

**LIVE IN
GRACE,
WALK IN
LOVE**

**LIVE IN
GRACE**



**WALK IN
LOVE**

**A 365-DAY
JOURNEY**

BOB GOFF



**NELSON
BOOKS**

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1. LIVE IN GRACE, WALK IN LOVE.

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

MATTHEW 11:28-30

I remember learning to ride my first bike, but my favorite bike memories are when I taught my kids. Without fail, at the beginning, the front tire would wobble back and forth more and more wildly just before one of them bit the dust. And they all bit the dust. Sometimes they would try again; sometimes they would call it quits. Learning to ride a bike at first is completely unnatural. Once it clicks—the balance, pedaling, steering—it’s hard to imagine *not* knowing how to do it. With enough practice, you don’t even think about riding a bike anymore. You just do it.

Jesus talks about taking up a challenge to live differently. It’s sort of like riding a bike. He wants us to live in grace and walk in love, but at first it is a gangly, wobbly wreck. We might even get banged up a little. Then, after a while, you just know how to do it. The Bible describes it as a rhythm, like breathing itself, where we are taking in grace for ourselves and holding out love for others. It is not natural, and it takes some practice. But Jesus showed us the way. Maybe one day we’ll look a little more graceful and pull off some cool tricks—hop a couple of curbs, do a wheelie or a bunny hop. Not unlike Peter and John, who healed a man in Acts 3, Jesus wants us to stick with Him through the awkward learning parts so we can learn to ride like He does. He wants to take our mind off of falling so we can pedal more fearlessly. Sure, there will be some scratches and scrapes. But we can pick each other up and help each other get back on for another go.

What habits and rhythms do you need to practice to help you naturally experience God’s grace in your life?

2. PLANS WORK OR THEY DON'T. LOVE ALWAYS WORKS. GO WITH THE SURE THING.

The entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

GALATIANS 5:14

What is it about January 1 and making New Year's resolutions? I think they're terrific because they get people inspired to move toward the person they want to be. Later in January, I go around asking people if they made any resolutions—it gives you a window into what their hopes and dreams are. One predictable recurring theme is friends who want to go the gym on a regular basis. They say their gyms are like ghost towns in November and December, then January hits and they get as busy as a New York City subway. They also say the crowds begin to trickle down as the month goes on, and by February they're back to the familiar faces they see throughout the year. If only we could make our commitments surefire bets, right? Here's the thing. Plans are a toss-up: sometimes they work out and sometimes they wither. Love always works. What if we simply commit to love?

Don't plan on doing it or make a resolution to do it the way people hope to go to the gym. Just do it. No plan, no agenda. Just Jesus leaking out through you into the world. Our lives are a series of positive experiences and more than a few negative ones. Make your life about people and you won't regret it. There's no gym to join, no pounds to lose. Our hours and minutes are what make up our lives, and God never intended relationships to be an afterthought. Make this year about people. We won't give our friends the love they deserve if we try to work them in when our lives slow down. We'll wake up one day and realize we never really got to know the people we bump into every day, even if they're the ones who sit across the dinner table from us each night. If you have to choose between your plans and your loved ones, go with the sure thing and choose love.

Who do you need to focus your love toward today?

3. GOD HOPES WE'LL DEVELOP A GREATER FEAR OF INACTION THAN OF FAILURE.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

PSALM 23:4

Have you ever heard a plane break the sound barrier?

About 768 miles per hour—that's how fast you have to go to outrun sound itself. Modern planes can do it pretty easily. Around World War II, though, scientists and engineers thought Mach speeds might be impossible in a manned aircraft. Their hesitance had everything to do with what happened at 767 miles per hour. Just before a plane breaks the sound barrier, all the created energy is pushing against the plane. Think of riding an old, rickety roller coaster in midair—all the shaking, jerking, and rattling made more than a few pilots throttle back.

When we're chasing our dreams, all the turbulence we face shouldn't scare us into pulling back, though. The shaking, jerking, and rattling in our lives are telling us we're getting close to the breakthrough.

If there's anything to fear, often it's pulling back, not pressing forward. Is fear of failure holding you back from breaking your personal barriers? You might be at 767 miles per hour. Throw the throttle down, because once you push through fear produced by the rattling, you find the next-level experience you've been hoping for. God hopes we'll develop a greater fear of inaction than of failure, because then, we'll experience with wide-eyed excitement what it's like to cruise, doing what we were made to do.

Where is fear holding you back right now?

4. LIVE A LIFE OF CONSTANT ANTICIPATION.

[Abraham] did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.”

ROMANS 4:20-22

The city where I live is known for one of the best fireworks shows on the planet. It's no secret either. People from all over fly into San Diego to witness the spectacle. The city loads four barges down with munitions, parks them in different parts of the bay, then synchronizes the launch with music as hundreds of thousands of people assemble to watch an hour of explosions. Thousands of fireworks are put on display. It's a pyromaniac's dream. The question isn't whether the show will burn your retinas a little bit but if you'll get there early enough to get a parking spot and a good seat.

One year, instead of a perfect symphony of pyrotechnics and patriotism over the course of an hour, someone made a mistake and hit the wrong button. Every single firework went off at once. It was all over within thirty *seconds*. It was nine o'clock at night, but the sky was as bright as noon for a brief moment as thousands of fireworks all exploded on the decks of the barges. It was *awesome!* More than a few people in San Diego lost their eyebrows that night. The people with the best view were the dudes who pushed the button. Sure, they lost their jobs, but I bet they thought it was worth it.

When we're really walking with Jesus, our lives look just as expectant as people in San Diego do now every Fourth of July. There's no question that something awesome is going to happen. It might be a big success or an epic fail; the only question is how close you'll be when all the fireworks go off.

Live a life of constant anticipation. Is it possible your big idea will blow up? You bet. Do it anyway. Trusting Jesus is like watching a lit fuse; it's only a matter of time before He's going to do awesome things in your life. Quit playing it safe. Press the button.

**Where in your life are you playing it safe? What
could you do to press the button?**

5. DON'T LET WHAT YOU'RE AFRAID OF KEEP YOU FROM WHAT YOU WERE MADE FOR.

[Be] confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

PHILIPPIANS 1:6

Before Bill Gates was one of the richest men in the world, he was a Harvard dropout with a failed business. He cofounded a business called Traf-O-Data. Have you heard of it? Of course not. Me neither. It was started in the 1970s, and this company generated reports about roadway traffic to help cities know where to put traffic lights or which roads needed improving. It was far from a head turner. Here's why it's interesting. The company and its ideas crashed and burned.

Bill Gates was born with a gift, though, and he didn't bury the gift just because his first attempt was a failure. He and his business partner learned from their mistakes, started Microsoft, and changed the world.

Failure tops the list of greatest fears for most of us. It's vulnerable to put our passions into action because we can't play it cool if it crumbles. If others see us go all in, they'll certainly see us if we fail. We'll be embarrassed, broke, and our friends might be awkward in the way they handle it all. What if they see that our best wasn't enough? What if we hear that dark voice inside us again that says, *You're not enough?*

We can't win the game from the bleachers. We'll never succeed unless we get out on the field and go for it. Whether it's starting a business, putting music to your poems, or braving rejection from the girl who makes you lose your words, you won't get the gold if you're too scared to work the mine. God created you with unique gifts and ignited the passions He put in your heart for a reason—don't let fear steal your opportunities and leave you on the sidelines wishing you'd tried. Do what you believe you were created to do. Is it possible it won't work? You bet. Fail trying, don't fail watching.

What do you need to hear or believe from God in order to find the courage to step out on a big dream you have?

6. QUIT WAITING FOR A PLAN; JUST GO LOVE EVERYBODY.

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

1 JOHN 4:7

Have you noticed a surge in the number of workout programs out there? It seems like every time I pick up a magazine, a new study says the key to weight loss is to avoid carbs, or only eat carbs, or eat only free-range llama eggs. I'm still looking for the workout plan that pushes popsicles, cake pops, and Pop-Tarts as the key to getting ripped. It would seem the only thing we love more than dieting is talking about dieting.

I'm not one for diets or workout plans, but I do know what it's like to spend too much time coming up with a plan instead of just *doing* the plan. The same holds true with our personal plans. It's tempting to sit around dreaming about what we would do if only we had the money or the time or the unique opportunity. But all that planning for the future takes us away from the one thing all of us can do right now: love the people around us.

God isn't dazzled when we go across an ocean. He delights when we go across the street.

It's great to map out a plan to use your gifts to make the world a little more beautiful or functional, but try not to forget that you're already where you are. Go change the world from where you are, while you're moving toward where you wish you were. Changing the world turns out to be easier and harder than we tend to make it: it's easier because it doesn't take as much money or time as we think it will, but it's harder because, like the workouts we avoid, it takes courage, commitment, and sacrifice in the moment.

If you're a planner, terrific. Go do loads of planning. If you were wired to be spontaneous, do plenty of that. By all means, keep scheming up plans, but don't forget there's a big difference between always preparing and actually being ready to start.

What is it that you've been planning without starting? You don't have to take all the steps—just the next one.

7. DON'T LET ANYTHING BUT JESUS DISTRACT YOU.

When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

MATTHEW 6:6

I read that the average person spends one out of every five minutes on social media. It's literally taking over our lives, minute by minute. To minimize the distraction, software companies have developed apps to keep you off for twenty-four hours, no matter what. Some apps are designed to restrict your internet access completely, and you can't turn your computer off and on, restart your internet, or do anything to get around it. This is how serious our distractive habits have become, and I know it personally. We all have our weaknesses. For some people, it's sports or fashion or cars. Me, I can't stay off social media when friends of mine start posting their kids' back-to-school pictures or Halloween costumes. How are we supposed to be productive when we see four-year-old pumpkins with superpowers?

It's easy to get distracted by everything else; what takes a little more work is to only get distracted by Jesus. When it comes time for praying or reading about Jesus, it's easy to feel like we're wasting time. We get fidgety. Our minds start to wander. Our fingers reach for our phones to take a quick peek and see what our friends are doing. With all the stuff on our to-do lists and all the opportunities to connect with others, it can feel forced to stop, be still, and be silent.

We're not wasting time on God. It's actually the best use of time to spend time with the One who created time in the first place. He knew we would need to eat, sleep, work, and brush our teeth, yet He still asked us to pray. He urged us to spend time with Him because He knew it would actually change everything.

Sure, it's good to guard your time, but it's even better to guard your heart. Don't keep such a tight grip on your time that you miss out on Jesus. Take some time today and decide to only be distracted by Him.

What's your plan to be distracted by Him today?

8. GOD USES UNCERTAINTY TO CHASE US OUT INTO THE OPEN WHERE WE CAN FIND HIM ALL OVER AGAIN.

In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

1 PETER 1:6-7

When we pray, it's easy to get a little tongue-tied. We don't always know what to say or how to do it "right." But when there's a crisis, sometimes we turn into world-class orators when we pray. We know exactly what we want, right? Whether you're driving through a hailstorm with your kids in the back seat or going through an unwanted career change with no opportunities on the horizon, difficult things can make us feel small. They make us feel so needy. They help us realize our absolute need for God to help us. These are the moments we find ourselves whispering panicked prayers as if our lives depended on them—because, in fact, they sometimes do.

It would be great if we could recognize how dependent we are on God in the high times, too, when we're healthy or have a little extra in our savings account. But the discomfort brought by fear and uncertainty in our lives can become blessings. Here's the reason why: comfortable people don't need Jesus; desperate people do.

I heard the other day that a lot of the buttons we have to push don't actually do anything. I don't know if it's true or not, but we've all had our suspicions. Like the button to change the traffic light so you can walk across the street or the one to make an elevator door close faster. They put those buttons there so we *feel* like we have some control over our lives, when we actually don't. We might think we've got everything in hand, but the reality is that it's only an illusion. Here's the thing: we encounter God all over again every time we're desperate enough to realize we're not actually in charge.

Fear and uncertainty launch us toward God, and He's always there to

receive us when we arrive. When all signs tell us there's no way out, we find God in the uncertainty, and He always makes a way. Take confidence in this. Realize you're terribly needy. It's a good thing.

**What are you feeling uncertain about that
you can bring to God in prayer?**

9. DON'T WORRY ABOUT ALL THE STEPS. BEGIN.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7

Have you ever run a marathon? Me neither. I have some friends who have done it, and I've learned a lot about life from what they experienced. They say that they feel like their bodies are going to shut down at multiple points in the race, so they keep moving when they stop by tables with water or orange slices. Some say they get a little delusional at certain points and sometimes feel an unexplainable sense of euphoria. All the friends I've asked say they couldn't think too far ahead when they felt like they were falling apart. In other words, they couldn't think about mile twenty-two when they were on mile twenty-one because it was just too overwhelming. They had to focus on putting one foot in front of another, and repeating this, until they finally crossed the finish line.

I think the same is true for most of us when we start a new project or pivot to a new direction in our lives. We can do our best to plan and train, but once we're in the race, all we can do is be present in the moment. We won't know what needs to happen at mile twenty-two until we get there. Some people delight in this, but most spend too much energy feeling anxious about a mile marker they haven't yet arrived at. Does that sound like you? Usually the things we worry about the most don't happen anyway. We fear there will be disaster only to find balloons when we arrive.

Take heart. If we're diligent and thoughtful each step of the way, we don't have to fret over contingencies down the road. Don't worry about what may or may not happen; stick by Jesus and trust He will work it all out in the end.

What's your next step? When will you take it?

10. WHILE YOU'RE FIGURING OUT WHAT GOD'S PLAN IS FOR YOUR LIFE, JUST GO LOVE EVERYBODY. THAT'S THE PLAN.

As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

COLOSSIANS 3:12

You know what's delightful? Catching up with someone in their fifties or sixties and finding out they're making an enormous career change. It reminds me we can always change and grow.

We tend to leave the risks and big life changes to college students or young professionals as if skinny jeans were the gatekeeper. The problem is this: most of us spend our whole lives trying to figure out what we're supposed to do with them. At some point we thought we had found our callings, so we ran toward them. Then we rethink whether we'd be better off using our gifts to serve in business instead of ministry, or as a social worker instead of a dentist, or as a Disney greeter instead of a banker. Because we're given so many options and opportunities, it's easy to spend so much time trying to find the ideal career that we miss our life. What comes from a good place doesn't always lead us to a good place.

We all want to use all our gifts. That's a good thing. There's nothing wrong with taking time to figure out the path that complements your ambitions and capabilities. We get into trouble when we become more concerned with all the potential paths we could take than we are about the people right in front of us.

Don't get wrapped around the axle thinking about God's "will for your life." God already showed us what it is. He wants us to love Him and love one another. It's that simple and that hard. He doesn't seem to have a strong opinion about the context in which we do it. He just wants us to give our love away freely.

While you're trying to choose which road to take when you get to a fork, be sure to keep your focus on the things you can be certain of. God wants us to love others the way He loved us. That kind of love will free you up to choose any path with a confidence you may have been lacking.

What do you need to do to refocus on the simple things today?

11. NO ONE IS REMEMBERED FOR WHAT THEY JUST PLANNED TO DO.

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

JAMES 1:22

Have you ever settled into bed at the end of a long day only to realize you forgot a family member's birthday? We've all experienced making the call of shame the next day, the apologies, and reassurance that we meant to call and that something special (very special) is on the way.

We've all been told, "It's the thought that counts!" But there's a difference between hearing someone meant to send flowers and the excitement of hearing the knock on the front door. There's a difference between a kind text message and a friend who's actually beside us when we get the phone call from the doctor with bad news.

It's so much easier to love people with our intentions than to love them in real life. It's exciting to scheme ways to make the world a little more beautiful. We can Google the details of our plans and tell our friends what we dreamed up. We can blog about it to raise awareness or have a Kickstarter campaign to raise money. Often, though, this is just brain candy. While it makes us feel good, it doesn't do much to move the needle in people's lives. No one is remembered for what they just *planned* to do.

Just like great characters in films are remembered by what they *do* and not by what they merely think about, we're known for our actions. The power of love is in the sacrifice and commitment it requires. Sacrifice and commitment always travel with love and action. Love looks like showing up with hands to help even when we don't know what to do. Love looks like stopping by even if we don't know what to say. Simply put, love doesn't just think about it; love does it.

**Who have you been "planning" to demonstrate love to?
What can you do today to follow through on that plan?**

12. DON'T JUST DO WHAT YOU'RE ABLE TO DO; FIGURE OUT WHAT YOU WERE MADE TO DO, THEN DO A LOT OF THAT.

This is why it is said: "Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

EPHESIANS 5:14

I've always had a soft spot for the kids on sports teams who seem to put the jersey on to please their parents. I look at those kids and feel myself melt with compassion. I want to tell them they are awesome just the way they are, no home runs required. I want to tell them God gave them unique gifts and passions, and they're free to run after all of them, whether they come with a jersey or not. They don't have to stick to kicking soccer balls just because it makes the people around them happy. I want them to figure out what sparks life in them and throw themselves into it without caring whether anyone is watching.

We all have capabilities. For example, I'm a lawyer by training and have loads of states I can practice law in. But just because I'm able to be a lawyer doesn't mean I'm made to be a lawyer. We don't need to do what we're merely capable of doing. The trick is to figure out what we were made to do and then make some changes to keep current with who we've become. We're all constantly changing. We're new creations. It's supposed to be this way. Don't resist the change. Go with it. Don't be limited by what you excel at. Ask God to show you what the newest version of you was made to do.

Kids who are pressured too much to fit into a box that doesn't fit who they are turning into will let you know about it. Many adults don't, though. We tolerate jobs no longer meant for us. The truth is, too many of us are a job or two behind who we've turned into. You may have picked your career path because it's something you were competent at in college, but it's not you anymore. Some of us are still crunching numbers because our parents did it and they sold us on the idea of a certain kind of career success. They helped us get a "good job" when what we're looking for is an epic life.

You not only have the freedom to make the changes you need to make; you must. With the urgency of a rock in your shoe you haven't stopped to take out, act on the ache you feel when you see someone else living out the story you always wanted—the story you were made to live.

It's never too late to do what you were made to do. You didn't make a wrong turn before; you merely turned into someone else. Go with it. It might mean a career change, or it might simply mean shifting your schedule to prioritize your newfound passions. Whatever it looks like at this stage of your life, figure out what you were made to do and then do a lot of that.

Forget who you've been and what you've done. If you had to claim it right now, what are you made to do?

13. IF YOU WANT TO FLY, YOU HAVE TO FAIL. DON'T BE TOO HARD ON YOURSELF WHEN YOU DO.

Though the righteous fall seven times, they rise again, but the wicked stumble when calamity strikes.

PROVERBS 24:16

I started an airline once. It sounds impressive, but it really isn't. Here was the idea. I live for part of each year far away from everyone in Canada. The nearest home is more than ten thousand square miles away. I thought it would be cool to have a fleet of amphibious planes that take off and land on the water to fly folks to mountain lakes and other inaccessible places like the place I live with my family. So I got a dock, hired some pilots, gave them fancy airline hats, and bought a bunch of official-looking pilot shirts with the gold stripes on the shoulders. I had everything in place except one minor detail—I didn't have an airplane. I'm not kidding.

I checked around, and buying an airplane that was already flying was too expensive, so we assembled our first one by picking over grounded planes—a couple of wings here, a fuselage there, a tire from that one—oh, and a propeller. We assembled our airplane from all the parts and stood next to it. The Wright brothers could not have been prouder. We put a Krispy Kreme-inspired paint job on it just so folks knew how serious we were. It looked delicious, if only barely airworthy. Simply put: we moved from thinking about this idea to trying it.

Chances are, you've started your own small airline before too. You've made a paper airplane, right? Then you've got one. Sure, it's a small airline, but who cares? The things that keep us from pursuing our dreams are often the failures and letdowns we've experienced in the past. Don't let who you were decide who you're becoming. The setbacks we all face can be big or small. We can spend all sorts of time carefully folding paper, hoping for the coolest-looking plane, or we can throw it into the air and see if it flies.

What if you decide in advance that failure isn't going to be a limiting factor

in your life anymore? Strip from the past the power you've given it over your future. Imagine what would happen if you realized one of the most crucial steps to getting from where you are to where you want to go is to not be afraid of making a couple of mistakes along the way. You're never going to land the plane in your life until you make enough mistakes to get your idea airborne. Will it work? There's only one way to find out.

What past failures have kept you grounded, and what steps are you going to take today to get back in the air?

14. DO A CANNONBALL WITH YOUR LIFE. IT'S OKAY TO GET A LITTLE WET.

When [Jesus] had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."

LUKE 5:4

When we play Monopoly at my house, everyone races to land on Boardwalk first. If you've played the game, you know Boardwalk is the most valuable property on the board. It can win you the game, but you have to take on some risk to buy it and build there. In Monopoly, you can't earn big money without risking a lot. If you only put a little on the line, you won't see much of a return. Sometimes you've got to go big to achieve your goals.

The same is true about us and the character we want to develop in our lives. Maybe we're skimping on our relationships, playing it safe and staying on the sidelines. Maybe we're coasting in a job because it pays the bills even though it bores us to tears. What if you were to flip it around? What would it look like to go all in with your life? Don't put your toe in the water; grab your knees and do a cannonball. Push all the chips to the center of the table. I know you'll be scared. Do it anyway. It's where the good stuff happens.

Forget buying Boardwalk. What would it look like to say yes to vulnerability in big ways? Tell someone you trust what's really going on inside of you, not what you wish were going on. If it's fear you need to move past, blow past it like it's not even there. Are you willing to risk failure, hoping you might be surprised by success? If it's learning to love a group of people you don't understand, what if you left the comfort of your easy relationships to build a couple of new ones with people you know might be a little more difficult but would stretch you?

There's no shortcut to big change; it always comes with big risk. Are you willing to take yours today? Don't make a list; make a call. You just might be surprised by the life you find on the other side of what's holding you back.

What vulnerable step do you need to take next?

15. DON'T LET OTHER PEOPLE DECIDE WHO YOU ARE. ONLY GOD GETS TO NAME US.

I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

JOHN 15:15

The nicknames we were given as kids often stick with us our entire lives. Sometimes the nicknames are given to us in jest and bear no resemblance to us. For instance, the basketball center called “Shorty” or the football linebacker called “Tiny.” Other times they can be spot-on.

When we're most innocent and vulnerable, we sometimes latch on to the worst labels, then carry them with us wherever we go. These aren't labels others give us in jest, they're names we give ourselves through our pain. For some of us, it's self-effacing names we gave ourselves about our weight or our intelligence. For others, it's about where we lived or how much money our parents had or didn't have. So many of us were labeled by whatever it was that made us stand out, and the label stuck to us like duct tape and continues to define us today.

Our Creator cleared it up for us, though. When Jesus called Peter a “rock” after he had failed, He demonstrated that many of these labels we've given ourselves just aren't true; they're lies masquerading as reality (Matthew 16:18). When you find yourself calling yourself by a name that just isn't true, remember what God calls us—He calls us His beloved.

We're all different. Not just a little bit different, but wonderfully and sometimes dramatically so. God chose to put different parts of His image inside every single person, so we all reflect Him in unique ways. Not so we would ricochet off of each other, but so we could refract His light in us in wonderfully colorful ways. What made you stand out as unique might be the thing God wants to use to show what He looks like to the rest of the world. What people used to tear you down is something God wants to use to build you up.

The swirls that make marbled stone so unique are also the points of greatest

weakness. Don't let your uniqueness break you. Don't let your failures define you. Don't give or receive names God never had for you.

The critics don't get the final word in God's kingdom. God gets to tell us who we are, and He says we're loved. Not just a little, and not for a while, but from here to eternity and back. The next time you hear the old tapes that make you feel unworthy, remember that the God who spoke the universe into existence, who hears the thoughts you don't speak out loud, says you're beloved and you're His. That's His name for you.

**What nickname have you given yourself or been given
by others that has hurt your sense of worth?**

16. WHEN WE SAY WE'RE WAITING ON GOD, WE'RE PROBABLY JUST STALLING.

Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

1 CORINTHIANS 11:1

Sometimes when someone says they're waiting on God, really they're just stalling. We're all prone to that more often than we'd like to admit. It can happen when there's a big decision before us and our gut has already given us an answer. Instead of making moves, we make lists. It can happen when the Bible gives a command but we rationalize why we should wait. We say we're waiting on God, but this isn't what's happening.

We'll pray more often and go on retreats to listen closely for God's voice. We'll talk it over with friends and Google our options late into the night. Maybe we'll give it a rest to see if the thing we know we need to do eventually resurfaces, telling ourselves, *Then I'll know it was from God*. But when we say we're waiting on God, He's often waiting on us.

In the life of Jesus, we get an example of how we're to live in the world. We know we're here to welcome people who look like strangers. We're here to offer places in our homes for those with nowhere to go. We're here to be friends with the lonely, the ones who were told they weren't worthy of love. The Bible is constantly talking about care for widows and orphans, the most vulnerable in society. You don't need another Bible study about the "will of God"; perhaps you need to decide you will simply do something.

If we're waiting on God to find out whether or not we should live a little more like Jesus, don't waste any more time—the answer is *yes*. We don't find many answers tied to the dock; we find them when we go all in on love. If you're feeling stuck, don't create a safe harbor by saying you're still waiting for God. Cast off the lines, point your boat toward the open seas, and set sail. There's a good chance God's waiting on you to make the next move.

What message have you been waiting to hear that you need to act on instead of waiting longer?

17. WHERE WE SEE HOLES WE'VE DUG, GOD SEES FOUNDATIONS HE'S MAKING.

Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy.

PROVERBS 28:13

Up in British Columbia, I like to dig holes in the ground for different projects. There are excavators and tractors and drilling rigs, and I like to put them all to good use. It's a paradise for a guy who likes to make things happen. I built a chapel and a barn, and we blazed some new trails to the mountaintops. We built a bridge to cross a ravine I couldn't quite jump.

More than anything, though, I enjoy the surprised look on Sweet Maria's face when she finds out what I've been up to with all the diggers, tractors, and dynamite. For my latest project, I got a little wild with the dynamite, blew a big hole in the ground, and filled it with water. Once the new lake was done, I took Maria to have a look. I wanted to give her the naming rights. When we were getting close, I asked her, "So, what are we going to name the lake I'm taking you to?" She answered, "What lake?!" Now we have a lake named What Lake. That'll be fun to explain to the grandkids.

God does that with all the holes we make in our lives. We think we've blown it again, but He points to them and says, "This'll make a great spot to pour out My love." Sometimes He makes lakes for us to dive in and other times He makes foundations for building our character on. No matter what, God finds us in the holes we've dug for ourselves. Where we see our failures, God sees foundations He's making.

**What hole do you have in your life that God can
use to build deeper character in you?**

18. WE CAN'T BE NEW CREATIONS IF EVERYTHING STAYS THE SAME.

“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

LUKE 10:41-42

Ask a few folks how they're doing today, and I guarantee you at least one will raise their eyebrows and say, “Busy!” Whether it's a mom juggling soccer practices and gymnastics, or a college student keeping up with classes and running for student government, or the person working at Arby's slicing the roast beef, everyone has their head down and their plate full of activity. It's not surprising that we often find our identity in the things we accomplish. We let responsibilities and activities in our lives build layer by layer on top of us until we finally break underneath them.

A lot of beauty gets buried in that hustle. What most of us long for, more than anything else, is a community where we can simply be known and loved. We want to be seen for who we actually are, not what we do or the person we appear to be. And we want to see others in their vulnerability too. This is the deepest need we all feel, and it's the easiest to meet in one another when we choose to make ourselves available.

If your schedule robs you of the joy of simply being fully present with the people you love, then it's time to quit a couple of things. We can't be new creations if everything stays the same. Don't feel stuck in all your activities; bail on the few that are robbing you of your ability to be present with the people you love the most. Friendship and hospitality are central to our new identity, and we can't welcome people into our lives if we're too busy to be available to them.

Quit something today. A job, a habit, a hobby, or sport that is stealing you away from the ones you love the most. You've been given not only permission by God to prioritize people over projects but the agency to do something about it.

**What activities are getting in the way of
your experiencing deeper love?**

19. GOD DOESN'T TRY TO ENTICE US WITH SUCCESS OR PUNISH US WITH FAILURE; HE WANTS TO CAPTIVATE US WITH PURPOSE.

I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

ROMANS 8:38-39

When we were kids, for many of us life seemed to spin on a cycle of rewards and punishment. Life was performance based. If we got straight A's or hit the home run, we could go out for ice cream or on that camping trip with the Boy Scouts. If we struck out in a relationship or failed a friend or embarrassed our family, we were grounded. It was as if love would be given and withdrawn like the movements of the tide. It was about what we did more than who we were. It was only natural to assume God worked the same way. Do good things and succeed and you receive love and approval from God. Mess up and love is withdrawn.

If only we could remind ourselves more often that God never cares about the grades on our report cards. He wants us to make it all about His love, not our performance, and He's a whole lot more concerned about our character than our accomplishments. He doesn't find joy in our success; He delights in our attempts.

God's response to our success is love, not merely approval. And God's response when we fail is massive love. Nothing will separate you from His love. Money and big houses and status aren't what God offers us if we behave ourselves, and He doesn't punish us with loss or sickness when we make a mess of things. Are there consequences when we fail? You bet. Often, in fact; but one of them isn't that God pulls away. The opposite occurs. He draws close to us. He wants us to put our passion into action because He knows it is in our pursuit of Him where we'll find our greatest joy. He wants us to be captivated with purpose, regardless of whether it looks like worldly success.

If you find yourself believing God stacks all your successes on one side of a scale and your failures on the other to measure how you're doing, remember that the only curve He grades on always tips toward His extravagant and inexplicable love.

**What success or failure has been getting in the way
of your experiencing God's deep love for you?**

20. GOD ISN'T AFRAID OF OUR DOUBTS; HE'S WAY MORE CONCERNED WHEN WE FAKE IT.

Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight.

HEBREWS 4:13

My all-time favorite game to play with our kids when they were young was hide-and-seek. I would walk into the room and see two feet, a knee, a child-sized bulge under the blanket, or perhaps an ear sticking out from behind a curtain. The kids thought they would be hard to find when, actually, they were hard to miss.

I think that's how God sees us when we try to hide who we really are from Him. He knows the thoughts we're too embarrassed to mention and the feelings we can't articulate, and He knows about all our uncertainties. He hears the prayers we wouldn't have the courage to even whisper and knows our hopes that are still being developed.

Yet we still try to hide who we really are from Him. Perhaps we think if we just hide how we really feel, what we really want, and how scared we really are, He won't see us behind the curtains we've made. Hiding from God didn't work in the garden of Eden, and it still doesn't work. He asks us now what He asked Adam and Eve then—*Where are you?*

God isn't afraid of our doubts. He's not put off when we struggle to believe, and He's not surprised when we don't understand what a God who says He surpasses all understanding is doing. He's not keeping track of the number of days when we feel close to Him, nor is He docking points when we wonder if He's even there. Instead, He sympathizes with our fears that He might not be as good as He's promised.

It's the very reason God sent His Son, Jesus, to us. Jesus came to give us a living example of the God we couldn't see, because He knew we needed someone who would feel the weight of our weakness while still living authentically into both His deity and His humanity. His response to Thomas, who saw Jesus in the flesh and still doubted, wasn't a scolding; it was grace (John 20:24–29). You pick any story out of the Bible and you'll find the same. This is still His

response to you and me. We need to get real enough with Him about our doubts so He can be Jesus enough with His grace. Simply put, we don't need to hide anymore.

What parts of your life are you hiding from God?

21. IF YOU WANT TO DAZZLE GOD, BE YOU.

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

ROMANS 15:7

For many years, our family would invite a bunch of friends every summer up to our lodge in Canada. We spent weeks getting ready, and when we finally saw the boat bringing them in from several miles away, we would jump into a boat and speed out to greet them.

One of the things I have loved most is that we host people from all walks of life, from many differing worldviews, from every side of a debate, from places locked in war with each other, and everywhere in between. People who usually sit at different tables join my family for the week at the same table, laughing together and dreaming some dreams.

Since when did we decide as a community of faith that having the same beliefs and opinions was a prerequisite for loving, accepting, and welcoming someone? It's not enough to just tolerate or be polite to people we disagree with and for them to merely do this with us. We need to love each other without an agenda. Do it any other way and we signal to each other that others need to be like us to be liked by us. The cost of acceptance is way too high if it costs people who God made them to be.

Life is so much better when we get to be authentically who we are and others get to be authentically who they are. All of this isn't part of a plan to make other people change; it's all done in the hopes that we'll change. And guess what? It works. The people I used to think of as difficult I now think of as delightfully different. We don't just tolerate those who are different from us at the lodge—we celebrate them! We delight in the way each person shows us a side of ourselves or Jesus we hadn't quite seen until we met them.

Instead of implying to people that they need to change in order to be welcome at the table, let them know they're welcome just as they are. You don't need to be someone else to be loved by God, and no one else does either. If you want to dazzle God, go be you.

Who's on the opposite side of the table from you in your world?

What's your first step to building connection with them?

22. LOVE DOESN'T OBEY ALL THE RULES WE TRY TO GIVE IT.

My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism.

JAMES 2:1

My kids always made up silly games when they were young. I didn't understand *at all* how to play them, how you won, or what the purpose was. But that didn't matter because I loved being with my kids. We didn't need a set of rules or a clear winner for the time to be meaningful.

I think love works the same way: love doesn't obey all the rules we try to give it anyway. Sure, we might tell ourselves to take it slow, to play it cool; but love can't wait for us to get ourselves sorted out. I've heard the phrases "true love" and "tough love" used in an attempt to distinguish the kind of love we're giving or experiencing, but love doesn't come in flavors; it travels with us.

Just like little kids in a make-believe game, love finds its own way because it's never stationary. It lives on the move, not in containment. It can't sit still for long because it's too eager to find people to express itself to.

It's good to have boundaries in our relationships, but it's also okay to break the rules every now and again too. People will tell you not to give money if you don't know how someone will spend it, but sometimes love tells you to give it away anyway. People will tell you to turn off your phone to create space to reflect and recharge, but sometimes love answers the call. People will try to put principles in place to give order to our lives, and that's fine. But love doesn't obey all the rules we try to give it, so don't get hung up making them.

**What "rule" do you need to break so you
can be more loving to others?**

23. GOD'S MORE INTERESTED IN WHERE WE'RE HEADING WITH HIM THAN ALL THE PLACES WE'VE GONE ALONE.

Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails.

PROVERBS 19:21

I bet I've been to fifty different countries so far. I spend half my life on planes because I want to be where people are. Since people are everywhere, it kind of makes sense. Every now and again, I'll look at pictures and reminisce on past adventures. I get to remember all the people who have changed my life, even the ones who helped me grow a few gray hairs. Occasionally I'll come across pictures that make me a little sad, though, because I'll remember it was a time I tried to tackle something without God's help. Do you know what I'm talking about? Those times where you think to yourself, *Don't worry God, I've got this one?*

You see, God's more interested in where we're heading with Him than all the places we've gone alone. He's not that impressed with our flashy social media posts if those pictures tell a story of a life lived without Him. He wants to be in the mix of it with us. He wants to surprise us with unexpected joys and spread love to others through us.

The exciting part about looking through old photos is the transformation we can see: if I flip a few pages back in the scrapbook, I'll see how I moved from going at it alone to going with God. The moment we turn to Him, He sometimes throws a party—but not always. More often, He nods to us and moves with us to the next adventure.

What project are you working on without God's help?

24. OUR FAITH ISN'T ALL THE THINGS WE SAY WE BELIEVE; IT'S WHAT WE DO NEXT.

You, Lord, are forgiving and good, abounding in love to all who call to you.

PSALM 86:5

When we try to follow Jesus, grace always meets us when we fall off the wagon. No matter how far we fall, God is there to take us back the moment we turn to Him. We don't have to give a long acceptance speech to receive His grace. We don't even need to get our act together first—He scoops us into His arms when we're still covered in mud from head to toe and calls us beautifully His. Is this fair? Heck no. Don't worry about it.

What that also means is this: we can't count on yesterday's faithfulness on our part to carry us through tomorrow's problems. Since it's never been about us being good enough or having the right answers, we can't just ease into cruise control. God doesn't care how many Bible studies you've been to. He isn't wowed because we've memorized a couple of verses either. He only cares about what we do next with what we already know, and every day we all start in the same place.

Sometimes we get so carried away trying to be right that we forget to be kind. We forget Jesus didn't ask us to have all the answers. He also doesn't need us to be the hall monitors of other people's conduct. He had a few strong words for the people who appointed themselves as protectors of truth. Jesus simply asked us to follow Him, not to monitor who everyone else is. And following Him sometimes means identifying with and hanging out with the very ones the religious people rejected.

If we find ourselves more concerned with proving we have all the right knowledge about Jesus than living out the message of Jesus, we need to get back to where we started when we first heard about grace. Is this going to be tough at times? You bet. Our faith isn't all the things we say believe; it's what we do next.

In what ways have you been trying to prove your commitment to God instead of trusting His approval of you?

25. GOD ISN'T AS CONCERNED ABOUT THE OUTCOMES AS WE ARE. HE WANTS US TO BE HIS WHILE WE TRY.

“Come now, let us settle the matter,” says the LORD. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”

ISAIAH 1:18

If you've never been to a kids' baseball game, you're in for a real treat when you go. At least one time a game, when a kid happens to connect the bat with the ball, I bet you'll see them dart toward third base while the fans erupt with applause. Meanwhile, there's at least one player sitting down in the outfield, picking dandelions and blowing them out like birthday candles. At the end of the game, the kids line up to give high fives and then, win or lose, everyone gets a free soda and everyone makes a mad dash, side by side, for the concession stand where snacks are waiting.

Those games always remind me of how God feels about us. He doesn't get wound up when our plans fail, and He's not thrown off when we run in the wrong direction. We're the ones who came up with competitions, winners and losers. These distinctions were never part of God's plan. And God never told us that success meant big accomplishments. Success with Him has always meant simply living in grace and walking in love.

Have you blown it? Me too. Next time you feel like you've missed the mark, go watch a kids' baseball game. Watch the kids who wander around the outfield with curiosity and wonder. God delights in their joy even though they don't always have their eye on the ball. He delights in you too. Look at their faces when they guzzle the postgame sodas and remember God isn't as concerned about the outcomes as we are. He doesn't care what jersey we wear. He just wants us to be His while we try.

How have you blown it lately? Are you letting that setback convince you that God thinks less of you?

26. HEAVEN'S LEANING OVER THE RAILS, WONDERING IF WE'LL BE AS COURAGEOUS AS GOD THINKS WE ARE.

It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

EPHESIANS 2:8-10

I remember when my daughter, Lindsey, took her first steps. She was my first child, so I had never witnessed the moment a person goes from the “not walking” column to the “walking” one. For a few weeks, she would crawl and find the edge of the coffee table. Then she'd pull herself up, wondering if she should give it go. One fateful morning, after weeks of backing down, she made her first wobbly steps. Maria and I were holding out our arms, cheering and yelling. You would think she has just won the Iditarod the way we were carrying on.

Have you ever seen a parent watching their child take their first steps, who folds their arms and says nonchalantly “I've seen better”? Of course not! They're over the moon. I think that's how God sees us. He's not disappointed that we haven't already taken big steps or made big moves. He's already a few steps ahead of us, holding out His arms. He's waiting to see if we'll be as courageous as He thinks we are. When we take the step, He isn't surprised when we stumble, nor is He angry when we fall. He rushes toward us and scoops us into His arms.

A lot of people make God out to be an angry dad. I used to think God's expectation was perfection and that anything less made me a disappointment. No matter how hard I tried, I never believed I made God proud. But over the years I've come to realize God is far more like the proud parent who celebrates the steps rather than one who fixates on the stumbles. God delights in our every move, every brave step, no matter how small. Go make yours.

**What small steps have you taken lately
that God could be proud of?**

27. REAL FAILURES ARE SO MUCH BETTER THAN FAKE SUCCESSES. DON'T BE AFRAID TO PUT A FEW THINGS ON THE LINE.

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:8-9

They say that for every one good idea a person has, they had to produce at least forty bad ones to get there. I'm pretty sure the numbers are skewed because my ratio's at least one hundred bad for every good one, but who's counting? Usually when I feel like I've failed, it's because my definition of failure is a little off.

Sure, we might have to shut the doors on an organization we poured into for years. A vacation we planned for the kids might devolve into a week of petty arguments and ketchup smears all over the car. We might have given our all to college only to find we weren't cut out for the classroom. It doesn't always mean we failed. Sometimes it just means it's time for a change.

We often use other people's metrics to define what was a success and what was a failure. Even when our plans fail, we usually realize a lot of people were loved in the process, which was our goal in starting. We ended up crossing paths with people we might never have met if we hadn't put ourselves out there. Sometimes these people even nestle their way into our inner circle.

Beyond my faith, the goal I have in life is to find people to share it with. Our ideas are a success if we have more friends when they end. Our failures make us more real too. They give us more in common with everyone else who has experienced frustration and loss. You never know: whether it's a small, private failure or a big, public one, the impact our lives will have is sometimes much greater in our failures than in our successes. Try something big. Dust off that big idea you've had. Stop waiting. Don't worry about if it won't work. Be concerned if you won't give it a whirl. I'd rather have a couple of ideas fail than a faith that won't try.

What failure in your life do you need to redefine?

28. FAITH ISN'T FIGURING OUT WHAT WE'RE ABLE TO DO. IT'S DECIDING WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO EVEN WHEN WE THINK WE CAN'T.

Jesus replied, "What is impossible with man is possible with God."

LUKE 18:27

I love how much Jesus talked about kids when He taught. He spoke to audiences packed with people who had memorized entire books of the Bible, religious leaders who were the recognized authorities on religious truth, leaders in the community. I bet they expected to be commended by Jesus for all their titles and degrees and perhaps affirmed as the ones who should be the guides for everyone else. Yet this isn't how Jesus rolled. Instead, He pointed to a couple of kids and told everyone that if they wanted to find understanding, they would need to trade in their large, complicated faith and have faith like a child. In other words, it wouldn't be when we earn the extra theology degrees or enter into formal ministry when faith leaps forward. Jesus said our faith will grow when we regain a sense of childlike wonder.

Nothing is impossible to kids. Ask them what they want to be when they grow up and they'll tell you, in all sincerity, they're going to wear NASA suits and fly to the moon. Sometimes I wonder if the only reason more of them don't do it is because we adults spend the next few decades telling them they can't. It's like we have our hands on their shoulders as they sit and each time we tell them to get up and chase their dream, we also tell them why it won't work. With each of these words of correction, we push them down a little harder into their seats.

But faith puts reason in its place. There's nothing wrong with using the minds God has given us. When our heads tell our hearts that our dreams are too big, or that we should grow up and be more reasonable with our faith, this is just a reminder to go find your kids playing and park and watch them interact with the same world you're living in. Then take them to get snow cones with extra syrup, get it all over your shirts, and let them tell you about their big,

messy, outrageous dreams. Children are the ones Jesus sent to be our guides because faith isn't figuring out what we're able to do. It's deciding what we're going to do even when we think we can't.

**What's an outrageous dream you've buried that
God might want you to dig up again?**