




the secret to loving your life

By FRANCIS ANFUSO

A close-up photograph of a man and a young boy. The man, on the right, has a beard and is smiling broadly, his eyes closed in a joyful expression. He is wearing a light-colored, button-down shirt. The boy, on the left, is also smiling and has his eyes closed. He is wearing a dark blue shirt. They are embracing each other warmly. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a window with blinds.

Stop believing the lie that God has favorites. *“God shows no partiality.”*

Romans 2:11

At one point in my Christian life, I'd become so preoccupied trying to attain God's approval... I'd lost sight of His unwavering acceptance.

If I believe God is always displeased with me... eventually others will sense that I am displeased with them.

God the Father is not just fair with those who love Him, but equally fair with those who hate Him.

acceptance

TIMELY RESIGNATION

Ever wonder if you're resisting the will of God? I've found, at times, resignation and acceptance are the only appropriate responses to the challenges we're facing. I know I'm supposed to resist the devil but am I ever actually resisting God? When is resignation an appropriate response? When we know something actually is the will of God. In Mark 16, Jesus surprised Pilate by not answering his questions. Why would Jesus not come to his own defense? Because He knew it was the Father's will for Him to die for the sins of the world. Therefore, He rested in the will of God and didn't resist it, and so should we.

God has never intentionally pushed us away from Him, but He's always pulling us toward Him.

We can never know God's love until we fail... and then see that He is still madly in love with us.

ABUNDANT LIFE

Are you living the abundant life Jesus promised? (John 10:10) We as Christians are called to live victorious, resurrected lives, but how will we know this is taking place? You know you're walking in resurrection life when you're more concerned about Heaven's impression of you than Earth's. When you're more interested in trusting God than understanding why things are happening. Dead men have no preferences. They bask in total acceptance and complete resignation. It IS God's will for each of us to have no preference other than to obey and be at peace with what He provides. For it is in dying we live. And it is in living a fully surrendered life we experience all God intended.

HAVING A PRE-CAUGHT CONSCIENCE

It's always fascinating how cooperative people become, me included, after we've been caught doing something we shouldn't have done and are facing serious consequences. From little children to seniors, when caught red handed, suddenly we're compliant. The patriarch Joseph's brothers were only interested in doing the right thing after they were finally busted for doing what they knew what was wrong all along. It made me think. What I really

Even if your feet are in Church, your AFFECTIONS may still be in the world.

need is a pre-caught conscience. To live surrendered, becoming putty in God's hands, fully conscious to do God's will, and His will alone. How would that change my life? I'd be

waiting for the blessings of right living to overtake me and not the repercussions of past disobedience.

THEN WHAT?

A pastor friend told me about how Jesus delivered him in his early 20's out of alcoholism and a promiscuous lifestyle. But even though he had been truly born again, the temptations didn't stop. In the process of having his life restored, he decided to take piano lessons. During his first lesson, the female instructor made an aggressive pass at him. Newly married, but for a moment tempted after her suggestive invitation, he turned and said these insightful words before walking out, *"Then what?"* Instead of metal colliding and a tragic collision of lives, there was the sound of screeching tires and cheering angels.

If you pamper your PRESENT, you will destroy your FUTURE.

Until I see my separation from sin as a life and death issue requiring a desperate response, I'll never rise to the proper level of concern.

If we refuse to go forward into the future God has for us... we'll eventually go backward and return to the false security of the past.

"If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness!"

Number 14:2

We get to choose our sins, but we rarely get to choose our consequences.


Parable of the Lost Son

Luke 11:14-16

Unless we allow God to form HIS FIRE within us, we will warm ourselves by the fires of this world. John 18:18



compromise



My contentment has nothing to do
with what is happening around me,
and everything to do with what is
happening inside me.

If you are rarely or never **CONTENT**
then you must come to the
inevitable conclusion, you are not
processing life as God intended.

If I am truly *“casting
all of my cares
upon the One who
cares most for me”*
(I Peter 5:7), then I
should be living the
CAREFREE LIFE.

After Being Beaten
and Thrown In Jail,
Paul Still Affirmed,

*“...I have learned
in whatever state I
am, there I will be
content.”* Philippians

contentment

YOU COMPLETE ME!

What's it going to take to make you the complete person you want to be? In a famous romantic line at the end of a movie, a man finally admits he loves a woman and says, *"You complete me!"* Wow! Sensational! Tearjerker!! But it's just not true! Now, I love my wife dearly, and she loves me. But I don't complete her, and she doesn't complete me. We must find completeness in the God who created us. The Bible is crystal clear, *"We are complete in Him (Jesus)."* (Colossians 2:10) People try to find the completeness they long for in everything imaginable, but only one thing really works: a daily relationship with Jesus Christ.

True contentment is a commitment to receive whatever God gives.

SHALOM

Have you ever heard someone say *"Shalom!"* It's a beautiful Hebrew word. I thought it just meant *"peace,"* but it's so much more! Shalom speaks to our wholeness, well-being, safety, happiness, completeness, peace, prosperity, victory, contentment, and rest. The symbols for the word shalom read, *"to destroy the authority that binds to chaos."* The root word meaning is *"to restore what is needed in order to make someone or something whole and complete"*. Ps. 34:14 says, *"Keep turning your back on every sin, and make 'peace' / 'shalom' your life motto. Practice being at peace with everyone."* Shalom...be whole, at peace, restored by the blood of Jesus, and the marvelous grace of God.

Contentment is more of a decision than a consequence.

Rivers are never stopped by obstacles... they just go around them. Be a River!

DISAPPOINTMENTS LEAD TO MISSED APPOINTMENTS

What if I believed that everyday had, hidden within its moments, divinely ordained experiences that would make my life both memorable and even magnificent?

This perspective would not only make life worth living, but it would also connect me to God's original intention for creating every moment in my life. But, if, on the other hand, I fixate on the disappointments life inevitably sends my way, then I will probably miss the divine surprises He's sprinkled into each and every day.


"This is the day the Lord has made. I'm going to rejoice and be glad in it."

(Psalm 118:24) Can't wait to see what God has in store for me today!

CONQUERING DISAPPOINTMENT AND FAILURE

What if one of the principal goals of life's journey is learning to conquer disappointment and failure? God created us to be *"...more than conquerors through Him who loved us."* (Romans 8:37) Conquer means *"to gain control of, to overcome, to reach the summit by climbing."* I have so little respect for myself when I wallow in my weakness. I need to stop feeling sorry for myself and accept that God has never pitied me. He's always seen me through the eyes of His original intention: strong, bold, humble and brave. God will help you leave the land of "poor me" and journey into the *"overcoming land"* of shattering disappointment and forgetting your failures.

When we spend our lives dwelling on yesterday, we shouldn't be surprised if tomorrow never comes.



Every second we have spent wishing
we were somewhere else, or that we
were someone else, has been a naive
slap in the Face of God.

God never again opens doors He closes.
Therefore, I must not waste time
standing by old doors.
*“Forget the former things, do not dwell
on the past.”* Isaiah 43:18

Something’s terribly wrong
when we think our BEST DAYS
are behind us.

Unless we allow God
to renew our hearts
and minds . . . we will
rummage through the
clutter of past pain,
strapped to cadavers
of disappointment.

disappointments

God has no intention of fulfilling my expectations, but every intention of fulfilling His expectations through me.

Trace every OFFENSE back to an unfulfilled EXPECTATION.

Then ask God to train your soul to RESPOND WELL.

“My soul, wait silently for God alone, for my expectation is from Him.” Ps. 62:5

I’ve wasted too much time waiting for my will to be done or for someone else to act the way I thought best.

If I am waiting for someone other than God... I am wasting my time.

expectations



LIVING FULLY ALIVE

Did you grow up hoping your life would be “mundane”? Mundane means, *“lacking interest or excitement; dull!”* Of course not! Who wants a boring, predictable life? As a young Christ-follower, I coined a saying: *“If it’s boring, it’s probably not of God.”* Though overstated, it spoke to my youthful desire that living for Jesus would be exciting, powerful, and unpredictable, which I desperately wanted! So, what does it mean when life doesn’t turn out the way you expected? It may mean you have a life as God intended. But what if your life is turning out the way you expected? Well, it may mean you need to raise your expectations and believe God for more!

That part of us that obsesses, wishing things would get better, is not our FRIEND. It is our ENEMY.

BITTERNESS can come when we respond poorly to someone not doing WHAT WE EXPECT.

THE ARENA OF EXPECTATION

One of the silliest ways I get tripped up emotionally has to do with expectations of what I anticipate happening in my life. Consequently, my perspective of my future is often won or lost in the arena of expectation. Why? Because I can’t place my complete hope in God as He asks, and still have a secret stash of hope in me. The hope that is real depends completely on the only Person capable of fulfilling them. Therefore, I focus on following God’s Spirit daily and expect that Jesus will guide my life into a future filled with hope. *“My soul, wait in silence for God only, for my hope is from Him.”* (Ps. 62: 5)

DEEPEST OF ALL DESIRES

Would you believe God wants to give you the desire of your heart? He does! But only He knows what that deepest of all desires is. Deep down, we each have a longing to love and be loved in an infinite way. That's the primary hook behind a recent book and movie series. Its principal audience, teenage girls, looks for love beyond the physical. The deepest of all desires is to be *"first loved" and "then to love."* Until we believe God loves and is fascinated with us,

If you want to do something extraordinary for God, you must reject the lie that you are ORDINARY.

we'll search in vain to find someone who is! We were created first for God's pleasure, but the admission price to this delightful relationship requires complete surrender and commitment.

FASCINATED OR CAPTIVATED

Do you believe Peter was fully persuaded he would never deny Jesus, when he said, *"Even if everyone else deserts you, I will never desert you."*

(Matthew 26:23) It seems obvious, he was. So, what was his mistake? Peter began following Jesus from a distance. Herein is the great danger today. As it becomes more and more offensive to follow Jesus, our tendency can be to get further away from Him. Yet, staying close is the only way to live spiritually safe. Peter was fascinated following Jesus, but until he was captivated, he wasn't fully committed. He may be our Savior, but unless He captivates us as our Lord, eventually we may fall away.

When you really know and TRUST GOD you come to realize there's nothing you have to do to MAKE YOUR LIFE SPECIAL.



God alone makes us special.


From the Garden of Eden
to Moses' Tabernacle, from
Solomon's Temple to eternity in
Heaven, God longs to be with us
now and forever.

God made me to be a
fascination to Him.

More than anyone who has
ever known me, He is most
fascinated with my life.

God doesn't have any
average children.

fascinating God



Saying that God forgives you because He loves you, is a clear indication you have no understanding of your sin and its consequences.

How can I bless and serve the person who has hurt me the most?

Jesus washed Judas' Feet before he betrayed Him.

God doesn't want to just forgive you. He wants to set you free from your sin.

Luke 4:18-19

Not only is sin not a deal-breaker . . . setting us free from your sin is the very purpose Jesus came.

forgiveness

THE GREATEST TEST IN LIFE

Once you've been hurt, it's harder to trust. And since all of us have been hurt, it's hard for any of us to trust anyone...even God. You can see lack of trust not just in 60-year old's, but sad to say, in 6-year old's as well. Perhaps the greatest test in life is our ability to trust after we've been hurt. That's why the Bible says, *"...be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you."* (Ephesians 4:32) While being hurt by others is inevitable, Jesus compels us to follow His example in forgiving, saying, *"...he who has been forgiven little loves little; but he who has been forgiven much, loves much."* (Luke 7:47) We realize the extent of God's love when we receive and then offer others His complete forgiveness.

**Though our sins
are primarily
against God, His
FORGIVENESS IS
ONLY BECAUSE
OF JESUS.**

BEARS AND SKUNKS

Those who work with animals in the wild have said that the only creature bears will allow to eat with them are skunks. Perhaps the reason is obvious. The cost of not living in peace with skunks is just too high! What a great principle, and one that all of us can learn from. There are many things in life that, if we give in to, will cost us far too much. The cost of unforgiveness, for example, would certainly qualify. How much senseless pain has been perpetuated because individuals were unwilling to forgive? From marriages...to families...to nations, unforgiveness costs more than we should ever want to pay. Perhaps the secret of learning to forgive is most clearly seen in the sinless life of Jesus. His willingness to die on the cross for our sins cost Him everything.

**FORGIVENESS
is God's Gift...
NOT man's
achievement.**

**God doesn't
want to
Clobber
you... He
wants to
Crown you.**


ACCEPTANCE WITHOUT APPROVAL

Being loved unconditionally is our greatest desire. We want to know that we are loved, no matter what. If a child grows up feeling like he can't please his parents, don't be surprised if they ultimately feel like they can't please God. I didn't know God liked me because I didn't know my dad liked me. Too many children feel they can never measure up to their parents' expectations and that their love will be withdrawn. Acceptance doesn't mean that we will always approve of what our children do, yet we should always accept them unconditionally. Unless we know God loves us, we'll never feel fully approved. Only a relationship built on love will last.

BELIEVING EVERYONE LIKES YOU

A pastor I highly respect taught his children that when they entered a room, they should assume that everyone liked them. I wondered if this crazy idea may produce more pride than promise. But, as I watched his son and daughter become great and godly leaders, I remembered his words. After 30 years of following Christ, I then received the revelation that God didn't just love me — He really liked me! It radically changed my life. What if we each not only knew God liked us, but trained our children to believe the best of everyone they met? Including, that others liked them! Wouldn't that encourage relationships filled with hope and anticipation versus insecurity and hesitation?

**My value
to God has
nothing to do
with HOW I SEE
MYSELF but is
based solely
upon HOW HE
SEES ME.**



Is God glad or sad, grateful or disappointed in who you are?

The answer to this question will shape every dimension of your life.


Even in my lowest moments God still likes me, and fully differentiates between who I am and what I do.

Unless we know we are *“fearfully and wonderfully made”*

Ps. 139:14, we may live under the illusion that we are bad or in some way deformed.

“I have never disillusioned God because He’s never had any illusions about me to begin with.” Mike Bickle

God likes you



God not only loves us unconditionally...
but likes us so completely His heart
smiles whenever He thinks of us...
and He thinks of us constantly.

God likes you, all the time, just
as you are; not based upon your
performance but based upon
who He created you to be.

God has had so many
good thoughts about
you... they cannot be
numbered. Ps. 139:17

I have found no
greater pleasure in life
than the breathtaking
realization that
my life actually
pleases God.

God really likes you

GOD'S IN LOVE WITH YOU

God's madly in love with you! No matter who you are. No matter what you've done! He loves you with an everlasting love. Because He already knows everything you'll ever do, either God's always loved you, or He's never loved you. He doesn't just see a few random moments of your life. He sees its entirety! God doesn't love us more when we're good, nor does He love us any less when we're bad. Why? Because even in our lowest moments God still likes us and fully differentiates between who we are and what we've done. He not only loves us unconditionally and forgives us eternally, but God likes us so completely His heart smiles every time He thinks of us — and He thinks of us constantly.

**Ever see a
doting parent
smile at a child?
THAT'S HOW
GOD FEELS
ABOUT YOU.**

**I was created to be the fulfillment
of GOD'S DREAMS, not the
embodiment of His disappointment.**

THE SOUND OF YOUR VOICE

Do you like the sound of your voice? God does! Growing up, I didn't like the way my voice sounded. I wanted it to be deeper, richer. Now, I find it ironic that I'm on the radio. God's got a great sense of humor. God is far more gracious than critical. He focuses on what really matters. The Bible says, *"The LORD doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."* (1 Samuel 16:7) Maybe, if God likes the sound of my voice, I should like it also. Let me take it one step further. If God likes me, I should like me, too.

MAKING YOUR LIFE A “GET TO”

No one wants to bless your life more than God, and every blessing that lasts is because of His grace.

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of lights...” (James 1:17) No one gives gifts like God! God is looking for people willing to distribute these gifts: His love, joy, peace, forgiveness, and kindness. Many times, He wants us just to be intermediaries, *“flowing rivers of blessing” and not “stagnant pools of entitlement.”*

Someone willing to allow His life to flow through

**GOD’S INTENTIONS
toward me will
always far exceed
... MY GREATEST
EXPECTATIONS!**

them. God doesn’t want to make your life a miserable *“have to.”* He delights in making it a glorious *“get to.”*

THE TERRIBLE TWO’S

There’s a syndrome that some two-year old’s experience. It’s called, *“you exist to bless me.”* Perhaps that’s why it’s called the *“terrible twos.”* As parents, we know that part of the process of successfully raising children is to transition them from being *“natural-born takers”* into being *“supernatural givers.”* There’s no learning process in *“taking.”* We’re all born *“master-takers.”* Teaching us to give is God’s way of raising His children. The only way we can fully experience the greatest fulfillment in life is learning how to give. For it was Jesus Himself who said, *“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”* (Acts 20:35)

**Every one of
us want to be
blessed. But
God can only
bless what’s
BLESSABLE!**

The primary project God wants to complete is ME!

Any other project that distracts from this primary project He considers “UN-BLESSABLE.”

In life, things only work out for two kinds of people:

1. Those who love God
2. Those who are committed to His purpose alone (Romans 8:28)


Jesus didn't say, “*Blessed are you if you know these things.*” He said, “*Blessed are you if you do them.*” John 13:17

There are two things STALKING every follower of Jesus: GOODNESS and MERCY!

Ps. 23:6



God's blessing



All the Prodigal Son's father could see was... not a rebellious son - but the damaged life of the son he loved.

Jonah was waiting for God's JUDGMENT.. when he should have been believing for God's MERCY. Book of Jonah

My IDENTITY can be either shaped by "*My Earthly Failure*" or by "*My Heavenly Father.*"

Replays of our lives will reveal that every thought, action, and intention from God's heart was designed for our good.

God's heart for us

DISCOVERING WHO YOU ARE

Our maturity level is as much determined by what attracts us as it is by what distracts us. We discover the purpose for God creating us when we worship Him and wash our minds and hearts with His Word. If we don't find our true self by focusing on the endless beauty of God's heart, we will be seduced by the shallow fascinations of our own. Only then will we realize we've been chasing an identity God never intended for us. Today, spend time worshiping Jesus and let His Spirit and Word wash over your parched soul. You will find the true fulfillment God has always intended for you.

I needed a SAVIOR. He wanted a SON. We were made for each other. Actually, I WAS MADE FOR HIM.

WE REBEL... GOD RESCUES

Do you believe your future is bleak? It's a lie! Replace this lie with truth, and you'll begin seeing your life from God's perspective. While Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments, the children of Israel were rebelling in the valley below. This fascinating parallel becomes even more amazing when we compare it to our own lives. God was contemplating our bright future, while we were blowing up our present. We're plotting "*Rebellion.*" God's planning "*Rescue.*" God's heart is always about Rescue, never Retaliation; about hope and never despair. His bright future for me was always intended to eclipse my bleak past. Am I willing to believe it, receive it, and then live it?

Like any good parent, God makes a distinction between WHO WE ARE to Him and the foolish things we do.

We can never know God's love until we FAIL and then realize HE IS STILL MADLY IN LOVE WITH US.


"I SEE YOU!"

Every baby in an orphanage cries to be held. That's a good sign. When they stop crying, that's tragic, because they've given up. Are you crying out for love? Wonderful! The God of love wants to hold and comfort you. I remember watching a movie where, no matter what the daughter did, she couldn't get her mother's approval. Then, in the movie's climactic finale, the mother looked into her heart-broken daughter's eyes and said tenderly, *"I see you! I see you!"* This touches a need we all have. Does anyone see me? God's answer: *"I've seen you at your lowest. And, if you'll let Me, I'll rescue you and shower you with My love."*

CLING TO JESUS

Have you ever tried clinging tightly to more than one thing at a time? After the resurrection, Mary was so overjoyed to see that Jesus was alive, she reached out to hug Him. He stopped her, saying, *"Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended."* You'll notice He didn't say, *"Don't even think about hugging me!"* It's because Jesus longs for us to cling tightly to Him. What are you clinging to? Too many of us cling to false comforts that hurt us – the world, our flesh and, at times without fully realizing it, even the Devil. Cling to Jesus, the One who loves you most! (John 20:17)

The emphasis should NEVER BE ON MY LOVE FOR GOD. But, instead, always on HIS LOVE FOR ME. Romans 5:5



One minute before I
received Jesus, I was in
rebellion, but
He was in love.


Two minutes later His
love had not increased
one degree.

I resisted God's Spirit
for years, until I was
bankrupt of all that He
intended for my life.
Yet, God was loving me
every painful moment.

God loved me when I
openly mocked Him
and His Word, ridiculed
sincere Christians, and
laughed at my saintly
mother as she prayed.

There is an infinite
difference between
my capacity to hold
on to God, and His
commitment and ability
to hold on to me.

God's love



When we have a professional
photographer take our picture, we
always ask them to make us look
better than we actually look.

GOD CALLS THIS GRACE!

Only when our HOPE is
completely dependent upon
God's GRACE will it lead
us to His REST.

*"...fix your hope completely on
the grace to be brought to you at
the revelation of Jesus Christ."*

Peter 1:13

Every challenge in life is
designed to reveal our
weakness, God's strength,
and how absolutely sufficient
His grace is in our lives.

When the LAW was given
to MOSES, 3,000 people
DIED. When PETER
preached GRACE, 3,000
people GOT SAVED.

grace

LEARNING HOW TO LOSE

A highly successful college quarterback made it to the NFL but didn't succeed. As he reflected on why, he transparently acknowledged, *"My father taught me everything about winning, but nothing about losing."* His comment is both sad and brilliant. Looking back over my own life, I've learned far more from my losses, than my wins. Whatever character has been formed in me has been forged in the furnace of personal affliction, not on the altars of public adulation or self-gratification. We can't get the grace needed to process life properly unless we bow low enough to receive this merciful handoff from God. Believe it or not, there is a Humble Servant sitting on a throne in Heaven.

HIS GRACE IS MORE THAN SUFFICIENT FOR ME if I focus on HIS STRENGTH more than my WEAKNESS.

The closer I get to God, the more I see my imperfection, but much to my surprise, HIS SMILE is infinitely bigger than I imagined.

ABUNDANT LIFE

Are you living the abundant life Jesus promised? (John 10:10) We as Christians are called to live victorious, resurrected lives, but how will we know this is taking place? You know you're walking in resurrection life when you're more concerned about Heaven's impression of you than Earth's. When you're more interested in trusting God than understanding why things are happening. Dead men have no preferences. They bask in total acceptance and complete resignation. It IS God's will for each of us to have no preference other than to obey and be at peace with what He provides. For it is in dying we live. And it is in living a fully surrendered life we experience all God intended.

ONE MIRACULOUS NIGHT

As a young man, I had so many offenses against people it twisted my perspective. I was so angry about my past! I became an atheist for seven years, openly mocking God, the Bible, and Christians. Bitterness and resentments were choking out my life, making me hyper-critical of others. After a broken relationship, I contemplated suicide daily for six months. One lonely day, I woke up after sleeping by a river. Miraculously, that night, I received Jesus and let His river of life flow into my heart and mind. A half century later, I can hardly believe how blessed I am.

**Sometimes
BEING THANKFUL
is the BIGGEST
SACRIFICE YOU
CAN MAKE.**

I was rescued from certain death and given everlasting life. And for that I'm eternally grateful!

GRATEFULNESS VS. REGRET


Had I died while making hundreds of past deceptive decisions, I'm convinced my soul would have been eternally lost.

The more I realize the extent of my rescue,

the more grateful I am for God's forgiveness. *"It is through the Lord's love that we have not come to destruction, because his mercies have no limit."*

(Lamentations 3:22) The limitless love and merciful kindness of God has rescued my soul. I'm constantly amazed at the price Jesus paid dying an excruciating death in my place, and the vastness of His love and forgiveness toward me. Instead of wallowing in a lifetime of sadness and regret, I'm basking in eternal joy and forgiveness. Thank you, Jesus!

**To the extent
we have been
RESCUED, that
is the extent
we will be
GRATEFUL.**




We've given up on God too quickly.
Our rescue is at hand, if we will just
wait, hope and believe.

If you are **THANKFUL**
for **EVERYTHING**,
you won't have time to
be **UNGRATEFUL** for
ANYTHING.

If you disregard what
you do have, you'll never
believe for what you don't.
2 Kings 4:1-7

From the moment Earth fell into
REBELLION, the focus of all
existence has been a
RESCUE MISSION.

gratitude



Happiness is more about a state of mind than having things work out.

If we define
HAPPINESS as “a
*self-centered quest for
personal fulfillment,*”
then NO, God doesn’t
want me to be HAPPY.

Happiness is available
to everyone — it’s just
a new perspective
away.

Happiness is not
having what you
want... it’s training
your soul to want
what you have.

happiness

MAKING YOUR LIFE MEANINGFUL

Writer Tennessee Williams was once asked, *"What's the secret to happiness?"* His misguided response was one word, *"insensitivity."* In other words, don't let anyone or anything affect you enough to rob you of your happiness. Hmm? Is becoming completely insensitive to the world around you really the key to happiness? I don't think so! I like what Jesus said about happiness far better. If happiness does exist, as the God who created genuine happiness, He'd certainly know how to find it. In Acts 20:35, the Amplified Bible quotes Jesus saying, *"It is more blessed — makes one happier and more to be envied — to give than to receive."* Happiness is not getting all you can, it's learning to give all God asks. God's not trying to make your life livable, He wants to make it meaningful.

**HAPPINESS is
a DECISION I
MAKE EVERY
MORNING
when I wake
up.**

PLEASURES THAT SATISFY

Pleasure... at what cost? The devil's happy to give us the pleasures of Connecticut and Vermont Avenues, as long as he gets to keep Boardwalk and Park Place. But, if you've ever played Monopoly, you know that Connecticut and Vermont Avenues are basically worthless, while Boardwalk and Park Place are priceless. The devil offers counterfeit intimacy — through shallow, momentary pleasure. But pleasure without eternity is a forgery of what we're created for: a personal relationship with God. Only God's way leads to life and true satisfaction: *"You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of Your presence and the pleasures of living with You forever."* (Psalm 16:11)

**HAPPINESS
only comes
to THOSE
WHO DECIDE
TO EMBRACE
LIFE AHEAD
OF TIME.**

**That part of us
that obsesses,
wishing things
would get
better, is not
our FRIEND. It
is our ENEMY!**


CONNECTING DOTS IN YOUR LIFE

In my half century of following Jesus, I've deduced that the breadcrumbs God leaves along the way will always lead to a safe, healed place. In Genesis 45, Joseph finally connected the dots that everything that hurt him was allowed by God to work for his good. The pain, rejection, suffering—all had prepared him to inherit the blessings God had always intended for him. My father wounds and church wounds were the breadcrumbs of future victories for me and for multitudes I've been able to help. Hidden within your greatest suffering is the liberation you've always dreamed of. Your pain will lead to your passion and purpose if you trust that all things work for your good.

HONORING MY CHILDREN

When my mother became pregnant with my twin brother and me, she was 41 with three older children. My father, about to be elected to the first of five terms in the U.S. Congress, told her to get an abortion. She refused and we were born. Sadly, twenty years later, the courage my mother demonstrated, I refused to step into. In 1969 and 1971, I didn't allow my two babies to be born into the world and had them aborted. Though completely forgiven since receiving Jesus in 1972, my mother's obedience and prayers have fueled my commitment to honor the memory of my children, whom I named Noah and Caleb; for we will indeed meet again.

**If I am waiting
for SOMEONE
OTHER THAN
GOD... I am
wasting my
time**



God has no intention of fulfilling my expectations, but every intention of fulfilling His expectations through me.


I've wasted too much time waiting for my will to be done or for someone else to act the way I thought best.

Trace every OFFENSE back to an unfulfilled EXPECTATION. Then ask God to train your soul to RESPOND WELL.

"My soul, wait silently for God alone, for my expectation is from Him." Ps. 62:5

Bitterness can come when we respond poorly to someone not doing what we expect.

healing parent wounds



My father had everything:
wealth, fame and family.
Yet, without God, what he
pursued never fulfilled him.

Even when bitterness
blinded me from
seeing the beauty of
my father's approval,
the longing for it was
always there.

I refuse to pass on the
lies given me from
past generations.
By God's grace, every
curse is broken, in
Jesus name!

Growing up I
had this tension:
longing for
my father's
affirmation,
while rejecting
how insignificant
thinking of him
made me feel.

health is a gift

CONNECTING DOTS IN YOUR LIFE

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Initially, I blamed God for every betrayal that suffocated my undefended childhood.

My Heavenly Father has planned magnificent surprises my natural father never did or could.

HONORING MY CHILDREN

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WE REFLECT OUR INSIDE

Before there were mirrors, there were puddles. We will always, in some way, reflect what is around us. That's why the Bible says, *"...stop fooling yourselves! Evil companions will corrupt good morals and character."* (1 Corinthians 15:33) Who we surround ourselves with, we will, in time, reflect. And what's inside of us will eventually be reflected around us. What we say will flow from what's in our heart. (Luke 6:45) To stay aware of what's inside me, I take seriously the life and death admonition of Scripture, *"Guard your heart above all else, for it determines*


**What's in your
HEART is who
you REALLY ARE.
Proverbs 23:7**

the course of your life." (Proverbs 4:23) *"Jesus, let the puddles in my heart reflect You!"*

HAVE YOU LOST HEART?

Have you lost heart? God knows where it is. He will help you find it. Earth is brief! Heaven is long! Though our time here is the shortest chapter of our endless lives, it will set the tone for eternity. While it's appropriate to rejoice in its brevity, it's wise to be concerned with its finality. Let the Apostle Paul's words lift your spirits, *"Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory..."* (2 Corinthians 4:16-17) Don't lose heart! The eternal glory will be worth every pressure and trouble we'll ever go through.

**The REAL
LIMITATIONS
in our lives are
ONLY IN OUR
HEARTS.**



Ultimately, the condition
of my heart and mind is
my own choice.

If your heart is right,
you'd be amazed at
what God can do!

*“Esau ran to meet
Jacob, fell on his neck,
embraced him, kissed
him, and they wept.”*

Genesis 33:4


Instead of admitting he was
bitter, Judas allowed the cancer
in his heart to contaminate his
life and destroy his future.

Empty-Hearted =
Fruit of Hopelessness

Half-Hearted =
Fruit of Deception

Whole-Hearted = Fruit of a
Heart Filled With Grace

heart health

A person in a space suit stands in the center of a fiery, orange and yellow tunnel. The tunnel is surrounded by dark, rocky walls and a starry background. The person is looking towards the viewer.

No matter what I have done or
what sin I have committed, there
is nothing I could ever do to
make God stop loving me.

My focus in life
should never be on
my love for God, but
always, and in every
situation, on His love
for me. Romans 5:5

My repentance and
return to God, doesn't
reactivate His love for me.
It was never deactivated.

My expressing
how much I love
God could not
possibly have the
same impact as
first receiving His
love for me.

His rescue, our response

DON'T LET HATE SMOTHER LOVE

Have you ever acknowledged that eventually people may hate you because you follow Jesus? Probably not. But Jesus said exactly that: *"...all nations will hate you because you are my followers."* (Matthew 10: 22) While not a comforting thought, Jesus always spoke truth. Are you preparing your heart to be hated? Now, I didn't say, *"Have you decided on a strategy of being obnoxious to provoke people to hate you?"* No. Instead, Jesus said, *"All you have to do is just love Me a lot and represent Me well, and people will hate you."* I'm not paranoid, but I do keep my heart prepared to not let the hate in others smother the love in me.

**I can't fully
love God... IF I
DON'T KNOW
HE FULLY
LOVES ME.**

**GOD'S LOVE
FOR ME
HAS NEVER
INCREASED.
How could
it? He's
always loved
me with all
of His Heart.**

LOVE ALWAYS CHOOSES THE BEST

God has no greater desire for each of us than that we become like Him. There's no loftier goal. It should be the Mount Everest of all our hopes and dreams. Thankfully, the God of love always chooses the best of all options for us. Sadly, for many, it's easier and far more common to become dried-up springs, settling for living an illusion. We become like the idols we serve. Serve Jesus and you will become like Him: loving, caring, compassionate, kind, and selfless. Live for yourself and you will chase the mirage. I choose Jesus. *"Peter replied, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life."* (John 6:68)

Surround yourself with people who will tell you what you NEED to hear, NOT what you WANT to hear.

TRUTH = FREEDOM

I sincerely value and appreciate our wonderful public servants, but I have as much faith in politics and human governments being able to cure man's ills as Jesus did. Jesus knew the Kingdom of God was the answer to mankind's greatest needs, not man's efforts. Jesus said, *"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."* (Matthew 6:33) While there's no shortage of people sharing their version of freedom and truth, let's never forget what freedom and truth really are and from where they come—from God alone. Accept no earthly substitutes. Truth and freedom are only real if they are Heaven sent!

FORGET SELF-CONFIDENCE

This is truly a treacherous age; an upside-down world, riddled with unreality. From the moment the serpent said to Eve, *"Surely you will not die"*... Satan continues to spew lies. Those claiming truth, often drips deception. Those who hate, often call others *"haters."* Those professing higher moral ground choose immorality. Those flaunting spirituality can be the least spiritual behind closed doors. Two scriptures sum up hypocrisy's danger. *"Claiming to be wise, they became fools."* (Romans 1:22) And in The Message Bible, 1 Corinthians 10:12 says, *"Don't be so naive and self-confident. You're not exempt. You could fall flat on your face as easily as anyone else. Forget about self-confidence...Cultivate God-confidence."*

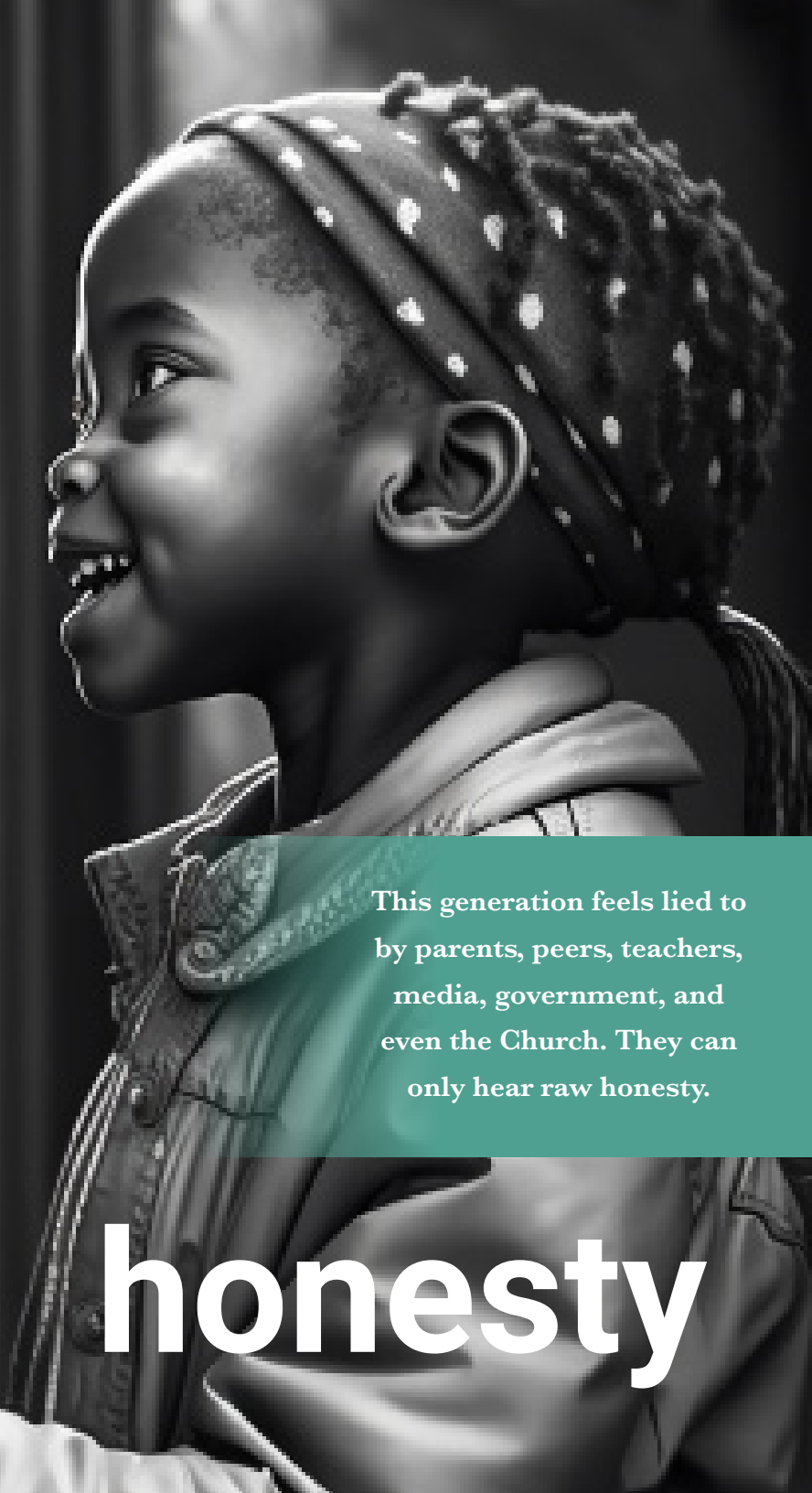
**TOXIC SECRETS
always WOUND.
HONEST
ADMISSIONS
always HEAL.**



Only Honesty can resurrect
Innocence by humbly admitting to
God, *“Against You, and You alone
have I sinned.”* Psalm 51:4


Raw, Real and
Unrehearsed Testimonies,
welling up from Spirit-
Filled Depths, and Costing
Everything, are what will
work in the days ahead.

For now, we struggle to
understand, to believe,
to be known, to live
honest, vulnerable and
transparent lives before
God and man.



This generation feels lied to
by parents, peers, teachers,
media, government, and
even the Church. They can
only hear raw honesty.

honesty

A woman with long brown hair, seen from behind, wearing a white knit sweater and a dark skirt. She has her arms raised in a gesture of praise or hope, standing in a forest with tall, thin trees and soft, golden light filtering through the canopy. The background is slightly blurred, emphasizing the woman in the foreground.

I Can't Become More
Than I Hope To Be!

I've been Empty-
Hearted w/o God...
Half-Hearted for
Lack of Relationship...
and now Whole-Hearted,
drinking from the Well
of Heavenly Hope.

HOPE is staying
CONFIDENT in
the middle of
CATASTROPHE.

Each of us are
given equal
amounts of HOPE.

hope

WHERE TO FIND ENCOURAGEMENT

Are you looking to others to encourage you? Don't! Unless we find our support and acceptance in God alone, we will eventually be disappointed. When faced with impossible situations, David encouraged himself, Jacob wrestled with God, Daniel prayed, and Esther acknowledged, *"If I perish, I perish, but I'm going to do the right thing."* Jesus is always the last Man standing, and only those who stand with Him will be the ultimate winners. The Psalmist challenged his own soul to trust in God, saying, *"Why am I discouraged? Why is my heart so sad? I will put my hope in God! I will praise him again—my Savior and my God!"* (Ps. 42:11)

The Planet scavenges for HOPE until, at last, it realizes God owns the Rights to all the HOPE that ever existed.

Unless it is bottled in Heaven, Earthly Hope will eventually be revealed for what it is: a FRAUD.

RESCUED RATS GIVE US HOPE

A 1950's study at Harvard placed rats in a pool of water to test how long they could swim before drowning. On average, they'd give up and sink after 15 minutes. Right before giving up, researchers pulled them out, dried them off, let them rest — then put them back in for a second round. Amazingly, this time they would tread water for 60 hours! Researchers concluded that because the rats believed they'd be rescued, their bodies performed the seemingly impossible. If hope can cause exhausted rats to keep swimming, what could hope do for you and me? Keep "HOPE" alive! Keep swimming! Jesus will rescue you! *"I've never seen the righteous forsaken."* (Ps. 37:25)

HUMILITY LEADS TO SUCCESS


Everyone wants to be successful! But most people miss one of the great paradoxes of life. They mistakenly believe the doorway to success is through their strengths. It's not! Our strengths provide the easiest way for us to fail. In our weakness we learn to humbly lean on Jesus. It is His humility that releases the irresistible grace of God in us. *"God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble."* (1 Peter 5:5b) If pride is resistible, then humility must be...irresistible. Humble yourself! It will activate the irresistible grace of God in your life.

Only when we are HUMBLE do we have the potential to live the FULLY TRANSPARENT, BRIGHT and ILLUMINATED lives God intended for us.

ATTITUDES DETERMINE ALTITUDE

The word *"humble"* literally means, *"hugging the ground."* It speaks of going low in order to represent the *"Most High."* It's what Jesus did, and what He asks us to do. *"...He gave up His divine privileges; He took the humble position of a slave..."* (Philippians 2:7) Many who have wanted to go high in God never arrived because they failed to go low enough to meet Him and cry out to Him. Humility activates the grace of a God who promises to give power to the humble, strength to the weak, and honor to the humiliated. Lack of desperation toward God, always leads to separation from God. Our attitude will determine our altitude.

DON'T WAIT TO BE CAUGHT? TURN YOURSELF IN. (Ezekiel 14:6, 18:30, Acts 3:1)




Though you might ask a photographer to alter a photo to make you look better, you'd never ask your doctor to alter an X-Ray. Expect God's Spirit to reveal who He created you to be.

**Beware the Dangers
of False Humility
(I.E. Self-Abasement,
Asceticism, Pious Self-
Denial) as compared to
God-Given Humbleness.
Colossians 2:18**

There is **NO MORE VALUE** in
thinking you're a "**NOBODY**"
than in thinking you're a
"**SOMEBODY.**"

The Branch that bears
the Most Fruit is Bent
Lowest to the Ground.

humility



I don't want to tell my children
I was living a double life.

Deception will lead to
unthinkable pain!

Integrity will prevent it!

When Jesus said, "*Satan has nothing in Me.*" He was proclaiming, "*There is nothing Satan can use against Me... because nothing is HIDDEN.*"

AUTHENTICITY and
INTEGRITY go hand-in-hand.

Together they release a
SPIRITUAL ENDORPHIN,
providing a deep sense of
inner wellbeing.

THE WORLD and the
CHURCH are equally
starving for real
HUMILITY, INTEGRITY
HONESTY, LOVE and
COMPASSION. IN
SHORT... JESUS!

integrity

TURNING YOURSELF IN

All of us are given two options when it comes to sin. Wait until we're caught, and we will be, or turn ourselves in and receive the immediate forgiveness of Jesus. When we run to God and acknowledge our sin before Him, it activates His grace, and gives us power to get victory over sin. In the first chapter of the Book of Jonah, he was running away from the call of God on his life. He told the men on board the ship that the reason they were in peril in a violent storm was because of him. Though Jonah was running away from God, God had not given up on him. A better option: run to God.

**I'd rather
be
FAITHFUL...
than do
MIGHTY
MIRACLES.**

**Few things
are more
disappointing
than a Spiritual
Leader's
Lack of
INTEGRITY and
UPRIGHTNESS.**

THE "MAGIC" MOTIVE

The motive of my heart best reveals whether my actions are birthed in integrity or vanity. The reason I do something should be because I love God. Likewise, the reason I don't do something should be because I love God. The Psalmist wrote, *"...you desire integrity in the inner man."* (Psalm 51:6) *"Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!"* (Psalm 139:23) King Solomon wrote, *"People may be pure in their own eyes, but the LORD examines their motives."* (Proverbs 16:2) Get your heart right. *"The Word of God...judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."* (Hebrews 4:12)

All that
God does
is designed
to LEAD
US INTO
INTIMACY
WITH HIM.

BORN AGAIN...AGAIN?

The only life worth living is the one God has planned for you, and the only way to experience it is through an intimate relationship with your Creator. Jesus said, *"I am life!"* (John 14:6) and the only people who believe Jesus was overstating are those who don't know Him. If you love Him, you know His goodness surpasses all expectation. Only 13% of Americans have a truly transforming faith, though 43% say they're *"born again."* What good is a faith that doesn't change you? If we say we've been born again, but don't have a transformed life, may I suggest being *"born again"* as many times as it takes to see your life change!

MAKING YOUR LIFE A "GLORIOUS GET TO"

No one wants to bless your life more than God. No one gives gifts like God! *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of lights..."* (James 1:17) God's looking for people who are willing to distribute His gifts: His love, joy, peace, forgiveness, and kindness. He'll bless anyone who's willing to give away the things He gives them. He wants us just to be intermediaries, *"flowing rivers of blessing" and not "stagnant pools of entitlement."* Allowing His life to flow through them. God doesn't want to make your life a miserable *"have to."* He delights in making it a glorious *"get to."*

God has NO
FAVORITES!

But He
does have
INTIMATES!

intimacy

A person is seen from behind, sitting on a dark ledge or wall. They are looking towards a bright, glowing light source that creates a strong lens flare and illuminates the scene. The background is dark and appears to be an interior space with some architectural details like arches or windows, but they are out of focus. The overall mood is contemplative and dramatic.

Anything less than intimacy with our Creator will consign us to conjure up alternate endings to our lives that will never come to pass.

The false feeling of Intimacy the Devil offers is a Shallow Substitute for the Guilt-Free Relationship God desires for each of us.

People are so hungry for authentic dimensions of life that they are willing to pay exorbitant amounts for false love and intimacy.

Many of us who claim INTIMACY with God have seen enough of His Heart to genuinely reflect Him.

There's a fork in the road of life.
One branch leads to pain without
purpose; the other to pain and
God's perfect plan.

We are Processing Life
Properly when we see
PAST HURTS as **PRESENT
OPPORTUNITIES.**

If my focus is on
PERSPECTIVE and
NOT CIRCUMSTANCES,
then the Best Season of
My Life is the one I'm
Presently In.

IRRITATIONS
are Divine
Opportunities... not
Stumbling Blocks or
Roadblocks.

irritations

PAIN REVEALS PURPOSE

When Jesus faced His greatest trials, He didn't manipulate His Father into lightening His load. Instead, Jesus realized His pain further revealed His true purpose in life. Jesus prayed, *"My soul is troubled... 'Father, save Me from this hour.' But for this purpose I came to this hour."* (John 12:27) He's saying, *"My pain reveals My purpose!"* Being created in God's image was the beginning of our purpose. Finishing that work is our destiny. Anything keeping us from fulfilling God's ultimate purpose—being conformed to His image—must be treated as a distraction. Tragically, most people live and die distracted. Beware! Be committed to live only His purpose for your life.

**Every
IRRITATION
is an
INVITATION
to go to the
NEXT LEVEL.**

**The PLAN of GOD we can't
see... is GREATER THAN
CIRCUMSTANCES we can.**

WE NEED WIND TO GROW

The Biosphere was an artificial, sealed ecosystem in the Arizona desert designed as a perfect environment to prove life could be sustained in a bubble. It didn't work. A surprising issue producing unhealthy trees inside the biosphere was lack of wind. Wind movement changes trees, creating a *"stress (reaction) wood."* As in life, the absence of adversity makes us weaker, not stronger. My older brother knew a man who inherited half a billion dollars. It became a curse, not a blessing. He described him as, *"The weakest man I ever met."* Thank God for the winds of difficulty in your life. Process them well, and you'll only grow stronger.

WHAT WE WORSHIP CONTROLS US

We were created to worship and we all worship something. Eventually, whatever we worship will control us. When Moses was delayed, the impatient Israelites used their jewelry to create a golden calf to worship. When Moses returned, *"... he took the calf...and burned it...ground it to powder, poured it out on the water, and made the Israelites drink it."*

(Exodus 32:20) The wages of sin is always death.

The patriarch Job said giving in to sin would *"wipe out everything I own."* (Job 31:12) To keep us from destroying our lives, God is willing to destroy any

**JOY only COMES
in the morning,
if we choose to
LET JOY COME.**

attachment we have in worshipping the lifeless idols of Earth.

JOY IS A CHOICE

Want to add more joy to your life? Sprinkle in a little faith! Faith is the miraculous ingredient that activates true joy in our lives. Whereas happiness waits to see what's going to happen, joy blissfully opens its arms to every moment, choosing in advance to see life from God's point of view. Joy comes in the morning, before anything has happened to make us happy! It's our choice to let fear, worry, depression or disappointment rule our lives. We can invite discouragement for breakfast, take hopelessness out to lunch, and join despair for a candlelight dinner. It's always our call. Will you choose joy today?

**The Clearest
EVIDENCE of
SPIRITUAL
MATURITY is
JOY!**



We don't worship to get
God's attention.

We worship with all our
heart because we have it.

The primary reason
we don't rejoice
is because we
don't believe.

*"Believing, you
rejoice with joy
inexpressible ..."*


1 Peter 1:8

Only God can change
Mourning into Dancing
and Clothes of Grief
into Robes of Joy.

Ps. 30-31

When God's Presence
Falls... Look For
His Revelation.
Numbers 11:9

joy & praise



Jesus loved the life He had been
given; that was His Great Attraction.
It will be ours as well.

God doesn't give us what we
think we need. He changes
our hearts so that we value
what He alone knows we
really need.

Because Mother
Teresa loved the life
God gave her, she was
able to love the people
God sent her.

Every day, I wake
up excited to see
what God has
planned for me.

living alive

LIVING LIKE YOU'RE ALIVE

Benjamin Franklin said, *"Some people die at 25, but are not buried until 75."*

How chilling! Am I living like I'm fully alive? One healthy habit I've practiced since I was a young Christ-follower is to front-load my day. When I was younger and more nocturnal, I front-loaded at night. Now, I begin my disciplines very early every day, giving me more time, fueled by prayer and the Word, to fulfill my other goals and desires. By living a front-loaded perspective every day, it becomes a compass helping me stay on track in getting where I really want to go. Front-load your day and sow your best into your life and future!

**Love the life
you have and
JOYFULLY
RECEIVE EVERY
MEAL placed
before you.**

A DIFFERENT LIFE

Do you wish you had a different life? Or that you were a different person? You're not an accident or mistake! A loving Creator formed you! The Psalmist said, *"I praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are Your works; my soul knows it very well."* (Psalm 139:14) Every second spent wishing you were someone or somewhere else is a waste of time and a slap in the face of a God Who's done everything possible for your wellbeing. Stop waiting! Surrender to God, believe the truth of His Word vs. your feelings, and start living!

**By LOVING
GOD'S PLAN
for my life, I
now love the
ONLY LIFE
TRULY WORTH
LIVING.**

**God's so excited
about the life
He's given you...
He'll settle for
nothing less than
you loving it too.**


A LIFE WORTH LOVING

Are you living the life you want to live? If not, what's missing? Maybe it's faith! Everything God has for us must be received on His terms: by faith. The same amount of faith I needed to embrace the God who saved me, is the same amount I need to embrace the life God gives me! It takes no faith to say, *"God hasn't given me a life worth living."* But it takes great faith to believe that *"God can ONLY give me a life worth loving."* But I still need to see my life through His eyes of faith to really understand why it's worth living. Faith makes the difference!

BLAMING GOD

Are you blaming God for your difficulties? We often misinterpret our struggles, blaming an innocent God. It's a complete dead end. Cast fears aside, disregard past misunderstandings, and wrap your arms around the only completely trustworthy Person: Jesus Christ. He has never failed us. He willingly died on a Cross in our place—for our sins. We'll stop blaming God for anything when we realize Jesus took the blame for everything. *"For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ."* (2 Corinthians 5:21)
No one has ever loved you like Jesus!

**God gives each
of us the life He
knows we need.
LEARN TO
EMBRACE LIFE AS
IT IS, not as you
wish it would be.**



If you're Bored, it's Not
God's Fault. Boredom is a
result of being unable or
unwilling to see life from
God's perspective.

That part of me that
wishes things would get
better is not my friend.


That's my enemy! I have
no idea what "BETTER"
looks like.

It takes No Faith to
say, God's Not
Given me a life
worth LOVING.
But Great Faith to
Believe God can
Only Give me a life
worth LOVING!

I have already
decided that I am
going to love my
life today.

What happens
next is not that
important.

loving life



*“He who hates does not know
God, but he who has love has the
key that unlocks the door to the
meaning of ultimate reality.”*

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

*“Hatred paralyzes life,
love releases it.*

*Hatred confuses life;
love harmonizes it.*

*Hatred darkens life,
love illuminates it.”*

Dr. Martin Luther
King Jr.

Though I was an
in-your-face atheist,
I didn't see the Rev.
Martin Luther King,
Jr. as a religious
leader, I saw him as
a humble father.

MLK

MORE HEALED THAN HURT

All of us have been hurt by people and it takes great courage to forgive them. Yet, the only way I can accurately represent God is if I'm willing to be more healed than hurt. Because Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was more healed than hurt, his mature responses reshaped our nation. Like Jesus, we need to choose compassion vs. criticism, courage vs. cowardice, hope vs. hopelessness, selflessness vs. selfishness, kindness vs. carelessness, peace vs. anxiousness, and fearlessness vs. fearfulness. These Godly character qualities can only become my response to life's challenges if I am continually dependent upon Jesus and choose daily to be more healed than hurt.

“Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy to a friend.”

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

May God weed out of our hearts any lingering prejudice and bigotry toward those He lovingly created in His own image and likeness.

GOD UNDERSTANDS RACIAL PREJUDICE

No topic is more complicated today than race and racism. So many lives have been marked by the long-term effects of prejudice. When others reject or dismiss us because of attributes beyond our control, it creates deep wounds, even generational wounds. God understands. He even chose to send His Son to be born into a race that many would say has suffered the most prejudice of all... the Jews. They've been oppressed for thousands of years, and still hated by many today. When you are persecuted unfairly, remember the promise of Jesus. *“God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.”* (Matt. 5:10)

BRINGING OUT THE BEST IN YOU

Are you facing major trials? Feel like giving up? Please don't! Trials throw the pass beyond our reach, but not beyond God's intent and grace. When we feel completely inadequate to meet our own needs, God can make up the difference in every dimension of our lives. During struggles, reach out to Jesus to receive the grace you need. Oswald Chambers writes, *"God does not give us overcoming life: He gives us life as we overcome."* The discouragements of yesterday don't disqualify you, the setbacks of today can't sabotage you, and the failures of tomorrow

won't finish you.

You were created to be victorious... to overcome. Live your purpose!


**EVERY
CHALLENGE
IN LIFE...
OVERCOME-ABLE!**

PERPETUAL OVERCOMERS

How do you connect with an invisible God? Walking by faith! If you don't, you'll find out you aren't following Him at all. The Bible says, *"...it is impossible to please God*

without faith." (Hebrews 11:6) Never let feelings dictate your faith. Put your faith in the facts—God's Word, the Holy Bible—because feelings will come and go. As a Christian, you're called to be a perpetual overcomer as Jesus was. Jesus, *"Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings..."* (Psalm 17:8) *"I trust in You, more than what I feel or see. Your eternal promises guide my life."*

**"OVERCOMING
LIFE IS Not
A Place, It's
A PERSON."
Oswald
Chambers**




Jesus was the Perpetual
Overcomer. Therefore, if my life
is hidden with Christ in God,
I am called to be a Perpetual
Overcomer as well.

Dream Great Dreams!
Pray Passionate Prayers!
Proclaim Good News!

Long ago, I settled in my
heart to live as an Optimist;
to live life enthusiastically,
wading joyfully through
every disappointment.

How we respond to the
“*UNTHINKABLE*” events in life
will determine whether we
become BITTER or BETTER.

overcoming adversity



Every tear, sorrow, and painful
mystery in our lives is intended to
reveal the perfect plan of God.

Many times, to avoid pain,
we go with the wind, when we
really need to drive directly
into the painful wind we've
been avoiding.

Our hurts often keep us
from seeing our hidden
worth, not found in high
points but rather hidden
under the rubble of our
greatest pain.

We only change
when our
willingness to accept
God-allowed pain
exceeds our fear of
suffering.

purpose of pain

WAKING UP YOUR PAIN

We all love our sleep, and most of us, frankly, need more. But there are certain areas in our lives where we need to wake up! It's been said that *"We need to wake up the areas in our lives that pain has put to sleep."* Pain whispers, *"Never let people get that close to you again."* At times, our avoidance of pain can leave us stuck in a perpetual state of unhealth. Movement, once possible, is gone because we were unwilling or unable to wake up to our need in time. Today, live awake, and allow Jesus to touch and heal every area of emotional pain in your life.

PAIN is inevitable... but MISERY is OPTIONAL.

REMINISCING OUR PAIN

Have you been severely wounded? At some point, most of us will be. Then we'll have to decide: are we on a journey to be healed and help others, or attached to remaining a patient and reminiscing our pain? When we hold on to a bitter perspective, we become unwilling to understand, forgive, and be healed. It's far better to exchange your pain for His peace—to call out to Jesus in the middle of your storms. Frankly, few of us have time for Him outside of the storms of life. If you let Him, God will give you the *"...peace that goes far beyond your understanding."* (Philippians 4:7)

Even Jesus had to endure a painful crucifixion before He could say, "IT IS FINISHED!"
John 19:30

If you don't see
your **FAILURES**
in light of God's
SUCCESS, you will
chase **SUCCESS**
and wind up
feeling a **FAILURE**.


WHY ME GOD?

Instead of, *"God, why is this happening to me?"*—ask, *"God, what are you trying to show me?"* It will always be something of eternal value. Apostle Paul assures us, *"...it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."* (Philippians 2:13) Though in prison, Paul perceived how God graciously used—for good—what Satan meant for evil. Refusing to be disheartened, Paul wrote, *"...what [has happened] to me...has only served to advance...the [spreading of the] good news."* (Philippians 1:12, Amplified) What a marvelous way to view life! The way God intended. Trusting Him every step of the way.

FIXATING ON BAD NEWS

Recently, my daughter said, *"Dad, that's the fifth sad story you've shared in an hour."* I realized it's a tendency I have to fixate on challenges that surround so many people I know and love. There's a difference between being caring, concerned, and intercessory, versus continually focusing on challenges and tragedies. Doing so sucks the life-giving truth out of my heart and mind. If, as the Bible says, all things work together for good to them that love God, then I should be sharing the gospel with myself first, then others. That's right, the *"gospel"*—a word that means *"good news."* It's my responsibility to keep the *"good news"*...good.

Don't start out
wanting to be
OBEDIENT...
and end up
wanting to be
SUCCESSFUL.

A man and a woman are shown from behind, embracing each other in a field of rubble. The woman has her arms around the man's shoulders, and they appear to be in a moment of shared grief or comfort. The background is filled with the twisted metal and debris of destroyed buildings, suggesting a scene of devastation. The lighting is soft and somewhat desaturated, emphasizing the somber mood.

I've already decided that I'm
going to love my life today.


What happens next isn't that
important.

I can choose to see my life
from God's life-giving point
of view, or be limited by the
narrowness of fear, unbelief
and ignorance which only
leads to anger, panic, and
despair.

If we view pain from
God's perspective,
we reap the benefits
of a life yielded to a
God worth trusting.

Though what happens
in life may seem to be
completely out of my
control, how I view it is
always my choice.

perspective

A man in a dark suit and white shirt is leaning over a chessboard, resting his chin on his hand in a thoughtful pose. The chessboard is in the foreground, with several pieces visible. The background is dark and out of focus.

I don't know what's best for me. I don't even know enough to have a strong personal preference.
Only God knows.

If I'm really "*Crucified with Christ*" then I have no preferences... Because dead men don't have preferences.

The two great Defenses Against Deception are refusing to have a Preference and guarding my heart from all Hypocrisy.
James 3:18

My Personal Preference in life will eventually dissipate into Partiality, which will always lead me away from God's Best.

preferences

WAITING FOR GOD TO MOVE

Are you waiting on God? It's a clear biblical principle that I believe and practice. *"Those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength."* (Isaiah 4:31) However, I've found that many times we think we're waiting for God to move, when it's actually our move. We're waiting for forgiveness, and He's saying, *"I already forgave you."* We're waiting for faith, and God's given us more than a mustard seed. We're waiting for an answer to prayer, and we're resisting His *"No"* because we want our own way. Wait on God but know when it's your move. More often than not, it usually is.

If I am more immersed in WHERE I WANT TO BE THAN WHERE I AM, I'm DISTRACTED.

My GREATEST PREFERENCE in life is to FULLY EMBRACE GOD'S PREFERENCE.

ATTACHED TO GOD'S PREFERENCE

Being attached to my preference can be really dangerous. Why? Because I've never known what's best for me. Only God does. I've been attached to lots of things, even people, I thought I desperately needed, but what I really wanted was God! Now... my overwhelming preference is to fully embrace God's preference. Now, I choose to wake up excited to see what My Heavenly Father has chosen for me. His perfect will for me is the script He's already written. The Bible says, *"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love Him."*

(1 Corinthians 2:9-10)

PRESSURE MAKES MUSCLES

Pressure can produce great value: from oil to diamonds to muscles. That's why I swim with hand paddles and fins, increasing muscle strength and endurance in the process. Strength and endurance also produce character and spiritual qualities. By applying greater passion in my prayers, my spiritual muscles increase. Passive swimming produces weak muscles. Passive prayers bring weak results. The Bible says, *"From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it."* (Matthew 11:12, NIV) Embrace the value of the pressures of life, and they will produce the strength and endurance you need to finish well.

The PRESSURES and PAIN of life pale in comparison to the GLORY that will be revealed in us.

THE PURPOSE OF PRESSURE

Have the pressures of life gotten to you? Challenges come, not because we have pressures, but in how we view them. If they are anchors around our necks weighing us down in despair, then we're missing their point entirely. Instead of sinking us, the pressures in our lives should anchor us to the One who loves us most. In eternity, we'll thank God for each trial He so wisely designed with us in mind. There are no accidental struggles in life; just marvelously crafted stretching's that not only bring out the best in us, but, once our eyes are opened, reveal the best of God's ALL-WISE intentions for us.

Whatever we are trusting in will come out in our RESPONSE TO LIFE'S PRESSURES.

If we respond properly to the pressures in life, we become diamonds. If not... we stay lumps of coal.

I once wore a shirt that read.

FRONT: I have no problems!

BACK: God's got a lot of problems and I'M PRAYING FOR HIM.

The greatest challenges in life are not found in our pressures, but in how we view them.

If life's challenges are anchors around our necks weighing us down in despair, then we are missing their point entirely.



pressures

As I have grown to know Jesus,
I'm far more interested in what is
happening in me than around me.

A process is always
connected to a
promise.

Without a
commitment to a
process, we will
lose our confidence.

If we refuse to embrace
the **PROCESS** — every
aspect of what we are going
through — we will miss the
entire point of life.

processing life



THE END IS THE PROCESS

We all think we know what's best for us, but rarely do. We pray, *"God, if you would just —, then I'll be blessed!"* Really? I don't have enough information to know what's best for me! But God always does. Oswald Chambers writes, *"We must never put our dreams of success as God's purpose for us; His purpose may be exactly the opposite. We have an idea that God is leading us to a particular end, a desired goal; He is not. The question of getting to a particular end is a mere incident. What we call the process, God calls the end."* (My Utmost For His Highest) EMBRACE THE PROCESS!

**GOD'S
PROCESS
IS OVER
TIME... NOT
OVERNIGHT.**

**If you were
absolutely
positive God
was protecting
you, would it
CHANGE HOW
YOU PROCESSED
YOUR LIFE?**

PROCESSING CRITICISM

What people say and do reflects what's going on inside of them, not what's going on inside of me. Too often, I'm stumbled by what others say and do, especially when it comes in the form of hurtful and mean-spirited criticism. Though I should dismiss unwarranted and derogatory comments at face value, oftentimes they've already lodged themselves in my heart and mind, leaving me unsettled and troubled. I may know that the comment is not credible, but still have to intentionally squash the nagging thought. One verse that I often reflect on to help with this is Philippians 4:8, *"Fill your mind with things that are true..."*

STOP WATERING LAST YEAR'S CROP.

MOMENT OF PLEASURE... LIFETIME OF REGRET

While God's forgiveness completely washes away my past sins, guilt and shame for my foolishness, past regretful memories and an active conscience keep me vigilant in not making choices that would destroy my present life. Oftentimes, moments of pleasure have left me with a lifetime of regret. The Psalmist wrote, *"Keep your servant from deliberate sins! Don't let them control me. Then I will be free of guilt and innocent of great sin."* (Psalm 19:13) As Heaven and Hell both motivate and inspire me, so do right and wrong. Therefore, my daily prayer is, *"God, keep me from foolish decisions that feel good momentarily, but bring regretful consequences."*

GOING BACK IN TIME

Wouldn't you like to go back in time to make right what you did wrong, or to make something bad, good? Usually, that's impossible. What's done is done, with no do-over. But God's provided a silver lining. C.S. Lewis wisely said, *"You can't go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending."* However, God has solved this riddle of life: His blood forgives, His Spirit heals, His will restores, and His presence comforts. Dying without regret isn't a hopeless dream—it's God's will for each of us! Let Jesus' death and resurrection cover your regrets, allowing you to live and die forgiven.

**I can't RELIVE the
opportunities
I'VE MISSED.
But I can
anticipate the
ones around
the corner.**

Being a charter member in the “*Free Love Movement*” cost me so much,
I’m still making payments.


To think that my actions
could stumble someone else
and keep them from going to
heaven, shakes me to the core.

It breaks my heart to think
my life could actually be a
hindrance instead of a help
for those around me.

We must look past
what we have done...
In order to see who
we were created to be.



regret



Responding poorly to life's greatest tests merely puts us back in line to wait for... another opportunity to react with godly character.

God is not trying to change our circumstances.

He's trying to change our reaction to our circumstances.

While the anguished cries of the psalmist realistically express raw emotion, they do not necessarily reflect the pristine response of a life thoroughly yielded to God's Spirit.

The real enemy is never the things happening around us... It is the poor response within us.

responding well

WHEN RESPONSE BEATS RESULTS

Which is more important: Getting a great result or having an exceptional response? Great results come and go, while exceptional responses are eternal. In Genesis 4, Adam and Eve's son, Abel, offered a sacrifice that God accepted, while his brother Cain's was rejected because he gave with the wrong motive. God then told Cain he'd be accepted if he responded well and did right. He cautioned Cain that if he didn't, sin was crouching at his door, waiting to devour him. (Genesis 4:7) God, help me respond well to challenges I face. The results of my efforts are in Your hand, for You alone know their true value.

**No one who
RESPONDS
WELL is ever
ULTIMATELY
DISAPPOINTED.**

**In the end, HOW WE RESPOND
to life is far more important
than WHAT HAPPENS TO US.**

RESPOND WELL DEPARTMENT

I once heard jolting news that could have been received as sad and disappointing. But God, in His mercy, quickly reminded me of my only responsibility. I'm only in charge of the Respond Well Department because He's in charge of everything else. What a relief! The world says, "*Be in control!*" but the Word says, "*Give God control!*" (Ephesians 5:18) Every challenge is designed to reveal our weakness and God's strength — to make us realize not just how desperately we need Him, but how absolutely sufficient His grace is in our lives. God's given us everything we need to love the life He's given us. (2 Peter 1:3)

MY "ALL-IN" MOMENT

Whining about a troubling situation, I quipped, "God, *what do you want from me?*" He quickly responded, "Only *what's best!*" Unclear, I sheepishly said, "What *would that be?*" His inner voice was immediate. "Out of all possible options for your life, it's the perfect future you'd hope for, if you knew what you really needed." I loved the thought of a perfect future, so added, "How will I know what that is?" Sensing He was about to reveal the secret of life, I listened with anticipation. One word was revealed. "Trust." Hmm? I was stuck. The only way I could see what was in

**THERE
ARE NO
LEFTOVERS
OR RERUNS
IN GOD.**

His hand was to be
"All In" myself.

HIDE AND SEEK WITH GOD

At a manufacturing plant entrance, a sign read: "If you're like a wheelbarrow, going no further than you're pushed, you need not apply for work here!"

God hid precious things on Earth so that finding them is a reward and prize to the diligent and industrious... but a disappointment to slackers. The nut hides in its shell. The pearl is buried within an oyster. Gold is imprisoned in the mountain. Gems are discovered inside rocks. Oil and gas are within the earth. God says, "You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart." (Jeremiah 29:13) Seek God, and you'll find what's priceless!

**GOD'S
FAVORITE
GAME IS
HIDE AND
SEEK!**

The things that are most
valuable are always hidden:
Gold... Diamonds... Oil...
Even True LOVE.


There are no
coincidences in God,
just Riddles waiting
to be solved.

When was the last
time you asked God
to reveal his secrets?
*“Ask Me and I will
tell you remarkable
secrets you do not know
about things to come.”*
Jeremiah 33:3

The sooner we give
up our addiction to
understanding what’s
happening in our lives,
the sooner we can Rest
in God and Enjoy Living.



secret (God's)



If we consume what God has given
us to pour out... His BLESSING has
turned to LUST in our hearts.
We have sadly EATEN OUR SEED.

As you see yourself,
so you are to others.

*"... we were like grasshoppers
in our own sight, and so we
were in their sight."*

Numbers 13:33

Most people know
what they want to
HAVE IN LIFE...
but they don't know
what they WANT TO
BE.

Some of the most selfish
words ever spoken...

*"At least there will be
peace and truth in
my days."* Isaiah 39:8

(Words spoken by King
Hezekiah after God told
him his poor decisions
would cost the lives of
his children.)

self-absorption

WOUNDED WOMEN IN PRISON

I once led a *"Father Wounds"* class (based on my book) for 40 women in Folsom Prison. Each person filled out a questionnaire regarding the specific type of father wound they had. They also identified what kind of child they were: *"Abandoned? Neglected? Fearful? Embittered? Abused? Spoiled? Adult? Performance-Driven?"* I was shocked by their most prevalent answer, which I'd even considered NOT including as an option. The most common description of their childhood was *"SPOILED."* WOW! SPOILED! Beware of always getting your own way... learn to honor God and others above yourself!

**We need to
acknowledge
WHO EACH
PERSON IS...
without
stumbling over
WHO THEY ARE
NOT YET.**

MOST DISTRACTED AGE EVER

We live in the most distracted age ever, and it's impacting all of us. Distracted drivers cause 64% of car accidents. Students can stay focused for only two minutes. Internet users focus for just 40 seconds. Twenty-five to 34-year-olds check their phones 50 times and spend 2-½ hours daily on social media, while 8 to 18-year-olds spend 9 hours on social media daily. We access media screens about 2,600 times daily. No wonder it's hard to focus on Prayer, reading the Word, and Worship. To connect with God without distraction, give God your freshest mind when you're most awake. Secondly, eliminate anything else that draws your focused attention away from being led by God's Spirit.

**If you insist on
BEING IN CONTROL
of where you're
going... you'll
eventually BE
TOTALLY OUT OF
CONTROL.**

SETBACKS

Why do our hearts melt when tested with setbacks? Is it because we fear what we don't know, or because we fail to trust the God who knows all things? Oftentimes, accepting what we cannot undo, with true humility, is the only good option. Being humbled by life is always awkward, even embarrassing, but by trusting God in the struggle, it eventually yields the eternal fruit of a blessed life. Long ago, I decided I'd live as an optimist and enthusiastically wade through disappointments. Paul the apostle agreed, writing, *"Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ..."* (2 Corinthians 2:14a) Trust God! He'll never fail you!

**Every
IRRITATION
is a PERFECT
INVITATION
to GO DEEPER
into TRUSTING
GOD.**

**Out of our
DEEPEST
STRUGGLES
will
emerge
our FINEST
HOUR!**

HEAVEN'S FINANCIAL PERSPECTIVE

Asking someone if they've ever felt financial pressure is like saying, *"Have you ever lived on Earth?"* Everyone, at times, struggles with their finances. That's why we need a heavenly perspective when it comes to earthly finances. James, chapter one, actually stunned me when I read that Christians who are poor should embrace the fact that God has honored them. While Christians who are rich should realize He's humbled them. Wow! Poor Christ-followers are being honored, while wealthy Christians are being humbled. I don't think I've ever read verses that defied conventional wisdom in a greater way. When I'm poor, through no fault of my own, I should see it as a blessing; and if I'm financially wealthy, I should be humbled, realizing all of my wealth was given to me by God.

There is not only life after failure,
there is a redemptive purpose in
every sin, setback, and heartbreak
we will ever go through.

Peace that comes when the
storm stops is temporary.

Learning to have peace
during the storms of life is
called "*MATURITY.*"

We can hide our
failures from others,
or see them as
OPPORTUNITIES to
view areas that still
need work.

There are no
setbacks in
God, only veiled
DOORWAYS to
our **DESTINY.**

A person is crouching in a bathroom, looking out a window. The room is dimly lit, with light coming from the window, creating a silhouette effect. The person is wearing a hoodie and pants. The bathroom contains a sink, a toilet, and a trash can. The overall mood is contemplative and somber.

struggles & setbacks

What God wants to DO IN US
is infinitely more important
than what I DO FOR HIM.

Changing what's around you
won't change WHAT'S IN YOU.

A plane flight has never
changed anyone.

We fill our pots with
WHAT WE HAVE, and God
transforms it into
WHAT HE HAS.

*"... you have kept the good
wine until now"*

Wedding at Cana: John 2:10

There are Three Stages needed for
TRANSFORMATION:

1. EMBARRASSED
2. FED UP
3. DESPERATE

But only "DESPERATE"
brings about CHANGE.



transformation

BIBLE G.O.A.T.'S

In Ezekiel 14, the Bible elevates three Old Testament Giants – Noah, Daniel, and Job – to such a lofty place, that they appear to be, next to Jesus, G.O.A.T.'s = the *"Greatest Of All Time."* What made these men stand out? Righteous Noah lived in an age where everyone was so corrupt, God rebooted the planet with a flood, starting fresh with Noah and his family. Humble Daniel refused to let his heart be seduced by absolute power. Lastly, persevering Job suffered more than anyone aside from Jesus, and yet without blaming God. Righteousness, Humility, and Perseverance: Qualities that would set each of us apart as well.

Only God can transform what seems to have LITTLE VALUE into something truly PRICELESS.

Our SACRIFICES only count if GOD CHOOSES THEM.

ACCEPT GOD-ALLOWED PAIN

When does our suffering produce a positive change in us? Only when our willingness to accept God-allowed pain exceeds our fear of pain. At times, we'll all suffer painful disillusionment before we fully surrender to reality. Even Jesus endured a painful crucifixion before He could say, *"It is finished!"* (John 19:30) As we keep our eyes on the prize, we'll see that our pressure and pain pales in comparison to the glory that will be revealed in us. (Romans 8:18) *"Lord, help us to see You working continually in our lives. Lead us to trust that the plan we cannot see is greater than the circumstances we can."*

THE “I DON’T KNOW-NESS OF GOD”

All of us occasionally struggle to admit when we’re wrong. But being wrong is a universal human condition. There is, however, one area we can admit to. Either we’ll realize our assumption was wrong, or that we just don’t know the answer to the Bible or life questions we have. I call it, acknowledging the “I Don’t Know-ness of God.” Sometimes admitting we just don’t know the answer is a breath of fresh honesty. I’ve seen this humble acknowledgment bring more clarity than trying to share an answer that when others


**TRANSPARENCY
is a KEY to
reaching a
CULTURE that
has been HYPED
TO DEATH.**

hear it, they realize it’s flawed and unreliable. Embrace the *“I Don’t Know-ness of God,”* and this truth will set you free.

THE GREATEST PRAYERS EVER PRAYED?

Is it possible that the greatest prayers ever prayed were never recorded in Scripture? Consider this! Christ’s disciples failed to believe the two greatest events in history: the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. All their boasting had done was bring 120 broken and disappointed disciples to an Upper Room of embarrassment and repentance. Cries of humiliation birthed tears of joy as they transparently acknowledged both their failings and God’s faithfulness. What asking of forgiveness took place? What revival launching prayers were prayed? Only eternity will tell. *“Jesus, lead us to Your upper room of repentance and revival, for only there will You have all of us fully surrendered to all of You.”*

**LIVE AS IF:
everyone in
the world will
eventually know
EVERYTHING
YOU EVER DID.**

A man with short dark hair, wearing a dark blue or black hoodie, is sitting on the ground in a forest. He is looking down and to the left with a thoughtful expression. The background consists of tall, thin tree trunks and dappled sunlight filtering through the leaves. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.


If we are not willing to be honest and painfully transparent, our lives will not be believable.

Heaven is where a fully revealed God, sitting upon a transparent throne, looks out across a sea of glass, transparent like rain.

To walk in the light means *“to make known one’s thoughts, to be transparent, to break the silence.”* 1 John 1:7

Truth and Transparent Vulnerability are essential in order to emotionally connect with hurting souls.

transparency



We never know which storm
will bring the most challenge,
or the greatest benefit. Embrace
storms as they come. There are
NO accidental storms.

God tests us for our
GOOD ... To help us
GROW.

Satan tempts us for
our BAD... To make
us FALL.

Why do our hearts flinch
when tested? Is it because
we fear the unknown, or
because we fail to trust the
God who knows all things?

Our lack will always
test our trust.
Numbers 13:27-33

trials & tests

FACING YOUR GIANTS

All of us are curious about our future. Here's a hint. You'll meet the biggest giants you'll ever face, not in your wilderness of wandering, but in your land of promise; not in your seasons of deprivation, but after you've stepped into your inheritance. It's healthier for me to believe that God is equipping me for greater challenges ahead, rather than mistakenly think life will get easier. That's not fatalism. That's realism. The Bible shows people of faith facing their greatest struggles later in life. They needed God more, not less. No autopilot. No cruise control. Fully conscious, pursuing God until their last breath, just as we must be.

Today's
TESTS
prepare
us for the
greater
TRIALS of
Tomorrow.

THE MEANING OF "TRIBULATION"

Do you ever question the ultimate purpose and value of your struggles? I do. In ancient times, harvesters used a threshing instrument called a *'Tribulum'* to separate corn from the husks. Over time, the Church writers appropriated the word to impart a higher truth. They concluded that sorrow, distress, and adversity were what God used to separate in Christ-followers what was trivial and poor, from what was solid and valuable. Tribulations divided their chaff from their wheat. Though difficult to embrace, our sorrows and trials, our 'tribulations,' thresh our inner, spiritual man, removing what is temporary and ultimately useless, for what is eternal and actually priceless.

Whenever
GOD ASKS A
QUESTION,
it's ALWAYS
A TEST.

TWO SONGS EVERYONE SINGS


There are two predominant songs people sing in life. The one that prevails will brand you. One leaves you *"BITTER,"* while the other makes you *"BETTER."* I call them the *"Somebody Done Me Wrong"* song, and the *"God Did Me Right"* song. One brings a curse; one a blessing. The most wrong done to any Person was Jesus. The Bible says, *"...his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness..."* (Isaiah 52:14) Yet He chose to see Himself as a Scarred Warrior, not a Wounded Victim. How you see yourself will determine the song you sing.

**Our PRESENT
RESPONSE will
determine what
our FUTURE
BEHAVIOR
WILL BE.**

**HOW WE
RESPOND to
Life's Body-Slams
is infinitely
more important
than WHATEVER
SLAMS US.**

CONNECTING THE MAIN DOTS IN LIFE

In my half century of following Jesus, I've concluded that the breadcrumbs He leaves along the way will always lead to a safe, healed place. In Genesis 45, Joseph connected the dots that everything done to him was allowed by God to work for his good. The pain, rejection, suffering... all prepared him to inherit the blessings God had intended. My father wounds and church wounds were breadcrumbs of future victories, not just for me, but for multitudes I've been able to help. Have you connected those dots? Hidden within your greatest suffering is your freedom. Your pain will lead to your passion and ultimately your purpose if you allow it.



Jesus appeared to be a victim
by dying for our sins but
ultimately became a hero by
conquering sin and death.


How would you
describe yourself?
A Wounded Victim or
a Scarred Warrior?

The most important time to seek
God is... after a VICTORY.

The most dangerous time to NOT
seek God is... after a VICTORY.

I've wasted too much
time waiting for my
will to be done or for
someone else to act the
way I thought best.

victor or victim



Spending my life wishing things
would work out is an enormous
waste of my time.

Hoping for better days
will get me off track.

Hoping for a better
understanding of God's
love will dial me in.

We know we are
trusting God when
we stop wishing our
lives would change.

Learn to embrace
life as it is...
Not as you wish
it would be.

wishing

WISHING THINGS WOULD WORK OUT

I don't know what's best for me—never have and never will. The smartest thing I can do is remain neutral with no personal preference: fully flexible and yielding only to the will of God. Have passionate faith, and let God's will be done, but don't be attached to how His will plays out. I need the same amount of faith to welcome the life God gives me, as I needed when I first embraced the God who saved me. We know we're trusting God when we STOP WISHING our lives would change. Love the life you have and joyfully receive everything placed before you. God hasn't lost track of you!

**HOPE
without
diligence is
mere Wishful
Thinking**

THINGS GETTING BETTER

Would it surprise you if I said: *"the part of each of us that wishes things would get better*

is not our friend?" It could be our enemy! I don't know what "better" looks like, but, if I let Him, He does intend to fulfill His expectations through me. But first, I must decrease, and He must increase. I can't be impressed by what I think or my experiences! How we respond to life is far more important than what happens to us. Oswald Sanders says, *"Maturity is moving from a thin skin and a hard heart to a thick skin and a soft heart."* Sounds like a great goal to me!

**Believing is
WILLING...
Not WISHING!**

EMOTIONAL ROLLER COASTER

Are you riding an emotional roller coaster?

Overcoming...then being overcome! The Psalmist wrote, *"I am overcome with joy because of your unfailing love, for you have seen my troubles, and you care about the anguish of my soul."* (Psalm 31:7)

It's our choice to be overcome by joy or by despair. If there were nothing to overcome, we'd have no reason to fight for joy. Like ripened fruit, joy would just fall from the trees of life. But that's not the case.

WORRY doesn't empty tomorrow of its TROUBLES; it only empties today of its PEACE.


Fight fears, doubts, and lies in order to receive the joy God has prepared for us! Whatever it is, fight for joy...it's absolutely worth fighting for!

WORRIED?

Are you worried about your future? God isn't! He's got a plan. Trust His will for you. Remain steadfastly open to live your life as He intended. Always believe your best days are ahead.

Pessimism is from hell. The God who makes the sun rise every day is an eternal optimist, and so are His sons and daughters. We're never invisible to God and He's aware of all our needs. *"... even the very hairs of your head are all numbered... so don't be afraid..."* (Matthew 10:30-31) Behind every challenge is a loving God whose victorious perspective is far greater than the trials you face. God owns the future. Trust Him!

WORRY is a symptom of having our OWN AGENDA, and NOT GOD'S.



There are many things worth
Praying about, but nothing
worth Worrying about.

**TRUSTING
JESUS** is the
only way to
the **WORRY-
FREE** life.

Jesus Said, “...*you are
worried and troubled about
many things. But one thing
is needed...*” Luke 10:41–42

By the Grace of
God, I refuse to
worry about the
Future, wallow in
the Past, or fear
the Present.

worry