

**KARYOBERBRUNNER**

FOREWORD BY DEAN FULKS  
*Author of Your Next 30 Days*

**YOUR  
SECRET  
NAME**

AN UNCOMMON  
QUEST TO STOP  
PRETENDING,  
SHED THE LABELS,  
AND DISCOVER  
YOUR TRUE  
IDENTITY

We hope you enjoy this sample of  
*Your Secret Name.*

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*And now we're grown-up orphans  
That never knew their names.*  
—“Name,” Goo Goo Dolls

## A NOTE TO THE READER

My name is Kary, and I want to thank you for investing your energy in this book. I encourage you not to skip this brief note. It will make more sense in a moment.

We both know you could be doing a million other things with your time. Instead, you've chosen to explore the concept of *Your Secret Name*. For this reason, I believe you'll be richly rewarded, but perhaps not in the way you might think.

Here's what I mean.

This message has the power to change the way you see yourself and the world. I know this because of the testimonies of others—thousands of others. This book has now lived and breathed for nearly ten years. It's traveled the world, and it's found its way into the hearts and minds of young and old alike.

I can't take a single ounce of credit or blame for anything this book births in you. Quite frankly, I don't even remember writing it. I just reread the manuscript for the first time in nearly a decade, and to put it bluntly, it was one of the strangest experiences I've ever had.

For starters, I didn't recognize the author. I say that without a shred of hyperbole. Ernest Hemingway is often credited with the saying "There is nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and bleed." He's correct—except for the typewriter part because I used a computer.

When I wrote *Your Secret Name*, I bled—and it was a whole bunch of blood too. Back in 2009, I was a full-time pastor,

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and I had never shared about my past in a public way. I knew doing so could be dangerous. I wondered if I'd lose my job or my friends or my reputation.

In a way, I lost all three and much more. But again, not as you might think. Thankfully, the church where I worked supported *Your Secret Name*, and me for that matter. I'll forever be grateful for that.

But I quickly learned that the message itself was dangerous. Once it got out, I was uninvited to events. Other people wrote blog posts condemning my view of God and life. One leader told his pastor he'd boycott an event if I came and spoke at his church. I spoke anyway. And that man was true to his word. He never showed up.

I realized that some people aren't *ready* for the truth. Still others don't want to *hear* the truth. And only a few brave souls are willing to *pursue* the truth.

Although I often hear stories of transformation resulting from *Your Secret Name*, I believe the life that changed the most was my own. This is why I can honestly say that I don't recognize the thirty-two-year-old kid who wrote the book.

Now I'm in my forties. I have less hair—or, more accurately, no hair at all. But it was this book that helped me take the first step in becoming a soul on fire. It helped me discover who God created me to be.

When I finished *writing Your Secret Name*, I knew I needed to start *living* my Secret Name. A couple of years after Zondervan published the book, I left my role as a pastor. Although I still loved the church, I knew I needed to become an entrepreneur to do my own gig and manifest all that was in my heart.

Today, I ignite souls full-time, often in the business context.

Since discovering my Secret Name, I haven't done well with boxes, categories, or labels. Maybe that's why I feel compelled to warn you. This book has the potential to reshape your beliefs about God, life, and even yourself. But only if you let it.



## A NOTE TO THE READER

If I were to write this book for the first time today, it would be completely different. That's the weird thing about being an author. A book is a snapshot of who you are at a moment in time. When you change, so does the way you think and the way you write.

For this reason, I tried to expand and update as little as possible. I wanted to keep the integrity of the message and only polish when necessary. I'm grateful that Zondervan reverted the rights to me. They didn't have to, but they chose to because of the work we're still doing around *Your Secret Name*.

Thousands of people are still finding their Secret Names. Many of them are going beyond the book and into the course, the events, and the global team of speakers, coaches, and trainers. They're taking the message into schools, churches, organizations, and anywhere else people need freedom.

Welcome to *Your Secret Name*—an uncommon quest to stop pretending, shed the labels, and discover your true identity. I can't wait for you to find out what awaits you on the other side.

Talk soon. And remember: I believe in you.

—Kary

# INTRODUCTION

## THE GENTLE WHISPER

**T**omorrow night I could change my little girl's future forever—and strangely, she isn't even born yet.

On our “date night”—an infrequent event for two parents with two other children under the age of four—my wife, Kelly, and I will go to a local bookstore, sit down with a stack of books, and participate in a ritual as old as humanity itself.

We're going to pick out a name for a child we've never met. At least that's the plan.

With only eight weeks left in the pregnancy, we can't afford to stall. Unfortunately, we've been having the same date night for the last several months, and we're no closer to choosing a name. When we come home, our babysitter can tell with one glance at our dejected faces that we're going to need her services again, and sooner than any of us thought.

Naming our first two kids posed a few obstacles, but at the present moment, this third one has us caught in a cruel headlock and almost ready to tap out. Until we settle on a name we're gridlocked, unable to move an inch in any other area of our fast-paced lives.

As a guy, coming home without a name feels similar to returning from a hunt without a kill—or maybe from the hardware store without that critical part (although admittedly

## YOUR SECRET NAME

I don't often venture into the realm of home improvement). In any case, my inability to score the right name undermines any hope of fulfilling the "masculine stereotype" of a problem solver.

Kelly doesn't feel any better.

She paces the house at all hours of the night, penciling possibilities that seem impossible when examined in the light of day. Somehow, both of us feel beaten by this task, and every day that we fail to come up with a name is another day closer to our daughter's birth.



At some point in history, we humans decided assigning names in infancy was a good idea. Our parents got suckered into the same strategy because they had the same pattern modeled to them.

The tradition isn't all bad, as there are some benefits to bestowing names early on. No one wants to be referred to as "girl" or "hey you" for the bulk of their childhood. Yet our need for names bleeds much deeper than birth certificates on official papers and lingers much longer than the echo from the server's voice at Panera Bread announcing that our "Pick Two" soup and salad combo is ready to be picked up at the counter.

The truth is, every single person who's breathing in this same air on planet Earth is also caught up in the same age-old Name Game. And as long as we're stuck in the Name Game—the unsuccessful cycle of trying to discover our true identity independently of God—rest assured, we'll never win.

On the contrary, we'll always be swept away with a dose of angst that often feels as colossal as planet Earth.

Think I'm exaggerating? Let me ask then:

- Are you completely secure in understanding who you are?
- Are you confident you know your true identity?

## THE GENTLE WHISPER

- Are you fully resolved concerning certain monumental issues, like discerning your purpose, calling, and lot in this life?

If not, don't feel discouraged. Instead, realize these feelings are both normal and natural. God planted these questions deep inside your soul in order that you'd eventually discover the path that leads to him. Or, more accurate, so that you'd reach the end of yourself and then finally be ready to experience the beginning of him. The Bible tells us: "He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart."

Essentially, we're all homesick for a place we've never been. And so we live as nomads, groping toward a destination we can't quite define. As creatures we fumble along, hoping to find our way back to the One who made us—believing that as we discover who *we* truly are, we also discover a portion of who *he* truly is.

Anthropologists agree with this phenomenon, at least in part. They understand uncertainty infects every person in every culture and that each one of us desperately desires the answer to the most basic question:

"WHO AM I?"

These three simple words hijack our brains at an early age, clutching onto our core, nagging us wherever we go. Children seek to answer this question in playtime by assigning titles like Mommy or Daddy when playing house or labels like cops and robbers when playing bank heist.

Adults seek to answer this question with more sophisticated strategies. Some of us climb our way up the corporate ladder, plowing through perpetual promotions. While others of us maintain our reputation of trendy and hip by sporting the latest gadgets and trinkets. In the checkout line at the mall, we buy the lie that a new jacket or pair of shoes will somehow dispel the hurt we feel in our hearts. But the excitement soon fades, and our souls are once again exposed as naked and needy.

## YOUR SECRET NAME

We incorrectly assume that names given by other people or other things will somehow scratch our identity itch.

Yet Birth Names (the names assigned to us when we *arrive* in this world) and Given Names (the positive and negative titles we inherit while *walking* in this world) were never hardwired to alleviate the tension.

On the contrary, they only fuel it, creating more space between our true identity and us.

And so many of us spend a lifetime running from our Given Names, exchanging our best years, hoping to escape these false words that reach out and long to define us. But transcending these titles is no simple task.

Slowly over time, these labels become part of our permanent wardrobe. And as we wear them, we end up settling for so much less than we were born to be.

We'd do well to swallow the truth—that such names are never enough. Neither our Birth Name nor our Given Names expel the ache or satisfy our souls. None serve as a substitute for our Secret Name.

*Secret Name?*

That probably sounds a bit strange, or at a minimum, unfamiliar.

But that's only because our vocabulary doesn't often venture into epic realms, realms of destiny and legacy. Instead, we frequently prefer trivial topics, like other people's attempts at dieting, our favorite college team's road to the championship, or our friend's most recent status update on the latest social networking site. But let's not be too hard on ourselves. We're not shallow people. Rather, we've just gotten used to relating on levels that avoid soul issues.

For a thousand reasons, it's much easier this way.

Good thing God has much more in mind. He wants to grant you a new name—a Secret Name, in fact—but you can only start embracing your future name when you stop running from your present ones.

## THE GENTLE WHISPER

You must accept who you are in order to discover who you were created to be.



This book is about giving up the Name Game. It's about putting an end to chasing the false names that offer only a hollow promise. It's about finally encountering your Secret Name, drinking it down, and allowing it to ooze into every quadrant of your life the ones you can see—and those you can't.

As you might have guessed, discovering your Secret Name isn't a painless process. And they aren't bestowed to the masses either, only unto the remnant courageous enough to deal with their junk.

The first step is to turn down the noise a few notches. The world perpetually shouts and screams, seeking to brand you.

Your true name—your Secret Name—is granted only by the One who knew you before you were born.

In all this, remember, the Father doesn't speak with a loud voice, but most often with a gentle whisper. Tragically, we rarely stay quiet long enough to hear him.

*Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.*

1 Kings 19:11–12



# PART ONE

What's in a Name?





*A bad wound may heal,  
but a bad name will kill.*

—Scottish proverb

# 1

## A WORLD WITHOUT NAMES

**Y**ou may be surprised to learn that I share a bond with the cool cat who hosted the hit game show *Wheel of Fortune*—a bond so strong that you might say our destinies are intertwined forever.

Pat Sajak and I both have a girl's name.

Don't laugh.

Growing up with a girl's name wasn't easy. More than once I remember the mean kids circling me, wickedly chanting, "Kary has a girl's name. Kary has a girl's name."

I remember I got a piece of mail addressed to *Ms. Kary Oberbrunner*. It was an invitation to an all-girls summer cheerleading camp. Good thing my friends never saw that brochure. Come to think of it, upon opening it, I burned it—promptly.

Such acts of naming slowly ate away my security, eroding my confidence like a constant drip of water over time erodes a menacing solid block of concrete.

Eventually I reached a breaking point.

I had to stop the pain, and I decided building myself up physically would solve the problem. Television convinced me that putting on some serious muscle would silence the malicious taunts. Strength worked for Mr. T and the A-Team, and I believed it just might work for me too.

## YOUR SECRET NAME

Since steroids are hard to come by in the first grade, I settled for a much faster strategy. One morning, while in my bedroom getting ready for school, I stuffed my tiny navy blue sweater full of socks. I thought a dozen balled-up socks placed strategically in my sleeves and chest area would add an edge to my image and give me a new name, perhaps Spike or Rock. I walked into class, sweater bulging with fake muscles. The kids circled me as usual, but instead of calling me names, they looked on with strange curiosity.

I was thrilled. My brilliant plan was giving me the empowerment I craved—until one of my “muscles” fell out of my sweater and onto the floor.

I received a new name that day—IDIOT.

The school year inched by slowly that year. I longed for summer afternoons where my cousins and I were the kings of the woods behind their house—where we would invent our own names for each other, names consistent with our other favorite TV shows, old shows, like the *Dukes of Hazzard*, *MacGyver*, and the *Greatest American Hero*, popularized by its theme song “Believe It or Not.”

Unfortunately for us, there was nothing believable about our make-believe playtime, and each school year jolted us back to reality. My classmates knew nothing about the clever aliases my cousins and I assigned each other.

Thankfully, not everyone at my school was cruel.

At recess one day, a particular girl decided she’d seen enough of my verbal beatings and decided to oppose the mean kids. “Stop making fun of Kary,” she said.

“Why should we? He has a girl’s name,” one particular bully pointed out reasonably.

“So?” my defender shot back, searching for some type of logical defense.

“There’re plenty of cool guys with girl’s names.”

“Oh yeah? Like who?” The bully wasn’t about to back down.

## A WORLD WITHOUT NAMES

We all wondered if she'd manage a rebuttal. With my self-esteem on the line, I desperately prayed she would.

"Pat Sajack," she blurted out. "He's cool, and Pat's *definitely* a girl's name."

*Pat Sajack?* I thought. *I guess he's cool.* Maybe I was hoping for someone a little . . . taller?



Although we humans tend to fixate on names, at one point in history, this simply wasn't the case. Rewind time way back to the beginning when a much different world existed—specifically, a world without names. The first two chapters of Genesis refer to the first two people as man/woman, male/female, and man/wife. These individuals were identified for what they were (gender and species), not for who they were (personal names).

Remarkably, an environment devoid of sin also meant an environment devoid of human names.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps difficult to imagine, but names were simply unnecessary in those days. Since the original man and woman knew who God was, they also knew who they were—an inescapable by-product. And so the insatiable question presently seared into our brains—Who am I?—didn't exist because separation from God didn't exist. The core question of identity found its idyllic resolution within a pure relationship with the Father.

Prior to the fall, detailed in chapter three of Genesis, the first two people experienced perfect harmony with their Creator. They walked and talked with God intimately and frequently. Names existed in the garden of Eden, but only names that described *what* beings were, not *who* these beings were.

God placed the responsibility on man to name the lower order, thereby fulfilling his original command to "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every

## YOUR SECRET NAME

living creature that moves on the ground.” According to God’s will, the man obediently assigned names to all of the animals and birds:

*Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.*

Genesis 2:19–20

Yet, for man and woman at this time, there was no need for names—that is until sin emerged and ripped them away from God. A fractured relationship *with* God meant a fractured understanding *of* God as well as a fractured understanding of themselves—also an inescapable by-product. By losing their grasp of who God was, they also lost their grasp of who they were. The damage now done and the ground now cursed, the man’s next response proved both chilling and revealing.

Guess what he did immediately.

Adam names his wife—Eve.

God never told him to name her. Only a chapter before, this act of naming, commanded by God himself, was reserved for Adam to bestow names upon animals, not fellow human beings. Pulling back the layers, we see how sin infects a person, even within the first few minutes of contracting the fatal disease.

By naming his wife, Adam attempted ineffectively to solve a riddle well above his pay grade. No other human can answer for us our deepest question of identity.

Sin causes us to treat other people as less than human—more specifically, like animals. And sin seductively whispers the lie that we’ll find our true identity by naming others or by receiving names from other people.

## A WORLD WITHOUT NAMES

Deception now feeding our souls, the truth is that an inaccurate view of God yields an inaccurate view of ourselves—a dilemma we often rush to remedy. But factor God out of the equation and we're left only with using our own efforts to score a new identity, a trend found just a few chapters later in Genesis.

Humankind tried to combine its collective energy in an attempt to provide an answer to the age-old, sin-induced question: Who am I? This mass of humanity slaved away and built the Tower of Babel for no other reason than to forge a new name. They hoped that by carving out stone, they'd somehow carve out their Secret Name too.

*“Then they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.’”*

Genesis 11:4

Fast-forward and the story is still being retold. We're caught up in the same Name Game, carving out new names, trying to satisfy the same ache. You'd think after all this time we would've learned idyllic resolution is *still* only found within a pure relationship with the Father.

But we haven't learned, and so we enter this war-torn world with a few strikes against us. Unfortunately, we arrive with a Birth Name.

Birth Names aren't the enemy, but they certainly aren't a friend either. They don't offer any clarity regarding the question—Who am I?—if that's what you're wondering. Birth Names offer different levels of insight, depending on where you're from, but they can never replace the need for discovering our Secret Name.

Many cultures bestow Birth Names based on their meaning, but Westerners tend to choose ones predominantly based on the way they roll off the tongue.

## YOUR SECRET NAME

We may pick a name because it's popular or because someone we admire holds the name. Perhaps a few expectant parents even settle on a name based on its etymology. But for the vast majority, choosing a Birth Name is almost totally dependent on personal preference.

Not so for hundreds of other cultures around the world, including Africans, Arabs, and East Indians. For many of these cultures, a name describes a person, often referring to his or her physical characteristics.

Customs expert James M. Freeman explains:

*Thus a certain Abyssinian was named Omazena, because of a wart on his hand; an Arab boy was called Duman, because he was born before the gate of Bab-el-Duma at Damascus. Among the Hindoos we find Ani Muttoo, the precious pearl; Pun Amma, the golden lady; Chinny Tamby, the little friend. Among the Native American Indians we have Kosh-kin-ke-kait, the cut-off arm; Wah-ge-kaut, crooked legs; Wau-zhe-gaw-maish-kum, he that walks along the shore.<sup>2</sup>*

For such people groups, one's Birth Name marks a person for life, and changing it is out of the question.

Within the biblical tradition, naming proved an even weightier undertaking. For these cultures, a particular name often carried a prophetic commentary. Your Birth Name shaped how you acted and who you became, functioning as a window into your behavior and temperament. This pattern begins in the first few pages of Genesis, the first book of the Bible. When Eve gives birth to her first child, a son, she says, "With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man."

Eve named him Cain, meaning "acquisition" or "possession." The name *Cain* is related to the Hebrew verb *I acquired*. Some scholars feel that Eve's name choice represented her belief that Cain would fulfill God's prophetic statement concerning the promised seed that would come from her.<sup>3</sup>

## A WORLD WITHOUT NAMES

Eve named her second son Abel, which means “breath,” “vapor,” or “vanity” and seems to relate to shortness of life spoken of much later in the Scriptures.<sup>4</sup> We observe that jealousy *possessed* Cain as he observed God’s favor for Abel’s sacrifice rather than his. Cain wished he could *acquire* God’s favor, so he cut his brother’s life short.

With Abel dead and Cain disqualified (murder tends to have that effect), “God gave Adam and Eve another son—Seth—which means ‘the appointed, the substitute’ (taking Abel’s place).”<sup>5</sup>

As the centuries rolled on, the plot thickened. God has always been calling a people out for himself—in the Old Testament predominantly the Israelites, and in the New Testament predominantly the church. The Israelites originated from Jacob, the younger son of Isaac, the promised son of Abraham, who was the father of many nations and the recipient of God’s unconditional covenant.

Echoing the choices of Cain and Abel, the younger of the twins (Jacob) shrewdly stole the birthright of the older brother (Esau) with a covert act of deception. Jacob invited Esau to exchange his inheritance for a bowl of stew. At the end of the meal deal, Esau might have had a full stomach, but most certainly he also had an empty soul.

Jacob received his Birth Name, meaning “deceiver” and “heel grabber,” because he exited the womb clutching his twin brother’s heel. Labeled a “schemer” and “one who undermines,” Jacob lived up to his name repeatedly at the expense of his brother Esau.

Jacob needed transformation and, more than that, he needed a new name—especially if God would build his chosen people through Jacob’s lineage. How could God name his people after a patriarch who habitually manipulated and swindled others through scheming?

As if being called a “deceiver” wasn’t bad enough, Jacob had to deal with the shameful connotations that clung to



## YOUR SECRET NAME

any name associated with the “heel.” In the Old Testament, God linked Satan himself to the first reference to the heel, prophesying that the evil Serpent would one day bruise the heel of Eve’s future offspring.<sup>6</sup>

“Heel” received some additional poor marks in the New Testament. In one of history’s darkest moments, on the threshold of Judas’s betrayal, Jesus identified the turncoat disciple as the one who “lifted up his heel against me.”

Jacob, the future father of the twelve tribes of Israel, spent a lifetime running from both his Birth Name and his Given Names. If Jacob hoped to inherit his divine destiny, he needed an entirely new identity.

He needed to learn his Secret Name.



Chances are that somewhere along the way, you’ve been tagged with a Given Name<sup>7</sup> that you’re not too crazy about:

ORPHAN	HEALTHY	STUTTERER
RICH	AGNOSTIC	DEPRESSED
POWERLESS	VENGEFUL	UNPROTECTED
WEAK	BRILLIANT	ATHLETE
LOST	COMMON	SINNER
UNCREATIVE	TRAPPED	HANDICAPPED
MISTAKE	OVERWHELMED	INCAPACITATED
ACCIDENT	TIRED	INVALID
UGLY	VICTIM	DISABLED
BATTERED	REJECTED	BORED
EXHAUSTED	UNSEEN	BURDENED
FATHERLESS	INVISIBLE	COCKY
EXPOSED	FORGOTTEN	DESPAIRING
FAITHLESS	ABANDONED	IGNORANT
UNWANTED	RUSHED	IDIOT
ARROGANT	HASTY	FOOLISH

## A WORLD WITHOUT NAMES

UNTOUCHABLE	PLAIN	SPINELESS
SELF-RELIANT	SLUT	FEARFUL
UNABLE	SIMPLE	WIMP
SUCCESSFUL	DISPOSABLE	BANKRUPT
UNSURE	DOWNCAST	FRIENDLESS
UNSTABLE	SOMBER	DAMNED
HOSTAGE	MELANCHOLY	CURSED
ABDUCTED	LEGALISTIC	UNLUCKY
ENSLAVED	TAINTED	ACCURSED
CAPTIVE	TRAMP	CLUMSY
POOR	IMPURE	AWKWARD
HOMELESS	DIRTY	FAT
BUM	DEFENSELESS	ANOREXIC
GIFTED	OPPRESSED	CUTTER
NEEDY	SINGLE	SELF-INJURER
FAILURE	DISTURBED	LAZY
DISCONTENTED	TROUBLED	BLAH
DISTRAUGHT	CRIMINAL	FREELoader
SICK	GUILTY	SUICIDAL
UNHEALTHY	ESTRANGED	USED
DISEASED	BANISHED	PERPETRATOR
VIOLENT	MISFIT	MOLESTER
WHORE	COLD	UNBALANCED
TENSE	CALLOUSED	STRESSED
ALONE	IMPATIENT	OFFENSIVE
JUDGED	UNAPPRECIATED	UNPRODUCTIVE
MISJUDGED	OUTCAST	WASTEFUL
POPULAR	UNLOVED	LIAR
DIVORCED	RELIGIOUS	DECEPTIVE
UNSKILLED	FAMISHED	UNCERTAIN
INCAPABLE	UNFULFILLED	AVERAGE
UNFAITHFUL	INDECISIVE	UNIMPRESSIVE
ADDICT	BROKEN	
HELPLESS	LOSER	

## YOUR SECRET NAME

Most of us spend a lifetime running from these Given Names, wasting our best years trying to escape words that trap and define us. But transcending these terms isn't a simple task.

God desires a different outcome. He has a Secret Name for each one of his children, and he whispers to all those who will listen, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give *some* of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it" (Revelation 2:17 NASB).

For each of us, the pretending will stop—either in this life or the next. But only a few of us choose to learn our Secret Name this side of eternity. The rest of us have gotten so used to the bondage, we remain content only knowing our Given Names.

Jacob might never have learned his Secret Name either, but during his exile in which he ran from his vengeful brother, he had a dream. Through this dream, God showed Jacob a different way and a different world, and when he awoke from his dream, he thought, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it."

Jacob had no idea that God planned to build a nation through him. He couldn't imagine the lands he would one day inherit or fathom that the blood flowing through his veins would, centuries later, animate David and Solomon. He couldn't foresee Jesus, the Promised Redeemer, would descend from his son Judah.

But before any of this could happen, Jacob needed to discover his Secret Name. That would make all the difference.

You too need to be awakened by God's whisper in a dream because, most likely, you have no idea of all the wonderful plans God wants to lavish upon you.

So are you ready to discover your Secret Name?

Learning it will make all the difference.

I know it did for me.

## 2

### THE STATUE MAKER

**A**t a young age, my brother, two sisters, and I realized our parents weren't in the running to win the "First Out of Church on Sunday Morning" award.

Wondering if Jesus would come back to earth sooner than our parents would emerge through the exit door, we decided to innovate. In order to survive the boredom, we created a unique game called "statue maker."

Chock full of imagination, our game boasted a multiplicity of positions.

Although all of us desired a particular role, only one lucky person landed the coveted "statue maker." The rest of us became statues—except for the unfortunate kid tapped to be the "shopper."

In the pregame phase, the statue maker spun her statues one at a time.

Round and round, round and round, and when released, the statues froze their poses. Those of us challenged by gravity, usually the younger ones, tended to fall instantly to the ground. Others, mostly older kids, stumbled and teetered, trying to regain balance, to everyone's amusement. Each statue froze in a different shape—some on all fours, others with both arms extended upward, and others even flat on their backs.

## YOUR SECRET NAME

However a statue emerged from the statue maker's spin, he or she had to remain fixed in *that* pose. If the shopper caught any statues moving prematurely, they were immediately disqualified, even before the game started.

Still in the pregame phase, each of us statues needed to receive one critical piece of information—our secret name.

LION

LLAMA

BALLERINA

BASKETBALL PLAYER

Our secret names varied, as did our poses, yet we all received our identities in the same manner—with a gentle whisper.

The statue maker studied our frozen forms, looking for the essence of what was locked inside, waiting to come to life. She'd confront that essence and cultivate it by granting each of us a new name. Upon hearing her whisper, our hearts raced as did our minds as we began to calculate how to best embody our new identity.

With secret names fully distributed the game officially began.

At that point, the shopper entered the imaginary store and asked to see the statue maker's statues. Expectancy crackled in the air as the statues mentally rehearsed the moves required of them upon their awakening—from roars to leaps to twirls.

Although currently comatose lumps of clay, we'd soon come to life.

Walking by us, one at a time, the shopper examined our awkward and sometimes downright silly poses. If he wanted to find out more about a particular statue, he'd touch the statue on the head, giving it permission to come alive. With that touch, the statue's eyes opened, it sprang to life, and the gate of creativity swung open to release the flood. Leaping and lunging, jumping and crawling, we embraced our new

## THE STATUE MAKER

identity with fearless fervor. Finally unleashed, we embodied artistry, our imagination now our only boundary.

One at a time, we continued our dance until the shopper's hand touched us on the head again, thus refreezing us. Although the shopper's goal was to discover our secret names, the goal of each statue was equally clear. We wanted our dance so believable that the shopper risked his guess on our identity. If, through our passionate portrayal, a statue emerged worthy of *that* risk, and assuming the shopper guessed our secret name correctly, the respective statue became the coveted statue maker in the next round.

Our game was a dance of self-discovery and self-revelation. Thinking back to my childhood, I'm glad we had the chattiest parents in the church.



While playing statue maker, were we dancing near the divine?

As children, were we tiptoeing near something deeper than as adults we often fail to recognize?

One time Jesus addressed some adults fighting over whose name was the best and over who was the greatest in the kingdom. He said, "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

As I have come to see it now, the Statue Maker is God. He designs us, shapes us, and names us in love.

This creation process is mysterious, at times even painful. For many of us, this pain is deep and, in some cases, unspeakable. But understand that God sees and feels this pain. He's not a cosmic watchmaker, uncaring and uninvolved, winding up the world and then retreating to more exciting endeavors. Believing that God cruelly uses us as pawns is simply a lie some of us tell ourselves in order to avoid more pain.

How come?

## YOUR SECRET NAME

It's far less painful to pretend that God doesn't care—that he's detached and distant and eternally discontent—than to believe that God is cognizant of and concerned with every detail of our lives. We often prefer a distant God. Such thinking is safer and less complicated. God is in heaven and we're on earth. He lives his life and we live ours. As the first man and woman discovered in Eden, there's comfort in hiding from God.

After all, when he finds us hiding, he'll discover that we're naked. Better to pretend that we've got everything under control than to admit our own shame, frailty, and need.

But if we're honest, we sometimes wonder: If God is powerful, why doesn't he stop the pain? Or, if he allows pain despite his power, doesn't that prove he's cruel? We begin to question whether we can trust God. And if the answer is no, if we can't trust him, then we don't have a chance of loving him.

Fear him?

Maybe.

But never love him?

Living in fear, some of us choose *rebellion*. We think it's less painful to pretend that God doesn't exist, and so we make ourselves god. We manipulate people so we can obtain our most coveted commodity: control. With people and possessions in our back pocket, we buy the illusion of a pain-free existence.

Living in fear, others of us choose *religion*. We make God into something he's not. We try to manipulate and control this false god with good works to obtain our most coveted commodity: also control. With strict obedience to rules and rituals, we believe our god is somehow appeased and our good behavior will spare us from a pain-filled existence.

Although both paths are dressed up a bit differently, they lead to the same lonely place—isolation.

We know this.

We feel this and we taste this.

## THE STATUE MAKER

Like lost ships drifting in the ocean, we inherently know we're meant for a destination. Only this particular destination isn't a place, but rather a Person—the Statue Maker, to be exact.

Whether you believe in God or not, he believes in you. He fashions each of us according to his likeness. And even though we all have the divine spark within us, most of us never acknowledge this divine thought. As in my childhood game, we try to *act* our part before we *know* our part.

But without first knowing who we are—without hearing our Secret Name whispered by the Statue Maker—we have no other choice than to exist as unidentified individuals, privy only to whatever names the world wants to assign to us.

Consider the nearest high school.

Many teens are ruthless. They classify and identify, categorize and patronize, ensuring that everyone knows where he or she fits in the food chain. Cliques set themselves up as judge and jury, deciding which teen to emulate and which one to regurgitate.

But the plot doesn't change much as we age. Just the other day, I had breakfast with a successful lawyer in his sixties. While discussing the premise of this book, he shared the nickname his father pegged him with. Whether his father meant it or not, calling his clumsy son “Moose” proved to have far-reaching effects. To this day, in moments of living life on autopilot, he's still trying to shed this Given Name, just like the rest of us.



Names cut deep and stick with us our whole life. We can't measure how much we compensate or overcompensate for the voices set on repeat within our subconscious. Much of what we do is a reaction to these labels. It's why we

- vow to prove them wrong.
- never take a risk.



## YOUR SECRET NAME

- get that surgery.
- buy that item.
- take that job.
- don't speak up.
- wake up early.
- stay up late.
- look at that.
- refuse to eat this.

Given Names shape us. They make us, and they can even break us.

But the Statue Maker has something better in mind. He alone knows our Secret Name, and until we learn that name, we're either a mass of frozen potential yet to come alive, or we come alive prematurely, acting out our Given Names because they're the only names we know.

Jacob fell victim to this unhealthy tendency. He wasted far too much headspace thinking, calculating, and scheming about how to obtain a new name. It's why he swindled his brother's birthright out from under him and why he stole his brother's blessing and had to flee his home and everything familiar.

Like so many of us, Jacob wanted to create a new name for himself rather than receive his Secret Name from the Statue Maker. But sadly, through his intense efforts to shirk his Birth Name, he actually came to embody its very meaning: one who supplants and deceives.

All the while, God waited patiently for Jacob.

Eventually, Jacob turned down the noise and listened long enough and hard enough to hear his Secret Name.

Our lives aren't that much different. An entire world is waiting for us to become who we were born to be. The world

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yearns for us to embrace our destiny. Because when we're alive, everything we touch comes alive too.<sup>1</sup>

Have you ever spent time with someone truly alive?

Such people have a restorative quality about them. Rather than taking energy from others, they're so full of life that they give energy to others.<sup>2</sup> Anchored and centered, people who know their Secret Name are dialed into a different channel and marked by a quiet confidence that allows them to heal the world.

But what sets them apart?

And who gave them permission to dance while the rest of us remain frozen in time?

How do they know what part to play?

In reality, we're the ones playing—they're actually *living*. They know something the rest of us don't.

They know who they are.

They've learned their Secret Name.

And as we'll soon find out, we can too.

# 3

## THE NAME GAME

**W**hat do you do?”  
We tend to get asked this question more than any other.

Not “Who do you love?”

Or “What makes you tick?”

Or “What are your dreams?”

Instead, we get a worn-out question that, if we focus on it, puts even more distance between our Secret Name and us.

For many of us, the most important features of a person are external—not about who they are but rather what they have or how they look.

Who has the best job? The nicest car parked at the biggest house? Whose kids dress to impress and make the honor roll? Who still excels at sports, throwing parties, or tithing? Who is the sexiest or savviest?

Although there are exceptions, most men define who they are by what they do—their jobs. Most women define who they are by who they know—their relationships.

Suckered into the Name Game, we focus on externals. We judge and compare and evaluate a person’s worth based on the surface level of other people’s Given Names.

Who can blame us?

## THE NAME GAME

We're human, after all, and it's way easier to look at the size of a guy's bank account or a woman's bra than brave the deep, stormy waters of Secret Names.

That's far too risky and requires some serious emotional excavating. Besides, few of us have done the deep digging in our own lives, and thus we're a bit disqualified from doing it in the lives of others.



As a kid, I was constantly searching for a new name. Every day, the names people gave me pressed down on me like a heavy weight. I hung out with some fairly talented friends, the type of guys whose outer confidence fueled my inner conflict.

Kevin was good at everything: singing, band, sports, and academics. A prodigy, he graduated high school much younger than the rest of us. Then there was Chad. All the girls commented on his looks, sense of humor, and sensitivity. The very fragrance of cool hung on Joel like expensive cologne. When he walked into a room, the suave factor went up at least ten degrees. I could go on and on—Nate, John, Jason—everyone seemed to have an identity they could proudly claim.

Everyone but me.

I was the guy with the girl's name, the skinny guy.

I experimented with a variety of other things, hoping that somehow, somewhere along the way, I'd stumble upon my Secret Name.

In one of my first school memories, I tried my luck as an artist. The teacher charged my entire class with the task of making a bunny rabbit. She gave us brightly colored pipe cleaners, paste, cotton balls, crayons, a paper plate, and some construction paper.

Clueless about the finer points of art, I went for speed.

I cut, pasted, and colored as quickly as my little fingers would let me—and then promptly presented myself and

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my masterpiece at the teacher's desk, anxiously awaiting her accolades.

"Class," she instructed, "turn your attention up here. Now, Kary finished his project first, and I want you to look very closely at his work."

I stood there, a fragile mess of potential. This was my moment to come alive, my awakening. This would shut all those kids up, especially the ones who made fun of my girl's name.

"Class," she continued, "I must say, in all my years of teaching, this is the absolute . . . worst bunny I've ever seen. Please don't rush your project like Kary did."

I thought about melting into the floor or dying on the spot. Instead, I bit my lip. I distracted myself with pain, rather than settling for tears. I knew crying in front of my classmates would label me for life.

Maybe you know the feeling? Perhaps you bore a similar moment in your own childhood—a time when you withstood uninvited stares of criticism or cynicism?

That day I learned to hold back, to stay in my shell a little longer—better to let *other* people take risks and look foolish.

Still, my desire to learn my Secret Name superseded my desire to play it safe. A few years later I tried out for the Sunshine Kids, a singing group associated with my school. Each kid in the group dressed up in some kind of ethnic clothing and sang, "It's a Small World (After All)" at venues all over the country. The director must have felt sorry for me. She let me into the group even though I couldn't hold a tune.

She picked me to be the German kid. My last name (Oberbrunner) sealed that deal before I could even form an opinion on the matter. I was rewarded with a combination of brownish shorts, tube socks, a white shirt with suspenders, and a silly hat with a red feather in it.

Needless to say, I dropped out of the Sunshine Kids after one performance, and no one seemed sorry to see me go.

## THE NAME GAME

In high school, I tried out for the school play—making my debut in my junior year. The cast grew close to each other, almost like a family. But in my senior year, my childhood stuttering demons returned. I left the stage in tears and told the director the next day that I was done. My life had enough drama already. I didn't need to create any more.

Eventually something stuck—or so I thought. I was decent at wrestling, and it seemed like I might have found my niche and perhaps my new name. Despite my childhood asthma, my cardiovascular health surpassed most. I trained unofficially year round, even joining the soccer team just to stay in shape for wrestling.

Although I made some strides my junior year, taking first in some tournaments and making it to state, my career ended early. A freak accident at the conclusion of my senior year—I was jumped in the alley behind my house and received a major concussion just days before the state tournament—caused my parents to bench me, all according to doctor's orders.

As a result, that next year I didn't attend a prestigious college or join the military like my friends. I went to an unaccredited Bible Institute that trained people to serve overseas as missionaries. Nine times out of ten, just applying guaranteed acceptance. Seventy-five bucks a week covered room, board, and tuition. Not that the Bible Institute was a bad choice. I learned critical lessons about life and God. Plus I met many great people. But I didn't find a new name there, and believe me, I tried.

Overcoming the Name Game seemed so easy for the friends I met. They came as freshmen, learned about God, met their true love, got married by their senior semester, and went further in missionary training. Not me.

I tried to make the missionary gig work. But while sitting at a bonfire halfway around the world on a short-term mission trip, I knew that to stay permanently just to play the Name Game would be wrong. I decided then and there that the full-time missionary thing wasn't for me.

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After completing my two years at that Bible Institute, I looked into attending college. My choices were a tad restricted due to the fact that only two colleges accepted my non-accredited coursework. Logically, I attended one of them, in small-town Indiana.

Things began to click. I aced Greek and Hebrew and knocked a year off seminary. Then, while working on my master's in divinity, I decided to enter the military as a chaplain.

The armed forces always appealed to me. When I was young, a high school senior unofficially mentored me long before it was a buzzword. Although this popular football player eventually graduated, he came back to church on Christmas breaks wearing his uniform from West Point. Even as a young kid, I could tell the military brought with it a certain type of name recognition, and I craved it.

I connected with a certain flavor of church, which agreed to pay for my seminary in exchange for becoming a military chaplain under their banner. I got licensed as a pastor, received my required denominational endorsement, and applied to the Air Force. I could almost hear my new name—LIEUTENANT—and I fancied the way it rolled off the tongue.

I passed my physical with flying colors, but the day I went to sign my papers at the Air Force recruiter's office, my future crumbled before I had enough sense to recognize what just happened. The recruiter led me through a standard questionnaire.

We each had a copy in front of us. She'd read the question from her form, and then I'd check the appropriate box on my form: *Yes* or *No*.

"Have you ever had cancer?" she asked.

"Nope," I replied.

"What about HIV?"

"Nope."

"Asthma?"

"Yep," I answered. "But only as a child. I grew out of it a few years back."

## THE NAME GAME

I must have given a wrong answer because the recruiter looked up from her clipboard, promptly stood up, walked out from behind her desk, and abruptly closed the door. After sitting back down, she placed the clipboard on her desk and folded her hands. The mood morphed from tranquil to troubled.

“Let me tell you something,” she said, speaking in a solemn tone. “Listen very closely. If you want to get into the Air Force, I suggest you change your answer.”

“Why?”

“Since Desert Storm, we’ve beefed up our standards. Too many soldiers with childhood asthma had adverse reactions to the desert conditions. We don’t take chances anymore.”

I looked down at my copy of the form. At the top, in black and white, the official papers warned: “Any falsification of information on this document could result in a fine of \$10,000 or 5 years in prison.”

She leaned in and picked up the pen that I must have dropped. “Here . . . just check ‘No.’”

Obediently, I picked up the pen and let it hover over the box.

“Don’t worry, Kary. We do this all the time.” She shrugged and leaned back with a casual air. “Besides, no one would qualify if they didn’t fudge a little.” Her laugh seemed forced, almost nervous.

I left childhood and entered adulthood in one single moment. My present circumstances converged with images of my future on the battlefield. But more than that, I remember the internal battle between my emotions and my conscience.

I wanted to find a new name so badly I actually considered following her orders. But the more I thought about the white lie, the more it made me sick. I knew I couldn’t base my new career on deception.

Besides, what’s in a name if you have to lie in order to receive it?



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“I need the weekend to think about it,” I stated rigidly. But I knew I wasn’t going to budge.

“Fine,” she said, standing up. “Take your time. But I’m telling you, they’re not going to let you in if you admit to asthma.”

I walked out of her office and into the parking lot. I slammed my car door and cursed God. What gave him the right to dangle yet another dream in front of me, only to yank it right back when just inches from my grasp?

Hot tears stung my cheeks. I was so close to learning my new name, finally, and now one check mark stood in my way. I had been convinced becoming a chaplain was the path for paying my seminary tuition. I had signed all the papers with my denomination, and they had already released the funds and introduced me at several functions as the chaplain cadet.

Still, I knew what I had to do. I called the recruiter on Monday and told her I wouldn’t lie.

She was right. The Air Force didn’t let me in.

Resolved not to quit, I applied for the Army and Navy as well, but they didn’t budge either. My application moved up the ladder, all the way to the Pentagon, not because of me but because of my endorsing agent’s special connections. Still, the answer was firm. In red letters across my file, it loudly proclaimed—REJECTED.

I’d struck out again. My Secret Name eluded me, slipping right through my fingers. I was left without a new identity—just my Birth Name, and a girl’s one at that.



Jacob had trouble finding his Secret Name too. Growing up alongside a sibling with natural-born talent didn’t ease the ache. Esau, the firstborn, had everything going for him, including being Dad’s favorite, an excellent hunter, and exceptionally hairy—all key qualities in primitive cultures. The Scriptures define Esau as a “man of the open country” and a “man of the

## THE NAME GAME

field.” He liked the outdoors, stunk like the outdoors, and he was *covered* in red hair.

Jacob, on the other hand, had smooth, soft skin. In a pastoral culture that valued hard physical labor, such skin was a sign of weakness. Jacob may not have been well liked by his brother, but his mom, Rebekah, preferred him over his older brother, Esau. There’s nothing wrong with being a mama’s boy, but in antiquity, there were stigmas associated with a man who refrained from hunting and preferred the kitchen instead.

Jacob did both.

He knew more than his fair share about cooking. After all, Esau sold his birthright for a pot of stew cooked by his kid brother. While Esau followed Dad on hunting expeditions, increasing his follicle count and predatory tactics, Jacob hung out in the tent with Mom, using lotion for his smooth hands.

Besides being described as a schemer and supplanter, Jacob is also described as plain and quiet. Quiet can be a good thing, but this wasn’t confident-quiet or relaxed-quiet. No, this was fear-quiet. Unknown-quiet. Jacob didn’t stand proudly in his quietness. Instead, he hid shamefully behind it.

Strangely, people like Esau often find themselves in more trouble than people like Jacob. When it becomes our defining trait, success can hijack us, whether in terms of looks, talent, athleticism, or money. Sometimes it’s the only thing people see.

Maybe *you’re* one of these successful people. Maybe your brother or sister is the simple, plain, ordinary one. Maybe you’re the one with the looks, the talent, or the brains—the one graced with the killer sense of humor or the artistic eye. Your angst is just as profound and your pain is just as pronounced as Jacob’s.

Each of us—no matter our Given Names—must learn our Secret Name. Because beneath the *surface* of every person is a human being with an insatiable need to know who he or she was created to be.

## YOUR SECRET NAME

Just listen to Esau's heartache—the successful brother—when his father, Isaac, tells him he can't grant his son his Secret Name. “When Esau heard his father's words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father, ‘Bless me—me too, my father!’”

Your grief may be just as deep, your reply just as bitter. But our earthly father isn't the one who grants us our Secret Name. This type of name must fall from the lips of Another.

# PART TWO

## Accepting the Present



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