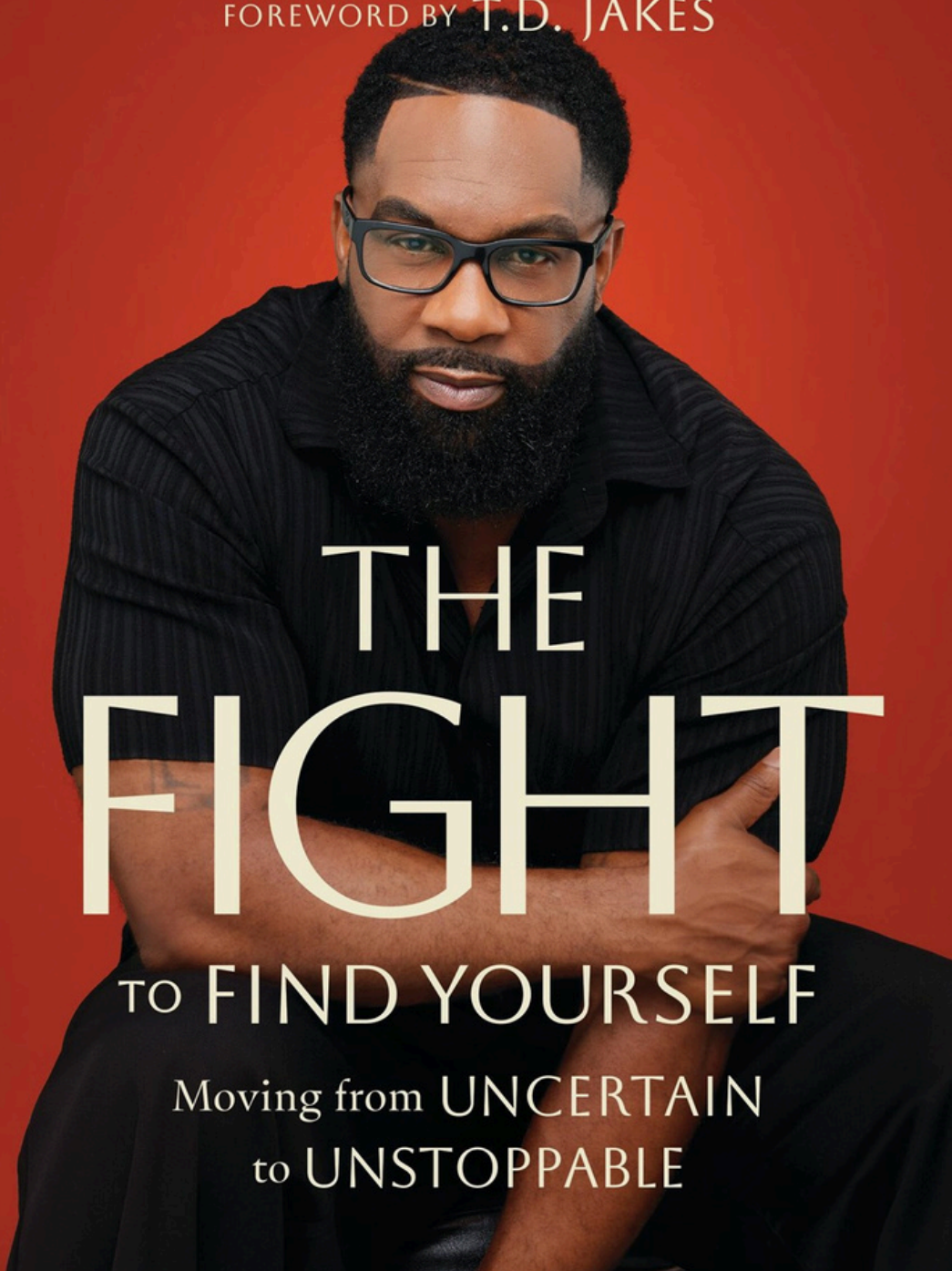


JOEL TUDMAN

FOREWORD BY T.D. JAKES



THE  
FIGHT

TO FIND YOURSELF

Moving from UNCERTAIN  
to UNSTOPPABLE

REFLECTION GUIDE

# How to Use This Guide

This reflection guide is designed to help you internalize, apply, and wrestle with the truths in Joel Tudman's *The Fight to Find Yourself*. Each section includes:

- Key Themes
- Personal Reflection Questions
- Journal Prompts
- Scripture Focus
- Challenge/Action Step

Feel free to move at your own pace. This journey is your fight—take time to sit with what hits deep, and don't be afraid to revisit a chapter more than once.

**“Before I formed you in the  
womb I knew you, before you  
were born I set you apart.”**

**JEREMIAH 1:5**

# INTRODUCTION

## The Fight

From the outside, Pastor Joel Tudman's life looked like a success story: thriving church, Division I coaching role, a strong family, and public impact. But under the surface, something critical was missing: himself.

The introduction to *The Fight to Find Yourself* is raw, honest, and powerful. Joel shares how his identity was wrapped in his roles: pastor, coach, husband, father, motivator. Like many of us, he had learned to perform, produce, and push forward—doing good things, even godly things without doing the inner work of asking, *Who am I, really?*

As a child, Joel's purpose seemed clear: preaching into a vacuum as if it were a pulpit. But over time, the boy with clarity became the man with complexity. He lost touch with the core of who God made him to be. He was living on autopilot, achieving but not aligning. And the cost? Internal emptiness, hidden grief, and emotional stagnation that no amount of external success could fix.

Then, God forced a pause.

The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted everything. It exposed cracks. Joel began facing the pain he'd buried...grief from the death of his son and his father, the emotional distance in his family, and the realization that he didn't truly know himself. Moving to Dallas and joining The Potter's House under Bishop T.D. Jakes was a catalytic moment. It gave Joel space to grieve, reflect, and reset. For the first time, he saw how much he had built his life around what he could do, and not who he was.

This introduction invites you into a brave space: a place to ask hard questions, confront hidden pain, and stop hiding behind what you do. You'll be challenged to face your own internal fight between the version of you the world sees and the man God is calling you to become.



# CHAPTER 1

## Why We Don't Believe What God Says About Us

In Chapter 1, Pastor Joel exposes a core truth: many of us know we're supposed to believe we are God's children, but we struggle to actually receive that truth. Our identity has been shaped more by performance, pain, or the past than by God's promises.

Joel takes us back to Eden, where doubt first crept in with the words, "Did God really say...?" Ever since, we've wrestled with trust. But God's truth hasn't changed: we are still loved, still named, and still His. The fight to find yourself starts with learning to believe what God has already said.

### Key Ideas

- Identity begins with being, not doing.
- Doubt is the enemy's oldest tactic to disconnect us from God.
- Adam and Eve's sin opened the door to identity confusion.
- Your past (even family history) may influence you, but it doesn't define you.
- Belief in God's truth is a fight worth showing up for every day.



**“This is my Son, whom I  
love; with him I am well  
pleased.”**

**– MATTHEW 3:17**

# CHAPTER 2

## Reasons We May Have Missed Who We Are

In Chapter 2, Joel reflects on the reasons many of us lose sight of who we truly are. He opens with a memory from his childhood in church, a time when he felt loved and safe, but also surrounded by unspoken pain. As an adult, he began to understand how trauma from his early years affected his ability to see himself clearly. He shares a powerful story from therapy, where he was asked to visualize his younger self. What surfaced was a deeply buried memory of abuse and fear. This moment marked the beginning of a journey toward healing, where he learned that his tough, emotionless exterior was not who he truly was, but a survival mechanism developed to protect himself from further harm.

Throughout the chapter, Joel talks about how people often create false identities to cope with pain or to meet the expectations of others. These false selves may help us survive for a time, but they ultimately distance us from our true identity. When we base our identity on the opinions or reactions of others, we live in a constant cycle of reward and punishment. One moment we feel like a winner, and the next we are consumed by shame and self-doubt. Joel shares a personal experience from high school, when a moment of public success was followed by a painful betrayal. That experience reminded him how fragile a false identity can be when it depends on others' approval.

By the end of the chapter, Joel emphasizes that no matter how far we may have strayed from who we truly are, it is never too late to begin the process of recovery. Facing the truth about our past can be scary, especially when it includes trauma, but with support and intentional effort, healing is possible. He encourages readers to stop ignoring their thoughts and emotions and start listening to themselves with compassion. Doing this inner work is essential in the fight to find yourself and live with authenticity and purpose.



# CHAPTER 3

## What the Fight Looks Like

In Chapter 3, Joel explores what the personal fight to find yourself really looks like in everyday life. He begins by sharing a story about failing to affirm his daughter when she proudly showed him her painted nails.

This moment revealed something deeper: he couldn't give her what she needed emotionally because he had never learned how. Joel explains that many of us live in familiar patterns of disconnection, self-criticism, or emotional shutdown, and these patterns can prevent us from fully showing up for the people we love. He realized that if he wanted to change, he needed to start doing the internal work.

For him, that looked like a three-part journey: prayer, therapy, and rebuilding relationships. Joel emphasizes that prayer is a powerful replacement for negative self-talk. Instead of spiraling into shame or self-blame, he encourages readers to talk to God honestly, bring their emotions into the light, and listen for God's response.

He also reminds us that we all hear from God in different ways, and even simple prayers like "Jesus, help me" matter. Using a verse from Philippians, Joel explains that bringing our worries to God through prayer, petition, and thanksgiving leads to peace. Ultimately, this chapter is about starting the slow, intentional work of healing—breaking old patterns, seeking connection, and trusting that change is possible with God's help.



# CHAPTER 4

## Are You Ready?

In Chapter 4, Joel reflects on his teenage years in Amarillo, Texas, where poverty and temptation led him to briefly enter the world of drug dealing. At first, he was drawn in by the appearance of success—money, cars, clothes, attention—but he quickly realized he was in over his head. A major turning point came when two girls stole from him, and instead of retaliating, he let it go. That decision caught the attention of a well-known drug dealer, who surprisingly encouraged Joel to leave that life behind and go to college.

It took time, but Joel eventually chose to walk away from the fast life, choosing instead to follow Jesus. That choice came with sacrifice, he had to give up toxic relationships, easy money, and his own anger and pride. Joel uses this chapter to challenge the reader with a bold question: Are you truly ready to change? Real growth, he says, requires letting go of comfort, bad habits, and false identities. It means facing hard truths and asking God what needs to go in order to move forward.

Being ready for the fight to find yourself involves courage, surrender, and sacrifice. Joel reminds us that Jesus gave up everything for us and that following Him will cost us something too. But with that cost comes real transformation. The fight begins with forsaking what holds us back so we can step fully into the life God is calling us to.



**“But this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world”**

**JOHN 9:3-5**

# CHAPTER 5

## Fight Right

In Chapter 5, Joel opens up about his struggle with unhealthy habits during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly emotional eating and weight gain, as a way of dealing with stress. This physical change became a symbol of a deeper issue: he was fighting his battles with the wrong tactics. From junk food to negative self-talk, Joel realized he had been choosing comfort over true growth, and it was hurting him more than helping. He shares how even well-meaning thoughts can mask harmful patterns—like harsh self-criticism disguised as motivation.

These bad tactics, whether they're unhealthy thinking, toxic relationships, or emotional avoidance, can make it feel like we're fighting—but we're actually just stuck. Joel encourages readers to "fight right" by replacing harmful inputs with healthy ones: nutritious food for the body, truth-filled thoughts for the mind, and spiritual nourishment for the soul. He emphasizes the importance of self-awareness, grace, and intentional input—feeding our minds with God's truth, affirmations, and positive influences.

The chapter challenges you to examine how you're handling your stress, what you're saying to yourself, and whether your fight is moving you forward or holding you back. Ultimately, fighting right means developing new habits, showing yourself kindness, and committing to strategies that truly build you up rather than break you down.

## Self-Reflection Questions: Chapter 5

1. Make a brief assessment of the two things we discussed in this chapter: your internal dialogue and your closest relationships, or of another area in your life where you're trying to force it.

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2. Are your thoughts the kinds of things that you'd say to a friend?

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3. Do you have a friend who is sharpening you—are you having godly conversations (not necessarily "conversations about God" all the time, but conversations that you'd gladly welcome Jesus into without being ashamed)? Are you challenging one another? Are you being this kind of friend for someone else? If not, what's holding you back from this kind of friendship?

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**“But we have this treasure  
in jars of clay to show that  
this all-surpassing power is  
from God and not from us”**



**2 COR. 4:7**

# CHAPTER 6

## The Things We Leave Behind

Chapter 6 explores the challenges and emotional tension that come with leaving things behind when you start fighting to find yourself. Joel shares his personal experience of moving his family from Oklahoma to Dallas, emphasizing how difficult it was to leave familiar stability and step into the unknown. Even with faith and guidance, he felt regret and isolation early on but learned that pain and change are part of growth.

The chapter also reflects on Jesus calling his first disciples, who left their fishing jobs to follow Him without fully understanding what lay ahead. Despite their commitment, he experienced doubts and regrets, showing that such feelings are normal. Jesus recommissions Peter after moments of doubt, reminding readers that God supports us even when we question the sacrifices we've made.

Joel highlights that some people face choices made for them, which adds complexity to his fight to find themselves. He encourages readers to learn from biblical characters like Hannah and Samuel, who faced difficult decisions and separation. Samuel's experience of being given to God as a toddler is described as a form of trauma, yet also an opportunity for growth.

Finally, the chapter offers three practical steps to handle leaving things behind: study biblical examples, evaluate how holding on affects your identity, and honestly weigh costs versus benefits.



# CHAPTER 7

## Breakdown or Breakthrough

In this chapter, Joel shares a pivotal academic experience early in his doctoral studies where a professor gave him a low grade—not for poor content, but for weak framework and presentation. Despite his initial frustration and pleas, she insisted on strict academic standards, teaching him a vital lesson about accepting correction. This experience shaped his future success, teaching him that breakthroughs often come from embracing hard truths and guidance rather than resisting them.

Joel then recounts a heartbreaking personal challenge, losing his oldest child while pursuing his doctorate, and how wise counsel helped him decide to push through instead of dropping out, reinforcing the theme that every obstacle can lead to either a breakdown or a breakthrough.

The core message is that growth requires learning to receive correction from trusted mentors and guides, even when it feels uncomfortable or humbling. Joel illustrates this with stories from coaching sports, where correction was central to improvement, and from his preaching ministry, where tough feedback from Bishop Jakes helped him deepen his authenticity and effectiveness.

The chapter closes with encouragement to cultivate a correction culture, surrounding yourself with people who speak truth into your life, and to give God your full attention and right attitude, recognizing that breakthroughs often happen internally before any external change is visible. Joel emphasizes the importance of being present in everyday moments, paying attention to God's leading, and resisting distractions that block spiritual growth.



**“Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.’  
Then John consented”**

**MATT. 3:13-15**

# CHAPTER 8

## Finding the Fire to Try

This chapter tells the story of a young man struggling to find work after leaving the military. Despite financial hardship and even an eviction notice, he stays committed to volunteering at a church. When offered a job that conflicts with his volunteer hours, he surprisingly turns it down to keep serving. His faithfulness leads to an unexpected opportunity, the head of facilities offers him his soon-to-be-vacated job, with better pay and stability.

Joel uses this story to illustrate a key idea: greatness begins where you are, not somewhere in the future. Like King David, who was a shepherd before becoming king, or David facing Goliath with just a sling and stones, the chapter encourages readers to give 100% to their current circumstances.

The chapter also explores the importance of rest and trust in God. Rest isn't about escaping life through vacations or distractions but finding peace by "yoking" yourself to Jesus, who shares the burden and offers renewal. Joel emphasizes that real rest comes when you stop resisting God and bring your whole self to Him, trusting His Word even amid uncertainty.

Ultimately, the chapter challenges readers to be intentional about doing their best right now, trusting God with what they have, and embracing rest as part of the journey to finding themselves.



# CHAPTER 9

## Writing a New Story

Joel reflects on his early longing for his earthly father's approval and identity, which went largely unmet until the very end of his father's life. Ultimately, he learned that true identity comes not from human approval but from God, the heavenly Father who knows and calls us His own.

This chapter encourages readers to do the spiritual work of letting God define who they are, shedding old self-concepts rooted in past pain or mistakes. Joel emphasizes that the fight to find yourself is ongoing, but through it, you become "better because true change happens inside, starting with your mindset and daily thoughts.

Joel shares that this transformation brought him relief and peace, moving from a place of white-knuckling through life to resting in the certainty of God's mercy and love. His grip on control loosened because he knew his identity was secure as God's child.

To help ground this new identity, Joel offers three practical spiritual disciplines:

1. **Fasting:** Becoming hungry not just physically, but spiritually, to hear God's voice and align your will with His. Fasting helps you focus and resist distractions, teaching obedience and dependence on God rather than self. Joel uses Jesus' 40-day fast and temptation in the wilderness as the ultimate example of trusting God's plan over personal desire or proving oneself.
2. **Devotion:** Although not fully covered in this excerpt, it's hinted as a practice for ongoing connection with God.
3. **Showing God's Mercy:** Living out the mercy you've received by extending it to others.

Joel warns against trying to control life or prove worth through external success or manipulation of God's promises. Instead, he urges patience and faith in God's timing and plan, even when the path includes hardship or internal struggle.

This chapter invites you to write a new story for your life, one rooted in your identity as a beloved child of God, guided by His presence, and lived with courage and focused faith.



**“Be strong.  
Let all that you do  
be done in love.”**

**1 CORINTHIANS 16 13-14**

# EPILOGUE

## Win the Fight

Joel imagines how simple it would be if finding yourself was as straightforward as following GPS directions. But the truth is, you already know who you are at the deepest level—you are a beloved child of God. Winning the fight means returning to this truth again and again.

He recaps the journey of the book: understanding why the fight exists (because we've all lost sight of our God-given identity), facing personal history and brokenness, and choosing to engage in the fight through prayer, honest self-talk, and reassessing relationships.

Joel stresses that the fight requires courage to face weaknesses and to use God's grace as a tool for transformation, not shame. He reminds readers to "fight right" by being aware of the messages they accept and by embracing correction and growth.

The fight is internal and begins exactly where you are. The key is to be fully present and faithful in your current circumstances, trusting that growth happens there.

Joel offers hope: the fight to find yourself does not last forever. Though your identity as God's child never changes, your perspective will. The past loses its power, the future becomes less intimidating, and you make peace with yourself. This peace—rooted in God's view of you—is the real victory.

In the end, the fight can be won, through God's grace. **You don't have to keep battling against yourself but can rest in the truth of who you are.**



“And the peace of God,  
which transcends all  
understanding, will guard  
your hearts and your  
minds in Christ Jesus.”

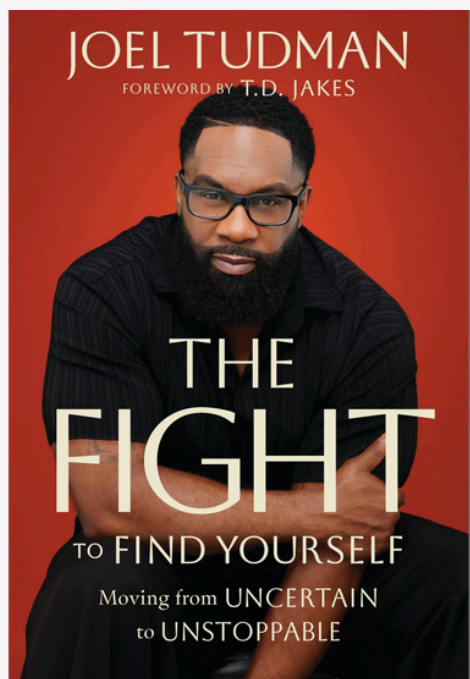
PHIL. 4:7

# ABOUT THE BOOK

**Do you ever feel like you're pretending? Do you ever feel like the "real you" is concealed by the disguise you wear every day? Do you even know who the real you is?**

Many of us feel confused about who we are and what God created us to be. We go through the motions, doing what's expected of us, but we feel lost, empty, or just a deep-down sense that there must be more out there for us. We have never taken the time to—or been allowed to—find out who we are at our core. Often, it's not easy to understand who you are at your core. Sometimes, you have to fight for it.

In *The Fight to Find Yourself*, Pastor Joel Tudman pairs biblical content, practical teaching, and deeply personal stories to help guide readers struggling with grief, confusion, or feeling lost, to move forward into hope, joy, and a better future.



When you truly know who God made you to be, you will be able to know yourself, accept yourself, feel like *you*, and walk out into the world with your head held high, knowing you are a beloved child of God, already loved, already good enough. This is a powerful and inspiring manifesto to help readers move from being lost, feeling guilty, confused about their callings, or wrestling with grief, to moving forward into healing, health, and happiness in their lives.

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