

CATCHING WHIMSY

365 DAYS *of* POSSIBILITY

BOB GOFF



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Catching Whimsy

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*To Sweet Maria Goff and our kids and their
spouses and their kids and their kids.*



INTRODUCTION

Why a devotional called *Catching Whimsy*? A couple of reasons. First, we can't catch what we don't chase. I want to provide you with some daily thoughts to help you chase after a more meaningful life, experience a more engaged faith, and approach the challenges that will likely come your way with greater intention and confidence than perhaps you have experienced in the past.

Next, I want to give you a daily tap on the shoulder to remind you that God is over the moon about you and your beautiful, often complicated life. He is not looking for the easiest path forward for you but the most purposeful and lasting one.

Finally, I want to whisper some truth, hope, and whimsy into as many of your days as you will allow me to, with the hope that some truths you find in these pages will turn out to be louder than all the other noise competing for your heart and attention every day.

Whimsy isn't something we just stumble into, happen upon, or that sticks to us unnoticed like a dryer sheet. It is something we need to chase after every day with intention, resolve, and tenacity, not unlike a child trying to catch a bubble as it floats in the air. It's not easy to do, but you can spot someone who has caught up to whimsy a mile away. It shows up as joy and hope and generosity and selflessness and endless amounts of curiosity.

In the past few years, the idea of catching something has gotten a well-deserved bad rap. I want to reclaim the phrase and suggest that some things, like whimsy and wonder and passion and the ability to give and receive extravagant love, are worth catching. The truth is each of us are only one or two decisions away from a more beautiful and winsome life; we just need to decide to access it through a door God leaves ajar for us each day.

A while back, I wanted to find a book that emphasized the love and radical acceptance Jesus demonstrated in His life, but I couldn't find one that spoke about it using plain and simple language and that offered the message in a relatable context. I couldn't relate to twenty-dollar words and the theologically complicated and lengthy explanations I found. I didn't want to know what the words in the Scriptures meant in Greek or Aramaic or Hebrew about dealing

with the lovely people I encountered on Sunday mornings; I wanted something that would help me live out the impossible demands of Jesus on a Tuesday or Wednesday evening with the difficult, sometimes prickly people I assume are just as insecure as I am, but maybe less adept than me at hiding it. So I decided to write what I couldn't find.

For the past decade and a half, I have been writing books about loving people the way Jesus did and I have attempted to communicate Jesus' messages the way He did—with stories. The Scriptures say Jesus never spoke to anyone without telling them a story or two, and I think I know why. We remember the stories we are told much longer than all the information that comes our way. For this reason alone, I have organized this daily devotional around telling stories that *connect to faith*, rather than merely giving information *about faith*.

I have also written these devotional passages and the stories they are wrapped in to point you toward certain questions to consider. When I have written in the past about how to move from merely thinking about doing big things to acting on those ambitions, I have asked my readers to tease out answers for themselves to questions like these: What do you want? Why do you want it? And what are you going to do about it?

My hope is that the passages in this book will help you not only ask these questions of yourself but also find a more courageous and authentic path forward, as well as unlock answers to the questions that have snagged you and kept you stuck in place.

But don't stop at simply finding answers. Finding answers might lead you to a more informed life, but not necessarily a better or more obedient one. It is what we do with the information we amass that says the most about who we really are. When we stop at finding the answers instead of actually doing something with them, we run the risk of getting stuck in an endless cycle of planning that doesn't lead to action.

My hope is that when you turn each page of this book, you will not merely agree with the words I have written but replace that endless cycle of planning with doing something about what you believe. I hope you will entertain the possibility that God does not want us to spend our lives caught up in figuring out His will for us but instead wants us to find a new gear to access a more loving and adventurous relationship with Him, one full of connection and wonder and possibility.

Hear me when I write that despite all the Bible verses you will find in these pages, this is not a religious book. Instead, these pages are filled to the brim

with ideas drawn from the many books and letters that make up the Bible. C. S. Lewis famously wrote, “One road leads home and a thousand lead into the wilderness.”¹ For some of you, the verses you will find in these pages might be familiar; for others, they may be new.

Whatever your background and experience with faith, both good and bad, I hope you will find both comfort and acceptance in God’s words to us in the Bible and in the application of them to your life, because words without application are merely more noise in an already loud room. I hope these words will lead you to a quiet place, a deep level of gratitude, and perhaps even lead you home to a renewed sense of whimsy.

Let’s go catch a couple of bubbles of truth together. Let the chase begin!



JANUARY

AMBITIONS AREN'T BAD WHEN THEY'RE DRIVEN BY LOVE

I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

EPHESIANS 4:1

Have you ever felt selfish about pursuing an ambition? It's easy to equate ambition with selfishness. Don't take the bait. Ambition and selfishness are entirely different things. Give this a try: Write down your ambitions using four columns. In the first column on the left side, write down your highest lasting values. These will be the things that express your faith, your hopes, and what you want to be remembered for long after you are gone. In the second column, write all your ambitions, and draw a line connecting these ambitions to your high and lasting values. In the next column, write down the reasons you are uniquely equipped to do these things. And on the far-right side, in the final column, list the reason(s) you think you shouldn't pursue an ambition or why you think it might be selfish to do so.

It's easy to see our ambitions with a critical eye. But look at your list and be honest with yourself. Are you avoiding an ambition because it's truly selfish or because you have a boatload of self-doubt? Remember, it's not selfish to exercise your gifts and chase the opportunities God brings your way.

I'm a guy who gets a lot of calls after putting my cell phone number in the back of millions of books. When I did it, I didn't know if I'd get one call or one thousand, but I knew I wanted to be available. What if you were to say to the world, "I want to be available to the things that God has already put inside me"?

We can't always control the opportunities that come, but we can decide to make ourselves available when they do. Start today by saying, "God, I am available to those things that might come my way that uniquely sync up with what You already made me good at."

It is not selfish to take the beautiful ambitions God has uniquely called you to and do the heavy lifting it takes to accomplish them. In fact, it might be selfish not to.

Get busy. Start making your lists, and add a dash of whimsy to them.

MEASURE IT TWICE; CUT IT ONCE

Plans fail for lack of counsel,
but with many advisers they succeed.

PROVERBS 15:22

We all need a plan to succeed, yet it can't be all planning and no strategy. It can't be all strategy either; we must figure out the moving parts along the way.

Omar Bradley was an army general in World War II who famously said that amateurs talk strategy while professionals talk logistics. I agree. But the truth is we can't do without either; we need the right amount of both. As you think through what worthy ambitions you want to pursue next, you will need one scoop of strategy and two scoops of logistics.

Try this exercise. Talk about this year as if it already happened and you are reviewing it. What would you say about it? Most of us wouldn't say, "I really didn't do anything, and that was exactly what I was aiming for." Instead, we might list the things we can envision having completed.

But don't just stop at listing the tasks you want to have completed; think about who you would want to help you with the logistics of making it happen. Get those people on board right now, so you can avoid the year-end review where you kick yourself for not having the right team together to execute your ideas.

There is an old woodworking saying: "Measure it twice; cut it once." Once you have a viable plan, ask yourself who you need in your life to help you measure it a second time and who can help you cut it once.

RELATIONSHIP AUDIT: KEEPING OUR ACCOUNTS IN THE POSITIVE

So that we may not cause offense, go to the lake, and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours.

MATTHEW 17:27

Even the early followers of Jesus had to engage with the day-to-day matters we deal with. They had plenty of things to manage, including their finances. There was a tax collector who came to check in on Jesus. You can think of it as the first time Jesus was audited. The collector said, “There’s this two-drachma tax. Did you pay it?” One of Jesus’ friends said, in effect, that Jesus did pay His taxes. They had nothing to hide, but they did have some accounting to do.

Audits can be a real hassle and something to avoid when it comes to paying taxes. But auditing our lives is actually a great thing to do. Just like we account for our income and losses every year, we should regularly be looking at where we are with our family, faith, friends, generosity, availability, and more.

The first thing God did in Genesis was create, and the second thing He did was hover over what He had just created. Do the same in your life. Hover over your family for a moment. Ask yourself, *What does each family member need that only I can give them?* Next, hover over your faith, and ask yourself, as you look back over this past year, *Has my faith grown, or is it staying about the same?* Don’t beat yourself up with your answer; understand yourself better with your response. Now, hover over your friends for a moment. Do an audit on each relationship. Who are the people you are pouring into? Is there a quick call you can make to speak some words of truth over them? Finally, hover over yourself, and ask yourself what you want to do in this coming year.

Adopt a practice of setting aside time every year to audit the various areas of your life. For each of these areas, ask yourself, *Just as God is providing what I need, how can I be a part of providing what the people around me need?* God is probably not going to give you a fish with a \$20 bill in its mouth, but He might have already given you a friend who needs just the right word, in just the right season.

Ready to begin your audit?

MOTIVATION MATTERS

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

GALATIANS 6:9

I have had plenty of passing interests and habits, like my brief fascination with making saltwater taffy. But some habits—the ones that are genuinely good for my heart, soul, and those around me—I want to keep around longer. I want these to etch a fresh groove in my mind and become a fundamental part of my life. But how do we make these new ideas for our lives stick?

The key isn't just creating new habits; it's understanding the underlying reasons for developing those habits. If you haven't been able to stick to a new habit, it might be because you haven't found it worthwhile in the grand scheme of your life. In the sea of possibilities, it didn't have enough buoyancy to rise to the top. To lift your new idea to the top, you need to get clear about the compelling reasons for it. A truly good reason isn't simply that someone told you to do it; that's compliance, and compliance won't stand up to the test of time and life as it happens. Instead, you need reasons that speak to the deepest parts of you and will truly motivate you.

If I say, "I'm going to run every morning," for example, my underlying reason might be that I want to be healthy and able to be present in people's lives. It's the foundation of a habit that makes it meaningful, not the decision to merely have a new practice. Remembering these foundational reasons will provide you with the momentum and enthusiasm to carry it through.

One last thing: don't be too hard on yourself. You're going to slip up, and that's okay. Adopting new practices isn't about adding one more thing to fail at; it's about risk and extending yourself some grace.

So, as you endeavor to form new habits, get clear on your reasons for each habit and then surround yourself with people who genuinely encourage you and remind you why it's worth it.

Establish something new, whimsical, and lasting in your life.

JANUARY 5

TELL OTHERS WHO THEY ARE BECOMING THROUGH GOD'S EYES

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

PHILIPPIANS 2:3-4

Did you know helping others find their way forward can help you find your way forward as well? In his letter to the Philippians, Paul told the early church that one way to live out their faith was to do it the way a friend of his, Timothy, did it—by taking a genuine interest in the people around him.

When you take a genuine interest in others, you stop telling them what you think they ought to do, and instead find yourself reminding them who you think they are becoming. Every day, we can tell the people around us about the things they might not see in themselves.

For instance, Jesus didn't say to Peter after he had denied even knowing Him, "Peter, you're such a wimp." Instead, He reminded Peter of who he was becoming, telling him, "Peter, you're a rock." He took a genuine interest in Peter at a time when Peter thought he was a failure. Jesus thought Peter had a bright future, not a sordid past. God didn't see a loser revealed; He saw a leader emerging.

We will become what the people around us say we are. Don't take my word for it, look at the Scriptures. Peter became a rock, Moses became a leader, King David became humble, Rahab got brave, Nicodemus became faithful, Paul got loving, Jonah wasn't fish bait anymore, the leper got healed, the woman at the well changed, the centurion was amazed, Matthew the tax collector reformed, the prodigal ran home, the criminal next to Jesus woke up in paradise, and you arrived on earth as a son or daughter of the living God.

This is what happens when people start seeing themselves the way God does.

**Let's be a part of helping those around
us see what God sees in them.**

DELIGHT IN SMALL BEGINNINGS—GOD DOES

Do not despise these small beginnings, for the
LORD rejoices to see the work begin.

ZECHARIAH 4:10 NLT

We all sometimes feel a little hopeless. Maybe there was something you wanted badly, but it didn't materialize. Perhaps it was a relationship or a promotion or an opportunity that didn't come together. Or it could be that what you hoped for was something more intangible. Maybe you wanted to develop character qualities like more patience or kindness or compassion or empathy. But just when you thought you were making progress and seeing these attributes emerge in your life, you had a setback, an argument, an unkind word or thought.

In the South, there is a saying that makes a lot of sense to me: "Be where your feet are." The best way to reset from a time of disappointment or hopelessness is to understand clearly where you are now and where you're trying to go. God's got some big hopes for the person you are turning into. Resist the urge to fake it or rush it. Understand where you are starting from and be willing to take small next steps toward your worthwhile goals. Experience the journey by trying to understand it. This way, when you come to something discouraging, you won't lose your equilibrium. You will have the confidence that comes from knowing the adventure you are on and knowing where you are headed.

The prophet Zechariah told his people not to despise small beginnings because God delights in seeing the work begin. When my grandson took his first step, I didn't see him trying and say, "I've seen better." Of course not. It was his first step, and I delighted in it. Continue to take small steps in Jesus' direction. When you mess up, sure, call yourself out, but don't beat yourself up. God isn't looking for a string of successes; He delights in our attempts.

What small move do you need to make toward Jesus today? Do this with a ton of expectation and one step at a time, beginning with where your feet are right now. The angels are leaning over the rails hoping you will. Now go catch some whimsy!

JANUARY 7

IN JOY AND SADNESS, HE IS OUR COMFORT AND FRIEND

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4

One of Jesus' disciples, John, wrote about when one of Jesus' friends, Lazarus, died. When Jesus arrived at the place where Lazarus's family lived, Mary, Lazarus's sister, ran out to meet him and let him know her brother had already died. Here's the amazing thing about Jesus: He could have brought Lazarus back to life that very moment. Jesus had even told His disciples what He was going to do. Jesus' life was all about overcoming death, setbacks, and disappointments, and with a snap of His fingers He could have had Lazarus standing right next to them.

Instead, He stopped and wept with Mary. Jesus' plan to bring Lazarus back to life didn't undo or upstage the pain Mary had experienced in losing her brother and Jesus didn't overlook it; He entered it. He wasn't late to the funeral; He was right on time for the sadness.

God cares about us and all our experiences, good and bad. As much as we would like to, sometimes the first step isn't to fix the painful things in our lives or anyone else's, but to mourn them. Don't get me wrong, I don't think we're meant to permanently dwell in mourning, but it's an important first step in our own healing and the healing journey of others we are privileged to walk alongside.

I know it can sometimes feel like God has gone silent in the middle of something incredibly painful. Perhaps when God is quiet in these times, it's because He is sad too. The quiet doesn't mean He's not there. He was with Mary, and He will be with you in your pain as well.

Invite Jesus into the grief; He is already there waiting for you.

FROM SANDY SETBACKS TO A FIRM FOUNDATION

Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them . . . he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built.

LUKE 6:47-48 ESV

Jesus told a story once about two men who built houses. One man built his house on the sand, and when the storms came his house fell apart. The other man built his house on a rock, and when storms came that man's house stood strong.

Out of all the types of buildings Jesus could have talked about to illustrate this idea of having a strong foundation—barns and silos, official-looking offices, garages—I don't think it's an accident that Jesus chose to talk about a house. A home can represent our families, what we value most, and the things we have worked to build with our ambitions. Jesus explained to His followers that building something lasting with our lives begins with a foundation that is as strong as rock, one built on loving God, loving others, and being generous with our time and gifts.

It is an exercise worth doing to list the things you value most in your life—not cars and boats and savings accounts but people, places, and character traits you want to be remembered for. Next, list the impediments you keep running up against, the self-defeating habits, the letdowns you have experienced, and the hurts you have felt. You're not going to make any headway without getting real about where you are, but setbacks don't need to become campsites for us. Ask God for the courage to invite the disappointments out of the shadows. Once we see these perceived impediments clearly, we can do something about them. We can recognize them as the sand that they are and start building our foundation on something stronger and more trustworthy.

Jesus didn't give an epilogue to His story, but I can imagine it going something like this: The man who built his house on the sand said, "I'm going to get rid of a couple of old habits. I'm going to take what I can learn from the storm and start building again." Just when we start to think we've dug ourselves a pit, we realize instead we're prepped to lay a new foundation.

Have a little courage. Rebuild your foundation. You've got this.

QUESTION WITH HOPE AND WHIMSY: GOD IS ALREADY AT WORK

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.”

JOHN 9:1-3

Think about the miracle when Jesus spat on the ground and made some mud to heal a blind man. The first questions the onlookers asked were, “What caused this man to be blind? Who sinned?” I think my question would be, “Why did you just hock some spit and rub mud in the poor guy’s eyes?” What if we changed the questions we asked? What would happen if we replaced some of our initial questions with these: “What is Jesus doing, and what is He going to do next?” This is a small but important shift in the way we perceive what is happening around us.

Sometimes the events in our lives are opportunities for God to show up, and I have learned to trust that He always wants to show us more of who He is. When things have been awful in my life—when there’s been a big setback, when a friend has died, when we have experienced a loss—sometimes it feels like God has gone below the surface, but what I think is happening is that He is on the search for us.

Think of the things happening in your life right now and invite God into them. Ask yourself, *Is there something God might be doing in this right now? And what might He do next?* This isn’t merely putting a happy face on difficult circumstances, and it is not a trite exercise to look for the silver lining. It’s a shift in perspective to consider, “Are the fingerprints of Jesus visible yet in this situation?”

In the opening paragraph of the book of Acts, Luke encouraged his friend Theophilus to look for “many convincing proofs” that Jesus was still alive (v. 3). Maybe you’re going through a hard time right now. What if you were to change your viewpoint to one like Luke encouraged? What if, instead of wondering why things are happening, you gave that question a quarter twist and started thinking, *Maybe these things are happening so the works of God could*

be put on display in my life. What might He be doing now, and what might He be doing next?

God is constantly searching for the most authentic version of us. He wants us to let Him know when we feel joyful or gut-punched. Even in the most challenging circumstances, God is at work. And when we see Him at work, perhaps we will get a glimpse of what God will at some point put on display for everyone to see.

Look for God to show up today. Be authentic with Him!