

BLESSED ARE
THE SPIRALING

**How the Chaotic Search for Significance Can
Lead to Joy Through Life's Shifting Seasons**

LEVI LUSKO



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Blessed Are the Spiraling

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To my dad, Chip Lusko



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FOREWORD

I WAS IN a spiral of my own a few years back, and in the midst of it, I flew to Montana to spend some time with my good friend Levi Lusko.

After I arrived, he asked if I wanted to hike up a mountain. If you know Levi, then you know this is a very typical Levi kind of question to ask. I accepted the challenge, and off we went.

The route was short and steep—only 1.75 miles long but a considerable 2,100 feet of elevation gained. As we went straight up this mountain, lungs and muscles burning, we talked. And as we talked, I was changed.

Levi opened up to me about his own few years of spiraling. The fears and the questions.

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FOREWORD

Uncertainty about how to get his footing in life's shifting seasons. Struggling to resist lies the Enemy was trying to get him to believe about his worth and his future. Ultimately his rediscovering the majesty and worth he found in Jesus as he walked with Him to the other side of it all.

It will go down as one of the most memorable and formative conversations of my life. Yes, the beauty of the landscape was breathtaking, and the wild huckleberries were delicious. But more than that, it was our conversation on the mountain that stirred my heart. It turned out to be what we American evangelicals call a "God Moment." It was exactly what I needed to hear for the season I was in.

When he told me this was going to be the theme of his next book, I all but cheered, because I know I am not the only one who needs what Levi shared with me that day. Whether you're going through a midlife crisis, struggling as a single parent, facing an empty nest, or feeling disoriented for any reason, this book holds road-tested truths to guide you through whatever mountain you are up against.

I pray that as you read this book, you will have your own God Moment like I did on that Montana mountain, because I know you will come through better for it.

There is blessing waiting for you in your spiraling.

—Phil Wickham, award-winning singer-songwriter

INTRODUCTION

I AM LOST on the mountain.

It's cold and I'm slipping. I can't see.

I have been here before, but it's dark now. Nothing looks like it did on other days. There is a treasure I am looking for. I'm scared by everything.

Lying on the bathroom floor, sweating and crying, I can't breathe. I pace the halls at two a.m. wishing I could just go to sleep.

Who will take care of my family if something happens to me?

Is this as far as I can go? Are my best and brightest days behind me?

Am I yesterday's news?

Who am I if I can't perform?

There seems to be no treasure in the past; it's all in the present

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and future. Or maybe it is all in the past and there's no more treasure to be found.

Why is it so hard to enjoy where I am without fearing that it will be lost or taken away?

How much blessing will it take for me to be happy?

I am now forty years old. This is, presumably, the halfway point. Of the hill. The mountain. And I am over it. In every sense of the word.

Have I peaked? Am I able to progress? Where is there to go from here?

Do I have worth beyond my role and my accomplishments? Is there purpose beyond productivity?

As they say, the only constant in life is change.

Will I still find meaning when my path takes a turn and I no longer have or can do the things that have made me "successful"?

Is there significance to discover when life gets in the way of what I enjoy?

Will life be full when the nest is empty?

For so long the kids we have been raising have taken so much oxygen and energy in our home, but the day is quickly coming when they will be out living life on their own.

What will I do when physically, mentally, emotionally, or verbally I inevitably decline? When the little man in my brain who hands me files goes on longer and longer vacations, then decides to relocate to the south of France permanently?

These were the types of questions that stormed my mind during a full-on midlife crisis and sent me spiraling. Far more than a cliché, this was legitimately the most disorienting time of my adult life, a tumultuous stretch of months when I kept grasping for anchors as my inner battles waged on.

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Maybe for you it wasn't a midlife or quarterlife crisis that sent you spiraling. Perhaps it was a divorce. A death or diagnosis. A nightmare work situation. A transition into a different stage that turned your life into a foreign country.

It doesn't have to be a bad thing; it could be a good thing you were looking forward to—a graduation, a promotion, or retirement. Spiraling comes in all shapes and sizes and can show up when least expected. Blessings and burdens are both heavy and can be easily confused.

Whatever brought you here, you are asking really painful but important questions—about your worth, your purpose, your future, your story.

GETTING LOST

I had plenty to eat as a child, but you wouldn't think I did by my appetite for *more* in life, which motivated me throughout my later teenage years and on into my twenties and thirties. There was fire in my belly to spare. I had places to go and things to do. Drive, intensity, and focus.

At thirty-eight the bill showed up for the pace I kept in those two decades. Leading and writing and dreaming and speaking and traveling. I went to Africa in that period twice, just for the weekend. I don't recommend it.

It's all one big, beautiful, and nauseating blur. One made even more intense because of the death of Lenya, our daughter who went home to be with Jesus unexpectedly in 2012. We buried her on the day after Christmas. And then I tried to bury myself in ministry. None of it was bad. The books and the sermons and the

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church plants and the speaking tours. It was just an unsustainable pace. Man cannot live by sugar-free Red Bulls alone.

My mantra became “I can’t get out of this trial, but I can get something out of it.” Turn the pain into power, convert the loss into fuel. All good things. (And I truly believe it was God’s will, as far as I can tell.) That is the essence of the Beatitudes—blessed are the brokenhearted, those who mourn, those who are persecuted, those who spiral. But it can become unhealthy and untenable if not tempered, conditioned, and refined. The Sabbath is a weekly and yearly principle for a reason.

Preaching around the globe to “make the devil pay” did not bring Lenya back, but it ticked miles in dog years on my internal odometer without my realizing it. Ironically, in time, her death would be revealed to be the least of my worries. A gaping wound of that magnitude got my undivided attention. It was the myriad other ones that I had been dragging around untreated for decades that would cause the most problems.

Death from a thousand paper cuts.

No one gets off this planet unscathed.

It was a perfect storm, and going into the pandemic, I was a ticking time bomb. I had flown a million and a half miles in ten years, and then travel screeched to a halt. When the music stopped, I was left without the distraction and novelty of the scenery constantly changing. My ever-faithful TUMI carry-on suitcase sitting at the foot of our bed wasn’t the only thing that needed to be unpacked.

The body keeps score.

And, as Warren Buffett once said, when the tide goes out, you find out who has been swimming without a bathing suit.

GETTING FOUND

My midlife crisis rocked my world. And then it surprised me with *delight*. Ultimately it was a death that led to life. An end followed by a new beginning.

Getting lost on the mountain allowed me to be found.

It positioned me to recalibrate, see what truly matters, and become aware of my mortality. I no longer seek to be the young warrior but instead embrace my place as a father who is on the path to becoming an elder and eventually a sage of the tribe. I now see the stages of development as nothing to fight against but everything to embrace.

I still have battles to fight, but I am gladly accepting my current season of life and looking ahead to the next one with more excitement than dread. I have a game plan, and you can have one too. It's what we don't understand that scares us, and things are much less terrifying with the lights on.

Don't misread what I am saying—life is still plenty chaotic. But a surpassing joy has opened up in the midst of it that has warmed and comforted me like a hot-water bottle in a cold cabin bed.

I hope to be a Sherpa, a guide for you on the mountain. (Or if you are reading this on behalf of a spouse who is facing a disorienting season, a guide to help you help them.) You have to face this season of spiraling *for* yourself but not *by* yourself. I can't walk it for you, but I intend to walk with you. Not because I am any better than you but because it appears I got disoriented first and have been able to get my bearings. I was lost, but I've been found. I have moved from a human view of the mountain to a divine one, and it has changed everything.

INTRODUCTION

So, walk with me from an earthly understanding of the arc of life to a divine one.

We are headed from Valentine's Day to Good Friday.

From love to LOVE.

From human to divine.

It was C. S. Lewis who observed that once God's *agape* (unconditional) love lights our fire, we won't look for the human loves of *eros* (sexual), *storge* (family), or *phileo* (friendship) to fulfill us. They will stop being a substitute for the transcendent and take on real meaning and beauty. They will go from disappointing you to fulfilling you, because you won't expect them to do what they can't. No person can fill a hole in your soul. But once God does that for you, you will be able to enjoy the relationships in your life for what they are—a gift to enhance your life, not the sole source for your life's meaning.

This is what I believe you will find on this journey. Not just human love, but a divine love so enchanting, intoxicating, and all-consuming that it will change how you approach human love. Loving God so fiercely doesn't make other loves lesser; it makes them possible.

You don't have to live full of dread and desperation. The gloomy mountain you now look at in fear and terror, once it is aflame with the glory of God, will transform before your eyes.

Joy is waiting.

LEVI LUSKO

Valentine's Day
Whitefish, Montana

GET YOUR
BEARINGS,
FACE YOUR
SHADOW, AND
STRATEGIZE FOR
THIS SEASON

PART ONE



CHAPTER 1
GOING UP

I FELL DOWN a flight of stairs at our church in Pueblo, Colorado, when I was a one-year-old. I was in one of those walkers with a tray that allows babies to move around a room at will, all while drooling and eating Cheerios to their hearts' content.

Somehow, I managed to evade the bounds of captivity while the nursery worker was distracted. Newly emancipated, I roamed the building wearing my footie pajamas, eventually steering my mobile saucer straight for a set of stairs that led to the basement. Unluckily for me there was no door at this open stairway. Clearly, I had no idea what I was doing, but I like to imagine that I saw

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myself as an eeny-weeny Evel Knievel as I headed straight for the top step and floored it.

The stairs were made of concrete, trimmed by metal, and the landing was cement. Not ideal.

I tumbled down each step, going head over wheels again and again, before violently crashing at the bottom. While all this was happening, my dad was preaching in an adjacent auditorium space. The crash of the walker and my subsequent screams echoed throughout the entire school building, and everyone came running at once. Fortunately, one of the first to reach me was a nurse who began assessing me in my adrenaline-spiked, hyperventilating state.

My mom says she had to wait for a minute and pray to summon the courage to walk over to me because she could tell it was serious. She didn't know whether she would be able to handle it if, for instance, her son's head was caved in.

The entire church congregation prayed as my parents took me to the hospital. Remarkably, I was completely fine. I am convinced we will see guardian angel involvement when replaying in heaven the stored file from this day.

Experiencing my midlife crisis at age thirty-eight felt exactly like that violent, unstoppable somersault down a concrete, metal-lined stairway. One moment I was going along fine; the next, the bottom dropped out and I was in a free fall.

Debilitating panic attacks. Heart pounding, palms sweaty, mind racing. Complete chaos emotionally, fear of the future, suicidal ideation, constant dread.

Most terrifying of all was my lack of desire for the one thing I have always been most confident about: my calling to preach God's Word. There was even one episode backstage when I was crying

uncontrollably, grasping for the motivation to go out and preach. For the first time in decades, I didn't know if I wanted to continue pastoring or leading a team and ministry. I consistently had dark, scary thoughts that sent me downward.

Where did this come from? Tumble.

Why is this happening? Tumble.

How will I survive this? Tumble.

Where do I go from here? Tumble.

Will I ever feel like myself? Tumble.

Who am I? Tumble.

It's terrifying to spiral. Adrenaline does not de-escalate an adrenalized response; you can't fight and win in a fight-or-flight reaction. Trying to reason your way out of a panic attack is useless too; you might as well pour gasoline on a fire. Instead, you must slow down and stare down what is actually going on.

So I did.

I saw my doctor and counselor, started meeting with a psychologist, and spoke to friends and other pastors. I confided in my wife, was vulnerable with my kids about what I was facing, and depended on God for every next breath. I made serious changes to my pace of life, prioritized activities that replenished me, and took up a new hobby. I examined everything I was putting into my body and, for a time, took a prescription drug that helped. I adopted breathing activities that regulated me and faced some emotional wounds I thought I had resolved. I left no stone unturned and began a long process of deeply personal inner work and healing.

Through it all I came to realize, with stunning clarity, that I was at a turning point, and I needed to get my bearings as I headed into the next season. The transition, as hard and dark and

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painful as it was, represented a curtain falling on a chapter of my life. But what that meant was that another curtain could rise on something new.

And new seasons require new strategies.

I was at the stage of life when, biologically speaking, catabolism was exceeding anabolism. On a cellular level my rate of decomposition was beginning to exceed the rate at which new cells were being formed. My connective tissue was degenerating as soft tissue grew weaker. The inevitable process of physically aging was barreling forward, and there was nothing I could do about it.

NEW
SEASONS
REQUIRE
NEW
STRATEGIES.

Over the hill. Past my prime. *This is it; don't get scared now.*

But I *was* scared. And that is important. The free fall got my attention in a splashing-water-on-my-face way, waking me up to what God was trying to teach me, giving me the healthy respect I needed to take it seriously. I wasn't *just* scared because my outward man was perishing or because I likely had less time in front of me than behind me. I was terrified to have my sense of identity—and all that was so tightly wound around it—tampered with. My mind, which had always been my greatest strength, was now spinning out of control. Would I ever get it back? And who would I be if people weren't calling me brilliant or looking to me for input, advice, or product reviews? My breakdown was screaming of the inevitability of decline and change, a preview of coming attractions.

Do you still matter if what makes you *you* withers?

Try as we might, none of us are powerless to stop the crushing onslaught of time and forces outside of our control that will

conspire to take everything that forms how we see ourselves that is not connected to our relationship with God.

Woe was me.

I was in a spiral free fall, and I was undone.

THE NATURE OF TRANSITIONS

Poet William Butler Yeats viewed life as “a spiral, a twisting down closer to the center around and around in smaller and smaller circles.” His description is profound and seems to line up with my experience. But if it’s possible to be in a downward spiral, why can’t we spiral in the right direction and go up?

As I picture us all rising up this spiral staircase, I see the higher views bringing us new perspective and insight. Increasingly, we care less about things we once obsessed over; we now see they don’t matter like we once thought they did. As we get closer to the end of the journey, we (hopefully) better understand what is truly meaningful. There is significance in the spiral. It is not meaningless. The goal is to get closer to the center as you go around and around in smaller and smaller circles.

One of the most important things I learned through my crisis was that, in the grand scheme of my development as a human, it doesn’t have to be a circular movement going down but can be one going up. Your spiraling can send you in the *right* direction.

One of my counselors explained that human growth isn’t a straight line slowly angling up; it is more jagged than that. We rise, and then our path flattens and is seemingly stagnant for a season; then another growth spurt surges, followed by a flat line; then another up. The line looks more like stairs. But what that means is

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each time you are about to grow, you hit a proverbial wall, which is always hard, messy, and uncomfortable.

How do you feel when you slam into the upward plane of a new phase?

If you're like my son, Lennox, you are elated. When he lost his first tooth while eating a burrito, he took the tooth out of his mouth and held it high. With blood dribbling down his chin, he beamed and shouted, "Puberty! Puberty! Puberty!" He took it as a badge of honor.

Most of us, however, are more like my daughters, who freaked out when they lost their first teeth. It is indeed quite shocking to have something fall from your body that you were very much attached to. You have the foreign sensation of feeling the gaping hole it left behind and eventually the rough edge of the new tooth pushing through. Without your consent the childhood you were enjoying—*thank you very much*—is being torn from your fingers.

One of my daughters actually declared war on puberty after she learned about it. She resolved to do everything in her power to outwit it, avoid it, and defeat it. She meant business. Dug battle lines. Decided she would not be taken without a fight.

Change is scary.

It's scary to know acne and turbulent emotions are around the bend. It's also scary to have your children graduate from high school and prepare to move out. To lose a job you love. To watch a marriage end. To discover thinning hair, ear hair, a slowing metabolism, or a thickening midsection and realize you are getting older.

These all are potentially disorienting moments, stirring fear about sources of identity, purpose, and gratification slipping away. You feel like you're running straight into a wall. *Smack*.

But the truth is, you don't have to dread transitions. You can

view them as catalyzing forces preparing you for the coming attractions of joy and development. The key is in how you choose to interpret them.

An end and a beginning.

Studies show that on average we face a developmental shift every eighteen months. Hitting these walls, or crisis moments, is not a necessary evil; it is *simply necessary*.

Panicking can be a sign that you are simply misunderstanding the nature of growth. You were expecting it to be a diagonal line, like floating up a mountain in a ski lift—not climbing up a staircase. Smashing your nose into a solid object understandably leaves you drawing the wrong conclusion about what happened.

But nothing, in fact, has gone wrong; something has gone right.

“You just reached the end of your latest developmental shift,” my counselor told me repeatedly, “and it is time to take a step up to another level.” It wasn’t a wall that had bloodied my nose; it was a stair.

It is in the coasting moments that we are tempted to take our most recent growth mode for granted and assume it will carry us forever. All the confusion and pain and bumping into stairs is meant to supply us with the energy for the next jump. We just have to look up.

Author Bruce Feiler calls these transition moments “lifequakes” and believes that successfully navigating them is the key to how you handle life. Unsurprisingly, it is in these brutal moments that you will be tempted to make your greatest mistakes. Hit the wall, and you might be tempted to quit the job, leave the relationship, or abandon the new language you were learning or the trip you were saving for.

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Haste makes waste. Don't call the plastic surgeon, the divorce lawyer, the old college boyfriend, or the Corvette dealer just yet. Instead, take a breath, get your bearings, regroup, and evolve for the next season. The factory that once produced a now-obsolete technology doesn't need to be burned to the ground; it needs to be retooled for what's next.

*THE WALL
YOU'VE
HIT IS A
CHANCE
TO GROW.*

Properly understood, these moments don't have to prompt terror or hysteria. They are the cue to grow. To morph. To mature.

Have you hit a wall? Do you fear that something is terribly wrong? Don't jump to conclusions. Put the label maker down. Maybe you've simply gone as far as possible with the tools you currently possess. You've reached the necessary end of one step, and the wall you've hit is a chance to grow—to rise to the next level on a spiral staircase of blessing. Round and round you are meant to go, tighter and tighter in smaller circles, toward what really matters.

The worthless burning away, the Worthy remaining.

And at the end of your journey, you will find not something but Someone.

FROM OVERNIGHT SUCCESS TO DEATH ROW

John the Baptist's entire life story is one of clarity and confusion, revelation and relegation, ecstasy and exile as he struggled and grew step after step.

It had been four hundred long years of silence since the prophet Malachi had hit send on his theologically rich email. The angel Gabriel showed up and promised Zacharias, a weathered old priest,

that he was going to be a father. Zacharias had the nerve to ask the angel for a sign so he could know it was legit.

Let me run that back for you because it shocked the angel also.

You are burning incense in a temple and *poof!* Out of thin air a bright, powerful angel shows up and gives you an announcement. And you ask this heavenly creature, who has just miraculously appeared—presumably with some glory, pomp, and perhaps some circumstance—for some heavenly assurance. Like, what? You want a double rainbow during the drive home?

The angel was so stunned by this demand for confirmation that he sass-ed Zacharias pretty hard: “I am Gabriel!” he shot back. “I dwell in the presence of God! Is that not enough of a sign for you? But since you want some guarantee, here’s what you’ll get. You will be mute until the baby is born.”

And just like that, Zacharias was speechless.

Later, Mary and Joseph received similar visits from Gabe, sans the sass, then John the Baptist and Jesus each were born. The new covenant was afoot.

J the B was a bridge between the Old Testament and the New Testament. A point of transition. Living, breathing, spiritual puberty. It began during a dark period for John—he was in a holding pattern, having dwelled in the desert for several decades, eating bugs and wearing camel skin.

Then God nudged him, and he began to preach. Successfully. Suddenly his name was on everyone’s lips.

“Can you believe what he wears?”

“Yeah, he is, like, so savage. Doesn’t even care!”

“Did you hear he fearlessly throws shade on the Pharisees?”

“He called them snakes! That guy is my spirit animal. *We have* to go hear him this weekend.”

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He was a one-man Coachella, out in the desert eating weird food, dressed in strange clothes, and attracting massive crowds of people. And right when he was at the top of his game, he hit a wall.

Jesus asked John to baptize him. The clouds parted; the Holy Spirit descended from heaven like a dove; the Father spoke. Definite stairstep.

But afterward, Jesus started preaching, and everyone followed *Him*—including people who had been following the camel-skin-wearing, locust-crunching Jedi master. John's remaining padawans were defensive of him; he'd once been the newest, freshest thing on the block. "Jesus is baptizing more than you, John," they might have grumbled. "We need to do something to get our momentum back!"

"He must increase, but I must decrease," John said, confident about transitioning into a new season (John 3:30). They were words he probably had to preach to himself over and over as his podcast numbers nose-dived when Jesus popped off and went viral.

It would be disorienting to feel like you were no longer thriving at the one thing you had given your entire life to. But John consoled himself: Jesus was going to inaugurate the kingdom soon and it all would be okay.

Then John preached a sermon that offended the wrong person, and he ended up in jail. There's a wall for you! *Smack.*

Panic set in and he began to question everything. Not only was he at a low point in his life, he was afraid he'd made a huge mistake. He was middle-aged and having a full-blown existential crisis.

From death row, John sent word to Jesus that he was afraid he'd been wrong; maybe Jesus wasn't who John had thought he was. Matthew 11:2–3 says, "When John had heard in prison about

the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said to Him, ‘Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?’”

The emotion in the question is unmistakable. He had thrown everything into his calling; now it seemed his gamble might have been foolish. *Who am I if I’m not the one who prepared the way for the Messiah? If you’re not it, what does that make me? A fraud. A failure. An impostor.*

Jesus sent back a message that would have been hard to receive but also could serve as a nudge up another step of faith: “The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. *And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me*” (vv. 5–6, italics added).

This was an invitation for John to see the blessing in his spiraling. To rise up in trust. Tighter and tighter, round and round, closer to the center.

It also helped him summon the courage to prepare to face what every human needs to: death. Ours might not be coming as quickly as John’s death was, but we must reckon with the tangled and traumatic reality of our mortality. To grasp that every day matters, and it’s up to us to make each one count. Only then will we be able to make it up the next stair with a fresh perspective to face whatever God puts in front of us.

No one wants to die, but I bet you would rather die well than poorly. Living a glorious life and dying a glorious death is what Jesus invites us to do as we deny ourselves, pick up our crosses, and follow Him. And remember, in Christ, death is just the *beginning*. As Jesus exhibited by rising on the third day, death is not the end of the road but a bend in the road. All that and more was in His communication to His cousin who was in crisis.

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We don't know exactly what John's reaction was to this cryptic message from Jesus, but we do know what Jesus' true thoughts about John the Baptist were. After the messengers had left, Jesus

*IS IT POSSIBLE
THAT WHEN
YOU AND I ARE
SPIRALING,
JESUS CALLS US
BLESSED?*

turned to the crowd and gushed about how proud He was of John. He confirmed John was indeed the promised forerunner to the Messiah, then doubled down with this mic drop: "Among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matthew 11:11).

Did you catch that?

When John's wheels had to have been spinning, when he was heading into a free fall and feeling like a failure, Jesus didn't chastise him. Jesus described his cousin as the greatest man ever born of women.

Let that sink in. John was spiraling, but Jesus called him blessed.

Is it possible that when you and I are spiraling, Jesus calls us blessed?

YOU CAN DO THIS

Sometimes part of our angst is that we are struggling at all; we feel thrown by it. But if the greatest person ever born of a woman was continually subjected to ongoing dramas, disappointments, and forced development—even as he passionately followed God—why would it be different for us?

Things for J the B were awesome for a while, but it was

impossible for him to hang on to his spot at the top forever. It is the same for you and me. There will come a time when we can't hang on to our youthful physique or robust health, maintain our relevance in the industry we work in, keep up with every new social media platform, or cling to some other earthly crown. Do me a favor and picture whatever prominence you are most tempted to be defined by. See it in your mind. Okay, now listen . . . Do you hear footsteps? The “executioner” is coming. Not for your head, but for your spot at the top of whatever ladder you are on.

It's not a matter of if but when.

The goal then is not to try to win at a losing game but to play a game where victory is possible: pleasing God and running your race faithfully, loving selflessly, and then finishing obediently. Strive to win an *imperishable* crown that you can keep forever. Don't zero in on a temporary one you will lose when the pieces go back into the box at the end of this life.

John struggled yet still checked all those boxes—faithfulness, selflessness, obedience. He didn't die the most popular preacher, but he pleased the only audience that counted: his Savior. Flawless victory. Jesus deemed John a smashing success, the very model of significance.

According to Jesus, even if we are the least in the kingdom, we are even *greater* than John! This is because we are in Christ in a different way than John was as an old-covenant believer. John had the Holy Spirit *working* in his life; we have the Holy Spirit *living* in us! Jesus took us off the grueling treadmill of law and drew us into a relationship where pleasing God is our passion. It's not rooted in slavish fear but in ever-increasing power, love, and a sound mind.

And so this is what it comes down to: *It's possible to come through crisis and be better for it.*

BLESSED ARE THE SPIRALING

You can do this.

No, it won't be easy.

But every time you smack into a disorienting wall of transition, you can make it your goal to see your life through Jesus' eyes. From the wise vantage point high up on the spiral staircase, closer to the end of your life, you can keep rising in levels of obedience. You can keep trusting Him as you move forward and up, one shaking step at a time.

This is desiring for God to increase and for us to decrease. What we do on the stairstep above might not be bigger, more epic, and grander—it might be unseen, smaller, and quiet. Jesus fed a hungry crowd of four thousand people after He fed the famous five thousand. The ENTJ in me chafes at that. *Come on, Jesus, let's go for six thousand!* But bigger isn't always better.

The stages of spiritual development don't promise more quantity but instead proximity to Him. They trade impressing the world for welcoming more of heaven's beauty. They take you around and around, further up and further in, closer to the center, in smaller and smaller circles. What is waiting for you on the next step is guaranteed to be glorious.

The fact is, you can make it through the stairs unscathed just like I did as a child. Not by pretending the steps aren't scary and disorienting and painful, but by embracing the lack of equilibrium and doing exactly what John did—reaching out to Jesus in your confusion.

As you learn to breathe and reevaluate, you will realize it wasn't a dead end you smacked into; it was an opportunity to ascend to another level on the way to glory. And as you do, God will send angels to help you so you don't strike your foot on a single step.

So, if you feel you're in free fall, you are not alone. I've been

there. And I know for sure I have many more spiraling encounters with stairs of development and puberty-like moments to come. But I am less afraid than I once was because of who I know is at the top of the stairs.

A PICTURE BY THE BED

I once rode on a chairlift with a woman who noticed I was with my son, Lennox. As we chatted, she shared her strategy for getting her kids to love skiing. Though they didn't start until they were two, she put them in ski outfits and skis when they were one and took a picture of them in the snow. Then she framed two prints of the photos and put one on each of their nightstands. And whenever they pointed to the pictures, she told them they were amazing skiers. There was never a time in their lives when they didn't see themselves as belonging on the snow.

"Did it work?" I asked.

"Yep," she said, grinning proudly. "All five of my children are now adults, and they all are fantastic skiers who love the sport."

Some of the story didn't sit well with me; there was a slight manipulation and heavy-handedness to it. But there was also gospel truth.

God doesn't call you to get your act together and hope you can rack up enough points to cash in for a halo one day. Instead, He puts a picture by your bed of who you are in Christ and how He sees you. God's righteousness isn't based on you but placed on you. And the day-to-day goal isn't to get something

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by doing the right things, but remembering who you already are and then being what He has legally once and for all decreed is true about you.

So, if it's been awhile since you have glanced at the pic by your bedside, allow me to reintroduce you to yourself.

In Christ you are the righteousness of God.

You are more than a conqueror.

Your testimony and the blood of Jesus overcome the Enemy.

You are a child of the King.

You are the temple of the Holy Spirit—the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead lives in you.

You are chosen, forgiven, called, and equipped.

You are seated in heavenly places and your prayers pull down strongholds.

You are indestructible in the will of God and headed for heaven when you have finished your mission.

So, as for those spiraling stairs you are bound to face? Let me assure you, you have what it takes.