

“Living in our broken world, full of pain and disappointment and sin, is difficult for all of us. In *Life in the Wild*, Dan DeWitt reminds us that the mess we live in is, like us, awaiting a future redemption. Read along as Dan teaches us to navigate these challenges and anticipate the arrival of our perfect hope, Jesus, who will make an end of death and make his blessings flow as far as the curse is found.”

RUSSELL MOORE, *President, Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention*

“This is exactly the book our culture needs right now. In this age when we’re saturated with reminders that we live in a fallen world every time we turn on the news, *Life in the Wild* gives Christians a much-needed dose of perspective—and hope.”

JENNIFER FULWILER, *SiriusXM radio host; and author of One Beautiful Dream*

“Beautifully written, and with great insight into both the ideas of history and the contemporary mind. Dan DeWitt provides an exciting retelling of the glory, the desperation, and the hope of humankind. Many will gain wisdom for living ‘life in the wild’ of this present world as they enjoy this work. Those who make the journey through its pages will learn that there is another Message that offers far more happiness than all the offerings of the messages of the secular age. This is a work of great joy.”

ERIC C. REDMOND, *Assistant Professor of Bible, Moody Bible Institute*

“Dan DeWitt is one of this generation’s most articulate and compelling writers. His keen insight brings clarity to some of life’s most difficult questions. Everyone should read this book.”

THOMAS WHITE, *President of Cedarville University, Cedarville, Ohio*

“An intriguing view into the story of us! Dan gifts readers with a biblical survival guide for the wilderness of life.”

V. ROSE, *singer and songwriter*

“This is a fresh and urgent field guide to life in the real world—the world of brokenness, tragedy, and disappointment. Dan DeWitt gives us not only clarity and realism, but also wonderful hope, as he consistently and carefully points us to Christ. It did me good to read it!”

SAM ALLBERRY, *speaker, Ravi Zacharias International Ministries; editor, The Gospel Coalition; author of Is God Anti-Gay?*

“*Life in the Wild* is the book I have been waiting for from Dan DeWitt. At the turn of every page, the aroma of Christ is sweet. This work will make you laugh, weep, and shout for joy.”

KEVIN JONES, *Associate Dean at Boyce College; co-author of Removing the Stain of Racism from the Southern Baptist Convention*

“Life is wild, and by ‘wild’ I don’t mean awesome and fun. Life can be wildly tough. In *Life in the Wild*, Dan DeWitt teaches us why life is terrible at times and where to turn. But there’s hope and you’ll find our Hope shared in these pages!”

TRILLIA NEWBELL, *author of God’s Very Good Idea*

“We all recognize that something is wrong in us and around us. *Life in the Wild* helps us embrace the truth that even when we feel small, the gospel is ‘big enough to make sense of sinkholes and shark bites.’”

CARMEN LABERGE, *author of Speak the Truth: How to Bring God Back into Every Conversation; and host of The Reconnect*

“Dan does a wonderful job of unpacking the Genesis story of humanity and how the gospel of Jesus is what we need to survive and make sense of the wild world we live in. As a church-planting pastor, I will be eager to get this book into the hands of new believers, young Christians, and discipling groups!”

LUCAS PARKS, *Lead Pastor of Village Church Belfast and Acts 29 Country Director for Ireland*

“*Life in the Wild* is a manifesto of hope in the midst of a hopeless world. When so much darkness surrounds us, Dan DeWitt extends a beautiful and biblical lifeline of light in the gospel. I wish every young Christian, seeker, or skeptic would pick up this book to find the hope we’re all looking for.”

JAQUELLE CROWE, *author of This Changes Everything: How the Gospel Transforms the Teen Years; and editor of The Reblution*

“This world is full of unspeakable tragedy. The gospel contains unparalleled hope. Convinced of both realities, Dan DeWitt guides us through Genesis 3 with wit, warmth and wisdom. Let *Life In The Wild* show you afresh the depths of our fallenness and the heights of God’s redeeming love. It will do your soul much good.”

GLEN SCRIVENER, *evangelist; and author of 321*

DAN DEWITT

**LIFE
IN THE
WILD**

**FIGHTING FOR FAITH IN
A FALLEN WORLD**

The logo for The Good Book Company features a stylized, curved line above the text "thegoodbook" in a lowercase, sans-serif font. Below "thegoodbook" is the word "COMPANY" in a smaller, all-caps, sans-serif font.

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*To Nannette, my mom,
a model example of what it looks like to
fight for faith in a fallen world.*

Life in the Wild

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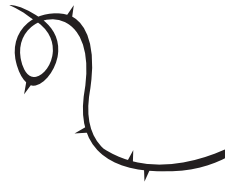
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FOREWORD



BY MIKE COSPER

FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR, HARBOR MEDIA

If you walk in the door of many—if not most—Western churches on a Sunday morning, you'll be greeted with smiles, with hot coffee, and with the thunderous and victorious sounds of contemporary worship music. You'll sing choruses about how great God is and how great our love for God is, and hear a sermon about how great life with God is or how wonderful it is that we're changing the world for the better.

And then you'll go home. There, you'll find miserable news on television. You'll find pill bottles lining kitchen and bathroom cabinets that are supposed to remedy everything from sinus problems to schizophrenia. You'll find pictures of relatives who suffered brutally with any manner of disease, or photos of loved ones who died in traffic accidents, were killed by roadside bombs in Iraq or Afghanistan, or simply left one day, content to live their lives without any connection to home or family.

In other words, you'll return to the real world, where bad news greets us all too often and where the triumphal sounds

of Sunday morning ring hollow. There's no doubt that the Scriptures offer joy and peace, but they also offer suffering at the hands of lions and swords and crosses and thorns.

As Dan DeWitt puts it—and as so many others have put it—“life sucks.” And as much as we'd like to paper over that thought with platitudes and happy praise choruses, the paper is thin, the suffering is real, and all too often our worlds come crumbling down around us.

In *Life in the Wild*, Dan invites us to face these realities and to see their origins in the book of Genesis. He traces the textures of brokenness and exile across the map of history, finding resonance in art and literature, from *Les Misérables* to *Star Wars* to the works of C.S. Lewis and Francis Schaeffer. It's an unflinching look at the reality of life in a fallen world, and life in a world that all too often sucks.

There's an old joke about a certain kind of Christian who, upon falling down the stairs, says, “Well, I'm glad that's over with.” This reflects a spirit of inevitability regarding suffering, but also a sense of indifference on the part of the God who is sovereign over all of creation. It's a kind of baptized stoicism—a belief that because suffering is inevitable, we had all better suck it up and deal with it as it comes. Thankfully, you will find none of that misery here.

Instead, Dan invites us to face the reality of life in the wild—life in the exiled aftermath of Genesis 3—in order to see the pathways that might guide us through it. Rather than embrace the kind of doped-up optimism for which Christianity has long been critiqued (thank you, Karl Marx), or its opposite (the fatalistic assumption that misery is inevitable), Dan invites a sober look at the world as it is in order to better

understand the redemptive promises of the gospel. As an old Puritan prayer puts it, we see the light of the stars much more brightly from the valleys. We live in a valley, but the hope of the gospel is a bright light.

And here's the thing: if we want to participate meaningfully and redemptively in a fallen world, there is no other starting place than to acknowledge the truths about life in exile. By acknowledging that life sucks, we can begin to look for hopeful pathways through its thorns and thistles, and we can begin engaging our friends and family and neighbors from a place of honesty.

Life in the Wild is an exploration of those pathways. Whether talking about God's truthfulness and trustworthiness, the challenges we face from ecological disaster, or the challenges we face in a world that's eroding the meaning of marriage and gender, Dan addresses each with a sense of grace, love, and compassion.

His approach refuses the pressures of compromise on one end and the temptation to be combative, bombastic, and pharisaical at the other. It is a refreshing vision of life in a fallen world.

Above all else, this book is *pastoral*. Rather than dealing with these topics in the abstract, or burying them in the coded language of theology and philosophy textbooks, *Life in the Wild* is an immensely readable book. Each chapter moves from ideas to concrete practices—invitations to transform our thinking and doing—that make life in a dark world more bearable, more hopeful, and more open to the possibilities of joy that remain in its midst.

I believe you'll find that *Life in the Wild* is as joyful as it is sober and as winsome as it is confrontational. Most of all, I

Dan DeWitt

hope—as I’m certain Dan does—that it helps you see more clearly the plausibility and worthiness of following Jesus in our fallen world.

Mike Casper



INTRODUCTION

THE HUMAN TRAGEDY

It was a warm spring afternoon two weeks before my high-school graduation. My Italian mother came to my room carrying two small bowls with silver spoons planted in scoops of vanilla ice cream. We sat on my bed to talk.

Just an aside: if an Italian woman brings you food when it's not mealtime there's usually a catch.

I looked suspiciously at my mom as I enjoyed the unexpected treat. My mom's never been one to beat around the bush. "Your father and I are going to separate," she told me. I wasn't entirely surprised.

Two weeks later, on a Friday evening, I walked across a platform in my school gymnasium to receive my diploma. That next morning my dad backed his pickup truck out of our gravel driveway on West Chambers Street in Jacksonville, Illinois. Life would never be the same.

That's not to say that life wasn't good. It just wasn't the same. And how could it be? My two siblings and I were all out

of school. I was the last to graduate and I was heading off for college. And now my parents were getting divorced. Nothing could remain the same.

My mom had a simple way of putting everything into perspective. “Life sucks,” she would say. “What are you going to do about it?” That pretty well summed up her philosophy of life. Things go wrong. Bad things happen to good people. Good things happen to bad people.

What are you going to do about it?

My mom is a tough-minded, godly lady with an unquestionable work ethic and a bent toward the artistic side. That’s my way of saying she’s pretty amazing. And her approach to life has rubbed off on me.

Living in the Land of Meh

Mom’s confident expectation that things wouldn’t always, or even usually, go as planned, along with her resolve to make the best of it, seemed biblical to me. After years of studying theology, I find it still seems right. Anyone who has read the first few chapters of Genesis knows that something has gone terribly wrong. To quote Shakespeare, “Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.”

Life sucks. What are you going to do about it?

As Dorothy learned in *The Wizard of Oz*, we’re not in Kansas anymore. We are far from the Garden of Eden, described at the beginning of the Bible. Our ancient parents were expelled from that perfect place. We’ve been exiles on an eastward journey away from paradise ever since the human rebellion in Genesis 3. The good life is a fading image on the rearview mirror of our hearts.

So, what are you going to do about it?

Are you going to try to go back? It's not there anymore, you know. All of that was done away with in the biblical flood. And speaking of the flood, it only took our race six chapters of the Bible to get from creation to cosmic judgment. We're not very good at making the most of things.

In fact, an earthly utopia only lasted for two chapters in the biblical story. Yup, we could only get through fifty-six verses before making a mess of things. Well, technically speaking, Adam and Eve botched it. But if we were in their place, we probably wouldn't have made it out of the first couple of chapters either. If I were the first man, I probably wouldn't have gotten beyond Genesis chapter one before blowing it.

We no longer reside in Eden. Now we live in the land of Meh, a world seemingly ruled by Murphy's Law. If it can go wrong it often does. And things have gone terribly wrong.

Even if you don't believe in God, you may have an intuitive sense that things are off kilter. But does that even make sense? If there is no God, if there is no grand design, then why does it feel as though something good has gone bad?

On the other hand, if you do believe in God, does that offer any practical help for dealing with all the mess life throws at you?

What does the Bible say about our human dilemma? Can it explain the world we live in that is marked by both design and disorder, by both beauty and horror? It's my belief that the first three chapters of Genesis shed light on the world we live in. Understanding these early chapters of this ancient manuscript can allow us to better understand the daily news headlines.

Disagree? Open a Bible and take a look yourself. Perhaps my book can serve as something of a tour guide.

A Promise Made in a Garden

As you start out in Genesis, you will see that there was a time, long ago, when our forefathers knew pure, unadulterated, undiluted, untarnished goodness. Can you imagine that? But that was a long time ago, before the devil (described in Genesis as a serpent) enticed the first people to reject God's perfect plan for their lives and make their own choices about good and evil.

This is how they lost paradise:

"You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat from [the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

*And he said, “Who told you that you were naked?
Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you
not to eat from?”*

*The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she
gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”*

*Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this
you have done?”*

*The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”
(Genesis 3 v 4-13)*

And so, in just a few verses, the first people went from a perfect relationship with God to hiding from him; they went from obeying God’s words to listening to the devil instead; and now they would have to leave the safety and beauty of the garden and find a way to exist in the wild.

In this book we’ll think about what was lost in the Garden of Eden as described in Genesis. We’ll look at the consequences of the curse of sin, the results of grasping for the fruit of moral self-rule, and the effects of human rebellion that indelibly mark our lives.

But I hope to do something more. I hope to paint a brutally honest picture of what living in a fallen world looks like. And I want to paint it in red hues that depict a bloody battle waged over the souls of men.

God promised to undo what was done, to restore what was lost, and to bring us back into his presence, where we can again experience his goodness. That’s the point of the promise the Creator made to the first couple in Genesis 3.

*So the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this ... I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; **he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.**”*
(Genesis 3 v 14-15, bold text mine)

Adam and Eve had to leave the garden. Instead of flourishing in a garden of beauty and perfection, they had to live “in the wild”—in a world stained by sin. But these rebels were given a promise strong enough to sustain them over the years to come. A promise that someone from their family line, one of Eve’s offspring, would defeat the serpent once and for all.

Life in the wild wouldn’t be easy. But like my mom says, “Life sucks.” What could they do about it?

The truth is, *only God could do something about it.* That’s why the rest of the Bible, from Genesis 3 forward, is about God coming to do what Adam should have done in the first place. God would come in the flesh, step into human history, and write himself into this twisted story to begin setting things right.

Jesus came to obey God’s word; protect his bride, the church; and defeat the serpent. That’s what Adam should have done. That’s what Jesus came to do. That’s the story of the Bible.

This single promise offered in the garden serves as a beacon of light to guide our steps in the fallen terrain. It offers hope and help for people like you and me. We are messed-up people living in a messed-up place. If we just look inside the pages of Genesis, we will discover a description of our situation.

Maybe we will even find rest for our road-weary souls.

Is Life a Tragedy or Comedy?

In literature the terms tragedy and comedy have specific meanings. A tragedy is a story in which someone falls from a favored position. A comedy is generally a story in which someone ascends from a humble station. In simple terms, a tragedy has a happy beginning and a sad ending. A comedy is the opposite.

Think of the biblical story as both tragedy and comedy. It begins and ends in joy. But it is mostly filled in between with a dark struggle to restore what was lost so early on, so long ago.

The opening and closing acts are about goodness. We live between acts now where we can see light by looking far back, perhaps further than our eyes will allow, or by gazing out into the indefinite future. It can seem nearly impossible at times to find our way in the here-and-now, in what I will describe throughout the book as *the wild*.

This fallen world, the wild, hasn't changed much since Adam and Eve's time. The headlines have basically been the same since Genesis 3. But one day the page will turn, the king will return, and history will be set aright. One day goodness will be restored.

In the Garden of Eden, humanity lived in God's presence. And throughout the Bible we see hints that one day the garden will be restored. There will again be a place where we can live in peace with our Creator.

That's why both the tabernacle and the temple, the buildings where the Israelites worshipped God, had ornate organic designs. These were symbols of nature that pointed *back* to what was lost in Eden and *forward* to a day when Eden will be restored.

The Blessed In-Between

Followers of Jesus live in what theologians describe as the “already but not yet,” a time of struggle undergirded by living hope. Christ has come; that’s what the Gospel stories are about, but his kingdom is not yet fully realized on earth. Eden has yet to be restored. It won’t be until his final return that things are ultimately put right.

We see Jesus, we believe in Jesus, and we wait for Jesus. Yet still we suffer. But the authentic gospel, the pure message of Jesus offered in the Bible, offers real and rugged answers for life’s dark places. That’s what we’ll discover in this book.

Many within the church misrepresent the challenge of living in a fallen world by glossing over the reality of human pain. Some Christians deny suffering by acting as though it is somehow optional—as if faithful Christians need not concern themselves with such things. Prosperity-peddling preachers make it sound as though heaven is attainable on earth if we can just muster up enough faith—or send them enough money.

There’s only one problem with offering Eden now. The *fake it until you make it, don’t worry, be happy, smile your problems away, enjoy your best life now* sort of Christian clatter offered through a lot of Christian broadcasting and bookstores rings hollow when real hardships come—and they do. They always do, to all of us.

The Bible leads us to expect this. It is a book of suffering. The first book to be written in the Old Testament actually wasn’t Genesis. It was Job, a story about a man who lost everything. Nearly half of the Psalms are considered to be songs of lament or songs of suffering. The final book of the Bible, Revelation, is a letter to churches that are being persecuted.

But the Bible is also a book of hope. Our suffering leads us somewhere, to someone. The gospel message says that we are not in Eden—we are in the wild. But we are on a journey out of the wild, and a new Eden lies ahead.

Reality about the wild—and hope in the wild—is what we're all after.

So yes, life sucks. That's what Genesis 3 tells us to expect. But if we trust in Jesus, he will help us to live well in the wild, as we wait for the day when he returns and calls us out of the wild and into the perfection to come.