

Named

I AM GOD'S BELOVED

matthew
clark

P R E F A C E

What's in a Name?

Some names arrive quietly.

They don't announce themselves; they just settle in, slipping into the silence after a hard conversation or the pause before you answer a question about yourself. Eventually, you realize you've been answering to those names for years.

For a long time, I called that freedom.

I've learned that the deepest lie we believe isn't just about who we are; it's also about what freedom actually means.

We often define freedom as the mere absence of restraint. But real freedom is a lot more unsettling, and beautifully healing, when we finally stop trying to protect ourselves with our own armor. It starts when we let go, not just of the things we've done wrong, but of the protective masks we've built, the scripts we repeat, and the labels we've accepted as truth.

This book is an invitation to discover what that kind of freedom actually looks like.

The Apostle Paul writes, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). That transformation is not cosmetic. It is structural. It reaches into the deepest assumptions of how we see ourselves and God.

The writer of Hebrews calls Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith. I love that imagery because it reminds us that we don't write our own stories or give ourselves our own names. We are written into existence by the One who loves us.

Yet over time, false names begin to take hold, whether they are spoken over us, formed in pain, or simply names we have come to believe.

Unlovable.

Not enough.

Whatever that lie might be for you.

They do not arrive loudly. Sometimes they accumulate.
But there is another voice.

“I have called you by name; you are Mine” (Isaiah 43:1).

This book is about returning to that voice. About laying down
what was never true and learning to live from what has always
been spoken by God.

Not as theory. As identity.

A quiet war for your true identity is already underway.

CHAPTER 1

The War of Names

To the one who is victorious... I will give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.

— REVELATION 2:17B

Look in the mirror.

Whisper your name.

Now whisper the lie you've carried in secret.

For most of us, the name and the lie eventually sound exactly the same.

The battle begins right there in the mirror. When how you see yourself shatters, the whole world skews out of alignment. You start reading rejection into every silence. Every unanswered text. Every room you walk into.

You even look at God through the warped mirror of your own fear, wondering why the One who spoke you into existence suddenly feels so quiet.

The Frontline Within

Every war has a frontline. For most of us, it is not temptation. It is exhaustion.

I let pain, rejection, and lies decide what I was worth, hiding who I actually was.

This forgetting is why names don't just describe us; they define us. They have the power to shape seasons and

destinies, either binding us to false identities or propelling us into versions of ourselves we were never meant to become. Somewhere beneath it all comes the quiet, unsettling question that lingers in the heart:

Is that really me?

In my friend group, I was the peacemaker. When people argued, I stepped in; when someone was hurting, I listened. I kept things calm, smoothed edges, absorbed tension. They called me “the steady one,” and I wore it like a badge.

Until it became a weight.

Over time, I realized I never let anyone see me crack. I didn’t know how to say, “I’m not okay either.” I held everyone else together, but no one was holding me, and what sounded like love had quietly become a place to hide.

This is a quieter kind of mask. It doesn’t wear obvious labels like ‘Failure’ or ‘Unworthy.’ It looks like being Capable, Steady, or Needed. It pretends to be a calling, but it actually functions as a cage.

Before I Could Speak

Language came late, and when it came, it came scrambled.

I was somewhere between two and three years old before I began to speak. When I finally did, the words came out in the wrong order, my pronunciation was off, and sentences were put together all wrong. It was as if the pieces were all there, but I couldn’t get them to line up. I don’t remember the age it finally smoothed out. I just know I struggled with language for years, and I know I went to classes for it, even if the memory is gone.

What I remember is the bus. I saw something out the window and wanted to say it. The words started to come and then they didn’t. They came out jumbled. Slow. Stuck in my mouth like they had forgotten the order they were supposed to arrive in. I stuttered through whatever I was trying to say. I don’t even

remember what it was anymore. But I remember what came next. The laughter. The looks. The kids who weren't kind about it.

I learned to be quiet.

Not because I had nothing to say. Because saying it cost too much. The fear of being looked at differently. The fear of being called on.

Silence felt safer than a sentence I couldn't trust to come out right. I disappeared into a world I could control. I drew tanks, planes, and army men—whole battles on paper where nothing depended on getting the words in order. On the page, I never stumbled. On the page, I was fluent. There, I learned to say what I couldn't speak.

That point marks the onset of me becoming a designer. The boy who couldn't trust his own words taught himself to communicate without them. To say things in image and line and arrangement.

To be understood without having to speak.

It is a strange thing to write a book about names when, for the first years of my life, I could barely get my own name in the right order.

Scavenger at Five

Five years old. A frozen cul-de-sac in England. Staring into a roadside grit bin. A heavy yellow plastic box filled with road salt and industrial glass, meant to provide traction for tires on ice.

To everyone else, utility. To me, a treasure chest.

One day I saw the way the winter sun hit the jagged shards, turning gray pavement into a field of beauty. I followed the trail of glass back to its source: the yellow plastic box sitting at the edge of the road.

The lid was heavy, but it wasn't locked. I lifted it with both hands and reached in, pulling out the shards one by one. To my five-year-old eyes, those jagged shards of glass looked

exactly like diamonds. Then I filled my small fists with as much “wealth” as I could carry. I squeezed so hard, driven by the pride of what I would soon show my mother, that I didn’t feel the edges cutting into my palms.

When I walked through the front door, I held out my hands like an offering. “Look, Mommy,” I said. “I got you diamonds.”

My hands were a mess of glass and blood. Even though I was bleeding over the possession of a handful of road salt, she didn’t scold me. She looked at me with a tenderness that still haunts me, whispered, “Thank you for these diamonds,” and immediately began to wash the wounds.

Decades later, the grit bin has changed, but the posture remains. As a creative, I have spent years clutching the glass of deadlines, client approvals, accomplishments, and applause, hoping that if I bled enough for my work, someone would finally tell me I was valuable.

Still a scavenger, mistaking the things I produce for the name I possess.

I’ve asked that same question in the mirror, when the man in the glass wasn’t a reflection but an accusation. His only name was *Fraud*.

The Anatomy of a Lie

To understand how a lie becomes a name, look at Cain.

When God favored Abel’s offering, Cain’s anger did not stay a feeling; it took hold. God warned him that sin was crouching at the door, but he did not rule over it. He rose up against his brother and became a murderer.

God’s verdict branded him: “You will be a restless wanderer on the earth” (Genesis 4:11–12). The lie Cain embraced became his name: Outcast. Fugitive.

You’ve never stood in Cain’s field, but haven’t you felt the heat of that same anger? That’s how the accuser works, not by forcing

us to sin, but by convincing us the darkest names might actually fit. Shame doesn't usually destroy you all at once. It renames you slowly, in the quiet moments you think no one is watching.

Not every false name is self-inflicted.

Some were spoken over you before you had words to refuse them. A parent who left. A person who took what was never theirs to take. A childhood that handed you shame you never earned. Someone else's sin sentenced you. Someone else's wound named you.

Unlovable. Worthless. Invisible. You didn't choose those names. They were assigned.

The work of renaming is the same. The fault is not.

For most of us, these aren't the whispers that lead to murder, but to the quiet repetition of smaller sins and the lies we tell ourselves about them. We carry wounds into rooms while calling them personalities. Some families pass down eye color. Some pass down silence. Some pass down rage. And eventually one of us starts noticing the pattern instead of defending it.

Timothy Keller names this struggle directly:

Many people know God forgives them, but they cannot forgive themselves. This self-condemnation traps them in cycles of guilt and shame.

I lived in that trap for years. I understood the concept of forgiveness in my head, yet I still sat as my own unyielding judge. I would replay my failures: the sharp words I couldn't take back, the ways I hadn't fought for my marriages. I would sentence myself to a life of quiet self-punishment. I believed that if I stayed miserable long enough, I might eventually pay off the debt I was carrying. Between the heavy accusations we hear and the quiet kindness of God, our inner lives can feel like a constant tug-of-war.

Here, the flesh goes to work. It is that internal voice that confuses God's conviction with the accuser's condemnation.

Beneath it all is a quiet, exhausting war between who you are and who you fear you might be. It's the voice that takes the Spirit's whisper of "You are loved" and screams "You are a fraud."

Victory begins when you stop saying "the lie" and start saying, "My flesh is feeding me a lie about my name."

When you externalize the lie, you can fight it instead of fighting from it.

The Battle of Agreement

The war doesn't start with what you do. It starts with what you agree with. And that agreement is almost always quiet.

That is where the real battle is fought. Not between good people and bad people.

Between truth and the lie you've learned to call your name.

There's a quiet lie most of us live by: keep moving, don't look back. If you never confront what shaped you, you do not outgrow it.

You carry it forward.

The war of names does not end with a single decision. It ends with a thousand small refusals, each one a vote for the name Heaven spoke.

Each one a step away from the name the accuser assigned.

REFLECTION

We often see God not as He is, but as we are. Where in your life do you tend to project your own fears or insecurities onto God? Do you assume He is disappointed, angry, or distant when you struggle?

What is the primary "accuser's voice" you hear in your mind?

What is the most common lie it tells you about your identity? Name it specifically.

What is one truth from Scripture about your true name that you could begin returning to daily? (See Romans 12:2.)

Draw a line. On one side write every name you've been answering to. On the other side write the name God speaks over you. The line is the decision. What are you willing to leave on the other side of it?

PRAYER

Jesus, I confess I've listened to the accuser's voice and let his lies define me. I'm tired of carrying these stones of shame.

Today, I open my hands. I stop clenching the sharp stones of these old accusations. Names like Failure and Unworthy. My fingers have grown accustomed to their weight. I let them drop. I refuse to spend another day defending the corpse of the person I was never meant to be.

Name me again. Wash me in the truth that I am Your Beloved Child. Give me the courage to walk the new path of the Spirit today. Amen.