WHEN FORGIVENESS IS ENOUGH

Making Sense of God's Calling

JACK FLACCO
For God
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In the fall of 2011, I began writing a book that would later become the first entry to a zombie trilogy, featuring a shotgun-toting truck driver named Ranger Martin. I completed the series in the fall of 2015.

Earlier in January that year, I had promised myself that I would read the bible from beginning to end, a goal I had wanted to accomplish since my early teens. I completed it December 2015.

Soon after that, I realized I needed to change my life.

As successful as I was with the publication of my horror novels, I felt that I had fallen short of true happiness. It was not until I read about Jesus and of what he had done for me that I knew then I had to live differently.

I learned how his sacrifice redeemed me to God, allowing me to approach the Great Creator as his righteous child, unblemished and filled with hope. I learned about God’s forgiveness, his ability to extend grace over my life as a powerful means to call me his son, and how I did not deserve his forgiveness, but he gave it to me anyway because of his love for me. And I learned how, as he forgave me, I had to forgive others, letting go of past grudges, making friends of my enemies.

All this was taking place while I blogged about it weekly in 2016 and 2017, as a means to understand what was happening in my life.

When the idea sprung to mind to turn these blog posts into a book, I originally thought it was a
bad idea. Yet, the more I thought about it, the more the book makes sense for those who are looking to carry around a reference for forgiveness. More importantly, as I understood God’s word much better, I edited the writing in order that it would reflect that new knowledge.

Therefore, if you are reading this book to become acquainted with your calling to repent and forgive, feel free to jump to the parts and sections where salvation is the main topic. If you are looking to show more gratitude, the latter half of the book will show you how to do that as well.

It is my hope that when you read this book completely or in part, you will glean tidbits of God’s understanding, as the spirit reveals through diligent bible study and prayer. It is also my hope that forgiveness may become a habit, just as it is with God, who readily waits for our repentance so as he may extend his gracious gift of grace on us.

Jack Flacco

September 2017
PART 1

A Calling to Forgive

“For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

—Mat. 6:14-15
CHAPTER 1

A Change in Heart

How does one go from writing about zombies to writing about God? Specifically, how did it happen to me? Believe me when I say, I did not go out of my way looking for it. I was curious, but not to the point where my life would take a drastic about face. Only a miracle could have done that. And earlier in my life, I was not into miracles.

Yet, when you see everything slowly spiraling out of control, when things that once made sense but now becomes nothing more than a jumble of disconnected events, and when your legs break from under you to reveal a foundation constructed out of rot, that is when miracles happen.

For me it happened when I began reading the bible from cover to cover, a lofty goal I had wanted to achieve since my early teens. Never had the
When Forgiveness Is Enough

Notion entered my mind that I would not accomplish such a feat, that is, until later in life. I held firm, though, with the hope that I would find the opportunity to do so.

Eventually, with the success of my book series underway, my relationships with others went the opposite direction. I could have been a better person, but I was not. I could have contributed more to worthy causes, but I did not. And for a while there, not only was I in a bad place with those around me, but I was also in a bad place with God.

What can I say other than I was thinking only about myself. I recognize that now. Back then, I did not.

Nonetheless, things began to happen to me when I was in the middle of reading the gospels. Matthew 5-7, the Sermon on the Mount, hit me hard. The simplicity of verses like, “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you” (Matt. 7:1-2) prompted me to consider a time when I will not be alive, but will be standing before the throne of God to account for everything I had done while living on this puny planet called Earth (Matt. 12:36-37).

My life took a sudden and abrupt shift when I went from focusing on myself to focusing on others and God. It was not until I finally fell to my knees that I realized I was a sinner in desperate need of God’s forgiveness. I knew then that no matter what I did, I could never earn salvation, but through his grace, God is willing to give it freely to everyone who repents (Eph. 1:7-10).
Jack Flacco

King David echoes my experience in Psalms:

“For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Ps. 51:16-17).

Will I ever go back to writing about zombies? I think it hardly unlikely, even if I did depict them as sin incarnate seeking humans to corrupt. For now, sporting a contrite heart, I am happy to write about God and his awesome plan for those who are searching for real peace.
CHAPTER 2

What I Have Learned

During the time I was writing about zombies, I typically was not writing about God. I tried to keep my topics light and free from controversy. I wrote about other things instead, like morals, the law and justice. But about the G-word, I was never quite sure if I would end up saying too little or saying too much. I found it risky because I did not want to alienate readers who read my work strictly for entertainment purposes only.

Once I had promised myself that I would read the Holy Bible in its entirety, that was when God opened my heart for me to begin writing about him. Writing aside, to keep me on track, I went ahead and entered a chronological reading plan into my phone that would remind me daily of my goal. I say chronological because there are various reading plans out there that allow a person to start reading
the word in various ways. I chose chronological because I have always wanted to gain a historical perspective to the biblical writings than simply reading the book as another form of literature.

With that in mind, I completed my goal of reading the Holy Bible in one year.

Is there anything I can say about the whole thing? I can only describe it as an experience.

I learned there is a God.
I learned God would not give me a test he does not think I can handle.
I learned that no matter how many times I sin, God would forgive me.

I learned about faith.
I learned about hope.
I learned about love.

I learned that I mean something to God and he will do anything to save me from the penalty of sin.
I learned that as smart as I think I am, God is smarter.

I learned to be patient.
I learned to be kind.
I learned to love.

I learned what real peace is all about.
I learned to sleep better at night.
I learned a lot more, but those are the big ones. Apart from the experience of historical reading, I gained a huge understanding regarding human nature. For example, I found a whole book called Proverbs chalk full of golden nuggets of wisdom dedicated to dealing with human nature. One of my favorite sayings I picked up from the book is “How long will you lie there, O sluggard?” (Prov. 6:9). It means the lazy should wake up to do some work. It also means I should stay busy. I find it hard to get into trouble when I am busy.

Yet, of all the things I have learned, I think loving God and loving others is most important. To me that point made enough of an impact to promote a change in how I act and with what I write—a change that has since become noticeable to others.
CHAPTER 3

The Bible: Cover to Cover

When I set out to read the whole bible, I did not know I would be in for a few surprises.

For instance, I had no idea that Job lived before Abraham, in spite of the fact that the Book of Job is located several hundred pages after Genesis. In addition, it was a revelation to me that after the flood, God declared that all animals would fear humans (Gen. 9:2). And the thought that an honorable man such as Jabez, whose name meant “man of sorrow” or “borne out of pain” had two verses written about him to demonstrate God’s blessings over his life (1 Chr. 4:9-10), left me wondering what else in the bible have I yet to discover?

The reading plan I used to accomplish this feat is part of the bible app that resides on my phone and
on my tablet. I simply chose a chronological reading plan that consisted of the English Standard Version (ESV). When I travelled, I read it on my phone, sync’d it with my account, then, when I returned home, I picked it up from where I left off on my tablet. Even today, it makes for a seamless experience.

Choosing to read the bible chronologically has its advantages, too. I gained an incredible amount of insight into historical events when reading about the same story through two different accounts. I did not have to understand why certain things happened the way they did because the context remained the same throughout. The chronological reading plan is especially helpful when working through the Books of Kings and the Books of Chronicles, as the reign of kings can be quite confusing when studying it in a non-linear fashion.

All history aside though, my favorite part of the bible is the gospels. In the gospels Jesus talks about how to get along with others (Mat. 5:43-48), how to have a relationship with God (Mat. 6:5-15), and what the ultimate goal for believers should be (Mat. 6:19-21).

Adding to that, one of my favorite verses I cling to comes from the gospels:

“Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you” (Luke 6:38).
In its basic form, it means that whatever I give is what comes back to me. I can attest that this principle works every single time I use it—and it does not apply to money only. It applies also to giving of our time to others without the expectation of receiving anything in return.

I learned all these things largely in my first year from reading the bible. Even after having read the New International Version (NIV) the following year, I still felt I had much to absorb. For this reason, I continue to complete an alternate reading plan with a different version of the bible annually. It is my view that the more I understand what the bible says, the more I will understand what God has planned for my life.

In turn, the more I will understand God.
CHAPTER 4

Transformation

Why am I here?

I had something happen to me. For those of you who believe in God, this is one of those stories. For everyone else, if you feel uncomfortable for what I am about to tell you and you want to put this book down, I will understand. Some time ago, I would have scoffed at the idea of a miracle as well. But miracles do happen, and it happened to me.

For several years before being saved I have done nothing more than write about horror. I have written about other things, too, but most of my writing, especially my books, focused on the zombie apocalypse. Now you might wonder what could possibly have happened to me that would have caused me to rethink my creative direction.
After all, the zombie genre is hot. What writer would not want to be a part of it?

To give you a bit more context, during my time away from the genre, I was also going through a transformation of sorts where I felt a calling to do more with my life. The more I resisted, the more it became evident that there was more happening to me than what I would have wanted to admit. That resistance came from a root of bitterness that had sprung from deep within my soul. I had no idea it was there. It had been there for years, and it took me by surprise the day I eventually began dealing with it.

When I say dealing with it, I mean going militant in order to flush it out of my life. This entailed a lot of bible study, a lot of prayer, and going back to church. That last part is the kicker. I had not been back to church in two decades. I had attended annual Easter and Christmas services in the past, but only because I had to, not because I wanted to. When I went back to church, I went back because I wanted to.

That is when the miracle took place. The root of bitterness left me, and I could feel God’s spirit flow through me, filling every part of my being. I had someone pray over me, releasing me from the burden of sin. I could hear God’s voice telling me that salvation is now mine. Some may laugh, but it did happen, and I will forever lay testimony to his glory for him taking me by the hand so as he may lead me to still waters (Psalm 23:2).

There Is More
In all this, something else happened. I had a revelation of what I needed to do with my life. All the writing I had done, every single article I had written, every book that I had published, had been nothing more than training for the real job at hand.

After praying about it and talking it over with my family, I came to understand God wanted me to write about forgiveness and repentance, and about how God touches people’s lives. I learned that the real superheroes are those folks who go to work every day and are examples for everyone else to follow while God works through them to perform great miracles. I believe that. I believe it so much that I confess I had written a superhero book called Resilience, but I had set it aside as a means to glorify God by writing about him instead. More than anything, I would like him to work through me so that I can give him honor and glory.

It might sound crazy, I know, especially after everything that I had written about in the past. But let me ask you this—are not the craziest ideas the ones that change the world?
CHAPTER 5

The Cost of Change

When I think back at everything that has happened, I wonder how I did it. I have a chronic neck pain problem that appears occasionally, which I have been able to manage. I am meeting new people, and my family life has never been better.

As for the church I have been attending, I can truly say I am enjoying it. The organization is not the cult group that I was a part of two or more decades ago; therefore, I am thankful knowing I can be myself without worrying that I am breaking some stringent directive. Given it is an evangelical church, the messages have a general theme aimed toward changing the heart.

My writing has also gone through a change, which is really a reflection of what has been happening inside me. No longer do I have the root
of bitterness that for years has held me captive, inspiring me to write horror. Now I wake up in the mornings with God on my mind and with thoughts of how I could glorify and praise him.

All These Changes Did Come at a Price

My focus has shifted toward God first, family second, and friends third. Everything else comes after these three priorities. As for my book Resilience, which I had written over the course of a winter, it currently does not have a publication date. And I am fine with that, as I know I can write about God-centered books instead.

For years, I suffered from insomnia, averaging two hours of sleep a night. Now, not a night goes by that I do not have a solid seven hours. It reminds me of the other day when I was watching Saving Private Ryan. In one of the scenes, the sniper character was able to sleep through anything. He was God-fearing, and he recited scripture whenever he delivered a bullet to an enemy. One of the other soldiers wondered how he could sleep through the night, given all the bombs going off around them and the number of people the sniper had killed. Another soldier replied that the man had a clear conscience.

When I think about it, I suppose I, too, have learned to go to bed with a clear conscience.

The other thing I have done is to reconcile with almost all those who have considered me their enemy. I found it surprising that everyone I offered my hand to in renewed friendship embraced me
with open arms. Of course, I had to humble myself before them with apologies and sacrifices, but overall, almost all responded positively to me wanting to put the past behind. This experience has prompted me to write a long bible study on forgiveness, which you can find in the Bible Study section of this book.

Is There Anything Else I Can Say About the Price I Paid?

All things considered, the changes in my life have introduced me to new things that I do not think I could have experienced had I not found God again. Just knowing I am free from the burden of having done wrong, as it says in (Eph. 2:8), “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” has brought a new hope I will surely appreciate no matter what life throws at me in the years to come.
PART 2

A New Life in Christ

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.”

—2 Cor. 5:17-18
I recently watched the film *Coach Carter*. I remember having caught the movie years ago, but so much time had passed that the memory of it had faded. I am glad I spent the time to enjoy it once again.

The plot focuses on Ken Carter, a hardware store owner, who takes the helm coaching an inner city basketball team that he leads to an undefeated season.

By all measures, this story inspires and provides a glimpse of what obstacles people face when battling trials on the road to success. I found, however, the most poignant moment of the film does not come from one of the team’s many wins, but comes when one of the students thanks Coach Carter for his dedication to the team. Even more so,
the speech is in answer to the coach’s curiosity of what the student feared most.

After some research, I found the origin of the speech the student recited came from a book written by Marianne Williamson called *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of A Course in Miracles*. In the book, the author goes on to explain our deepest fear is not that we feel inadequate, but that we see the light and it frightens us. She also explains that our destiny is to manifest the glory of God, and in so doing, it liberates us from our fear.

I have been thinking about how my presence could help liberate someone else’s fear. As I look to become stronger in God’s word, I am finding the things that once frightened me are no longer an issue. This is to say, much of what I have learned has given me the freedom from the anxiety stemming from fear. If anything, I have allowed God’s spirit to flow through me and on to others who need it. In other words, I am functioning as nothing more than a conduit for helping others, as it says in Galatians, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

Believe me when I say this, it has never been my intention to live the life I am now living, renewed in the spirit and allowing my light to shine in an obvious way. Before this, I have chosen to stand by the sidelines while permitting others to step in on my behalf. I will admit my liking to having had a low profile.
This is the reason Williamson’s quote resonates with me. It reflects that which has taken shape in my heart, manifesting itself through deeds I did not know I could accomplish. And realizing I no longer fear because I no longer linger on the thought of suppressing my real self, makes me all the more thankful I am living the life God wants me to live—shining his light so that others may be liberated also.
CHAPTER 7

What Matters Most

I feel privileged, not in the sense of what I own, but in the sense of who is now in my life. I have felt this way ever since deciding that, after a twenty-year absence, I belonged back in church.

The funny part about it all is that my wife, Luana, had never stopped attending. In fact, not so long ago, she was going to a charismatic church one week and an evangelical church the other. Given my skeptical mindset at the time, it made for some interesting comic fodder. I could not pass up the opportunity to razz her about the obvious inconsistency with believing two sets of doctrine. After all, both churches could not be right about salvation, I thought.

However, God was performing a great work with my life. All I had to do was be patient.
Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (John 14:27).

Through my church, I have learned to be patient and listen to what God has to say (James 5:7). I have learned what true peace means (Rom. 15:13) and I have grown to understand where I fit in the grand scheme of God’s plan (Mat. 5:9).

I have repented (Acts 3:19). I have forgiven (Mat 6:14). Above all else, I have taken into me God’s spirit to become a new man in Christ, of which would not have been possible had God not called me to be a partaker of his plan (Acts 2:38).

With that in mind, in spite of the thousands of churches and divisions among us, I believe we Christians have something in common. We all believe in Jesus. When someone asks us who we are, we readily answer we are Christians. That is all that matters. For even one of the criminals crucified with Christ said to him, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Luke 23:42). Jesus answered him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Verse 43).

If Jesus could save someone, who with his dying breath proclaims Jesus as Christ, how much more would he save us who believe having not seen him?
CHAPTER 8

I Praise Him

When I worship God at church or in prayer, I stretch my hands to the sky and thank him. I thank him for my life. I thank him for my family, and most of all I thank him for my relationship with him. That had it not been for him believing in me, I would not be where I am today—praising him with every breath I draw into my lungs.

David did the same, except I have yet to dance as he did when he defeated the Philistines to return the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:14, 16, 20-23).

That day was special. That day, the Lord God fought on David’s behalf and won (2 Sam. 5:17-25).

Now, when I praise God, I praise him for fighting for me. I have the reassurance that he will not leave me or forsake me, and just as he had done
with David, he will send his armies before me to make the way clear so that it seems as if I have accomplished it all on my own.

It sounds insane. I agree. But after several years of God’s constant intervention in my life, healing me of my chronic neck pain problem, ridding my heart of bitterness, exiling those who despised me into utter darkness, he has yet to fail me:

“It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed” (Deut. 31:8).

And I will continue to praise him, lifting my arms in true thanksgiving for extending his mercy over my life and the lives of those of my family, just as it says in (Ps. 148:1-4):

Praise the Lord from the heavens;
Praise him in the heights!
Praise him, all his angels;
Praise him, all his hosts!
Praise him, sun and moon,
Praise him, all you shining stars!
Praise him, you highest heavens,
And you waters above the heavens!

Therefore, I pray also that he, too, may bless and fight for all of you who are reading these words, as he has done for me, because his mercy is great and his reach is infinite.
CHAPTER 9

Miracles

Do you believe in miracles? I never did. In fact, there was a time I thought those who experienced a healing actually fell under some kind of self-hypnosis. I dismissed it as nothing more than an ol’ fashioned parlor trick found in a fantasy like The Wizard of Oz.

It goes that way until it happens to you. You never think it will happen to you. And sometimes, the little miracles in life convicts one into believing in the very thing he or she discredited in the first place.

Little Miracle #1

Some time ago, in celebration of my birthday, Luana and the kids treated me to lunch at one of the hotspots here in town. The food was great, the
company I kept was satisfying, and the service was beyond exceptional. Shortly after the main course, the server came by our table and asked me if I had decided what dessert I wanted, given Luana had mentioned why we were there in the first place. I said I had not decided and we agreed the server would surprise me. Several minutes later, I was regretting my decision, but it had nothing to do with receiving the dessert. The server had not brought it yet. I was thinking, since the treat would be free, I imagined I would be receiving a simple scoop of ice cream, or one of those sweet cookies instead. Then I thought, I should have ordered my favorite—cheesecake. I imagined it dished with no topping except for strawberries and syrup on the side. I really had it in mind of what it would look like and mentioned it to my family.

What happened next left me in awe. The server had brought me a plate of cheesecake, strawberries and syrup on the side, and a big sparkler in the center.

Obviously, I was praising God all the way home.

Little Miracle #2

I took a vacation recently. The first two days were nothing short of awful. I fell ill with aches, chills, a fever, and a nasty headache. Two days later, I felt much better, except for the headache. It just would not go away. That same evening, I had fallen on my knees asking God for relief. I asked him to remove whatever was causing the pain so as I may not only
feel better, but also serve him in the way he wanted me to serve him.

It did not help. That is when I decided to bring in the big guns.

I immediately went to Luana. She knew what to do. She laid her hands on my neck and the back of my head, where I told her the headache rested, and prayed aloud. She proclaimed God’s promise of healing asking for the removal of not only the pain but also the condition that was causing the pain. I believed with my whole heart that through her intercession my faith would heal me.

At the end of the prayer, after she had called on Jesus’ name, I soon headed back to bed. I did not even make it into the bedroom. The headache was gone. No pain. No weird sensations. Gone.

Other things have happened to me that I would classify as miracles. Rather than list those events, I am going to do something altogether different.

**Jesus’ Miracles**

Below are Jesus’ miracles listed in the gospel of Mark:

- Jesus Heals a Man with an Unclean Spirit (Mark 1:21-28)
- Jesus Heals Many (Mark 1:29-34)
- Jesus Cleanses a Leper (Mark 1:40-45)
- Jesus Heals a Paralytic (Mark 2:1-12)
- A Man with a Withered Hand (Mark 3:1-6)
- Jesus Calms a Storm (Mark 4:35-41)
• Jesus Heals a Man with a Demon (Mark 5:1-20)
• Jesus Heals a Woman and Jairus’ Daughter (Mark 5:21-43)
• Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand (Mark 6:30-44)
• Jesus Walks on the Water (Mark 6:45-52)
• Jesus Heals the Sick in Gennesaret (Mark 6:53-56)
• The Syrophoenician Woman’s Faith (Mark 7:24-30)
• Jesus Heals a Deaf Man (Mark 7:31-37)
• Jesus Feeds the Four Thousand (Mark 8:1-10)
• Jesus Heals a Blind Man at Bethsaida (Mark 8:22-26)
• Jesus Heals a Boy with an Unclean Spirit (Mark 9:14-29)
• Jesus Heals Blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52)

Missing is Jesus’ transfiguration (Mark 9:2-13), his prediction Peter would deny him three times (Mark 14:26-31), and many others. Mind you, I have listed these miracles from the gospel of Mark only. It goes without saying there are other miracles Jesus performed that I have not mentioned, detailed in the gospels of Matthew, Luke and John, such as Jesus turning water into wine (John 2:1-11).

Reading about all the miracles Jesus performed while he was here on earth inspires me to appreciate how God intervenes in people’s lives, even if it is surprising me with a slice of cheesecake with a side
of strawberry sauce for my birthday, or healing me suddenly of a headache. God knows the needs of his children. He goes out of his way to make his children happy. And if God chooses to bless his children with a small or large miracle, it is entirely up to him.

A miracle is a miracle. It still shows how much God loves his children.
CHAPTER 10

Thankfulness

Thanksgiving for us Canadians is a big deal. I can honestly say that these past few years have been the most remarkable years of my life. Never have I experienced such a powerful renewal of spirit as I have. And I believe this is only the beginning.

The little things are what I am thankful for.

Such as when I finish shopping, a line will open up for me at checkout, saving me oodles of time later on. I enjoy how the lights going home all turn green, as if by some unforeseen miracle the lights themselves know I am on the road. It still impresses me when I arrive in a restaurant with the family with no reservation and the server gives us the last booth in the place. And I am in awe whenever I go to a movie to find it has sold out, but when ordering the ticket, a spot just happens to
become available. This has happened on more than one occasion.

I am thankful for autumn, when the leaves change into a rainbow of colors, and all I can do is stand there wondering what have I done that I should so enjoy such an incredibly inspiring sight. I am thankful for this season’s rain, and the way it makes the moss on the rocks in the woods smell musty and worn. I am thankful for the lake in town where I can watch the ducks paddle in among the fallen leaves by the shore, and relish in their simple life.

I am most of all thankful for my family—for my wife, Luana, who has supported me during my change from being lost to being found. I know she has prayed to God for my change in heart, as I know the kids have had their hand in it, too. I am thankful for my kids, one who is studying general arts, and the other who is pondering the life of a preacher. Both have been my inspiration. Both have provided me countless hours of joy.

Lastly, I cannot end this thought without being thankful for my church, where I have learned that I am worthy to go before the throne of God and worship him with my whole heart. I thank my pastor and his wife for welcoming me into the fold and making me feel part of the family. No other place have I felt this before.

Oh, and of course, I am thankful for God patiently waiting for me (Isaiah 30:18) while I got my head straight as to realize what is important in life. He has blessed me with peace (John 14:27). He has given me the hope that lies in Christ (Ephesians
1:11-12). He has shared with me his Sabbath rest I so truly sought for so long (Hebrews 4:9-12).

For all these things, Thanksgiving Day will be a day of absolute gratefulness in my home.
PART 3

Enjoying God’s Favor

“Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands!”

—Ps. 90:17
CHAPTER 11

Finding Gladness in God

Think about this for a minute: The universe is presumably 13.7 billion years old. A light-year is the distance light travels in a single year, which is 6 trillion miles (9.5 trillion kilometers). This translates to a speed of 186,000 miles (300,000 kilometers) a second. The universe is 93 billion light-years in diameter and always expanding.

We live on Earth, third planet from a star called the Sun, in the Orion Arm, one of the spirals in the Milky Way galaxy. There are 100 billion stars in our galaxy, each of which may have planets of their own.

About 3 trillion galaxies populate the universe. Each of us is one of 7 billion people who live here on this tiny planet.
Now I ask you this: Is it possible we are wrong to think God, the one who created the heavens and the earth, made a mistake when he sent Jesus to die for our sins?

After all, who are we who live on this insignificant planet called Earth, among the 100 billion planets in our galaxy, among the 3 trillion galaxies in the universe, that God should so love us in such a way as to sacrifice his only son so that we could share in the inheritance of all things?

It sounds crazy!

Yet that is exactly what God has planned for every person who believes Jesus is his son. He wants us to inherit the universe and everything in it, just as it says in Romans 8:32: “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”

So today, as we make our way through the events that shape our lives, let us consider God’s view about this: We may be one of 7 billion people who live here, however his plan is to give each one of us all things according to his promises and his love.

If that is not something that brings gladness to your heart, then look toward the night sky for your inheritance.
CHAPTER 12

Practicing the Golden Rule

When I asked my friends the other day, what they thought the golden rule was they looked at me, puzzled. I do not believe I was speaking another language, so yes it surprised me to discover they really had no clue what I was talking about.

The golden rule states:

“And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them” (Luke 6:31).

Where I grew up though, it was more like, do it to others before they do it to you. A rough neighborhood and kids being kids, we did not have any sense of what was right and wrong.

All joking aside, another translation is: Do to others, as you would have them do to yourself.
But what if you hate yourself? What then? Does this mean you ought to hate others as you hate yourself?

The golden rule is not talking about that. It is not saying, first take care of your self-esteem then look after everyone else. Because it would be easy to duck responsibility, to sit in a dark corner somewhere and wallow in misery while life passes us by. On the contrary, the golden rule promotes active participation in the lives of others, and a byproduct of that participation is happiness.

A lack of self-esteem comes from guilt. Guilt causes depression, which then leads to thoughts of doing unimaginable things to the self. The fallen angel of light knows this and wants God’s children to live useless lives contemplating on the sins they have committed.

However, we do not need to worry about any of that. God has sacrificed his son Jesus so that we do not have to pay for our own sins: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16). Now when we commit sin, we experience short-term guilt, which leads to repentance (2 Cor. 7:8-10). That is an awesome thing. No longer is worthiness an issue. Nothing we can do can earn us salvation. God has given it to us freely through his grace (Eph. 1:7).

Knowing this, practicing the golden rule then becomes part of our nature.

It would be easy for us to share of our blanket with someone who is cold. We would not have a problem rationing half of our dinner with someone
who is hungry. And we would be happy to provide a portion of our drink to someone who thirsts.

The homeless would have homes. The sick would be well. And the poor would have a share to give. For as we see others in their time of need, we would see ourselves.

Small acts of kindness change people. If everyone practiced the golden rule, the world would be a changed place.
CHAPTER 13

Simplifying Our Lives

Have you ever seen a baby drive a car? Of course, not. Do you know why you have never seen a baby drive a car? It is because driving a car is not what a baby does. A baby eats, sleeps, and coos. It lives a simple existence. It is only when a baby develops an intimate sense of self does its life become more complicated. Before then, life is good.

Be As Children

Going back to the simplicity of when we were born may be difficult, but we can certainly aspire to live our lives as if it were so.

Jesus explains it this way, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will
never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3).

Children’s lives are lives filled with hope, joy and playfulness. From one moment to the next, children may not know what lies ahead, but regardless of what anyone may think, they will allow their imagination to lead the way.

If we can recapture the humility of a child and remember what it was like to be a child, the simplicity of life would return.

Get Rid of the Clutter

Let us admit one thing: Depending on the family, a child’s room is a disaster. Toys lie strewn on the floor. Books hang from the shelf. The area next to the hamper is a disaster. Nothing comes close to what a child’s room looks like during those endearing preschool years.

Yet, beyond the clutter lies creativity and song. When children have a vision of what they want to do, there is no stopping them. They have a knack for ignoring distractions.

The apostle Paul says, “For God is not a God of confusion but of peace” (1 Cor. 14:33).

Imagine how simple life would be if we did not have to stare at stacks of bills, dirty dishes and laundry.

Whatever clutter might exist in our lives, as children of God it is up to us to move past the ordinary in order to make progress in the extraordinary.
Focus on One Thing at a Time

As mentioned, children have an incredible ability to tune things out when it is in their best interest.

Noticing a child with a coloring book is one of those precious moments for an observer. There is nothing more important to a child than to pick the right color for a drawing and watching it fill the page.

Likewise, when we have too many things on our to-do list, we ought to focus on one thing and do it well.

Many times, what we think is important is seldom urgent, and what is urgent is seldom important.

How Simple Is It?

Once we look at things from a child’s perspective, everything else falls into place. Simplicity will return, and that playful attitude we had growing up will reappear.

So let us have fun with life, enjoying the moment while giving God the glory for all his marvelous works (Ps. 96:3-4).
CHAPTER 14

Enjoying Life

What is it that makes some people jolly and others miserable? In fact, let me turn the question on its head. Does money buy happiness? After all, is that not what everyone looks to when thinking about satisfaction with life?

I am sure that if you think about it for a moment, money is the furthest thought on your mind when it comes to happiness. Right? We all want love, joy, peace, comfort, none of which we can attain without first understanding what happiness is.

Ah, but I hear someone say, “Money will certainly buy me comfort—a new sofa, a new bed, a new car, house, wardrobe.”

Yes, I agree, but how long will that comfort last? Once the newness fades, then what? I can see why some folks end up in a cycle of going to work,
buying stuff, paying the bills for the stuff they bought, and going out to buy more stuff to protect all their stuff. Meanwhile, as the home becomes fuller, life becomes emptier.

For me, happiness is spending time with my family, sharing experiences with friends, and praying and listening to God. Add to that good food, travel, volunteering, and fulfillment with everything I set my hand to do, and there you have a perfect composite of how I enjoy life.

This is why I would like you to think about this next question. Take your time and really think about it. This question is all about you, and it all has to do with the perception of happiness.

How do you enjoy life?
CHAPTER 15

Staying Focused

It should not surprise anyone that we have developed the attention span of squirrels. After all, a typical movie at the theater cuts to a new angle or scene in roughly 0.5 seconds. Is it a wonder not all of us suffer from ADHD.

Yet, our short attention span does affect us, such that it prevents us from concentrating effectively.

How can we remain focused without sacrificing our time while doing it? How can we not feel threatened by the passing of time and accomplish our goals?

Put Blinders On

Ignore everything that goes on around us. We may be on a train or a bus reading our favorite novel,
when someone sits next to us who is blaring music from his or her headset. As hard as it seems, we can either move to another seat or simply ignore the interference.

It does take some practice, but it is possible to sit next to someone who is incredibly disruptive while working through a goal.

Is there a secret?

“Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col. 3:12-14).

**Follow the Plan**

Obstacles have a way of showing up at the most inopportune time. Our main concern, though, should be about how we respond to the challenge. Do we complain to those around us? Or do we pick up from where we fell and move on?

Once a plan is in place that points to a specific goal, we ought to forget everything else in order to achieve that goal. Of course, in some cases, this is not possible. Circumstances beyond our control will cause delays. That is life. However, as long as we keep to the plan, we will achieve whatever we set out to do:
Jack Flacco

“Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise.” (Prov. 6:6).

Despite its enemies, an ant will continue to accumulate food during the summer and autumn months as a means to survive during the winter.

That is what an ant does. Consider the ant.

**Imagine the Reward**

When all else fails, an image of receiving the reward, after we have achieved what we set out to do, is a great incentive to remain focused.

We can think of the journey being over. We can think of the relief, that after all the hard work, all the diligent study, all the trials we had to endure, all the snarky remarks from others, if any, all the late nights, all the early mornings, all the long treks, we can finally say we have successfully completed the work. Imagine what it would feel like if it took place tomorrow or the next day. Would that not be the most incredible feeling ever?

Hold on to that feeling. Keep it close to the heart.

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it” (1 Cor. 9:24).

**There Is One More Thing**

With God on our side who can be against us? Every hero has an enemy. Moses had Pharaoh. Samson had the Philistines. David had Goliath. In every
case, God was there making the way clear, fulfilling his promises and showing his love for those who followed his lead.

As long as we remain focused on the reward, we can achieve anything.
CHAPTER 16

Not Settling for Second Best

This part of the book is not about being Number One. It is not about having a winning attitude. Nor is it about succeeding at whatever we put our hand to do. Contrary to what the title implies, it has nothing to do with competing against, contending with, challenging or opposing an opponent.

Other than the devil himself, the only real opponent anyone ought to face is the one that stares at us from the mirror every morning after we get up out of bed. Even then, the battle may not head anywhere because we may not feel like making an effort.

That is not good.

Not settling for second best means trying our best, giving our best at whatever we attempt to do. If we end up a technical failure, then who is it who
determines that? Well, we do, of course. But who is it to say we have to accept it?

We need to rise from defeat, pat the dirt off our clothes, and move forward. Second best is a term others have coined to ease the pain of losing. Yet, how can it be a loss if the chance is always there to succeed?

Look what it says in the book of Hebrews, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 2:1-2).

We may not have made the grade this go around. It should not bother us, though. We have only discovered that we were not ready. With better preparation next time, we will certainly do better. We should not feel, however, that we have experienced a setback. In that respect, we have all experienced setbacks. How we deal with it determines if we have given it our best.

Trying our best and failing does not mean we are second best. It means we have tried. And really, in the context of our short life here on earth, there are many more opportunities to do better.
CHAPTER 17

Recognizing God’s Favor

Luana and I recently celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary. With it being the huge milestone that it was, we wanted to do something special. We also needed to stay close to home because Luana was still finishing off her Registered Holistic Nutritionist designation, and with exams and assignments due, we had to get back quickly.

We decided to drive to Toronto for several days and enjoy the comfort of a five-star hotel. Since it was a special occasion, we wanted to splurge a little. I mean, we scrimp and save so much throughout the year, even using coupons when we can, that with this being an once-in-a-lifetime event, we expected a lot. So six months prior, I booked an upscale 500-square-foot room in the heart of the city with plans to have dinner at the rotating
restaurant at the top of the CN Tower while the sun was setting.

When the day finally came, it was raining. Suffice it to say, I was disappointed. We would not be able to see the sunset as I had hoped. Being the optimist that she was, Luana said, “Think about it, Jack. No kids. No responsibilities. I am so looking forward to soaking in a hot bath and enjoying the silence.”

Little did I realize God was setting us up for a huge blessing.

The night before, I had received an email from the hotel confirming the reservation. But something did not look right. Instead of $476 per-night that I was quoted when I had made the booking, the notification said the room would be $299 instead. The hotel gave us a free upgrade. I could not believe it.

But it did not end there. When God blesses, he blesses big.

Arriving at check-in, the concierge welcomed us, and we proceeded to complete the details for our stay. We exchanged pleasantries and then I asked about the tub.

“Is it a Jacuzzi or a soaker?”

“Neither. A shower.” He said. “A King bed and a shower.”

“Any chance of getting a tub?”

“Let me see what is available.”

As he typed away, Luana and I chatted about the Victorian décor and the elegant look to the lobby. We could not help but appreciate the rich architecture all around us.
“I have another room that may work for you.” The concierge said. “It is in our renovated wing. It is a step up from the original room. It has a tub and two Queen beds.”

Luana is practical, so she nixed the idea with one of those what-are-we-going-to-do-with-two-queen-beds look.

“This is the reason we have been married for twenty-five years.” I said. ”The original room will be fine.”

He laughed, and then went back to typing on his terminal. And for a while, there was silence. It was a good five minutes before he said anything else. “I have one more option. The room has a King bed and a tub. It also has a sitting room adjacent the bedroom. A bit more spacious than the room with the two Queens. Is that something you might be interested in?”

Was he kidding? Of course! When the concierge gave us our pass cards to the room, he also handed us two gift certificates. One was for two sparkling wines and the other was for a dessert of our choice at the hotel’s lounge that evening. We were at a loss for words. We did thank him eventually, but it took some time to realize God’s favor was on us and the best had yet to come.

After we reached the top floor of the hotel, Luana and I made our way to our room. By this time, we had had so many surprises spring up on us that we thought there could not be any more.

We were wrong. Our pass cards had two room numbers, which I thought was odd. We could enter
our room through two doors from opposite ends of the hall.

Once inside, we dropped our bags, stunned. There was a King bed, bath, TV, sitting area in one room—yes, one room—and in the adjacent room was another bath, TV and sitting area. The hotel had given us a 1,000-square-foot room, which was almost $1,000 a night for $299.

The first thing we said to each other was, “This is God’s favor.”

We recognized it. We knew it. It was an extraordinary doing in an ordinary setting. No way could we have pulled off anything like this on our own. This was meticulously planned and perfectly executed. God’s hand was all over this one.

Later that evening we did end up having dinner at the top of the CN Tower. It was rainy, but Luana and I did not mind. We were together, and that is all that mattered.

We went back to the hotel for dessert.
PART 4

Overcoming Weakness

“For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”

—1 John 5:4-5
CHAPTER 18

Listening to What Others Have to Say

Have you ever seen those talk shows or news programs where the hosts try to best one another with quick-witted banter and sarcastic remarks? Sometimes it feels as if no one is listening. It seems they all want to make a point regardless of what anyone else says. After a while, it becomes exhausting.

Listening Has Become a Lost Art

In the book of James, it says, “Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger” (James 1: 19).

Is it not interesting that anger should play a central role when communication is concerned? In fact, going back to those TV hosts, you would think
that if no one heard their point it would be the end of their existence. Yet, although those off-the-cuff comments may have come in jest, after everything is over, they do tend to bite.

What James is saying is for us to slow things down, listen to what people have to say before we jump to conclusions with our own point of view.

Someone once said, “If your mouth is moving, you are not listening.” In a way, it is true. Carefully paying attention and giving the floor to others provides us with the opportunity to absorb a whole lot more than when we are talking.

**It Takes a Strong Will to Refrain from Speaking**

James also has this to say about the very instrument that will bring us either incredible happiness or absolute misery, “But no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison” (James 3:8).

If you think James is done with his assault on the tongue, he makes it even clearer, “With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so” (James 3:9-10).

The odds are against us. No matter what we do, we will not be able to win against the tongue. How many politicians have sparked an international incident because of their unruly tongues? A slip here, a slip there and the world suddenly becomes unrecognizable.
When Forgiveness Is Enough

How many times have we heard someone say, “I have misspoken?” What he or she really means is, “I messed up. I put my foot in my mouth, and I should have thought before I said anything.”

If well-known figures with many years of public speaking experience can still get into trouble with their tongue, what is it to say that we, who have very little practice in lesser situations, could do any better?

That is why it is far better to listen than to speak. It is less likely that we would say something we would later regret when we are listening.
CHAPTER 19

Overcoming Fear

Everyone is afraid of something. You can be afraid of heights (Acrophobia), afraid of open spaces (Agoraphobia), or simply afraid of spiders (Arachnophobia).

In my case, I have always been afraid of public speaking. I recently discovered my fear goes by the name Glossophobia, which is really speech anxiety. I would have thought, though, a fear such as this would have gone by a better name. Something like Heartinmythroatphobia would make sense. I would even be more willing to accept KillmenowbeforeIgoonstagephobia.

I have learned, however, that avoiding fear does nothing more than delay the inevitable. Eventually the same challenge will appear and I will have to tackle it one way or another.
Facing My Fears

To overcome my fear of public speaking I do what any normal human being would do. I immerse myself in situations where I cannot avoid public speaking.

I realize it sounds counterintuitive. After all, who does that? Who confronts the very thing that promotes that queasy feeling in the pit of the stomach that renders a person sick as a billy goat?

As silly as it sounds, I do.

Whenever there is an opportunity to make a speech, say a few words on behalf of an event, or have a need to make my opinion known, I am there. I do it because I know that if I choose to stay quiet, I will not grow and be a better individual. I will remain the same.

Sameness makes a person lukewarm.

And a long time ago, I promised myself I would never be lukewarm for something I care about a great deal.

God Fights on My Behalf

The other thing I have yet to mention that gives me the courage to step outside of myself and face my fears is that I have God fight my battles for me:

“Say to those who have an anxious heart, ‘Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you’” (Isa. 35: 4).
Imagine your fear being a big bully waiting for you at the end of the street. In the past, you turned the corner and went the other way. But on this occasion, right ahead is God who will ensure your safety. He will fight in your stead. He will vanquish your enemies and turn them into dust.

With a thought like that is it a wonder anyone has any fear at all.

**Will Fear Ever Vanish?**

Every so often, I still have that queasy feeling whenever all eyes are gazing at me. I am fine with that because I know as I move forward toward overcoming my insecurity I will be a better version of myself.

In that sense, it is all a matter of facing the challenge head on, and tackling it so that I can control it as opposed to it controlling me.

Add to that God’s help, and I know I have nothing to fear.
CHAPTER 20

Giving Without Expecting Anything Back

Firefighters have a tough job. They rush into burning buildings to save us from fires. They work odd hours. Their sleep patterns may be non-existent.

One thing is certain: The amount of time and dedication a firefighter devotes to the job does not compare to the appreciation shown to them in the form of compensation.

We owe them our lives.

Walking in Someone Else’s Shoes

That act of giving is not an easy thing to master. It takes a certain mindset to turn around and say, “Here, this belongs to me, but I want you to have it because it is the right thing to do.”
With firefighters, it is simply a case of walking in another person’s shoes. They have counted the cost and they know that if no one steps in to do anything, nothing will ever get done. They want to make a difference.

Giving of our abundance, whether it is time, money or health, means seeing things from the other person’s perspective. Mental and/or physical health issues may prevent someone from accomplishing anything of value, in which case, others may need to step in to help.

And that is okay. Aiding those less fortunate would lend to a spirit of humility that would inspire others to participate as well.

**Giving Is Not a Zero-Sum Game**

When was the last time we have heard someone say, “You rub my back, I rub yours,” or, “If you do this for me, I will do that for you,” or how about, “I owe you one.”

Sadly, all of these statements have a condition attached to them.

Why can we not give without it being a transaction? There is nothing wrong with the word reciprocation, however, when it becomes the sole reason for giving, it is nothing more than politics.

Giving from the heart means just that, giving without expecting anything in return. The apostle Paul made that clear when he says, “The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has
decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:6-8).

Now some may consider this philosophy a zero-sum game, in that someone else’s loss is someone else’s gain—but giving without strings is really a win-win game. In fact, bestowing on others all the joys and privileges we ourselves possess, encourages others to share in those same joys and privileges.

Imagine if everyone did that. There would be no need for the social safety nets our governments have established to help with the poor and the downtrodden.

We would all share in the abundance of the harvest our great lands produce.

**Giving to Give**

Therefore, let us not think of what we can get for what we give. Instead, let us provide shelter for those who do not have homes. Let us cook food for those who are hungry. Let us bring clothing to those who cannot afford to buy it themselves.

For with every good deed we do to those who cannot do it for themselves, a greater reward awaits us with the joy we gain from giving.
CHAPTER 21

Forgiving and Forgetting

With repentance comes forgiveness.
For God, forgiveness comes easy.
As long as we are truly sorry for what we have done, he will forgive us. In God’s mind, it will be as if we have never committed sin.

Then, why is it so difficult for us to do the same?

We carry grudges. “He did this to me. She did that to me. I hate him. I wish he were dead.”

If God used the same measure on us that we use to lay judgment on others, by now, we would all be dead.

But God is incredibly patient, not wanting to lose anyone to that vile enemy, the fallen angel of light. He wants everyone to share in the inheritance of all things.
When Forgiveness Is Enough

“He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son” (Revelation 21:7 KJV).

With a thought like that, who has time for petty slights, or for that matter, major grievances? No greater possession has God than for him to bestow us all he owns, which also includes granting us eternal life.

Therefore, as children of God, it is time we put away childish things, forgive one another, and look to our inheritance—the universe and everything in it.
CHAPTER 22

Loving Unconditionally

What does unconditional love mean? How does it apply to those people who have harmed us? We could easily dismiss them and move forward. That is a realistic choice.

But how different would that make us Christians from anyone else?

Would it not be more constructive to love our enemies in spite of their hatred toward us?

The high road is a far better road on which to travel.

Of course, we could never reach this decision without some help.

Love God

I recently read in the bible a reminder of what it means to love unconditionally.
Matthew 22:37-39 says, “And he said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

To love God—to really love God—means to do his will. His will is for us to worship him with joy and gladness in our heart.

And why not?

He sustains all things, great and small. His power infuses life in the largest of galaxies to the tiniest of particles. He set laws in motion for us to experience the wildest of sunsets to the most incredible of sunrises. His hand glides over the oceans imbuing his strength to the deep, so as we may marvel at his glorious handiwork.

When we kneel before him, we give him praise for his wonderful majesty over our lives.

We would not be breathing, if it were not for him.

I personally learned unconditional love by his love for me. I did not ask God to love me. He does it because that is who he is.

**Love Others**

Oh, what a world it would be if there were no more wars. Oh, what a life it would be if we could only resolve hatred in our hearts instead of on the battlefield.

When we reach that point in our lives that it makes more sense to allow God to work in us than
to take matters into our own hands, that is when we finally allow love to work his will in our relationships.

God is love.

If God lives in us, it is easy to let a slight pass. It is easy to say to those emboldened to offend us, “I forgive you.” It is easy to see the other person’s point of view. It is easy to understand their actions. It is easy to fall asleep at night and not hold on to things for the next day. It is easy to make amends with those who do not want to make amends.

It is easy because unconditional love does not hurt, destroy, ridicule, hate, put down, torment, or devastate.

Unconditional love is just that. Allowing God to live in us.
CHAPTER 23

Appreciating What We Have

Life is more than what we can get from other people. It has to do with love, joy, peace, happiness. It is not taking advantage of a situation because of a weakness or flaw in someone else’s reasoning skills. Not everyone is equal. Everyone is different, and with differences come challenges. That is what life is all about, to meet those challenges head on and to grow into better versions of ourselves.

I Did Not Always Feel this Way

I was one of those people who would swoop into a jammed parking lot, steal the last empty spot from an old lady so that I could finish my own Christmas shopping.
I was the guy who would take advantage of a two-for-one sale, going back to the store several times to make many purchases of the same product, in spite of quantities being limited.

And I was the jerk who did not believe in garbage cans. The city made sidewalks more than for walking. At least that is what I believed.

But, I have grown. I have matured. What seemed so important years ago does not seem so much that now. With a change in heart comes an appreciation for the simple things in life.

The Simple Things Make Life Special

I so love the way an ice cream cone twirls at the top when ordering it from a truck in the middle of summer.

I cannot get enough of the clouds dancing along the edge of the sky while playing a game of “Guess What I Am.”

I look forward to sitting at the table with my family, talking about how everyone’s day went, and discovering something I did not know before.

My nightly routine involves reading God’s word as a way to ease my mind of the day’s troubles.

And nothing compares to holding someone I love in my arms. Nothing comes close.

Is That All There Is to It?

As long as we look to the little things, that is how we are able to appreciate what we have. As long as
When Forgiveness Is Enough

we keep the little things in mind, life goes a whole lot smoother.

After all, we would not want it any other way.
PART 5

Living an Abundant Life—I

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

—Gal. 2:20
CHAPTER 24

Lead a Fulfiling Life

There is no trick to being happy.

Well, there is, but it has more to do with attitude. One can be a millionaire and be miserable. In that sense, money has nothing to do with it. Although, having money sure makes things easier. Still, as the old cliché goes, money does not buy happiness.

What about having the power to do just about anything? Will that bring happiness? Will that make for a fulfilling life—telling people what to do? I always thought those with the greatest power were those who served every day, unappreciated, ready and willing to surrender their lives for the needy. At least, that is what I always thought.

I suppose there is more to leading a fulfilling life than having money and power.
There is, and it is much easier than anyone thinks:

1. Enjoy a Healthy Lifestyle
2. Do What We Like to Do Best
3. Spend Time with Others
4. Do Good
5. Believe in Something Greater Than Ourselves

This five-point roadmap is not hard to apply on a daily basis, and its rewards are immeasurable.

1. Enjoy a Healthy Lifestyle

I get seven hours of sleep every night. I am talking about seven full hours of solid sleep without waking up. I never used to be that way. There was a time I only slept two hours a night. It was awful. Every morning I felt as if someone had run over me with a dump truck.

Paranoia also has a nice effect on someone who is an avid insomniac. I looked like a character out of a Tim Burton movie. Spiked hair, shadows under the eyes and pale skin that would make a corpse look good.

After several attempts at self-medication—not really—I took to changing my diet.

I went on a regiment of fresh fruits and vegetables, lots of fish, nuts, whole grains, and vitamin supplements. Slowly, the hours to my sleep pattern crept up to three, four and five hours nightly. I could not go beyond five hours until I
introduced homemade wine to my evening meals. Suddenly, I broke the five-hour barrier and blew past six to arrive at seven hours sleep per night.

With the added sleep, I found I could focus more, reason better, and do all the things I could not do, like, carry on an adult conversation; something Luana now appreciates.

Oh, and before I forget, I drink lots of water every day—half my weight in ounces. Nothing oils the joints better than the wet stuff.

Once I stabilized my health, good things followed. The days were brighter and my attitude was warmer. I said goodbye to zombies and said hello to superheroes.

2. Do What We Like to Do Best

What other activity could bring fulfillment than to enjoy doing what we like doing best? Everyone is good at something.

It can be walking, running, crafting needlepoint art, singing, fishing, playing guitar, playing video games, watching the stars, listening to music, painting, playing soccer, or football for that matter, building things, traveling, relaxing on a beach; it could be anything.

For some, their job is what brings fulfillment. That is quite all right. Imagine having a job as a skydiving instructor. Would that not be the best job ever? I could never do it, but there are those who made their hobby a job.

If we could make our hobby our job, how cool would that be?
The point is we need to find what we like to do and do it. The joy of doing it is the reward.

3. Spend Time with Others

One of the biggest pleasures I have in life is to sit down and share a meal with someone.

The conversation can go back and forth between past and present, on common activities, or simply on family. The exchange of ideas is a thrilling thing to experience. A good conversation can bond people, create future dates for more conversations, and provide an opportunity to discover something new.

Sometimes, the biggest surprise comes when it seems we have exhausted all dialog.

In those quiet moments together is when we realize what the relationship really means to us.

The simple act of playing ball with them, or singing, or doing something crazy, like, setting up soda bottles in the backyard with baking soda at the ready to produce the most awesome rocket ship ever, can make it one of our happiest memories yet.

Besides, embarrassing moments are best shared among friends.

Then, should a lull hit our lives, we will have those memories to draw on, to carry use forward, and lift use to our feet.

A happy and fulfilling life is more than the dinner entrée we serve our guests.

It includes our guests.

4. Do Good
Has anyone ever held the door for you? Do you remember how it felt?

Has anyone ever given up a parking space at the mall for you, just because?

How about at the grocery store checkout, has anyone ever beaten you to the front of the line but let you go first?

Imagine doing little things like that for others all the time. What would our life be like?

The old widow across the street would have someone to mow her lawn in the summer and shovel her driveway in the winter. Our neighbor could borrow our hedge trimmer without thinking that he owed us something in return. One of our friends could ask us for a ride to the airport without worrying about imposing.

Communities would flourish. Cities would not need the vast policing that it does now. And everyone would be nice to one another because it would be the right thing to do.

Of course, a change like that would be unheard of, unless…

…well, unless it began with ordinary people wanting to make a difference.

Part of that willingness to make a difference can involve volunteer work. Many organizations out there need help with initiatives tailored for the community, such as spending time reading to the elderly, feeding the homeless, or planting a tree for the future. Getting involved can be as easy as making a phone call or dropping an email.
Whatever we choose to participate in, we ought to recognize that our involvement will not only benefit those in need but also provide us with the satisfaction of knowing we have done good.

5. Believe in Something Greater Than Ourselves

A life with a purpose is a powerful thing.

*People who do not believe in something will fall for anything.*

I think that is a quote from somewhere.

Many of the greatest heroes of our time were the ones who believed in a cause. They saw something was missing and went ahead and filled the void. Sometimes, as is the case with Leonardo Da Vinci, who conceptualized flying machines, or Isaac Newton, who formulated the Laws of Motion, they end up changing the world.

That single belief in something greater than oneself made these people rich in knowledge and productive in life.

For some, it is the belief in a higher power.

What keeps me balanced is my belief in God and in his son, Jesus, who came to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

Having an anchor will keep us stable from the blowing wind that may want to take us away. That very same anchor may act as the cornerstone that will keep us grounded to our goal of pursuing our life’s calling.
Again, a life filled with purpose is a life fulfilled.

Believing in something greater than ourselves will keep us grounded in a life bursting with purpose.
CHAPTER 25

Experience Good Health

With Luana being a Registered Holistic Nutritionist, I can also say I have learned a few things along the way.

Many of these tips I have discovered on my own. I knew they were good for me, so I did them. I found them during a period of trial-and-error. But what Luana taught me was why they were good for me—the effects on the body, the longevity gained, and the big rewards earned in terms of positive mindset.

I can sit here all day giving her credit for many other things, but then where will that leave us? I will have not made any headway toward what I wanted to write about, and that would be a bad thing.

These are my tips for enjoying a life brimful and running over with good health:
Let us look at these points one at a time.

1. **Sleep as Much as You Can**

I have written about this before that I think some of you may actually find it boring. That may prove beneficial, because then it would mean you would be ready to apply this energy-boosting tip.

Sleep as much as you can. There is no short-changing sleep.

For me, sleep boosts my energy levels, enhances my focus, and increases my creativity.

I know that if I cheat on my sleep, my body will wreak havoc on my mind. My lack of sleep causes me to be forgetful, induces irritation, and swells my likelihood for bemoaning my life.

Nobody likes me when I complain.

Therefore, I sleep as much as I can. I make it a routine, and I am better for it.

2. **Drink Water**

What can be more important than staying hydrated? I drink half my weight in ounces every day. My
skin thanks me for it, my digestive system celebrates, and everything in my body works as it should. I do not think I need to be specific with that last point.

Drinking the wet stuff is a great choice for watering the tubes; but remember, fruits and vegetables are high in water content, too. Fresh cucumbers, watermelon, strawberries and celery make great choices for when we are in the mood for something else to quench our thirst.

The other big benefit to keeping hydrated is it may help with long-term muscle and joint damage. That is in addition to preventing dry skin, headaches, constipation, minimal urination, sunken eyes, and muscle cramps.

In other words, drink water throughout the day, and stay healthy.

3. Eat Good Foods

Good food starts with a deep fryer, thick sauces, and sugars. Wait a minute that is not right.

Let me try that again.

Good food starts with fresh fruits, vegetables, grains, nuts and fish. If you are familiar with the Mediterranean diet, then you will know olive oil is our friend. Foods rich in good fat may aid in maintaining cholesterol levels to where they should be.

I noticed that when I eat a meal heavy on the carbs and low on the veggies, I feel bloated, not able to move, and extremely tired. But when I eat a
meal made up of whole grain rice, salmon and steamed broccoli, I feel great.

It may have to do with the enzymes secreted in the gut. I have only so much processing power before my stomach says, “Hold on a second, you want me to work twice as hard to get you on your feet? Well, that is not happening, buddy.”

Lesson learned.

What my family and I also try to do is to always shop local. All our fruits and vegetables are from nearby farms, organic, and ready to serve. Then again, we live in farm country, so it is easier for us to buy quality produce than for those living in the big city.

Nonetheless, the point being, a vibrant life is a life given to food filled with ample vitamins and nutrients.

4. Get That Heart Pumping

I walk everywhere I go. I do take the car, yet it is not my main method of transportation. My feet keep me strong. I have had people comment that my calves are Olympic standard, whatever that means. I suppose the muscles I have there bulge a bit.

Every day I try to do something different to optimize my heart rate. It can be anything from walking to running on a treadmill. I even have a heart rate measuring app on my phone that shows me how I am doing in comparison to folks living in the mountains in Italy where my parents were born.
When we are fit, we can accomplish anything. Work is easier, talking with people is not a weight, and completing daily chores is manageable.

Let us not forget about the regular trips to the dentist. Keeping our teeth in tip-top shape is good for our heart and our health. Having no cavities means eating well without the burden of worrying about infections that may spread throughout the body affecting other organs. We do not want to have our heart failing because we did not take care of our teeth. That is a big no-no.

Do you want to live a life bursting with health? Begin a program that will exercise that beating organ in the center of your being. Your body will thank you for it.

5. Practice Proper Hygiene

I cannot tell you how it feels to meet someone decked out in formal attire only to sense a brutal odor contaminating my immediate vicinity. Now, I understand skipping a shower or two, but to look good and smell bad is another story.

We live in an age that no one dressed in a tux should stink. I am being truthful when I say this.

Garlic and onions is good. A toothbrush and mouthwash is better.

I am paranoid with my hygiene. I wash and shave every single morning. I may miss a shower on the weekend, but when I am with family, it is not a big deal. A bar of soap should be everyone’s friend for life.
Not only that, but a shower is an amazing thing. I can be so tired, yet, once I take a shower I am ready to conquer anything that comes my way.

Besides, looking after ourselves prompts others to look after themselves.

It is a rule. I made it up just now. It works.

In all seriousness, when we feel good about ourselves, we tend to feel good about life.

6. Take a Vacation

Every year, Luana and I sit down to decide where we would like to go for our annual family vacation. Sometimes, our vacation consists of a road trip with the kids, and other times we choose to spend several weekends away from it all.

A vacation is a great way to reset. It allows for whatever problems that exist to take a backseat in order for us to reconnect with our lives.

One of my favorite vacations is when I have the opportunity to float in a pool and watch the clouds overhead form shapes of animals. I will drift back and forth from one end to the other, daydreaming those animals to life.

A change of scenery also provides for wonderful experiences that under normal circumstances we would have otherwise missed.

But taking a vacation does not have to be an annual event. Every week I take a day to step away from the regular chores of life to read God’s word and relax with the family. It is on this day that I can certainly say that my appreciation for creation far exceeds that of all other days during the week.
Thinking deeply about something requires practice. What better way to practice than to apply this technique as part of a daily routine.

Meditation, when done correctly, will help maintain a positive frame of mind.

It does take a bit of effort, though. We will need a quiet time so that we can think without distractions.

How it applies to me is I take a moment to think about my life from all angles. If I find something in particular I need to resolve, I will sit in a comfortable chair and think through the situation to see if I can come up with an answer.

Another use of meditation is for us to ponder on life’s little mysteries. I like thinking about God and about how I can apply his perspective in my life.

For some, it may not be that easy to find a place where there are no interruptions.

In that case, take a walk.

A simple brisk lap around the block clears the mind of the clutter that has accumulated throughout the day, leaving us refreshed and invigorated to meditate on the important issues in our lives.

With these thoughts in mind, use meditation as a key weapon in your arsenal toward better health.
CHAPTER 26

Be Happy with What You Have

What is happiness? Is happiness attainable? Is it something we can give to someone else? In other words, can we make someone else happy? Or, do we need something—whatever it is—to make us happy?

I will answer these questions by introducing the following action plan:

1. Throw Away Envy and Selfish Ambition
2. Stop Humanizing God
3. Be Grateful

This plan will address the topic of being happy with what we have.

1. Throw Away Envy and Selfish Ambition
Remember how you felt when you received that shiny new phone for Christmas? You had resolved that nothing in the world could ever take away your happiness.

That is, until you saw someone else using the upgraded version. Now, you want one, too.

Envy and jealousy are like poison to happiness. No matter what, someone will always have it better.

The best way to fight the urge to compare oneself with another is to take life one day at a time. Satisfaction comes from realizing today’s problems and successes are for today. As the cliché goes, tomorrow is another day—another day to fail, another day to succeed.

As I believe Jesus is the son of God, I also look to the bible for wisdom. James 3:16 says, “For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.”

There is nothing wrong with planning. Wise stewards plan. But if planning leads to wanting to be better than others, then there will be no happiness.

Let us throw away envy and selfish ambition and allow happiness to flood our hearts and our minds.

2. Stop Humanizing God

There was a time in my life that I used to think God did not know what he was doing. I saw all the misery around the world, the pain people suffered, and I did not believe God could ever fix this mess.

It was too great, even for him.
Thinking that way led me to invalidate God and ask that if he could not fix the world, how could he fix me? In a sense, I humanized God.

Making God equal with me made the thought of his inaction bearable.

I was wrong. Once I began to know God and to learn why he did the things he did, by reading his word, praying, going to church, I learned about real happiness.

I learned God does things in his own time. He allows things to happen because it suits his plan. I may not understand it all, but I know his decisions will make sense to me eventually.

Having the faith that God will work things for the best is our reassurance he loves us and is greater than us or anyone else. As it says in Hebrews, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). Therefore, we may sin, we may stumble and fall, but he will never leave us. He has never left us, nor will he ever.

That reassurance is another layer to happiness.

3. Be Grateful

Have you ever exercised and found yourself exhausted to the point that you would give anything for a glass of water? Think about how it felt when you finally took that first gulp.


For a single moment in time, nothing else really mattered. The neighbors could have been bickering, your car payment could have been late
and your dog could have suddenly developed a case of worms.

But, for that moment—you were grateful.

Imagine carrying that grateful feeling throughout the day—all the time.

We would not complain about the noisy passenger on the train next to us. We would give food to the homeless sitting at the street corner. We would forgive those who had done us wrong.

Our lives, as we know it, would change all because we were grateful with what we had.

We would not worry about money. We would not worry about peace. We would not worry about anything, really

When we are grateful, everything else falls into place.

When we are grateful—there is no reason to be unhappy.
CHAPTER 27

Avoid Being Unhappy

Some time ago, I had taken it upon myself to conduct an experiment—unofficially of course, but an experiment, nonetheless. For one week, I had avoided news sites in an effort to determine how it affected my view of things. Surprisingly, I had found the results quite startling.

Before revealing my findings, I would like to talk a bit about how to avoid being unhappy. I can write about this now because a few years ago I went through days when I had allowed dark clouds to dictate how I felt. It was not after several attempts at learning key coping skills, however, that I am now fully aware of what triggers the moodiness.

In light of all this:

1. Stay Clear of Self-Absorbed People
2. Be Thankful for One Positive Thing Today
3. Give God the Glory

These three tips will help us avoid being unhappy.

1. Stay Clear of Self-Absorbed People

You know the ones of whom I am referring. These folks have nothing but drama in their lives. They cannot seem to look beyond themselves to acknowledge others are living on this planet, too.

I am not talking about people who look to do good in spite of common challenges. I talking about narcissists, whose only world is their own. They expect others to worship their every grand accomplishment regardless of their rather ordinary existence.

Avoid these people like used serving bowls, which appear clean on the outside, but are filthy from within. They want us to feel sorry for them because their self-esteem is shattered. They want us to be their strength because they cannot muster enough of it themselves.

If we do not supply them with their needs, they will move on to those who can.

Run away. You will be happier without them in your life.

2. Be Thankful for One Positive Thing Today

Something incredible happens when we become aware of our surroundings. We learn to see the good, and we change for the better.
It had been seven months before my baptism when I had resolved to be thankful for at least one positive thing daily.

As silly as it sounds, and as I think about how eating a piece of cheese could brighten my day, I appreciate the experience more than anything I could ever imagine doing in this entire world.

Catching the train on time, listening to a favorite song, the weather cooperating during an event, traffic being light during the journey home, and other things could mean the difference between unhappiness and being grateful to be alive.

Find that one thing to be thankful for today and cherish the moment. It is another step toward remaining in that positive mindset we so desire.

3. Give God the Glory

I was sick for several days one winter, but you would not have known it had I not told you. That is because throughout the entire ordeal I was giving God the glory.

Why is it we cry out to God whenever we need him? Why can we not pray and thank him every day simply for the very breath that flows in our lungs?

I have grown to include God in every aspect of my life—not because I have to, but because I want to. I realize he has made me, and he has sent his only son, Jesus, as a sacrifice for all the evil things I have done on this earth since the first drop of blood coursed through my veins (Hebrews 9:12).

Once I came to the realization God is the only one who will lead me out of illness and into
unbound prosperity and health, it is easy to give him the glory for everything that happens in my life.

If I should so find myself suffering for something he deems me worthy to suffer, then I will not hold back my praise for his awesome kindness toward me either. He always has a reason why we should go through the things he puts us through—either to make us better in this life or the next.

God always has a reason.

The Results

Getting back to my little experiment—you know, the one about me avoiding news sites?

As strange as it may sound, the longer I lingered on a news site, the more I felt my mood shift from bright and cheery to sullen and downcast.

That is correct. Today’s news is a drag.

Conversely, I also found that when I read about how people had achieved a milestone in their lives—a birth, a graduation, a wedding—my view remained sunny and filled with hope.

Coincidence? Perhaps. But certainly, my experience is something I could not dismiss as trivial. As unscientific as it was, this experiment has taught me to be extra careful with what I feed this tiny brain of mine. This pinkish mass in my skull has to last me a lifetime. I cannot play with it in such a way that it would affect my mood, which in turn would affect others who come in contact with me.

Therefore, I will list this point separately.
When Forgiveness Is Enough

Feed our mind with good things and watch our day transform for the better.
CHAPTER 28

Stay Positive

No one likes a sourpuss. If you do not know what that is, a quick Google search reveals it is a person who is bad-tempered or habitually sullen. For someone like that, it may take some effort to snap out of the blues. It would have been far better not to fall into a mindset of negativity in the first place.

How can we do that? How can we avoid the vortex of a swirling drain when there is just so much more to gain by living a life filled with hope?

Key strategies for this topic:

1. Keep Moving
2. Enjoy the Music
3. Forgive

What can we learn that we do not already know?
1. Keep Moving

As obvious as it sounds, it is hard to hit a moving target. Isaac Newton put it another way, “A body in motion stays in motion. A body at rest stays at rest.”

When we are on the move, we expend energy—energy that we would have otherwise consumed for other things. Sometimes, and this happens more often than we think, those other things are not conducive toward our betterment as human beings.

The solution is to keep moving. Our focus should be on volunteer activities. Community programs are a great way to lift the spirit. The moment we see others suffer is when we become aware of our own blessings.

That is not the end of it, though. The very act of providing for the needs of others changes our attitude and makes us humble. Attitude plays a big part with maintaining a positive outlook. We can own the world, but really, what good would we gain if we lose our souls?

2. Enjoy the Music

Music calms the savage beast. Is that not a saying from somewhere?

Have we ever thought how our mood changes when we listen to music? It would be difficult to be happy if a sad song is playing in the background of a restaurant. How many times have you heard
Mozart’s Requiem while wolfing down a pizza at some bar and grill?

Music plays such a big role when it comes to setting a mood. Music can make us happy. Music can make us sad. That is why it is so important to pay attention to what goes into our ears. All it takes is one song to change our attitude.

Have fun with music. Create mixes that inspire creativity. Listen to music that challenges our very being. If after hearing a song we feel awful, it may be time to forget that song ever existed.

Let us allow music to give life to our bones. The right kind of music will make us grow for the better.

3. Forgive

So much time goes to waste playing the “he said, she said” game. So what if he or she said something bad about us. If we are happy with who we are what difference does it make what others think?

Bringing God into the conversation will help with this point:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax
collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mat. 5: 43-48).

As much as it is opposite to how we, mere humans, think, forgiving an enemy releases us from the perils of hatred. Would it not be more beneficial to live a life without enemies than to spend time thinking about how we can do harm to those who have harmed us?

Even more so, forgiving those who are not worthy is more of a testimony for us. For when we forgive, we release ourselves of negativity from our lives. No longer are we captive to the chains of evil, but we are free to do good works inspired by the gifts of grace.

It may be hard to understand at first, and that is fine, however, the blessings that come with forgiving someone go beyond the forgiver to touch the lives of everyone involved.

With That in Mind

Once these techniques become part of our routine, it will be difficult to fall into a dark or glum state. We will find life more fulfilling, more rewarding and rich in positive experiences. No longer will we have to hide behind a fake smile or a performance laugh. We can be ourselves and live a happy, abundant life bursting with joy.
So keep moving, enjoy the music and let things go. After all, it is far better to be a role model than to become a case study.
PART 6

Living an Abundant Life—II

“You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”

—Ps. 16:11
CHAPTER 29

Break Bad Habits

We all have them but are too afraid to admit it. They dominate our lives, they control our routines, and they sour our mood.

What are they? They are bad habits. And bad habits are bad news for those wanting to live happy and abundant lives.

Let us take a moment to look at five ways we can break bad habits:

1. Confess the Habit
2. Recognize the Triggers
3. Replace the Bad with the Good
4. Make New Friends
5. Bring God to the Fight

What benefits come from overcoming weaknesses?
1. Confess the Habit

Mildred: “Judy, you may not believe it, but I bite my nails, bad.”

Judy: “I noticed. You have yet to gnaw off your cuticle to the bone.”

Admitting we have a problem is the first step to beating a bad habit. What better way to admit we have a problem than to confess it to a friend or loved one.

As difficult as it sounds, it really is easy to do. The problem lies with forgetting about our ego so we can grow into better people.

If we find we cannot tell our bad habits to someone around us, we can take to writing them down on paper. Once we read them to ourselves several times, we can either burn or introduce scissors to them.

In my case, I have done both. I have written them down and destroyed them, and I have told Luana about my deepest, darkest secrets as a way to throw away the insecurities caused by my weaknesses.

Yes, you may think that is extreme, but confessing our bad habits to others liberates us from carrying the burden ourselves.

2. Recognize the Triggers

Central to every bad habit rests a trigger. That trigger could be the innocent whiff of a scrumptious
cake, the sight of a beautiful woman, or simply the craving for something that will calm the nerves.

Whatever the trigger, it will lead us to where we do not want to go. Therefore, recognize it. Tame it. And move on to bigger and better things.

It is easy to say, but incredibly hard to do. How do we recognize the very thing that causes us to stumble?

Meditation is an awesome power that all of us bad-habit harbingers possess. By finding a quiet spot and meditating on what causes us to fall, we can identify the trigger. It will not happen overnight, but every moment we spend on improving ourselves is a moment spent overcoming a bad habit.

Sometimes, it is a matter of working through mock scenarios in order to determine the origin of the bad habit. Again, it will take time, but do not ever think it is time spent in a useless pursuit.

We will find the trigger. We will overcome our bad habits.

3. Replace the Bad with the Good

What is your bad habit? Is it eating late-night snacks before bed? Are you saddled with debt but cannot help spending more money on that fancy new vacation? Do you drink more than you should, even though you know it will lead to long-term health problems?

The best way to throw away a bad habit is to replace it with a good habit. Positive reinforcement is better than negative execution. We ought to find
the bad and lift away its effects on our lives by flooding it with the good.

You would love to eat a slew of late-night snacks. I understand that. Try drinking water, it will fill you and act as a cleanser. You have so much debt that you do not know how you will handle it in several months when the creditors start knocking on your door to repossess your home. Forget about that vacation and work at cutting down your spending. After all, you would like to have a future without worrying about who you owe, right? And that cocktail you are thinking about consuming? Consider having tea, or, better yet, a fruit juice. We should always think about the future by learning how our actions today will shape our tomorrow.

Do you bite your nails? Snack on carrots. Do you have a problem with wandering eyes? Think of the one you love. Are you prone to laziness? Find something to do other than watching television. It may sound harsh, but we are talking about getting rid of the things that hold us back from achieving our true potential.

4. Make New Friends

Every bad habit carries with it baggage. That baggage includes friends who are enablers. Enablers only have one thing on their mind—their own self-gratification.

Surrounding ourselves with people who genuinely love us for who we are will change who we are.
When we are with enablers, they will tear us down, strip us of our character, and allow us to struggle and fall in a pool of our own misery. What we need to do is identify the enablers and cut them from our lives. How far do we go?

Think of them as if they never existed.
We never knew them.

The other side of it is we now have the chance to meet new people who will build us up, carry us forward, and believe in us for who we are, and not who they think we ought to be.

New friends mean new experiences, which translates to new opportunities for growth.

5. Bring God to the Fight

Everyone may have a concept of what or who God is. For me, God is the creator of all things, the one who sacrificed his only son, Jesus, for the salvation of the many (1 John 4:9). Without God, I do not know where I would be.

When faced with a destructive pattern, it is good to know that God is there to fight on our behalf. We do not have to fight alone. Whatever the frailty, strength is always available (1 Tim. 1:12). We can tap into it and not worry about the cost (Eph. 2:8).

When our minds focus on eternity, the awful behaviors that plague us now do not seem so unstoppable. We can continue living, knowing there is always someone there to pick us up after a fall.
The trick is to permit that strength to course through our lives. In so doing, breaking a bad habit then becomes possible (Luke 18:27).
Get Along with Others

You see your friend from across the room. He smiles. He laughs with his buddies. When you navigate your way through the crowd to offer your hand, he takes a step back and looks as if you had just dropped from a nearby galaxy.

Life could not be more perfect.

Why are some people so difficult to appreciate? Is there a sign stamped on our foreheads that invites others to walk all over us? Or are we simply too sensitive to understand the nature of relationships and how they work?

Here are a few things to keep in mind when getting along with others:

1. Be Honest
2. Show Manners
Naturally, maintaining a relationship does take work, and these points ensure, at the very least, we are doing our part.

1. Be Honest

Every relationship we have experienced comes from an event we have experienced.

The relationship is there, it is alive, and it will not be going anywhere. Good or bad, it will always be there.

The first step to cooperating with one another is to admit we have to cooperate with one another. As simple as it sounds, it is one of the most challenging things to do. Being honest with those around us will make all the difference.

If we are in a situation where someone asks us our opinion, we need to tell the truth all the time. Some may feel that is a drastic step. Why tell the truth? Why expose us to possible criticism?

Because it is easier to remember the truth than to remember a lie.

2. Show Manners

You walk into a store, find the item you are looking for, and head to the counter for the purchase. Somehow, the cashier has not had the best of days, and she is looking to you as another excuse to vent
her frustration with life and her lack of the pursuit of happiness.

But you decide to engage her on another level.

She hands you the avocados, and you say thank you. She asks if you will need a bag. You say yes, thank you. You ask her to hand you the receipt instead of placing it in the bag, please. She does so.

You walk out and notice, looking back, a slight smile cresting on her face. Could it have been something you said?

A please and a thank-you can change a situation quickly, diffuse bad feelings, and transform a potential nuclear event into a kitten’s purr.

3. Appreciate Everyone

When was the last time we patted someone on the back? For some, it may be a meaningless gesture, but for others, it translates to a positive experience.

Let us take a moment to think about how it would feel if someone came to us and expressed their gratitude for something we did. Picture their face. Hear their words—if there were words.

Random acts of appreciation bond people.

Whenever we take it upon ourselves to make someone happy, we, in turn, by extension, make ourselves happy. Silly, is it not? It is true, though. Can someone say feelings of euphoria do not course through our veins when we show gratitude toward others?
That little bit of wonderful happens whenever we give of ourselves to others in a selfless and meaningful way.

4. It Is Not All About Us

Sometimes we are the ones who are the biggest stumbling blocks for others.

Either we face the reality that the world will continue on its merry way with or without us, or we continue believing everything we do deserves a spotlight.

There comes a time in one’s life that being a contributing member of society is far better than living in drama.

Here is an example: Johnny decided he was not going to attend his best friend’s wedding. He could not bring himself to shake the jealousy he feels when he sees his best friend with the girl who once rejected him. So he came up with the flimsy excuse that he will be in Europe that same weekend. What Johnny failed to tell his best friend is that he made his plans for Europe the very moment he received the wedding invitation.

Another example is the story of Mary, who hates that her sister had a baby. It should have been her. Every time her sister posts a photo of the baby on Instagram, Mary skips the post and moves on to other items on her feed. One day Mary came upon one too many photos, that she unfollowed her sister. Yes, it was an awful thing to do. Of course, she did later regret it and tried to explain it away.
Apparently, Instagram had a glitch that unfollowed people on her list arbitrarily. Or so she said.

In both cases, Johnny and Mary allowed envy to take root and skew their perspectives. Instead of being happy for his best friend’s upcoming marriage, Johnny drove a wedge between them that will forever affect their friendship. As for Mary, she may have gotten away with lying to her sister this time, but how many more times will she do the same and not hurt their relationship?

Any one of us can become Johnny or Mary.

To prevent this from happening, we have to remain focused and not succumb to the temptation of always wanting to be the center of attention.

5. Help Whenever You Can

The homeless man at the corner of that hectic intersection needs something to eat. What do you do? Do you give money? Do you hand over a portion of your lunch? Or do you extend him an invitation for a meal together?

It is easy to turn away people in need. All we have to do is say we are busy and look the part. No one bothers busy people.

But is that something we want to do?

Days before his crucifixion, Jesus said, “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me,
I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me”’ (Matthew 25:34-40).

Getting along with others is not just about agreeing and moving forward. It is about getting involved and making a difference in someone’s life.

This also means helping those who do not like us.

Imagine what a world it would be if we all did that.
CHAPTER 31

Avoid Envy

It never fails. You buy a brand new car, house, coat, phone, and then you notice the neighbor next door has a better version of it than you have. That wonderful feeling of pride you experienced owning that new item suddenly plummets to anger.

There is a way to avoid these feelings of despair:

1. Never Compare Ourselves with Others
2. Forget About Coveting What Others Have
3. Engage In Activities That Will Build Self-Esteem

Examining these aspects in detail will shine a light on envy.
1. Never Compare Ourselves with Others

Comparing ourselves with others is a losing game. Everyone is different. We all have different tastes, different styles and different goals in life. When we look to others, and compare what we have, let alone, what we do not have, and wish our lives were different, we set ourselves up for failure.

We need to appreciate our circumstances in order to appreciate our own value.

That is hard to do when society does nothing more than compare people with people all the time. Disengaging is not an option either. We cannot go a day without having contact with someone else.

Yet, when we look into the mirror, we ought to see how wonderful a creation we truly are, and that there is no one else like us in this entire world.

2. Forget About Coveting What Others Have

The bible is quite clear when it talks about coveting:

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s” (Ex. 20:17).

The idea that God knew what we would be like before issuing the tenth commandment should inspire a pause. Envy has a way of eating at our hearts, promoting fear, and lingering long after we come to the realization of its futility.
Coveting does one thing well. It convinces us we are inferior to those of whom we covet. We ought to know better. We ought to toss covetousness aside. God believes we are better than the things we desire that are not ours.

God wants us to be strong in spirit and strong in character.

Envy cannot grow in a person who avoids comparing oneself with others.

3. Engage In Activities That Will Build Self-Esteem

Ultimately, the cause of envy is low self-esteem. Being secure with who we are and what we do raises our satisfaction with ourselves and with what we have. If we do not like who we are, then logically, we would want to be someone else. What better way to be someone else than to want what others have.

Purging the need for validation is the first step to building self-esteem. Finding activities that will allow us to grow in that direction is the second step.

As someone who guides others with the direction of their lives, I tend to ask questions that promote discussion. One of the questions I ask is this: What makes you happy? Many of the people I speak with do not know what makes them happy. Some cite money. Some say a beautiful house and car, but no one really talks about satisfaction with their lives. There is always something missing, which they believe is something material in nature they need to possess.
Possessions do not make people happy. Money makes life easier, but it does not make people happy. However, the simple activity of flying a kite, or walking a dog, or stomping our feet in the rain may bring incredible joy that cannot be compared with anything else.

Simple activities such as these are what define happiness for us, and we would not need to succumb to envy to build our self-esteem.

**What More Is There?**

Perhaps it is time to see things from God’s perspective. Perhaps it is time to love others as he intended rather than want to become them.

Only then would we feel compelled not to envy others. Only then would we become whole.
CHAPTER 32

Achieve Success

Why do some people succeed with their goals while others fail? Is it because those who succeed have a plan? Or is it that they have the strands of success so ingrained in their DNA that nothing will prevent them from achieving their true potential?

I have often wondered this myself. But then again, over the course of three years, I did write a bestselling book trilogy while publishing three articles a week in support of my effort. So, I suppose, I do have some insight in what it takes to be successful.

Below is the template I use whenever I set out to accomplish anything that is beyond what I can accomplish on my own:

1. Create a Mission Statement
2. Prepare an Action Plan
3. Stay Healthy
4. Schedule Downtime
5. Leave Room for Incidentals
6. Never Give Up
7. Keep God in the Picture

You can use this template for just about anything. It will encourage you to keep pressing forward, never to surrender.

If one day, because of these seven keys, you become President of the United States, remember me as the guy who put you there. I take cash, bank draft, money order and certified check. However, I think I would be more useful as your Vice President.

1. Create a Mission Statement

Every success story has a beginning, and every beginning stems from a single thought. You cannot know where you are going if you do not have a destination.

Begin by thinking about what you want to achieve, sit down and write it down. Your goals will not become reality if you do not write them down.

When you have your goals written down in the form where you can see them, touch them, and read them back to yourself, they become real.

Think of your goals as Mission Statements. Simply writing the words, “Rock Star” on a piece of paper will not make it so. Instead, be specific: “In
one year I will lead a rock band, and in five years I will put out my first single.”

The more specific you are with your Mission Statement the more it will become an accomplished goal.

You can do the same thing with life goals: “By this time next year, I will have bought a house, paid my first mortgage installment and cut my own lawn.”

Seeing your goals detailed on paper will bring your goals to life.

Create your Mission Statement now.

2. Prepare an Action Plan

Writing down your Mission Statement is only the first step to achieving success. You will now need an Action Plan to move you along the journey.

How are you going to get to where you want to go? A good driver will have counted the cost of travel. A good driver will have also planned the route, landmarks to look for and destination. A good driver will know when the journey is complete.

Similarly, if you are thinking about completing your degree in Physics, you will need to create an Action Plan that details the courses you will need, the cost, time and effort you will expend to achieve this success.

An Action Plan can be as simple as:

Make $5,000 in tuition working at Mom and Pop’s Grocery for four months
Take 2 electives
Write my thesis
Graduate top of my class within a year of registering

Notice that the Action Plan contains a detailed timeline, cost estimate of the goal and a success benchmark. In this case, the success benchmark is graduating top of the class.

3. Stay Healthy

Once you begin your journey toward success, you will need one vital component to maintain your stamina. That very important component is your health.

Without good health, no matter how strong or positive you think you are, either it will take you longer to achieve success, or you will not achieve it at all.

Good health, however, comes with a price tag.

It means sleeping as much as you can so that the body can repair itself. It means eating right—fresh fruits, vegetables, grains, nuts and fish. If you can afford organic, buy organic. Organic food contains all the vitamins and minerals intact. A good multi-vitamin supplement will also go a long way toward improving your health.

Get rid of the junk food. Most junk food contains vast amounts of sugar, salt and fat that causes all sorts of ugly things to happen in the body. That goes for processed foods as well. If you grow a third arm, do not say I did not say so.
Most of all, exercise. Keep your blood flowing throughout all parts of your body. The more you exercise, the more you will feel energetic to tackle bigger and better tasks.

4. Schedule Downtime

Every week I take one day to unplug from social media. That is, I take one day to avoid logging into my site, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and all other forms of online activity.

You might think that is crazy. In a sense, it is crazy.

Doing so, though, allows me to take stock of my life without the distraction of pings, whistles, bings, dings and dongs. Rather, I will sit quietly and meditate on my achievements from the past week.

Scheduling downtime is an art. I nearly fell off my chair recently when I had read that some European companies offer their employees unlimited vacation time. Can you imagine having two months off from work lying on a beach in Italy eating healthy meals while North Americans slave away late into the evening just to make a buck?

As humans, we need time away in order to recharge and stay sane.

Time away or downtime does not mean unproductive time, though.

I get my best ideas when I am waking up or doing absolutely nothing. I cannot say how many times a good idea has raced through my mind while shaving.
Downtime presents you with a great opportunity to look at your Action Plan to ensure you are meeting your milestones based on your Mission Statement.

5. Leave Room for Incidentals

Things happen in life. Sometimes life throws you circumstances that will make it seem as if there is no way you will achieve what you have set out to do.

And that is okay. That is life. You will need to leave room for incidentals.

If you have given yourself a timeline, it may be that you will need to extend the timeline as a means to accommodate surprises.

Again, life events play into this, too. The only thing you can do is ride it out and once it is all over, do your best to get back on track.

In other words, accept it and move on.

6. Never Give Up

If I could stress anything more important, it would be for you never to give up.

Always look to the goal. Always keep your Mission Statement at the tip of your tongue. Repeat it several times as a reminder of what you committed to when you wrote it. Review your Action Plan to see where you are. Every time you feel the urge to give up, shake it off. Go for a walk. Go for a run.
Push those insecurities from your mind. You have counted the cost. You knew it was not going to be easy. Yet, you went ahead with your Action Plan anyway. You did it because you knew it was what you wanted to do.

Forget about what people may think of you. Let them think what they will. Your job is to continue on that journey to success. Nothing will stop you from that.

Nothing will prevent you from achieving your dreams.

7. Keep God in the Picture

This last point may be different for everyone. For me it means all the difference between success and failure.

God is my center, as I know Jesus is his son. I involve God in everything I do. Whenever I create a Mission Statement and write an Action Plan, God is there with me to put it all together.

God’s words to Jeremiah are always on my mind:

“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.” (Jer. 29:11-13).
Everyone needs someone great to believe in. For me it is God.
    He has my back.

One More Thing

After achieving success several times with this plan, you will ask yourself this question: What more is there?
    The best answer I have is this: Share this knowledge with everyone you know so that others may have the opportunity to make their dreams come true.
    Knowledge shared is knowledge earned.
CHAPTER 33

Show Others Gratitude

How awesome would it be if we showed people more gratitude? I am not talking about the superficial thank-you we dish out as a means to acknowledge participation in a mutual conversation. I am talking about acts of kindness that would replace the quick two words we throw around to get on with our day.

Of course, I am not saying we should drop everything so that we can show appreciation daily to the ticket agent on the train or the security guard at the mall, otherwise we would never get anything done. However, there is nothing wrong with going back the next day to give them both a coffee.

Doing something like that will give them a reason to remember us, and who knows, maybe one day we will become a story to their friends and family.
Without spending any more time on introductions, let us have a look at three things we can do to show others gratitude:

1. Drop a Note
2. Give a Gift
3. Perform a Random Act of Kindness

Before going on, I should mention that we should never limit ourselves to only these three things when it comes to showing others gratitude.

1. Drop a Note

Every so often, Luana will drop me a note to tell me that she loves and appreciates me.

I am not recommending that you should give a stranger a note to tell them you love them. That would be awkward. All the same, what you can do is compose a quick handwritten message to let them know how much you value them.

Sincere words have a way of making people feel good about what they are doing, especially if those people are working in jobs where gratitude comes less often than expected.

Even if not a stranger, words of thanks in the form of a note will make any friend or family member feel appreciated.

So go out there and drop those notes of kindness. You will never know what effect it will have on others unless you do it.

2. Give a Gift
No matter how small or how large the sentiment, everyone loves receiving a gift.

A token of appreciation goes a long way. It does not have to be pricey, weighty, or extravagant. As long as the gift comes from the heart, it will be special.

I once gave two bottles of wine—red and white—to a friend of mine to thank him for all the support he had given me throughout one year when things were not going so well with me. It surprised him. Since then, I can always count on him for an open and honest opinion.

Now before going on, I want to make one point clear: Giving a gift is not bribery. It is a heartfelt gesture to express our gratitude for a relationship. There is nothing wrong with giving and not expecting anything in return.

Otherwise, that would be bribery.

Therefore, have fun with this. Give a gift of gratitude that will mean everything to the recipient.

3. Perform a Random Act of Kindness

Sometimes a note or a gift just will not do. Sometimes the situation calls for something more—something beyond the regular conventions of selflessness.

A random act of kindness dictates that there is no reciprocation involved. The entire act is a one-way street, outflowing and selfless.

The gesture could be as simple as helping our neighbor with the groceries, or giving our time at
the local food bank, or even more so, providing financial aid to those in need.

It is up to us what that random act of kindness will be.

We can accomplish incredible things in another person’s life by simply giving without strings attached. Our actions can change someone’s life, especially when we are showing gratitude for the blessings God has given us.

For this reason, let us take this opportunity to show our appreciation to those who make our lives better.
PART 7

Bible Studies

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

—2 Tim. 3:16-17
CHAPTER 34

The Righteous

“I am worried. I do not know what to do. I have made mistakes and I do not know if those mistakes will come back to shorten my days. The future seems dark, the present seems long, and I do not want to remember what happened in the past, as it makes me think of the wretched life I led.”

Or so I used to think.

When I was unrighteous, my insecurities swelled with boasting—boasting of my talents, boasting of how I lived my life, and boasting of my successes. In reality, I was missing something. I did not know what that something was until I discovered it with new eyes (Acts 9:18). Even more so, I was not searching for anything. Instead, it appeared as a blip on my spiritual radar that would light up occasionally to tell me it was there, getting
closer to the center, and me not doing anything about it.

Only, what I thought was my center was nothing more than sin living in me (Rom. 7:17).

Over the course of several months, I had gone through a transformation. In short, I learned about reconciliation and letting go of grievances in order to move forward to becoming a new person in Jesus (2 Cor. 5:17). I also learned God has played a bigger role in my life than what I had expected. I found evidence of a deeper theme running through my years that, although I was not aware of it, came in the form of a realization.

This part of the book is about that realization.

**The Verse That Changed My Life**

Those unfamiliar with the Holy Bible, the book of Matthew, chapters 5-7 is where Jesus delivers the Sermon on the Mount, teaching his disciples about God’s blessings on the humble and the peacemakers, instructing them about how to overcome anxiety, and encouraging them to set aside treasures in heaven. As God was leading me into a new walk with him (Mic. 6:6-8), the one scripture that kept appearing everywhere throughout this period came from Jesus sitting on the Mount,

> “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Mat. 6:33).

**Do Not Be Anxious**
Learning about the concept of “and all these things will be added to you” required me to not only search, but after having found it, to read the entire passage in context beginning from (Mat. 6:25), “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?” The anxiety one feels striving after food, drink and clothing also extends to attaining lodging and all the other necessities this life has to offer. In other words, Jesus says I should not worry about all that. Verse 26 explains why, “Look at the birds of the air: They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” He goes on to explain that Solomon, King of Israel, once the richest and wisest man in the world, could not compare his array of royal garments to the attire with which God clothes the lilies of the field.

When I think about it, there really is no need to hold on to that sinking feeling of uneasiness regarding tomorrow because God has it all figured out today. If he can look after flowers and animals, which are of lesser value than I am, who is to say God will not take care of my needs? Did he not create me out of the dust of the ground, shape me into his image, and breathe into me the breath of life making me into a living soul? Has he not given me dominion over all things under the heavens and in the sea below? Was it not he who forged the universe and everything in it promising it as an
inheritance to all who believe in his son for generations to come?

If he could do all that, he can certainly look after my needs and me. Nothing is impossible for God (Mat. 19:26). Jesus even emphasizes this point when he concludes his teaching by stating, “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (Mat. 6:34).

To understand Jesus’ intentions when he came to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God, I had to define what the kingdom of God was. To do that, I dedicated a full year to accomplish one of my life goals—to read the bible in its entirety. I reasoned that if I needed to understand God’s will, I had to understand his word.

Much to my astonishment, once I had completed that task, I am now reading the bible daily simply for the sheer pleasure of it.

The Kingdom of God

During one of my study sessions, the very first verse I came across regarding God’s kingdom I found in the Lord’s Prayer, “Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven’” (Mat. 6:9-10). Above all things, Jesus wanted God’s kingdom to come on this earth and taught his disciples to desire likewise. And why not? Part of his mission was to proclaim the kingdom of God to the entire world, as described in the gospel of Luke, “And when it was day, he
departed and went into a desolate place. And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them, but he said to them, ‘I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose’” (Luke 4:42-43).

 Aside from being the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world (John 1:29), Jesus also taught others to seek the kingdom of God. However, he preached his message in such a unique way that the people at that time sought him from all the ends of Judea and Galilee. Only, his method of delivering his message was not for preaching the kingdom of God to everyone but to a select few, “And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. And he said to them, ‘To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven’” (Mark 4:10-12).

 As strange as it sounds, Jesus taught in parables not to make things clearer, but to hide the true meaning of God’s kingdom. Odd, now why would Jesus do that? Why would he want to hide the true meaning of the kingdom of God? Was it not his mission to save everyone from his or her sins?

 Surprisingly—for that time—no.

 Jesus was the sower planting the seeds, and it was his disciples who would reap the harvest (Luke 10:2), in terms of the new church he was building (Mat. 16:18-19). The book of Acts reveals the actual growth that took place once Jesus had
ascended to heaven and sent the Holy Spirit for all those who hungered for the kingdom of God, “So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41).

Over the course of his ministry, Jesus likened the kingdom of God to a mustard seed, the smallest of all seeds, yet, once fully grown, provides a shade for which birds can build their nests (Mark 4:30-32). Said differently, Jesus emphasized how his ministry, proclaiming the kingdom of God, which started humbly soon after the arrest of John the Baptist (Mat. 4:12-17), would one day flourish to engulf the entire world, as written in Revelation 22:1-5, “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.”

Being a believer to me means looking forward to the time when God will reign over all things with power and great glory, and his kingdom, of which Jesus proclaimed there would be no end.
Yet, the kingdom of God is only one-half of what I should be seeking.

**God’s Righteousness**

Getting back to the last part of (Mat. 6:33), where Jesus stated “and all these things will be added to you,” I desired never to worry about food, drink, or clothing ever again. Instead, I concentrated my efforts on God’s will.

His will for me was to seek his kingdom. His will also was for me to seek his righteousness.

Of course, what I did not know was how to define God’s righteousness. In my mind, righteousness had to do with integrity, morality, and walking upright in the face of adversity. However, those were just words according to my own opinion. Anyone, really, could have an opinion as to what God’s righteousness is. What I wanted to know, though, was God’s definition of righteousness. At any time, had he made a clear statement about it? If so, where would I find it? Was it something complicated I could not understand on my own? Or was it as simple as reading a single passage?

Psalms 143:1-2 came to mind, where it talks about God being righteous. However, there is more to it than that. It says, “Hear my prayer, O LORD; give ear to my pleas for mercy! In your faithfulness answer me, in your righteousness! Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you.”

When I first read this, I wondered if I even had a chance to understand God. If no one is righteous,
what is it to say that I can seek his righteousness in order for him to bestow me all things? I had to know more. It could not simply end there.

And it does not end there. The apostle Paul wrote the book of Romans as a means to address the necessity for justification through faith due to sin, as he wrote, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith’” (Rom. 1:16-17).

Paul was saying faith gives life to the righteous. Without faith, the righteous could not understand God because faith reveals God’s righteousness. To put it another way, faith is my lifeblood. Faith is the means by which I will know God. Hebrews 11 demonstrates that throughout the generations, great biblical figures have accomplished incredible things, not from anything other than by faith.

Therefore, as Paul stated later in Romans 6:1-11, death does not have dominion over me because I have died to sin and am now alive through faith in Jesus. Verses 12-14 says, “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.”
It took me a long time to figure out what Paul meant because I thought through grace I was free to do whatever I wanted, including sinning without penalty. But Paul was not condoning that idea at all. On the contrary, I became aware of sin through the knowledge of the law (Rom. 3:10-20). Without the law, I would not have known what sin is. Additionally, when sin is no longer the chain that holds me in bondage, I am free to act as God’s instrument for righteousness.

Who Are the Righteous?

Throughout these studies then, the question that kept resurfacing was, “Who are the righteous?” If Psalms 143:2 declares that no one is righteous, and in Romans 3:10, Paul agrees, then why does Jesus say, “Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mat. 9:13)?

The bible is replete with verses pointing to the righteous as those whom God had shown favor.

For instance, Abraham attempted to intercede on Sodom’s behalf asking God if he would punish the righteous along with the wicked for the city’s iniquities (Gen. 18:23). And after Solomon built the temple of the Lord, he presented a prayer of dedication to God expressing his desire for God to condemn the guilty all the while rewarding the righteous according to their righteousness (1 Kings 8:32). And the prophet Isaiah foretold of God’s judgement on Judah and Jerusalem assuring the
righteous the protections afforded to them by the Creator of all things (Isa. 3:9-10).

Nevertheless, the question remains: Who are the righteous?

The apostle John, the disciple whom Jesus loved and whom Jesus gave charge over his mother while hanging on the cross (John 19:26-27), wrote his first epistle to the church in Asia Minor (now Turkey) instructing believers there to remain faithful to the truth. In 1 John 1:5-6, he wrote, “This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.” Later in verse 9, he said, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Now, for a long time I had to think through that idea because I had the notion I was unrighteous. I thought my sins would always keep me separated from God. Yet, what John was saying is God will purify me and make me righteous.

John brings the message home in 1 John 3:7, “Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous.” And to ensure it is God’s righteousness of which he is referring, John explains it clearly this way, “Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed
abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother” (v. 8-10).

I cannot describe how incredible a truth (1 John 3:7) is. I will repeat it once again, “Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous.”

Which brings me to the realization I spoke about earlier.

**The Wow Moment**

Jesus gave his life as a ransom for sinners (Mark 10:45). He was perfect in every way, without blemish (1 Pet. 1:18-19). He was righteous. To think I could measure up to Jesus’ stature is unthinkable. Still, the scriptures are clear. If I practice righteousness, I am righteous, as he is righteous—not only I—but also everyone who repents, accepts him as savior, and sins no more. For then his righteousness lives in me.

No other truth comes close to understanding God’s love than for him to have given his only begotten son, Jesus, as a sacrifice for the sins of the many so that I and everyone else can live a true life in righteousness. The reason being is that Jesus lives in me, and it is his righteousness that makes me righteous (Rom. 3:21-26).

And that, dear friends, is a wow moment!
Jack Flacco

Not after a lifetime of doing things the wrong way did I learn about God. I still find it difficult to imagine that I had no clue who he was in the first place.

Yet, he was there for me. He never left me. He simply waited—waited for me to catch up while he did a great work (Deut. 11:7).
CHAPTER 35

Psalm 23

In the span of a month, I had memorized Psalm 23, one of King David’s most famous songs dedicated to God. It is something I had wanted to accomplish since returning to church, much like reading the bible cover to cover.

Below is the full text, as presented in the English Standard Version:

Psalm 23

1. The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
2. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.
3. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.
4. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you
are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

5. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

6. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

The interesting thing about memorizing scripture over a long period is having the luxury to think through the verses and their meaning. I can say without a doubt, each verse has had an impact on my life.

Let me begin with Psalm 23:1, “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.”

When David wrote this, he knew all about being a shepherd through experience. In his time working out on the field, he had saved his flock from the jaws of a ravenous lion (1 Samuel 17:34-35). For David to compare God to a shepherd was natural for him. He knew all about the life of a shepherd because he had been one before defeating Goliath (1 Samuel 17:36).

Years ago, when I was in the throes of agony, I did not desire anything from God other than relief from neck pain. Two vertebrae were fusing together. I would say, putting it mildly, it was an upsetting experience. However, it encouraged my belief that nothing really mattered in life other than to be kind to one another and to live as peaceable a life as possible. In other words, my want—my desire—was nothing in comparison than to know
God was working a miracle in my life. He was my shepherd, and I had no hesitation believing he was on my side.

After having undergone lengthy therapy sessions with a chiropractor in town, the fusion had all but reversed.

Psalm 23:2-3 continues to say, “He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.”

In another instance, I cannot say how important those verses were when I was going through one of the most distressing periods of my life. I had to let go of friendships in order to let God nudge me in the right direction. Once I had done that, green pastures and still waters presented themselves for me and I finally was able to find peace. It was not by accident. A shepherd knows where he wants to lead his sheep, and God took his time to bring me into the fold of the flock. I resisted, but he was there to lead me in the path of righteousness. It may sound corny, and I would have agreed with you several years ago, but after having lived through it, I am in no way fearful to give God all the glory and honor for my renewed spirit and attitude.

**David Changes the Way He Talks About God**

Psalm 23:4, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”
Something I had not noticed before was how David refers to God in a more personal tone. Instead of using the pronoun “him”, he uses “you” instead. I wondered about that. Why would he do that?

I have had my dark days where I did not see the light. I define dark days as a time when I did not know God, and led a life that went diametrically opposite to what God wanted. Nonetheless, when I did wrong, he made sure I knew about it through his correction in the form of situations that did not work quite the way I had planned. Now, that is not to say his rod and his staff are bad things, because he was purging sin from my heart, and I knew he was not about to abandon me because of my sin. No. If God was using the rod and the staff to tap me back into place along with all the other sheep, then I knew he loved me. All he wanted was for me to be safe. Moreover, yes, that was a comfort.

David felt the same way, and to express the comfort he had with God, he referred to him in the most intimate way he could.

Psalm 23:5 says, “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.”

When memorizing this verse, I learned that God sometimes will not get rid of a problem, but control it, which left me with no other choice than to accept it and move on. Much like a pack of wolves wanting to kill me, he did not get rid of the wolves but he protected me from them instead.

Even more so, months into my renewed life as a Christian, I was in the middle of a personal anointing at my church. I had gone up to remove a
When Forgiveness Is Enough

root of bitterness (Hebrews 12:15) from my heart, and I had gone up to ask for forgiveness for the transgressions I had committed to the Lord my god. More than anything, I wanted reconciliation (Matthew 5:23-24). Because of this, the minister left my forehead soaked with anointing oil, something I had never experienced before. That event made Psalm 23:5 even more real to me, as I pictured David, too, soaked in anointing oil on his way to becoming king.

God’s Grace

Lastly, Psalm 23:6 states, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

I am at the point now where I know God has forgiven me and his mercy is upon my life. I do not have to worry that I am unworthy to receive his grace, because really, he has given me his grace freely without conditions. Nothing I do will earn me salvation (John 3:16). I know that now.

And with that knowledge, I know that when I die I will dwell with God forever.
I have always thought forgiveness was this feeling of relief one receives when one absolves another of an offence. I also thought forgiveness was not possible without an inordinate amount of restoration, or as I would like to call it, works of restitution.

After reading my bible, however, I have found forgiveness in God’s eyes is an entirely different matter. He treats the absolution of sins as his highest form of love. I had to delve deeply into his word in order to understand that when God forgives, he does it without conditions. That unconditional love God shows is so wonderful, so great, so just, that nothing will ever compare to the feeling of knowing he forgives in whole.

A Root of Bitterness
If you have read this book and wondered about my past struggle with a root of bitterness, I will make it easy by explaining it here. Hebrews 12:15 says, “See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no ‘root of bitterness’ springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled”.

I have done some gardening in my lifetime. I cannot brag to having attained a green thumb, but I am able to get by. As any gardener knows, when planting flowers or anything else for that matter, the one thing that keeps popping to the surface is weeds. I do not like weeds. They are insidious. If I do not remove weeds, they will choke the good plants and cause them to stop growing. Even more so, left unchecked, weeds can kill plants leaving me with nothing to show for all my toil.

Therefore, I take desperate measures when dealing with weeds. I dig deep into the soil, looking for the root. If I were to cut the weed from where it breaks ground, it would only grow back. Then I would be there every few days to remove the same weed repeatedly. No. That does not make sense to me. Either I do the job right the first time, or I do not do it at all. Simple. I look for the root, and sometimes it is not an easy thing to eradicate. I can tug at it, but it may also have thorns to prevent me from removing it with my bare hands. In such cases, I use garden gloves for protection, but even then, the gloves may not be enough. I may need the help of various tools to aid with the extraction from the ground. A small shovel works well, as does a tool specifically designed to pluck the root.
It gets better. Once I remove the root, I then stand in one spot staring at a hole in the ground.

Similarly, a root of bitterness, as described in the book of Hebrews, can spring up and cause all sorts of trouble. The verse describes how that root, if left to grow, will fester and spread, corrupting other people as well. All of a sudden, the original incident that gave birth to bitterness becomes secondary, and every slight becomes an issue.

In Matthew 5:23, Jesus says, “So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”

Why would Jesus want me to leave my gift at the altar, find the person who has a grudge against me and reconcile with them? They are the one with the problem. Why should I be the one to lose face and try to make amends?

The Sermon on the Mount

That attitude of not wanting to help others, Jesus covers in The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). In his sermon, Jesus blesses the people and talks about how Christians should become examples for others to follow, likening them to light (Mat. 5:13-16). He also talks about the perils of anger, lust (v. 21-30) and retaliation (v. 38-42). He finishes the chapter admonishing his followers to love their enemies, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But
I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (v. 43-45).

Sporting around a root of bitterness will not encourage anyone to love an enemy. Jesus goes on to describe what happens when that root of bitterness spreads, “For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?” (Mat. 5:46-47).

In other words, Jesus is saying I should look to do more than love my friends. I should treat my enemies as I would a brother in Christ.

Jesus ends his teaching on the subject by instilling a goal to his listeners, “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (v. 48).

Attaining Perfection

Perfection for someone ordinary like me is impossible. I fail at things. I do the things I do not want to do (Rom. 7:15). And I am a sinner (Rom. 5:12). How can I be perfect as God is perfect? Impossible.

Yet, despite my own perceptions, it is possible. When the apostle Paul was dealing with pride, he had to overcome a messenger of Satan, whom he referred to as a thorn in the flesh. He pleaded with Jesus three times asking for relief. The story
continues, “But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Cor. 12:9).

If God can make me perfect by his grace, which he gives freely regardless of my weaknesses, then I have nothing to worry about in this life or the next. Paul explains it well in Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Filling the Emptiness

Remember the hole left behind after I had pulled the weed by its root in my garden? The emptiness I felt once I realized my life was not worth anything without God’s presence compelled me to kneel before him to ask for the soaking of his spirit. It was the only way I could move forward from the damage the root of bitterness had caused.

Back in my garden, I filled the hole with dirt, seeded and watered it every day until new growth sprouted to the surface. Likewise, instead of the emptiness left behind, I took to God’s word and seeded the hole with the word of life. I no longer needed to gird on the armor of God (Eph. 6:10-20) as my tools to remove the weeds, but this time, I watched as the fruit of the spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) took root in my heart and spread throughout all my relationships.

Put another way, God, the ultimate gardener (Gen. 2:8-9), replaced that root of bitterness in me
with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

I counted it a difficult thing to overcome a grudge, however, once I realized God had given his only begotten son as a sacrifice so that he could save me from the wages of sin (John 3:16), I looked upon my enemies not as I had, but with mercy. I gained the understanding through God’s Holy Spirit, that if I wanted God to forgive me of my sins against him, I needed to forgive others their sins against me.

God’s Forgiveness

Going back to the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus passes along the template his followers should use when praying to God the Father. I grew up knowing it as The Lord’s Prayer. Others may know it as the Our Father (Mat. 6:9-13). When praying to God, I use it as a prompt for what I want to say. Each verse is specific in intention, as I discovered one night when verse 12 jumped out at me. In it, Jesus says, “And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”

As anyone who has ever had a debt knows, it would be sweet music should a creditor decide to cancel a debt. For one thing, it means that whatever is owing to the creditor is no longer owing. Can you imagine what it would feel like if someone knocked on your door and said to you that your mortgage is no longer payable?

In like manner, Jesus talks about doing just that, expanding on the idea even further at the end
of the prayer, “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Mat. 6:14-15).

Not only does Jesus make it clear that the Heavenly Father will not forgive those who do not forgive, but he also implies that full responsibility for those debts will fall on the heads of the unforgiving.

I cannot fathom the thought of dying with full knowledge that I could have released others of their debts against me. Moreover, should I have a hard heart, I will also have to worry about judgement being against me in due course, as Paul says, “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?” (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

The Unforgiving Servant

In the parable of the unforgiving servant (Mat. 18:21-35), Jesus talks about forgiveness in its basic form. Peter came to Jesus and asked him how many times should he forgive his brother—seven times? Jesus answered him saying not seven times, but seventy times seven (v. 21-22). What Jesus meant was not 490 times, but we should always forgive, having mercy for those who have wronged us. He then begins to tell Peter the story of a servant who owed his master 10,000 talents (v. 23-24).

Now, a talent in those days equaled to about 20 years wages for a single laborer. There was no way the servant could ever repay the master all that
money in his lifetime. It would have taken the servant 200,000 years in all to wipe the slate clean. Stating it differently, Jesus wanted to emphasize the debt’s value as immeasurable.

Facing the fear of his master’s order to have him, his wife, his children and all that he possessed sold to repay his debt, the servant fell on his knees pleading with his master for forgiveness (v. 25-26).

What happens next astounds me, “And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt” (v. 27). Knowing fully well the servant owed him thousands of years of wages, immeasurable by human standards, the master forgave all of it.

When I think of all the bad I have done in my lifetime, and I think of how God sits on his mercy seat (Heb. 9:5), ready to extend his grace on to me, I humble myself in utter worship in the presence of his glory. For it says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8).

**Being Vigilant**

But the story of the servant does not end there. Instead of being thankful that his master stayed the order to sell him, his wife, his children and all that he possessed to repay the debt, and instead of waking up every morning knowing his freedom was secure, the servant did something altogether different, “But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke
him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt” (Mat. 18:28-30).

A denarii was a day’s wage. All the servant had to do was wait 100 days and his fellow servant would have paid him back. He did not wait. He had him thrown in prison.

When God forgives, going forward he expects us to forgive others in the same way. If we do not do that, we would have to deal with his judgement. This is what the servant faced, “Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’” (v. 32-34)

Eventually, the master delivered the servant to the jailers until he paid all of his debt (v. 34). In the King James Version, it is more specific, “And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.” Continuing with the English Standard Version, “So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart” (v. 35).

By this time, it is apparent that forgiveness has nothing to do with the one who may have perceptually caused the offense, but works by releasing the chains of the one holding the grudge. Once those chains fall under the weight of God’s grace, they become as if they never were. Ephesians
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4:31-32 describes the process in a beautiful way, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

My Forgiveness Campaign

I went on a forgiveness campaign of my own recently to reconcile with everyone in my life who I thought perceived me as an enemy. I had to grovel. I had to apologize. And in some cases, I had to open my heart completely in order to show my sincerity and seriousness with wanting to remove any occasion for the devil to lay his hooks into me again (1 Pet. 5:8). The hardest part about the whole thing, though, was the rejection. I realized that not everyone wants reconciliation. I thought it odd, at first. I mean, I did my part by leaving my gift at the altar, but the other person just did not want to hear it. They were content with the way things were.

To that, I cannot do a thing. What is important is I have done my part asking for forgiveness. And that is all that matters. My comfort lies in the knowledge that Jesus also faced rejection when he was walking among us on earth (1 Peter 2:4-8). So, why should it surprise me that even I would bear the burden of rejection?

For this reason, before reaching the end of his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus made it a point to emphasize a lasting lesson to his followers, “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment
you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you” (Mat. 7:1-2).

Lastly

When it comes down to it, forgiveness is not only about eradicating a root of bitterness and moving on. It also requires vigilance to love an enemy as oneself. I can attest it is not an easy task to do when all there remains of the relationship is sad memories. But with the help of the Holy Spirit, anything is possible. As long as we keep repenting, turning away from wrongdoing, God will blot out our sins (Acts 3:19). He will extend his grace, and Jesus’ sacrifice will not have been for naught (Rom. 6:5-8).
I would like to end by talking about something that has been a weight on my heart for quite some time. Many of you may want to skim through this section to get to the point, but I know that if you read every word and listen to what I have to say, God will truly bless you.

God has been good to me. I found him again, I returned to church, and I have a whole new set of people of whom I now count as my friends. I have learned all about forgiveness, love and joy beyond that which is superficial. I am also able to worship God with arms spread wide toward the heavens, much as I have read David had done countless occasions when he praised God.

Consequently, I have also made changes in my life that I could not have made had I not received
the Holy Spirit in baptism to help me with my daily walk with the most high God.

Now it may seem obvious that I would want to talk about how God has changed my life, given how I used to write about horror and all its variations. However, at this time, I do not feel God is leading me to do that, considering I have had the opportunity to write all about my change throughout this book.

Therefore, why would I even write this part at all?

**A Calling from God**

With the Holy Spirit leading me, I believe God has a plan for each person reading these words today. He has never been shy to reveal to me what his intentions are concerning my life. Somehow, I believe, some of you need to hear these words. Perhaps he is also revealing to you through me your calling to reach out to him for comfort.

I know life is hard. Life is tough—especially now. For some of you, even Christmas is a dark time of year. The lights mask the loneliness you feel when everyone is telling you that you ought to be joyful. Yet, how can you feel joy if nothing exists in your heart but emptiness? Yes, the gifts are aplenty, the food is delicious, and the company you entertain during the holidays may make it seem as if you lead a fulfilling life. Still, the emptiness remains.

Some of you may not even have enough money to purchase the simple necessities, let alone a gift for someone. Your families may also be
broken, which makes getting together a chore, rather than a delight.

I am here to tell you there is hope (Eph. 1:11-12).

**God Comforts the Brokenhearted**

God is love (1 John 4:16). He is here for those who are looking for comfort (2 Cor. 1:3-4). He is here to heal the brokenhearted (Ps. 34:18). He is here never to let you go. He really, really does love you, in spite of it all. You may feel that you have done the worst thing in the world, but if you come before God and sincerely confess your wrongs, he will forgive you (Acts 2:38). He always does. All he wants is to have a relationship with you.

Forget about not feeling worthy. Forget about the guilt. Allow God to give you wings so that you can fly (Isa. 40:31). Allow his light to flood the darkness and provide you the freedom to escape your troubles (John 8:12).

There is no other God than he (Deut. 4:35). He created the heavens and the earth (Isaiah 42:5). He set the earth on its foundations (Job 38:4-6) and separated the day from the night (Gen. 1:5). He made everything under the sun (Isaiah 44:24) and breathed life into our lungs (Gen. 2:7). He is the awesome God. And his life lives in every one of us who believes (John 3:16). His mercy is just and his righteousness endures forever (Ps. 111:2-3).

In the good and the bad, all glory goes to God. Somehow, and you know who you are, you needed to hear this.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jack Flacco was an author and expert in the field of zombie folklore before God called him into a ministry of reconciliation. He now preaches a message of repentance and forgiveness, offering hope to those looking to improve their relationship with others through faith in Christ Jesus.

Flacco and his family live in Ontario, Canada. When he is not ministering, he volunteers his time to community activities. Past work includes acting as an ambassador for the United Way, participating in Second Harvest Food Rescue’s food drive, and ushering at his church. His wife serves as Children’s Ministry Co-ordinator for Catch the Fire Newmarket and is a recent graduate of the Canadian School of Natural Nutrition.

Jack and his wife currently contribute to a wide variety of charitable organizations, which in the past has included Samaritan’s Purse, Kidney Foundation of Canada, and LIFE Outreach International.