

BANNING LIEBSCHER

FOUNDER & PASTOR OF JESUS CULTURE

THE THREE-MILE WALK

THE COURAGE YOU NEED TO LIVE
THE LIFE GOD WANTS FOR YOU

THE THREE-MILE WALK



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 **ZONDERVAN
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The Three-Mile Walk

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Introduction

I think it was Oprah who first popularized the phrase “Live your best life.” Social media overflows with posts of people announcing, “Living my best life!”—typically with photos of them eating amazing food, taking exotic vacations, or going to epic concerts, games, or shows. Others show them achieving their goals for self-improvement and self-actualization—getting fit at the gym, earning a degree, getting married, or starting a business.

This is pretty much the vision of the good life or best life in our wealthy, secular, individualistic culture. We are chasing happiness in exciting and pleasurable experiences, and we’re chasing purpose and fulfillment in achieving success.

However, despite what we show or see on the social media highlight reels, none of the things we’re chasing are leading us to a life that is vibrant, thriving, fulfilling, and truly the best. Instead more and more of us are battling anxiety and depression. We’re feeding addictions to our electronic devices, distracting ourselves from our struggle to live without a sense of deep purpose and meaning. Psychologists and social scientists are telling us that we’re wired for belonging and connection, but these experiences seem more and more elusive in our selfish, disconnected, transient, stressed-out, busy lifestyles.

It couldn't be more obvious that our culture's vision of the best life has some major flaws. However, people won't break out of the hopeless cycle of chasing happiness and meaning in temporary stuff and success unless they see a better option. This is where the people of God are called to shine. We have access to the truth that living our best life is found first in pursuing God above all else and surrendering to His plan for our lives. In God's kingdom, the way to self-actualization is not the way of achieving success but the way of discovering who the Father says we are as His sons and daughters and living out of that identity and relationship with Him. Likewise, the way to joy and happiness is not the way of collecting pleasurable experiences but the way of laying our lives down in sacrificial love.

However, many believers are not living deeply into the truth of who they are called to be and what they are called to do in the kingdom of God, at least not deeply enough that they begin to experience and bear the fruit of the abundant life, the best life, Jesus promised us. In so many cases, when the world looks at us, they see the same anxiety, depression, struggle, striving, insecurity, busyness, and distraction they are living under. When the church starts to look like the world—when, in Jesus' words, we lose our saltiness and become lukewarm—it is because we have ceased to be fully engaged in the call of God on our lives.

I don't think our lack of full engagement is just a clarity problem. Jesus' call to every believer is simple enough to understand. He calls us to follow Him, walk with Him, obey Him, and imitate Him in thought, word, and deed. Confusion and compromise set in not because we fail to understand the call but because the call is challenging to live out. It requires a conversion of the heart that produces a transformed life, a conversion that takes place not in a moment but over a lifetime of walking with Jesus. A converted,

whole, healthy heart, not a head full of biblical knowledge, is what motivates us to be fully engaged in our call.

In this book, we're going to look at three aspects of this converted heart. Each aspect is a word you're probably familiar with. Again, for most of us the challenge lies not in understanding the definitions of these spiritual words (though in some areas clarification and correction is needed, and we'll cover that too) but in living them out. First, a fully engaged heart is completely set apart for God; it is *holy*. Second, a fully engaged heart will risk and endure pain and difficulty; it is *courageous*. And third, a fully engaged heart is anchored in unseen reality and trusts it over and above seen reality; it is full of *faith*. Holiness, courage, and faith—these are the three “miles” of the heart journey we must walk to fulfill our call.

My heart burns with passion to see a generation fully engaged in their call, not just because it's what we're supposed to be doing as Christians but because that's where we thrive. I know from experience that once you experience the fully engaged life of walking with Jesus into all that He has for you, you are ruined for anything less. Let's head out on this three-mile walk together!

1

CHAPTER

The First Step

There are moments that mark us, change the trajectory of our lives, and ultimately define us. Sometimes these moments crash in on us, loud and obvious. Sometimes they begin subtly and slowly crescendo. Sometimes they come in answer to our prayers and cries, and other times they blindside us when we least expect it. But however and whenever these moments come, we cannot deny that afterward something is different inside us. Our hearts have been awakened to the call of God on our life.

As I look back on my life, I see marking moments when God awakened something inside me. The first happened when I was seventeen. Someone gave me a biography of Billy Graham, and I wept through the whole book; I couldn't put it down. The same thing happened when I read the biography of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. I found myself lying on the ground, weeping, wrecked by his courage and self-sacrifice. Throughout my late teens and early twenties, there were many occasions when I ended up weeping: when I read books like Frank Bartleman's book on revival and Kathryn Kuhlman's biography, when I heard preachers like Mike Bickle speak on holiness and Lou Engle teach on intercession for

revival, and when leader after leader called me out in meetings and spoke words over me, describing what they were seeing and sensing about God's call for my life. In every case, my heart wasn't simply being moved; it was being marked by a passionate hunger. I didn't have all the words to describe what was happening to me in these experiences; I just knew something had awakened inside me. Later I recognized that these were moments when God was calling me, speaking to me, and waking up my heart to His purpose for my life. My heart was saying, *I too want to change the world. I want to be a leader whose life makes a difference. I want to give myself to prayer for an entire generation to be awakened by the love and power of God. I want what these people have lived and are talking about.*

If you are a follower of Jesus, you have probably experienced moments like these, even if you didn't recognize them—moments when your heart was moved with desire. You have sensed that voice inside you saying, *This is it. This is what you were made for.* You have heard the call of God on your life. If you haven't, then my prayer is that while reading this book, you will experience a marking moment that stirs your heart and ignites courage to follow Jesus with all of your heart. If you have had that moment, then my prayer is this: I want you to fully engage the call of God on your life. We are at our best when we are fully engaged in becoming who God has called us to become and doing what God has called us to do.

It's easy to assume that when you've been awakened to your call, you'll engage your call. That is the logical progression. However, not everyone fully engages their call throughout their lives. Many stall out, give up, or never really say yes to the journey of experiencing all that God has for them. I wrote this book because I am passionate about helping you avoid the pitfalls that keep you from full engagement. I want you to be fully engaged in your call not just for a moment but for a lifetime.

Jonathan and His Armor-Bearer

One of my favorite Bible stories that paints a picture of what it looks like to fully engage the call of God on our lives is the story of Jonathan and his armor-bearer, told in 1 Samuel 14.

When this story begins, King Saul has led Israel to war with the Philistines, the old enemy God called the Israelites to drive out of the promised land. After an initial successful attack on a Philistine outpost, things have not gone well. The Israelite army is outnumbered six hundred to “six thousand charioteers, and soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore” (1 Sam. 13:5). Saul has been demoralized after disobeying God and making sacrifices before the prophet Samuel could arrive and is just sitting under a pomegranate tree, seemingly without a plan of action. The Philistine army is fully equipped with weapons, while Saul and Jonathan are the only men in the Israelite army with swords and spears. Now the two armies are encamped on the opposite ends of a treacherous three-mile pass, and fear is building in the Israelite camp as they sit, waiting for the upcoming battle.

It’s in this moment that something stirs in the heart of Jonathan, and he decides to take action. “Then Jonathan said to the young man who bore his armor, ‘Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be that the LORD will work for us. For nothing restrains the LORD from saving by many or by few.’ So his armorbearer said to him, ‘Do all that is in your heart. Go then; here I am with you, according to your heart’” (1 Sam. 14:6–7 NKJV).

Jonathan has an awakening moment. He’s looking at the circumstances—the terrified Israelite soldiers, his defeated father unwilling or unable to lead the charge, and the superior army about to crush them—yet he is not intimidated and overwhelmed with despair. Instead something inside him is provoked. A conviction

awakens that says, *Even though the odds are against us, I refuse to passively look from a distance at what I have been called to do. I am the son of the king, leader of the armies of Israel. I am called to fight and defeat the enemies of God's people. Nothing about these circumstances changes that call; in fact, now is exactly the time to engage it.*

Jonathan is no longer content to remain on the sideline of his destiny. He has to get up and do something about it. He invites one faithful companion, his armor-bearer, on a special ops surgical strike against the Philistine outpost. Together the two friends pick their way across the rocky, dangerous three-mile pass (if you want a visual, look up the Michmash pass on the internet; it looks a lot like the canyon where Indiana Jones was chasing the bad guys in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*). Then Jonathan suggests that they engage the army with a risky but divinely inspired strategy: they'll stand at the bottom of the cliff below the outpost, in full sight of their enemies, agreeing that if the Philistines call them to climb up to their camp, they'll take it as a sign that God is giving them the victory. "So both of them showed themselves to the Philistine outpost. 'Look!' said the Philistines. 'The Hebrews are crawling out of the holes they were hiding in.' The men of the outpost shouted to Jonathan and his armor-bearer, 'Come up to us and we'll teach you a lesson.' So Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, 'Climb up after me; the LORD has given them into the hand of Israel'" (1 Sam. 14:11–12).

Jonathan and his armor-bearer don't even try to be stealthy or protect themselves as they climb the steep cliff with their hands and feet. When they reach the top, Jonathan rushes into the battle with his armor-bearer right behind him, both killing man after man. In no time, twenty dead Philistines lie scattered on the ground.

The battle doesn't end there, however; it's just begun. It's at this point where God intervenes and shows up directly in the fight. He sends the Philistines into a panic, and they start to slaughter

each other. Soon word of their sudden, bizarre self-destruction reaches King Saul, and he finally decides to get up from under the pomegranate tree and lead his men to the battle. As the day progresses, more and more men join the Israelite army. Some are traitors who defected to the Philistines and decide to return to Saul and Jonathan after watching the enemy destroy themselves. Others are scared Israelites who have been hiding in the hills and, upon hearing that the Philistines are on the run, gain the courage to join the Israelites pursuing them (1 Sam. 14:17–23). In the end Israel wins the day and the whole tide of the war turns, all because one man decided to step out of the safety of the camp and engage the call on his life.

Jonathan's story is a story for all of us. He is an example of how to engage the call of God on our lives and what's at stake for us in engaging that call. As we journey together through this book, we'll be looking closer at each step of the journey Jonathan took that day with his armor-bearer, and what it means for us in our journey. To understand what Jonathan did, however, we first need to understand his mindset and motivations. What caused Jonathan to no longer be satisfied sitting idly by and stirred him to begin that three-mile walk?

I see four key internal postures, or attitudes, that shaped the way Jonathan engaged his call. He *took ownership* of his call, he *dreamed* of his call, he *counted the cost* of his call, and he *was provoked* by his call. These four movements are critical if we are to engage the call of God on our lives.

Step 1: Own the Call

Let me be crystal clear. If you are a believer in Jesus, you have a call of God on your life. This call has two dimensions—identity and

mission. You are first called to *be* somebody—to fully identify as a son or daughter of the Father, just like Jesus. Operating from that relational identity in turn defines what you are called to *do*—your mission, which is connected to the corporate mission of the people of God. Every member of God’s family is called to partner with Him to impact the world with the reality of His kingdom. He has destined you to do great things with Him, to do the impossible, and to overcome evil with good. He has called you to change the world.

You will never fulfill your call to be and to do simply by knowing about your call, however. You must take ownership of your identity and mission. Ownership is a mindset that generates an attitude of authority, initiative, and responsibility. Someone who owns their call thinks, *Nobody else can be a son or daughter for me. Nobody else can fulfill my mission to change the world. That’s my job.* Owners do not sit around waiting for someone else to live their Christian life for them. They have been given resources, opportunities, and responsibilities to accomplish what God has called them to.

One of the things I, as a pastor and leader in the body of Christ, have a passion for is to see believers cultivate an ownership mindset. We will never see the harvest God desires or impact cities at the level we should without every believer taking ownership of their call. It is the job of the saints to do the work of ministry, and the job of spiritual leaders to equip and encourage them to do this job (Eph. 4:11–12). Unfortunately, I typically find this ownership mindset lacking in church culture. Instead many Christians are being trained to think that it’s spiritual leaders’ responsibility to fulfill the identity and mission God has given them.

When we planted Jesus Culture Sacramento, personal responsibility was one of our founding core values. In those early days, we out of necessity kept things simple (and still do)—Sunday services, children’s ministry, and some larger community gatherings.

We didn't immediately build a small group structure or implement the normal church programs. We knew that as the church grew, we would add more structure and communities to serve people. Our goal was to make sure any structure we were building was equipping people to do the work of the ministry rather than doing the ministry for them. The vision was to build people, not just programs, and see what our people produced.

It was fascinating to see the response of people who had been in church for years. Not everyone who came at the beginning was unchurched or unsaved. Many of them knew how church works. It was not uncommon for people to approach me, asking how they could get plugged into community. Since we didn't have a small group structure built at that time and things were fairly basic, I encouraged them to invite someone out to coffee or over for dinner. Many of them just looked at me in confusion; they were expecting me to tell them about the systems and structures we had in place for them to find community and weren't sure what to do when we didn't have that. Others came to me, asking where our new believers' class was; they had a neighbor or coworker who had recently received Christ and were looking for the class they should send them to so they could be discipled. Since we didn't have a new believers' class, my response was something like, "The new believers' class is in your living room, and you're leading it." I had other people ask what our church was doing for the poor. I assured them that we believe deeply in our mandate as the body of Christ to care for the poor. But when I started telling them stories of what individual people in the congregation were doing to serve the church in our city, they seemed unimpressed. What they had really wanted to know was, "What is the corporation of the church doing for the poor? What programs do you run for the poor?"

Hear me: I am not opposed to small groups, new believers'

classes, or programs to care for the poor. This is not a commentary on that. Many churches run incredible programs to connect people and serve their city that are having tremendous impact. I'm also not opposed to systems and structure; we have both at our church. What I am opposed to is systems and structure that communicate it's someone else's responsibility to do what God has called you to do. With good intentions, we build structures in the church that are not equipping people to live out the call on their lives but rather are stepping in to fulfill that call. As a result, people begin to think that what God has called them to do is someone else's responsibility.

When you got saved, you became a follower and disciple of Jesus, which means He is the one you are to learn from and imitate. Every follower of Jesus is called to pray, gather in community, share their faith, disciple others, pray for the sick, take care of the poor, further the ministry of reconciliation, and be generous and faithful with their finances. This may be news to you, but it's not the pastor's job to disciple your neighbor. That's part of the call on your life. But we have a generation of people who have grown up thinking that it's the church's job to live out their Christian life for them. If your church never had a small group structure, would you still gather with other believers simply because that's what Jesus asks? If your church didn't have a program to take care of the poor, would you ask God what you are to do for the poor in your city because that's your call as a follower of Jesus? Your answers are probably a good indicator of the degree to which you've been encouraged to develop an ownership mentality.

I want to challenge you. When you see an area of lack in the church and think, *The church should be doing something about this*, stop yourself before you go to someone and start complaining about it. Instead take it to the Lord and ask Him, "God, are You highlighting this area of need to me because You want me to do something

about it?” Then do whatever He says. Maybe He just wants you to pray that the need will be met. Maybe He wants to show you others who are already working on the problem so you can partner with them. Or maybe He wants you to pioneer something new and build a solution. Whatever it is, you can be sure that it will look like you stepping up and taking ownership and responsibility, not standing on the sideline, critiquing and complaining.

God has called you to be someone, and He has called you to do something. But that call will never fully manifest unless you take ownership of it. One of the signs that we truly have been awakened to our call is that we have a growing sense of ownership of what God has called us to. The idea of sitting back and waiting for others to take the initiative before we act becomes less and less satisfying to us. Like Jonathan, we see that engaging our call is our responsibility.

Note: Taking ownership of the call doesn't mean that we go alone! Jonathan didn't set out to face the Philistines by himself. He didn't need an army, but he knew he needed at least one other guy to partner with him in his mission. As we engage in our call to be and do what God has called us to be and do, relationships will always be a critical part of that journey. We need people around us who have our backs, like Jonathan's armor-bearer, and we need to have their backs too. We can't start putting the ownership and responsibility for our part of those relationships on others.

Step 2: Dream of the Call

Jonathan didn't just have a sense of responsibility to act; he had a desire to act. His call was connected to the dreams of his heart. His armor-bearer recognized this and encouraged him, “Do all that is in your heart” (1 Sam. 14:7 NKJV).

You will never be satisfied until you are engaging the call of God on your life, because your call is connected to the dreams He has placed in your heart. This is what is happening in those awakening moments: your innermost dreams and desires are waking up and stirring your emotions and imagination to start envisioning and pursuing what He's put inside you. It's a heart awakening, not an intellectual awakening.

Years ago the Lord began to tell me that He was releasing dreamers again in the body of Christ. I began to wonder what a dreamer looked like. So of course I thought of children. Children are natural dreamers. I have three kids myself. When you have children, you begin to realize very quickly that they love to dream, and to dream big. If I asked one of my daughters when she was little, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" she responded with the most audacious things, like, "I want to be an astronaut and walk on the moon!" All my kids had big dreams.

When we are children, dreaming seems to come naturally; however, something happens when we transition to adulthood that causes many of us to lose our ability to dream. The way I put it is that we get introduced to "reality." When my daughter came to me and told me she wanted to be an astronaut, I patted her on the head and said, "Sweetie, you can be whatever you put your mind to." I didn't want to crush her dreams. But I didn't really believe my daughter would achieve that dream, because as an adult, I knew something she didn't know. I knew the odds of her becoming an astronaut. I knew the stories of people who tried to be astronauts and failed. So even though I didn't say it out loud, I thought, *Sweetie, there are 320 million people in this nation, and only a handful become astronauts. Unfortunately, you have even less of a chance if you're a female. Let's be more realistic and find something else to do.* My ability to dream with her was greatly hindered because of this thing called reality.

But Jonathan wasn't confined to the realm of odds and statistics. This doesn't mean he was in denial about his chances of success in taking on the Philistine army with one other guy. He simply knew there was Someone with them who was not confined to the human definition of reality. On their own, Jonathan and his armor-bearer couldn't save Israel, but Jonathan knew that God can save "whether by many or by few" (1 Sam. 14:6). Jonathan was connected to the truth that God is not confined to the realm of odds and statistics. I can imagine that as Jonathan made the three-mile walk across that valley, he wrestled with reality the way we all do when we start to pursue the dreams in our hearts. Yet he continued to trust that the dream God had put in his heart was possible, because the God of the impossible was with him. We must do the same.

Seeing a church that is not afraid to dream has been a passion of mine since I began ministry. Years ago I had a nighttime dream in which I saw people with wells of dreams inside them, but they were capped by lids. As I was preaching, I was reaching inside people and pulling the caps off the wells of their dreams. I believe God is uncapping His people's ability to dream by encountering them with His greater reality—the reality that sets them free from the limits of human reality. For too long, they've lived under the delusion that God is somehow bound by these limits. They think He's intimidated by the obstacles facing them or by their own weaknesses, that He can't redeem the years of sin, poverty, addiction, oppression, or other issues that have clung to their family line. But God is breaking that lie and unlocking a childlike belief that sees the truth: they are called to overcome these impossibilities with Him. As the dreams of their hearts awaken, they will begin to look at impossible situations and say, "God can save by many or by few. Nothing is impossible with Him." This belief will set them free to step out on the three-mile walk, knowing they are not alone.

Something we must settle in our hearts is that the call of God on our lives was designed to be fulfilled through partnership with Him, which means that if we try to imagine fulfilling it on our own, it will seem impossible. The call of God on your life *is* impossible without God! The person He is calling you to be is impossible apart from Him, and the thing He is calling you to do is impossible apart from Him. But the good news is that you are not apart from Him. This is the reality you must encounter that will uncap your ability to dream of doing the impossible with Him.

Encountering the real presence of God and hearing His voice is the center of the Christian life. One of the greatest tragedies in Christianity is that the gospel often gets reduced to a transactional relationship instead of an intimate relationship. God gives us forgiveness of sin and entrance to heaven, and in exchange we serve Him, which usually means doing a laundry list of spiritual activities like going to church, reading our Bibles, giving to the needy, being kind to our neighbors. This falls so far short of what Jesus died to give us—a real, dynamic, ever-growing, transformational, heart-to-heart connection with God in which we walk with Him, hear Him speak to our hearts, encounter His presence and love in tangible ways, and learn to make our home in Him (John 15:4). Building, strengthening, and living from this connection is the purpose behind every spiritual discipline we practice. If your Bible study, prayer time, church and Bible study attendance, fasting, and other spiritual activities are not leading you into real encounters with the presence and voice of God in which He awakens, speaks to, and transforms your heart, then you need to adjust something. These should be providing you with what you need in order to see and engage your call with an awakened heart and the awareness that the God of the impossible is with you, leading you and empowering you.

Your heart has the ability to trust God and His reality beyond what your mind can comprehend. If you've ever really been around somebody who is a dreamer, somebody who is engaging the call of God on their life, it's quite likely that they have appeared to be out of their mind. It's because they are engaging the things in their heart, not just in their mind. I'm not suggesting that we stop thinking or that we don't intelligently look at things. But our minds need to defer to what God is awakening in our hearts. Jonathan's armor-bearer understood this. This is why he did not tell him, "Do all that's in your mind. Do all that makes sense. Do only what's safe." He said, "Do all that is in your heart." If I had been walking with Jonathan in that moment, I probably would have said, "Jonathan, what are you thinking? There's an entire army of the Philistines, and it's you with one other guy. This doesn't make sense at all. You're out of your mind." But dreamers understand that even though it may sound crazy from a rational standpoint, from the heart it makes complete sense.

You may have a dream to write books that will impact the lives of thousands. People may look at you and say, "You didn't even do well in English at school. Are you out of your mind?" But your heart knows that this is the call on your life. You may have a desire to be a good father or a good mother, but your family heritage is one of brokenness and abuse. You may have a dream in your heart to start a business or a nonprofit, and people may look at you and say, "You have no money." It may not make sense, but it's the dream God has placed in your heart. It's time for you to believe that He is with you to do all according to your heart.

Pay attention to what's in your heart. Whatever stirs and moves you is connected to your dreams. A mentor of mine once said, "Pay attention to your tears, because they are the windows into your soul." Any strong emotion can move us to tears—longing,

excitement, sorrow, or even anger. I pay attention to what moves me and listen to hear if God is speaking to me through that. I don't dismiss the things that stir me—a preacher who says something that fills me with hope, a news story about injustice that burdens me to pray, a movie scene that breaks my heart, or books that awaken my imagination and passion. Instead of allowing these moments to pass me by, I ask myself why I am responding to them this way. Many times, I find that there is something in them connected to the dreams of my heart and the call on my life.

What opportunities move you with desire? What problems and injustices in the world ignite your anger? What stories break your heart? God might be speaking to you about the issue of orphans and foster care. Then, without any planning, you happen to watch two movies in a row in which foster care is an integral part of the storyline. Or the topic just happens to come up in conversations with people. Every time foster care shows up, you find your heart stirred with a deep emotion. God is trying to awaken something inside you. Pay attention to that, and ask Him to show you how He's inviting you to dream about the call on your life.

Step 3: Count the Cost of the Call

Have you ever stepped out to pursue a dream and experienced initial success, only to have things turn scary in a hurry? That's what happened to Jonathan. First Samuel 13:3 tells us that it was Jonathan who had led the first attack on the Philistines in this particular war. Saul had jumped on his success and announced it with trumpets throughout the land, which apparently was like waving a red flag at a bull. The Philistines wasted no time in amassing their superior army and declaring war, frightening Saul and the Israelites out of their minds. It looked like shedding first blood

was going to backfire on Saul and Jonathan big-time. As Jonathan considered going up for this second attack with his armor-bearer, he had to count the cost. Would he be risking his life again, only to see their situation get even worse? In the end he said, “Yes. It’s worth it.”

Early in my journey with Jesus Culture, God put a dream in my heart that we would see stadiums filled with a generation seeking God. We had, and still have, a passion to see people mobilized to encounter God and be equipped for revival. After years of doing conferences in our hometown and around the world, in 2011 we stepped out and held our first gathering in an arena—a three-day conference at Allstate Arena in Chicago. A gathering of that size and scope requires a lot of planning, which required a commitment from us two years in advance. When I said yes to Chicago in 2009, I really didn’t know what I was saying yes to. I was excited about the possibility of thousands gathering in an arena, and I was pursuing a dream God had awakened in my heart, but I didn’t understand what pursuing that dream would cost. Up to that point, our conferences had been held in churches or midsize theater venues. The most we had gathered was a little more than two thousand people. Now we were going to gather in an arena that could hold fifteen thousand people and spend ten times anything we had ever spent on an event. I remember walking into the empty arena the day before the conference and being struck by the weight of what my yes two years earlier meant. I realized while I looked around that arena that this could have gone a different direction. People could have not come. Finances could have not been there. I knew we had taken a risk, but I didn’t know how big that risk was when we committed to it. And in the end, it paid off. We ended up having fourteen thousand people attend. Even though it was the most pressure I had ever experienced in ministry up to that point, it was a

beautiful and powerful event, a marking moment in my life and in the lives of many others. I still run into people who tell me how God encountered them and awakened things in their hearts through the worship and messages preached at that one gathering, and they have never been the same.

But the story didn't end there. Right after our conference ended in Chicago, God spoke to my heart to gather again the following year, this time in two locations. And we did. We gathered outside New York City in an arena that held thirteen thousand and in Los Angeles at a large theater venue. This time we had a different outcome. I don't view those two gatherings as failures, because we were obedient, stepped out in faith, and did what God had asked of us, and many people's lives were changed. But this time the venues weren't full and the finances weren't there. The year leading up to those two gatherings, our team was under tremendous pressure, and it showed. It felt like bolts were popping out of our structure both relationally and organizationally. I had to navigate the embarrassment of having venues that were not full, and I experienced an unprecedented level of anxiety around finances. All of these things made me feel the cost of my yes more acutely.

Paying the price to pursue our dreams and engage the call on our life can be uncomfortable, exhausting, scary, and—yes—painful. When we experience this pain, the danger is that we'll stop dreaming and taking risks. The aftermath of our New York and Los Angeles gatherings brought me to a point of decision. Would I keep saying yes to the dreams God had put in my heart, now that I knew just how much it could cost not only me but our entire team? Or would I shut down those dreams to play it safe? I knew what the decision had to be. God still required me to move forward and engage His call on my life. So I told Him and our team, "I'm going to keep dreaming and keep saying yes. I don't want to shrink back

because I stepped out once and it didn't work out like I thought." Since that point, I know better what I am saying yes to when I step out to pursue a dream in obedience to His call. But being aware of the cost only makes my obedience a greater gift I now offer to God.

We must discover that the call of God on our life is worth the price of failure and disappointment. We will face both on this three-mile walk. Things will not work out as we planned and will probably leave us feeling discouraged or disillusioned. But we can't allow those experiences to kill our hope and convince us to pull back. If we allow disappointment to shape our future decisions, we will no longer dream, because it is too risky. We must be prepared to endure disappointment and continue the walk.

I remember a disappointing experience I had years ago, when my firstborn was still a small baby. It's a silly story but one that illustrates what it looks like to be excited and passionate about a dream and experience disappointment. We were vacationing with some friends on the coast of Oregon when I saw an advertisement for a whale watching excursion. It was an hour-long boat ride in the bay, during which we would be able to see a whale up close. That sounded exciting, so we bought the tickets. After we climbed on board with our baby girl, however, I made a big mistake. I took our baby down into the cabin to hold her as the boat took off. Within five minutes I was horribly seasick and on the verge of throwing up.

I went back up on the deck and did all I could to hold it together. Soon the boat pulled up right next to a whale. Everyone was talking excitedly and taking pictures of the whale, but I couldn't have cared less about it. I had one goal: don't throw up. That hour seemed like an eternity. Finally, we headed for shore. I stood on the back deck with about twenty other people, watching the shore approach with increasing desperation. It was so close. Then, about four hundred yards from the dock, seasickness finally overtook me. I leaned over

the side of the boat and started vomiting. All twenty people around me gasped in disgust as I emptied all I had into the ocean. It was not a pretty sight. And it didn't end there. I was sick the rest of the day. I will never forget that experience. Sadly, I've never been back on a whale watching excursion.

Our dreams, of course, are so much more significant than a whale watching excursion. But so many of us start out excited about a dream in our hearts, like I was excited about seeing a whale. "I want to be a whale watcher! I want to see a whale up close!" Then we get on our first boat ride in pursuit of that, and instead of seeing a whale, we just puke our guts out. That story then defines the rest of our life. Our inner narrative says, *I tried that once. I wanted to be a whale watcher, but it didn't work out.* And we stop dreaming, stop pursuing what is in our hearts, and stop taking risks. Or some of us don't even make it to the boat. We talk to someone like me, who had a bad experience, and hear, "Oh my, do not go whale watching. I had the worst experience of my life when I tried that." And we let someone else's disappointment stop us from pursuing what's in our hearts.

Too many believers are afraid to take risks because they think, *What if my dream doesn't happen? What if I step out and I pursue who God's called me to be and do what He's called me to do, but I fail in that?* We cannot let the fear of failure stop us from dreaming. If we do not dream, we disengage. Instead of leaning into God, we take a posture of pulling back from Him, which is not the direction we want to be moving. Bill Johnson told me once that the difference between those men and women throughout history who changed the world for God and those who didn't was that the ones who changed the world for God were not afraid to fail for God. We can't be afraid to fail for God. We have to be willing to step out, even when it's scary, because that's what dreamers do.

One of the messages most of us hear at some point is, “Don’t get your hopes up.” Well-meaning people say this out of pity to give us a dose of reality. They tell young people who have a dream to go to Harvard, “Hey, I know that Harvard is hard to get into. Don’t get your hopes up.” They treat people as if they’re fragile, as if they are going to be crushed by disappointment if their dreams don’t happen. Sometimes we even hear this in the church. But 1 Peter 1:3 tells us we’ve been given a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus. As a people with a living hope, a hope that flows from the victory of resurrection life over death, we are called to get our hopes up after every disappointment. Dreams require that you get your hopes up. Whatever disappointment you may have faced, whatever fear you may have embraced, it is time to hope again. Your dreams depend on it. The body of Christ is to be a place where we hear, “Get your hopes up.” Because hope is alive and well!

Step 4: Be Provoked by the Call

When Jonathan looked out at the Israelite soldiers huddling in fear and his father refusing to act, it provoked him. The Israelites had stepped out in their call to drive out their enemies and claim their land, and now they were going to just turn back like cowards? Not cool! They were not acting like the people they were called to be. This spurred Jonathan to do what a true soldier of Israel should have been doing—running with courage toward the battle.

The Bible tells us what the experience of the authentic Christian life should be and the fruit it should produce in our thinking and behavior. At its core, the Christian life is a real, dynamic, interactive relationship with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that transforms us from the inside out. It is a life full of encounters with the love of God that set us free from sin and shame and bring healing and

restoration to our body, soul, and spirit. It is a life of adventure with the Father in which we discover that He fully provides all we need to be successful as we trust Him and walk in obedience. It is a life of partnership in which we get to share His heart to invite the world into this amazing, abundant life. When we're living this life, we look vastly different from the world. The mind of Christ, the heart of the Father, and the fruit of the Spirit become visible and tangible through us.

We are all going to have moments when the Christian life seems to fall short. We're all going to fail to produce the fruit we should be producing. What makes this tragic is when we accept it and settle for a life that falls short of all that God purposed and purchased for us. When life falls short, when others fall short, and when we fall short, it should provoke us, because we know there is more. We should not settle for something less than the fullness of what God has for us. One of the most grievous things happening in the body of Christ today is that a generation of believers is settling for something less than the full, authentic Christian life.

I want you to be dissatisfied. Not ungrateful. Not complaining. Not powerless. But unwilling to accept a life that is less than what God has for you. The call of God on your life should provoke something inside you that causes you to refuse to settle for anything less than all He has called you to be and to do. It's time to start saying, "I'm done settling. God has called me His child, but I've been acting like an orphan. He's promised me a life of freedom and passion, but I've settled for a life of bondage. He's offered me complete security in Him, yet I've settled for a life of insecurity. But not anymore. I want to be who God has called me to be, and experience all He's called me to experience. I was called to change the world."

I pray that God will stir and awaken something in you that refuses to settle, that you would become like Jonathan, not content

— The First Step —

to sit back in fear, knowing you're called to take on the Philistines. You will never be fully alive or satisfied just sitting there, looking at your call from a distance. It's time to stand up and move toward all that God has called you to be, and to do all that God has called you to do. It's time to step out on the three-mile walk in order to engage the call of God on your life.



THE THREE-MILE WALK

by Banning Liebscher

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