pair got shot off his face. And anyhow, but then he found himself lying there. And there he noticed a piece of barbed wire on the ground.**

And it's one thing to want to be a soldier. It's one thing to be in battle. And that's what he kind of found. Like, he's, oh crap. If your pastor doesn't regularly say stuff like that, he'll be back in four weeks. So the barbed wire on the ground was the separation of him as he was and him as he knew he needed to be in the moment. And he made the decision to not go back like he felt like, but instead to press forward like he knew he needed to. And as he did, his soldiers said he became the most glorious soldier they had ever seen. And he took San Juan Hill that day. He and his men took San Juan Hill and the next hill after that. And he forever, the rest of his life, described July 1, 1898, that day as the greatest day he ever lived. Why? Because he said when he crossed the barbed wire, the power like a wolf rose up in his heart. And I think that if you make the decision to go forward where you feel like shirking back, you'll find that power like a wolf rising in you.

Maybe you say to me, Levi, I don't want to be a wolf because they're big and they're bad. Three little pigs told me that. And what kind of creature are you? Don't you know in the Bible they're terrible? How like the devil to get you to want to write off an animal with attributes you desperately need. Yeah, wolves are like the devil in parts of the Bible. But so are snakes. But Jesus said we should be wise like snakes. So if God made an animal, there's obviously not just everything bad about it. And there are ways in which I believe we desperately need to be like a wolf. We could talk at length about it, their leadership abilities, their emotional range and empathy, the way they take care of each other as pack animals. And in the weeks that come, we're going to explore. And this exact outline is not in the book at all.

So you won't find it. We're going to explore some ways that we need to be like a wolf, starting with this one. You've got to think like a wolf. You want to be a wolf? Y'all, you've got to think like a wolf. Someone say that out loud. Think like a wolf. Why? Because you are what you think. In fact, that's what scripture tells us in Proverbs 23, verse 7, where it says, "as a man thinks in his heart, so is he". You are what you think. I'm not saying that every single problem in your life can be solved mind over matter. But what I am saying is that what happens in your mind really does matter. This whole sermon now in just one sentence is this. You can change the way you feel by changing the way you think. And the way we feel is what is responsible for so much of the problems we get into. We do things based on how we feel. But we can grab the controls and take back the reins if we can alter how we feel by changing the way that we think.

First takeaway truth, jot it down, there's just a couple, and we're winding our way down, is this: negative thoughts can't lead to a positive life. Negative thoughts can't lead to a positive life. And the direction our thoughts are going, the polarity of our thoughts, if you will, positive or

negative, you put the batteries in the wrong orientation, no lights coming on in the flashlight. And the same is true with our thought life. And a litany of scripture verses. And there are hundreds of Bible verses found in this book that you will, you'll see in the bibliography at the back. But here's just three of them, starting with Colossians, chapter 3, which tells us this. "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above," so up or down, right, positive or negative, polarity, "where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God". "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth".

**And we find the same thing in Romans 12, where the word world is used like we talked about a moment ago. "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind". He's saying if you want to live right, you've got to think right. You have to be thinking positive, not negative. And then Jesus was asked one time, what's the most important thing we could do? I mean that's a good question to ask Jesus when you got a moment with him. And Jesus said this. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and" help me if you know, "all your mind" too. So we have to love God with our mind. Trust God, yes. But don't be an idiot. We have to use the right kind of thinking.**

And oftentimes our thinking devolves into negativity. None of you ever wake up in the morning, look yourself in the mirror, and say, you know, I'd love to have a terrible day today. But so many of us allow the kind of stinking thinking into our lives and selfish, narcissistic turmoil and worry and all of these kind of thoughts into our head that lead to the sort of a day that we ourselves don't want to have. Plus, listen to me, the reward for negativity is more negativity. Why? Because what you look for, you will find. What you look for, you will find. And this is true because of something about the way that God made our mind to work. Whatever you're searching for, you're going to see more of, all right.

So just understand something. You are in charge of the thoughts that stay in your head. You can't stop what shows up in your head. But you don't have to any thoughts stay there. So there's a difference between thinking and thinking about. A thought pops up. You're thinking that. OK, now don't choose to think about it, because you don't have to think about everything you feel. But you will feel everything you choose to think about. Stanford professor Arnold Zwicky put it this way. He called it the frequency illusion or zwicky. That's not an easy word to say. The frequency illusion is part of how our brain works. He said, "once you've noticed a phenomenon, you think it happens a whole lot, even all the time".

There's something about anything you're staring at that causes you to feel like there's more of it than there really is. Well, he says breaking this down a little further, there's two well-attested psychological processes that are behind the scenes at the frequency illusion. One is selective attention. The other is confirmation bias. And you've lived this out, because the last time you bought a car you were on Kelley's Blue Book and Craigslist and Autotrader and YouTube reading all this stuff, watching all this stuff about that F-150 you're going to get, a Tacoma you're going to buy for your brother or whatever it was. You were looking into all this stuff. And you spent so much time looking at it.

**And then what happened? Selective attention caused you to go out in the car that you currently have and drive around the city that you live in. And what happened? There were**

**Tacomas everywhere. There's one. There's one. There's one. My God. We made the right decision. This is a very popular car. This is everywhere. There are no more Tacomas today than there were yesterday. But selective attention is causing you to notice, because it's what you've been focusing on so your brain is causing you to see more of it because you've been dwelling on it. Then confirmation bias kicks in, which is what? Which is where your subconscious sees that you acknowledge the pattern that it brought to your mind. And when you go, oh my gosh, they're there. What did it get? It got an attaboy. You patted your subconscious on the head. And it was like, ha-ha-ha-ha. I like it. OK, I'll find more of 'em, master. I'll go get 'em.**

And so now you're in this thing called a frequency illusion where you're starting to live a self-fulfilled prophecy because what you're looking for, you will find. So the reward for negativity is more negativity. Here's how this looks. If you go to work thinking, they were mean to me last time. I bet they're going to be mean to me again. So now everything they say, everything they don't say, everything they laugh at, everything they don't laugh at, everything they invite so-and-so to, everything they don't invite you to, you're just waiting to get wounded. You're hoping to get hurt. You focused on negative things your spouse did. You're focusing on bad things that happen and at the church or at the small group or the drama or the, you saw it happens. Now you're staring at it.

So what's happening? You're going to see more of it. There's not more negativity. There never was. It's just that's what you're looking for. So your subconscious is, there it is, master. There it is. There it is. There it is. And then when it happened, you go, see, I told you so. I knew it was like that. Story of my life. No, that's a story you're choosing to write. That's the bad news. The good news is, if it can be used for evil, it can be used for good. What if you taught, what if you taught, I'm just trying to help you. What if you taught your subconscious to look for something different by staring at something different? What if you trained it to look for signs of good? What if you looked for signs of beauty? What if you didn't look for the worst examples of people in humanity? You looked for the best? You found anything praiseworthy? You found anything good? You found anything of good report?

All of a sudden, your subconscious goes, man, they used to be all negative and cynical and just retweeting the gossipy stuff and man, living in the cesspool of YouTube comments. But now there's a whole different version of them. They're not snarky anymore. They're finding good in people. They're finding good in situations. They're finding beauty. All right. Let's look for more of that. There's good. There is God at work. There's God in your life. There's God. There's someone who is nice. There's someone who is charitable. There's someone who is generous. And they're bringing it out to you. Now all of a sudden you're going, see, I knew it, story of my life. It's a pretty good story. I'm not talking about positive thinking as a replacement for God. I'm talking about positive thinking, listen, as a response to God. Because he's so good, I'm going to think positive because you, listen, you cannot worship and worry at the same time. You can't be accidentally negative while you're being intentionally positive.

In fact, that's what Philippians talks about. It's chapter 4. It's verse 8 where we're told this. "Keep your thoughts continually fixed on all that is authentic and real, honorable and admirable, beautiful and respectful, pure and holy". Would you even recognize the version of yourself you

would become if you lived this way for 15 minutes? "Fasten your thoughts on every glorious work of God praising him always". You can't worship and worry at the same time. So you can't be doing good things and thinking of good things and be thinking of bad. So that's the secret. That's the remedy. The answer isn't, try and stop being negative, because the only way to guarantee you'll think about pink elephants is to stop thinking about pink elephants. Don't do it. Quit it. You guys are so dumb. Quit it. Of course, if we think about it, we're going to be thinking about it.

**So when I say, stop thinking about it, I'm going to think about it. So instead, what if I replace it with something else? What if instead of pouting, I'm praising? because I can't be pouting while I'm simultaneously praising. What if I'm practicing gratitude? It's going to be the cure for the grumbling that so often sneaks into my life and sneaks into my day. What if I'm choosing to encourage people instead of being critical? I won't be able to do the thing I don't want to do while I'm busy doing the thing that God's called me to do. And it will change the game. So come on. Let's declare war on the old way of thinking. Let's think like a wolf. You can change the way you feel if you change the way you think. Now, let's come around the reality. This is a good game plan going forward. But for many of us we feel like we're already in that negative destructive cycle. And we've for so long selectively been focused on the wrong things that our confirmation bias is instinctual and habitual and feels engraved into steel somewhere inside of us.**

You're like, Levi, this is fantastic for those who haven't lived at all. But I already a whole lot. You know, my favorite thing about some of the news stories, I was reading about this whole Banksy thing, was that art experts are actually estimating that even though this whole plan was, you know, to point out the horrors of commercialism and the selling of art should be for beauty and all that. But they actually estimate that the painting now is worth much more than \$1.4 million because of the circumstances under which this all occurred and the videotaping that he planned from the beginning to put out on his Instagram and YouTube channels. And they say that this is actually just one piece of the painting. The actual art was the whole stunt that day. And I would say the same thing to you.

The reason that someone would pay much more than \$1.4 million to buy a tattered canvas is they know the tattered canvas is just one aspect of the painting they're purchasing, which is the entire masterpiece that came from the artist's mind. And so I would say to you with your tattered canvas of the things that you've done that you wish you could do differently, don't you know that that didn't surprise the creator, that he knew from the very beginning that was going to be a part of it, that you being marred and you being broken was always going to be the occasion that would give him the opportunity to show his great love for you? Didn't you know that you've never done anything that's disappointed your God? And you could never do anything that would make him love you less. And a perfect, pretty picture was never part of the plan, because he wasn't counting on your goodness. He was always banking on his.

And so if you bring him the tattered, ripped-up ruins and the mistakes and guilt of your yesterday, you watch him work it into the tapestry of his grace and the portrait of the masterpiece of the beautiful plan that he has your life. If Jesus' resurrection teaches us anything, it's that God can do beautiful things with broken people. If you receive it, say Amen. Thank you, Jesus for



this opportunity to celebrate how our tattered, shredded ruins in your hands is a part of a bigger, more beautiful painting. And I just want to give space for anybody responding to this message who would say, I want to change the way I think. I'm going to start there. I respond to this by saying, I want to declare war. If that's you I'm describing, then I just ask that just in the space and purity of this moment, you would raise your hand up to say, I want to declare war on something in my life. And I want it to start with my thinking. Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Jesus, for every hand at every church responding to your grace right now. Meet us here. Fill up the cracks in our lives with your beauty and your glory. Help us to go forward. Tomorrow is a brand new day. You can put your hands down.

I want to give space now as we always do for anybody who, coming to this service, you sense God stirring deeply in you, your need for him. And there is a place to talk about how you think. And there's a place talk about how you speak. We'll do that next week. We'll move on from there. But really, you need to begin by coming to the cross where Jesus died for you. He was willing to be shredded for you. He paid for your sins. And he loves you deeply. And if you receive Him into your heart he'll make you new. He'll forgive you, give you the hope of heaven, give you power to live with on Earth. And if you sense him here, listen. You have to sense him because he knocks. Bible says clearly he stands at the door of your heart and he knocks. You have to choose to open that door to him. If you're here and you sense him knocking even now, I encourage you to open that door cause you have to. No one can make you. Your friend who brought you, your mom who's been bugging you to come forever, or someone who sent you this YouTube link, and you didn't want to but you're watching it, they can't get saved for you.

**C.S. Lewis, the man I referred to earlier, he once said that the gates of hell are locked from the inside. You have to choose to let yourself out by letting Jesus in. If that's you I'm describing and you're ready to get right with God, I want to lead you in a simple prayer. I'm just gonna pray it out loud, one piece at a time. I want you to make it yours, and repeat it out loud after me. I'm going ask the church family that surrounds you to pray with you, our way of saying we welcome you into the wolf pack. Say this to God, meaning it in your heart. He'll hear you. Dear God, I know I'm a sinner. There's no excuse for that. I'm broken, and I need you. I believe you died for me and rose from the dead. Please come into my heart and make me new. I pray this in the name of Jesus.**

