

I walked into my bedroom and tossed my black, carry-on bag on the bed. I was tired from working excessive hours, and the relatively short flight from Cincinnati to Atlanta seemed unusually long. I just wanted to melt away my frustration with a warm bath and relax for the rest of the evening. A project I was working on had failed miserably, but in my line of business, I have learned that it's almost inevitable that some things don't go according to plan.

I grabbed the remote control and turned on the TV, my favorite form of relaxation. Unfortunately, surfing channels gave me no such peace today. Surfing the dozens of channels accentuated the mistakes I had made during my project.

I kept switching channels without thinking until I came to a familiar face on BET. The comical young Elvis hairstyle and poorly made makeup couldn't conceal the familiar face of Peter Popoff.

I smirked to myself and shook my head. Out of all the infomercials and weird people on late-night TV, I landed on old double P.

I swear this guy is like the terminator; he just keeps coming back!

Peter got my attention in the late '70s. I had heard whispers about Popoff misleading his small flock of worshipers, but that was nothing new. Church leaders had been misleading people for years.

What I thought was unique about his followers was, not only were his followers willing to accept his lies, they amplified them.

They never viewed his mission as an outright lie, but more of a strategic deception for success. He made statements that arrange the facts to paint the rosier

possible picture. He would spin the truth and mislead his followers because he could, and no one really objected because he was successful.

Your legacy is forever sealed with me if you have followers who are willing to do anything for you, including sacrificing their salvation. You are highly favored and deserve an exceptional place in my kingdom.

I didn't think much of Peter when I first met him. Rev. Ike was far more flamboyant, and Jimmy Swaggart was much more passionate. But Peter had those intangible qualities that can elevate and sustain you longer than the rest.

Peter was weird looking, and sometimes when he preached, he spat the words out the sides of his mouth.

Peter set goals for himself and went after them with a tenacious determination. He had a curiosity for success.

I didn't see Peter as being a long-term asset in my conflict, so I never gave him a large budget. I just sort of allowed him to freelance and make do with what he had.

It turns out that double P was far more cunning than I thought. Within two years, he had turned a bunch of rag-tag cons into a million-dollar business!

He solicited donations to float bibles into the Soviet Union by parachutes, hocked prayer clothes, and pretended to heal the sick.

But his most elaborate scam was that he could speak to God.

I laughed when I first saw it because I could not believe that followers of Christ were that naïve.

He had people believing that God Almighty had given him the ability to see audience members' names, addresses, and illnesses and that he could cure them.

He ran this scam for years, and people were dumping tubs of money at his feet. But like always, all good things must come to an end.

After all, when you're making moves at that rate of speed without the proper guidance, you're bound to make a few mistakes.

It's like playing Jenga. Occasionally, someone will get loose and reckless and cause their tower to wobble and sway. Sometimes it sort-of leans there awkwardly, but most of the time, it crashes to the floor.

Peter's kingdom bypassed the teetering and swaying stage and just collapsed.

A guy named James Randi showed up on the Johnny Carson Show and spilled the beans in intricate detail about his elaborate ruses. They would use aides to gather audience information, and his wife would feed him that information by wireless radio transmission through an earpiece.

You'd think when he got caught, that would have been the end of old double P, but as I stated before, those intangibles can sustain you beyond the lean years.

He declared bankruptcy in 1987, and then went underground.

All I could do was shake my head in disbelief, because lo and behold Thirty-five years later, I see the same guy on late-night TV, selling miracle spring water with the same determined tenacity.

I tossed the remote on the bed and took a sip of Pierre Ferrand Cognac. I walked to the bathroom and added sandalwood and eucalyptus-scented bath oil to the warm water that was already in the jacuzzi tub. The water nearly spilled onto the floor when I climbed in and settled my back against the warm porcelain. The womb-like warmth of the steaming tub overwhelmed my senses and promptly placed me in a relaxed state.

Maybe I got too cocky again. It wouldn't be the first time. After all, modesty has never been part of my DNA.

*“So, I guess you're probably wondering who are you and why should I be concerned about you anyway?”*

*Well, I've been called many names over the years. Devil, Satan, Beelzebub, Belial, Father of Lies, Old Serpent, Adversary, Power of Darkness, Tempter, Wicked One Lucifer!*

*Whatever names your parents or church leaders decided to call me to put fear in your heart, is who I am.*

*The truth of the matter is you shouldn't be concerned about me because I'm really not a bad person! In fact, I think it's just my reputation that precedes me.*

*I say that because you see me every day. I'm at your job, in your school, and without a doubt at your church.*

*I laugh at those pictures of me as some sort of cartoon character in long red underwear with horns and a forked tail, holding a pitchfork. Then there's the one with me as a winged female demon flying through the night, seducing men and attacking pregnant women and infants.*

*Man, somebody must have had a lot of free time on their hands to come up with those pictures.*

*The reality is that I don't come dressed like a comical character in red underwear and pointy horns. I come as everything you've ever wished for.*

*If you want me to be attractive with an engaging personality, I can be that. If you want me to be your best friend with the hottest gossip, I can be that also. I can be*

*whatever you want me to be, as long as you understand that you represent me and not God.*

*I consider myself a one-stop-shop for all your needs—sort of like a concierge service that specializes in accommodating all your carnal pleasures.*

*If you crave food, I can feed that limitless appetite until you say when. If you have an itch for a little sexual healing, I got flavors from vanilla to molasses. And if you lack confidence, I have the perfect substances that you can drink, snort, or shoot-up. All made just for putting your confidence level through the roof.*

*I pride myself on having a no-judgment zone.*

*My motto is, “I have a lot to offer, and I aim to please.”*

*Not only can I assist you with your carnal desires, but I can also personalize those desires and turn them into necessities and entitlements. I offer excellent customer service, but everything offered comes with a price.*

*Christians call it temptations so that you have a negative connotation about me. I just give you all the possibilities of what pleasure can be!*

*There has never been a time in history that I ever forced anything on anyone.*

*I’m like that little old innocent lady giving away greasy sausages at Sam’s Warehouse. I just offer you a sample; one naughty deed per toothpick.*

*It’s not my fault if you overindulge!*

*I’m amazed at how Jesus gets credit for saving souls, and I get blamed when your life goes up in smoke. It’s downright hypocritical if you ask me! All week long, I give you the opportunity to lie, cheat, gossip, and steal, and then you show up to church on Sundays cursing me and singing:*

*“I beat the devil running and I’m so glad.”*

*Really? Did I force you to sin?*

*Is that really what you want everyone to believe?*

*First, you have to be honest with yourself about a couple of things. I just offer what you desire and move on. You can accept what I offer or leave it; it’s no skin off my back. But to be perfectly clear, sooner or later everyone accepts my offer. I’ve only met one person who ignored my barrage of pleasure, and I eventually nailed his ass to a cross.*

*If I really felt like your little raggedy soul was that important to me, I would press you harder. My resume lists some of the most influential people ever to walk this earth, and every one of them has accepted my offer on at least one occasion: Adam, Eve, Trump, Hitler, Jakes, Osteen, and even your beloved Obama. You probably never seen them fall, but I promise you they fail just like everyone else.*

*I know every little dirty deed that I convinced them and you to do!*

*So, I ask you again! Why? Why would I be concerned about you singing God’s praises every Sunday?*

*You think that just because you don’t drink, smoke, or commit adultery, that you avoided my traps and snares.*

*Wrong!*

*When your classmate posts a picture standing in front of their private beach house, are you proud of their achievements, or are you gripped with that stinging pain of envy?*

*When Sister Wilson tells you something shameless and unfounded about Mother Brown,*

*Do you smile and politely say, “That’s odd! Mother Brown has always spoken so highly of you.”*

*Or does your curiosity suddenly cause you to listen to a little more chitchat and call your friends with the latest gossip.*

*I marvel at how easy the curiosity of good “Christians” causes them to meddle in the lives of others. Nothing is a bigger invitation to sin than a little chitchat about so-and-so?”*

*“Heads turn, ears perk up, and meddlesome curiosity is immediately incited. Seldom is the news that follows positive. Ninety percent of what you hear through gossip is none of your business. And yet, curiosity convinces you that you have the right to this information.”*

My relaxed state began to evaporate as the water started to cool, so I stepped out of the tub. I toweled off and wrapped myself in the oversized Gucci robe. My mind went back into business mode, as I walked back to my bedroom. Other projects needed my attention: Another war, another virus, and without a doubt more church leaders.

I could still hear Peter Popoff vaguely in the background as I sat on the bed and searched my bag, retrieving my leather diary.

“This faith tool is the miracle spring water, which will help you to see liberation from the bondage of Satan “It’s free. I want to send it to you, no obligation. Call me now!”

I was startled by the voice of Popoff growling at an elderly black lady.

“Is that your cane?”

The stunned woman looked at the cane and shook her head, yes. Peter Popoff quickly moved toward the cane and snatched it out of her hands, tossing it towards the pulpit.

“I believe God has given you a divine chiropractic treatment! Amen! Hallelujah! Amen in Jesus’s name! You can walk now without the cane. Take a few steps and make Satan mad!”

I gave a quick nod of approval towards the TV and pushed my back into the pillows that were stacked against the wall. I couldn’t help but smile in admiration of myself as I casually thumbed through my diary glancing at page after page of impious entry titles of past centuries. I needed to write something profound, so I thought about what was happening in my life, and all my fears, struggles, and triumphs over the years. And then inspiration struck! I lowered my pencil to a fresh page and began to write.

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Dear Diary:

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