



# Let Go and Let God

Lessons from a Life Guided by Faith

Ross Harvey

Do your best.  
Trust God with the rest.

## **Foreword**

### **The Great Illusion**

There is an illusion that most of us spend our lives believing.

It is the illusion that everything depends upon us.

We believe it is our responsibility to make things happen, to solve every problem, to overcome every obstacle, to create every opportunity, and to carry every burden. We worry about tomorrow, replay yesterday, and exhaust ourselves trying to control outcomes that have never truly been ours to control.

From the time we are young, we are taught the virtues of hard work, determination, persistence, and self-reliance. These qualities are valuable, and they have their place. Yet many of us quietly discover that no matter how hard we work, there remain forces far greater than ourselves at work in our lives.

Doors open unexpectedly.

Opportunities appear out of nowhere.

People arrive at precisely the right moment.

What seemed like a tragedy becomes a blessing.

What appeared to be failure becomes preparation.

And what looked like an ending becomes a beginning.

The longer I have lived, the more I have come to believe that there is a loving hand behind it all.

Not a distant God watching from afar.

Not a God waiting to judge us.

But a God deeply involved in the details of our lives, guiding us, shaping us, teaching us, protecting us, and preparing us for purposes we often cannot yet see.

This book is not about theology.

It is not about religion.

It is not about having all the answers.

It is about one simple lesson that has taken me a lifetime to begin learning:

God does not ask us to carry the world upon our shoulders.

He asks us to trust Him.

That may sound simple.

In reality, it may be the most difficult lesson any of us will ever learn.

Because trusting God requires us to surrender our timelines, our expectations, our fears, and our need to control every outcome.

It requires us to let go.

And that is where God's greatest work often begins.

The pages that follow are not the story of a perfect man.

They are the reflections of a fellow traveler who has spent much of his life striving, searching, succeeding, failing, hoping, dreaming, and slowly discovering that God was present through every moment.

My prayer is that somewhere within these pages you may discover what I continue to discover each day:

You are not carrying your life alone.

You never were.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **The Weight We Were Never Meant to Carry**

For most of my life, I believed that success came from effort.

If I worked harder than others, I could succeed.

If I trained harder, I could win.

If I planned carefully enough, I could avoid mistakes.

If I pushed long enough, I could eventually force life to unfold according to my vision.

And so I pushed.

Like many people, I spent years trying to build my future through determination, discipline, and persistence.

Sometimes it worked.

Many times it did not.

What I did not understand then was that beneath all my striving was an assumption that I was responsible for everything.

I believed the outcomes rested upon me.

The burden rested upon me.

The future rested upon me.

The success of my dreams rested upon me.

That burden can become exhausting.

Many people carry it every day.

They worry about finances.

They worry about health.

They worry about their children.

They worry about relationships.

They worry about their future.

They worry about things they can control and things they cannot.

The result is often anxiety, fear, and exhaustion.

Yet when I look back across my life now, I see something very different.

I see a path I could never have designed for myself.

I see countless moments when circumstances moved in ways I could not have predicted.

I see opportunities I did not create.

I see lessons I would never have chosen.

I see protection I did not recognize at the time.

And I see God's hand at work long before I knew how to recognize it.

The older I become, the more convinced I am that much of life is not about making things happen.

It is about learning to recognize what God is already doing.

This realization did not arrive all at once.

It emerged gradually through victories and defeats, through dreams fulfilled and dreams delayed, through seasons of certainty and seasons of confusion.

Most of all, it emerged through learning that God's timing rarely resembles our own.

We want immediate answers.

God often provides gradual understanding.

We want clear directions.

God often provides the next step.

We want certainty.

God asks for trust.

That trust is the heart of this book.

Not passive trust.

Not sitting still and waiting for life to happen.

But active trust.

Showing up every day.

Doing our best.

Taking the next step.

Living faithfully.

And then releasing the outcome into God's hands.

The phrase "Let Go and Let God" is often spoken casually.

Yet I have come to believe it contains one of the deepest spiritual truths we can ever learn.

We were never meant to carry the weight of the entire journey.

We were meant to walk with God.

There is a profound difference.

As you read these pages, I invite you not merely to consider my story, but your own.

Where are you striving?

Where are you fearful?

Where are you trying to control what cannot be controlled?

And where might God be inviting you to loosen your grip and trust Him more fully?

Perhaps the greatest freedom in life is not found in gaining more control.

Perhaps it is found in finally realizing that God has been holding us all along.

# **Part I**

# **LEARNING TO TRUST**

# 1. The Golden Boy

Looking back now, I can see that God was teaching me lessons long before I knew He was teaching them.

At the time, however, it simply felt like life.

Like many children, I grew up believing the world was full of possibilities. Yet somewhere along the way, I also developed the belief that if something was possible, then it was my responsibility to make it happen.

I wanted to excel.

I wanted to achieve.

I wanted to become everything I was capable of becoming.

And so I pushed.

In many ways, I was fortunate.

I seemed to possess an unusual ability to throw myself completely into whatever captured my imagination. Whether it was sports, academics, business, or a new idea, I rarely approached things halfway. When I committed, I committed fully.

Others noticed.

Teachers encouraged me.

Friends supported me.

Family members believed in me.

People often told me I was destined for great things.

Those words can be both a blessing and a burden.

When enough people tell a young person that he is destined for greatness, he begins to feel responsible for proving them right.

He begins to believe that every opportunity must be maximized.

Every gift must be developed.

Every challenge must be overcome.

Every dream must be achieved.

What no one tells you is that greatness and peace are not always the same thing.

You can spend your entire life climbing mountains and still discover that the summit does not provide what your heart is seeking.

But I did not know that yet.

At that stage of my life, ambition felt like purpose.

Achievement felt like meaning.

Success felt like the destination.

And so I ran toward it with everything I had.

As the years unfolded, sports became one of the primary vehicles through which I expressed that drive.

Competition fascinated me.

Not because I wanted to defeat others, but because competition revealed something about what was possible.

Each challenge asked a question:

How much can you improve?

How much can you learn?

How much can you grow?

The pursuit itself became addictive.

Every victory created another goal.

Every achievement revealed another mountain.

Every milestone became a starting line.

Without realizing it, I was learning one of the central truths of earthly success:

There is always another mountain.

The finish line keeps moving.

The horizon keeps expanding.

What appears to be arrival often becomes merely another beginning.

For a long time, I believed this was simply how life worked.

Work harder.

Push further.

Dream bigger.

Achieve more.

Repeat.

There is nothing inherently wrong with this mindset.

In fact, it can produce remarkable accomplishments.

But it also carries a hidden danger.

It quietly convinces us that everything depends upon us.

It encourages the belief that our future is entirely our responsibility.

That our worth depends upon our performance.

That our security depends upon our success.

That our happiness depends upon our achievements.

Many people spend their entire lives carrying that burden.

I know because I carried it myself.

Not consciously.

Not deliberately.

But deeply.

The strange thing is that even when life was going well, there was always a sense that something remained unfinished.

One more goal.

One more accomplishment.

One more breakthrough.

One more victory.

The destination never seemed to stay still.

What I did not yet understand was that God was preparing me for a lesson that would eventually change everything.

He was allowing me to experience the strengths of determination.

But He was also allowing me to discover its limitations.

Determination can help us climb mountains.

It cannot provide lasting peace.

Ambition can help us achieve remarkable things.

It cannot satisfy the deepest longings of the soul.

Success can open doors.

It cannot answer life's greatest questions.

Those answers would arrive later.

Through experiences I never expected.

Through lessons I never sought.

Through circumstances I would not have chosen.

And through a God who was quietly guiding my path long before I recognized His hand.

At the time, however, I was simply a young man moving forward with confidence, determination, and a growing belief that the future belonged to those willing to work hard enough to seize it.

I did not yet know that the greatest lesson of my life would have very little to do with seizing anything.

It would have everything to do with surrender.

And before God could teach me how to let go, He would first allow me to discover just how tightly I was holding on.

As I reflect upon those early years now, I do not see a young man chasing success.

I see a young man searching for certainty.

I see someone hoping that achievement would provide security.

Someone hoping that accomplishment would provide meaning.

Someone hoping that reaching the next summit would finally bring lasting peace.

God, in His wisdom, allowed me to pursue those dreams.

He did not stop me.

He did not condemn my ambition.

He simply walked beside me.

Patiently.

Lovingly.

Quietly preparing me for a day when I would discover that His plans were far greater than my own.

The truth is that God rarely begins by asking us to surrender everything.

Most of us would refuse.

Instead, He allows us to walk our chosen path.

He allows us to pursue our dreams.

He allows us to learn.

He allows us to grow.

And eventually, if we are willing, He gently reveals that the life we have been trying to build through our own strength can become infinitely richer when placed in His hands.

That realization was still years away.

For now, another passion was about to enter my life.

A passion that would shape my future in ways I could never have imagined.

Its name was racquetball.

And through it, God would begin teaching me some of the most important lessons of all.

## **2. Building Life in My Own Strength**

If there is one lesson that has taken me a lifetime to learn, it is this:

There is a profound difference between working hard and believing that everything depends upon you.

For many years, I did not understand that difference.

I believed that success belonged to those who worked the hardest, dreamed the biggest, and refused to quit.

To be fair, there is some truth in that belief.

Hard work matters.

Discipline matters.

Perseverance matters.

Commitment matters.

God has given each of us gifts, and we are called to develop them faithfully.

The problem arises when we begin to believe that we are the source of our success rather than stewards of the gifts we have been given.

Without realizing it, I gradually adopted the belief that my future depended entirely upon me.

The responsibility was mine.

The outcomes were mine.

The victories were mine to create.

The failures were mine to prevent.

The burden was mine to carry.

At the time, this did not seem like a burden.

It seemed like responsibility.

It seemed like maturity.

It seemed like ambition.

In reality, it was the beginning of a lifelong lesson that God would patiently teach me over many years.

Athletics became one of the first places where this mindset revealed itself.

The more success I experienced, the harder I worked.

The harder I worked, the more success I achieved.

The formula appeared simple.

Effort produced results.

Results produced confidence.

Confidence produced larger goals.

Larger goals required greater effort.

And so the cycle continued.

I loved the process.

I loved training.

I loved competition.

I loved measuring improvement.

I loved discovering what was possible through dedication and discipline.

The pursuit of excellence became a defining part of my identity.

When people praised my achievements, I felt encouraged.

When I succeeded, I felt validated.

When I won, I felt that I was moving closer to becoming the person I was meant to be.

What I did not understand was that I was quietly allowing achievement to become one of the ways I measured my worth.

Many people do this.

Some through sports.

Some through careers.

Some through finances.

Some through education.

Some through status.

Some through service.

The form changes.

The temptation remains the same.

We begin to believe that who we are depends upon what we accomplish.

The danger of that belief is not immediately obvious.

In fact, it often appears to work quite well.

Until life reminds us that many things remain beyond our control.

As the years passed, my ambitions expanded beyond athletics.

Business entered the picture.

New opportunities emerged.

New dreams formed.

New possibilities appeared on the horizon.

The same qualities that had served me well in sports followed me into business.

Vision.

Determination.

Persistence.

The willingness to take risks.

The refusal to quit.

These qualities opened doors and created opportunities I could never have imagined as a young boy.

There were moments of tremendous excitement.

Moments when dreams seemed to be unfolding exactly as planned.

Moments when it appeared that hard work and determination truly could overcome every obstacle.

Those experiences strengthened my belief that success could be engineered through enough effort.

That if I simply worked hard enough, planned carefully enough, and persisted long enough, I could shape life according to my vision.

Looking back now, I smile at that younger version of myself.

Not because he was wrong to dream.

Not because he was wrong to work hard.

But because he did not yet understand how much of life belongs to God.

He did not yet understand that opportunity itself is a gift.

That timing is a gift.

That health is a gift.

That relationships are gifts.

That inspiration is a gift.

That every breath is a gift.

He saw himself as the builder.

God saw him as the apprentice.

There is a difference.

An apprentice learns.

A builder believes he already knows.

God, in His patience, allowed me to continue building.

He allowed me to pursue goals.

He allowed me to experience victories.

He allowed me to experience disappointments.

And through it all, He quietly continued teaching lessons I was not yet ready to fully understand.

One of those lessons involved control.

Control is one of the great illusions of human life.

We believe we possess far more of it than we actually do.

We make plans.

We set goals.

We create timelines.

We imagine outcomes.

We convince ourselves that if we work hard enough, everything will unfold according to our expectations.

Then life happens.

Unexpected opportunities arrive.

Unexpected challenges emerge.

Health changes.

Relationships evolve.

Economies shift.

Circumstances transform.

The future refuses to cooperate with our carefully constructed plans.

At first, this can feel frustrating.

Later, it can feel humbling.

Eventually, it can become liberating.

Because the truth is that God never intended us to control everything.

He never intended us to carry the responsibility for the entire future.

He never intended us to shoulder burdens that belong to Him.

Yet many of us spend years attempting exactly that.

I know I did.

When things went well, I believed my efforts were responsible.

When things went poorly, I believed I needed to work harder.

When doors opened, I pushed forward.

When doors closed, I pushed harder.

What I did not yet understand was that sometimes closed doors are answers.

Sometimes delays are protection.

Sometimes waiting is preparation.

Sometimes what appears to be an obstacle is actually guidance.

These truths would become clearer later.

For now, I was still operating largely under the assumption that my future depended upon my ability to make things happen.

And so I continued striving.

Building.

Planning.

Dreaming.

Working.

Pushing.

Achieving.

Always moving.

Always reaching.

Always believing that the next accomplishment would finally provide the sense of certainty I was seeking.

Yet certainty remained elusive.

No matter what was achieved, another challenge appeared.

Another goal emerged.

Another mountain stood on the horizon.

The destination never seemed to stay still.

It was as though life itself was gently whispering a truth I was not yet ready to hear:

Peace does not come from controlling outcomes.

Peace comes from trusting God with them.

The younger Ross was still years away from fully understanding that lesson.

But God was already preparing the classroom.

The lessons were coming.

The Teacher was patient.

And the journey toward surrender had already begun.

Looking back now, I can see that God was never asking me to stop working hard.

He was never asking me to stop dreaming.

He was never asking me to abandon ambition.

He was asking something far deeper.

He was asking me to trust Him more than I trusted myself.

That sounds simple.

In practice, it would become one of the greatest challenges of my life.

And one of the greatest gifts.

For the God who guides our lives is not merely interested in what we accomplish.

He is interested in who we become.

And often, the path toward becoming begins when we discover that our own strength, remarkable as it may sometimes be, was never meant to carry us all the way home.

### **3. When Success Isn't Enough**

One of the greatest surprises of life is discovering that the things we believe will satisfy us often do not.

Not completely.

Not permanently.

Not in the way we imagined they would.

When we are young, we tend to believe that fulfillment exists somewhere ahead of us.

We imagine that happiness lies just beyond the next achievement.

The next promotion.

The next victory.

The next relationship.

The next business success.

The next dream realized.

We tell ourselves that when we finally arrive there, everything will feel different.

Everything will make sense.

Everything will fall into place.

And so we pursue.

We strive.

We work.

We sacrifice.

We climb.

There is nothing wrong with pursuing worthy goals.

God created us to grow, to learn, to build, and to contribute.

The problem is not the pursuit itself.

The problem is the expectation that accomplishment can satisfy needs it was never designed to satisfy.

I spent many years pursuing excellence.

In athletics.

In business.

In personal goals.

In dreams that seemed important and meaningful.

Many of those pursuits brought wonderful experiences.

They brought friendships.

Opportunities.

Growth.

Adventures.

Lessons.

Some brought success.

Some brought disappointment.

Most brought a combination of both.

Yet through it all, I gradually became aware of something I could not quite explain.

The sense of arrival never lasted.

No matter how significant the achievement, life quickly moved on.

The championship was followed by another season.

The goal was followed by another goal.

The accomplishment was followed by another challenge.

The summit revealed another mountain.

For a long time, I believed this was simply part of being ambitious.

Perhaps it was.

But I now believe something deeper was taking place.

God was gently teaching me that the human heart longs for something no accomplishment can provide.

We were created for more than success.

We were created for relationship.

We were created for purpose.

We were created for meaning.

And ultimately, we were created for God.

The world often teaches us that fulfillment comes from acquiring more.

More recognition.

More influence.

More accomplishments.

More possessions.

More experiences.

Yet many of the people who have achieved the most eventually arrive at a surprising conclusion.

There is always more available.

But there is never enough.

Enough is not found in accumulation.

Enough is found in contentment.

And contentment is not something the world can give.

It is something that grows from trust.

At the time, however, I had not yet fully learned that lesson.

Like many people, I was still searching.

Still striving.

Still believing that perhaps the next achievement would finally provide the certainty I was seeking.

The strange thing about certainty is that it often remains just out of reach.

We convince ourselves that once a particular problem is solved, we will finally feel secure.

Then another problem appears.

We tell ourselves that once a certain goal is achieved, we will finally feel at peace.

Then another goal emerges.

Life has a way of exposing our dependence upon things that cannot ultimately support us.

It does this not to discourage us.

It does this to redirect us.

Looking back, I can see that God was allowing me to discover the limitations of worldly success.

Not because success is bad.

Not because achievement lacks value.

But because He loved me too much to allow me to place my ultimate trust in things that could never satisfy my deepest needs.

There is a difference between enjoying God's gifts and expecting them to replace God Himself.

For many years, I did not fully understand that distinction.

I enjoyed the gifts.

The opportunities.

The dreams.

The victories.

The possibilities.

But beneath all of it remained a quiet longing.

A sense that there was still something more.

Not more success.

Not more accomplishment.

Something deeper.

Something eternal.

Something that could not be measured by trophies, titles, income, recognition, or achievements.

Many people experience this longing.

Some ignore it.

Some suppress it.

Some attempt to fill it with activity.

Others attempt to fill it with possessions.

Still others attempt to fill it with endless ambition.

Yet the longing remains.

Because it points toward something real.

It points toward the God who created us.

There were moments in my life when I caught glimpses of this truth.

Moments when a sunset felt more meaningful than an accomplishment.

Moments when a conversation touched my heart more deeply than a victory.

Moments when love mattered more than success.

Moments when faith seemed more important than certainty.

These moments appeared quietly.

Almost unnoticed.

Like whispers.

Like invitations.

Like God gently reminding me that life was about more than what I could accomplish.

At the time, however, I was still learning.

Still searching.

Still building.

Still convinced that if I worked hard enough, planned carefully enough, and remained persistent enough, I could eventually create the future I envisioned.

God, in His patience, allowed me to continue walking that path.

Not because it was the final destination.

But because there were lessons I could only learn by traveling it.

One of the beautiful things about God's guidance is that He rarely forces understanding upon us.

Instead, He allows experience to become the teacher.

He allows life itself to reveal truths we might otherwise resist.

He allows us to chase certain dreams until we are ready to ask deeper questions.

And eventually, if we are willing, He reveals that what we have been searching for has been beside us all along.

The older I become, the more I appreciate the gentleness of God's approach.

He did not condemn my ambition.

He did not criticize my dreams.

He did not shame my desire to achieve.

He simply allowed me to discover that none of those things could carry the full weight of my soul.

Only He could do that.

At the time, however, I had not yet arrived at that realization.

The deepest transformation of my life was still ahead.

A moment was approaching that would change everything I thought I knew about success, purpose, and the nature of God's involvement in my life.

A moment that would begin not in a boardroom.

Not on a racquetball court.

Not through an achievement.

But in solitude.

In reflection.

In a place where the noise of the world could finally grow quiet enough for me to hear something I had been missing.

The mountain was waiting.

And so was God.

The chapter I thought I was writing was about accomplishment.

The chapter God was preparing was about surrender.

I simply did not know it yet.

## 4. The Mountain

There are moments in life when everything changes.

Not gradually.

Not over the course of years.

But in an instant.

A conversation.

A diagnosis.

A birth.

A death.

A revelation.

A moment when the world appears the same on the outside, yet nothing remains the same within.

For me, one of those moments began in December of 2003.

What followed would become seven of the most important days of my life.

At the time, however, I did not know that.

I simply knew that something within me was searching.

For years I had been pursuing goals, building dreams, overcoming obstacles, and striving to create a meaningful life.

Many good things had happened.

Many difficult things had happened.

There had been victories and disappointments.

Successes and setbacks.

Moments of certainty and moments of confusion.

Yet beneath everything remained a persistent feeling that God was calling me toward something deeper.

I could not have explained it clearly.

I simply felt drawn.

Drawn away from the noise.

Drawn away from the distractions.

Drawn toward stillness.

Drawn toward God.

Many people experience such moments.

Some ignore them.

Some postpone them.

Some become too busy to listen.

I am grateful that God continued calling.

And somehow, by His grace, I listened.

The mountain itself was not magical.

The power was not in the location.

The power was in the space.

The silence.

The willingness to step away from ordinary life long enough to hear what had always been there.

We live in a world filled with noise.

Television.

Phones.

News.

Schedules.

Responsibilities.

Endless activity.

The constant pressure to do more, achieve more, become more.

In such an environment, God's voice can become difficult to hear.

Not because He has stopped speaking.

But because we rarely become still enough to listen.

For seven days, much of that noise disappeared.

And something remarkable began to happen.

The questions I had been carrying for years began to surface.

Questions about purpose.

Questions about meaning.

Questions about God's will.

Questions about my future.

Questions about why certain events had unfolded as they had.

Questions I had often pushed aside because life seemed too busy to examine them.

Now there was nowhere to hide.

No distractions.

No deadlines.

No meetings.

No obligations.

Only God.

And me.

At first, silence can feel uncomfortable.

Most of us are accustomed to filling every empty space.

We reach for our phones.

Turn on the television.

Find a task.

Start a conversation.

Anything to avoid stillness.

Yet stillness possesses a strange power.

When the noise fades, truth begins to emerge.

Not all at once.

Not necessarily in dramatic fashion.

Often gently.

Patiently.

Like dawn slowly breaking across the horizon.

That is how it happened for me.

The experience was not about receiving a list of instructions.

It was not about predicting the future.

It was not about gaining control.

In fact, if anything, it was the beginning of learning how little control I truly possessed.

What changed during those days was not merely my understanding of God.

What changed was my understanding of myself.

For years, I had believed that I was responsible for carrying the weight of my future.

Responsible for making everything happen.

Responsible for overcoming every obstacle.

Responsible for building every dream.

Responsible for solving every problem.

The burden was enormous.

I simply had not realized how heavy it had become.

God began revealing something different.

Not through condemnation.

Not through criticism.

But through love.

Through understanding.

Through the gradual realization that He had been present throughout my entire life.

Not occasionally.

Not only during moments of success.

Not only during moments of crisis.

Always.

Every victory.

Every disappointment.

Every open door.

Every closed door.

Every lesson.

Every relationship.

Every opportunity.

Every setback.

He had been there.

Guiding.

Protecting.

Preparing.

Teaching.

The more I reflected upon my life, the more clearly I began to see His fingerprints everywhere.

Events that had once seemed random no longer appeared random.

Experiences that had once seemed disconnected began forming a pattern.

Moments I had previously viewed as failures revealed hidden blessings.

Delays revealed purpose.

Disappointments revealed wisdom.

Closed doors revealed protection.

For perhaps the first time, I began to understand that God's perspective is infinitely larger than our own.

We see moments.

He sees lifetimes.

We see obstacles.

He sees preparation.

We see endings.

He sees beginnings.

We see what is happening.

He sees why.

This realization brought both comfort and challenge.

Comfort because it suggested that my life was not unfolding randomly.

Challenge because it required me to release some of my need for control.

Trusting God sounds easy in theory.

In practice, it requires surrender.

And surrender can be frightening.

We fear what might happen if we let go.

We fear uncertainty.

We fear outcomes we cannot control.

We fear losing the very things we are trying so hard to protect.

Yet during those seven days, a remarkable truth began taking root within me.

The future was never mine to control.

It belonged to God.

Always had.

Always would.

That realization did not make me passive.

It did not remove responsibility.

It did not eliminate effort.

Instead, it transformed the source of my confidence.

No longer did everything depend solely upon me.

No longer was I carrying the weight alone.

No longer did I need to force every outcome into existence.

God was not asking me to carry the future.

He was asking me to trust Him with it.

That may sound like a small distinction.

It is not.

It changes everything.

Because when we believe everything depends upon us, life becomes exhausting.

Every decision feels overwhelming.

Every setback feels devastating.

Every uncertainty becomes frightening.

But when we begin to trust that God is guiding our path, something remarkable happens.

The burden becomes lighter.

The fear begins to loosen its grip.

Hope grows stronger.

Faith becomes practical.

Peace becomes possible.

Not because circumstances become easier.

But because we no longer face them alone.

Those seven days did not answer every question.

In many ways, they created new questions.

Yet something fundamental had changed.

A seed had been planted.

A new understanding had begun to emerge.

The journey ahead would still contain challenges.

Dreams would still face obstacles.

Plans would still encounter delays.

Life would remain unpredictable.

But I would never again view it in quite the same way.

Because once you begin to recognize God's hand in your life, it becomes difficult to stop seeing it.

The mountain did not solve every problem.

It revealed a relationship.

A relationship that had been present all along.

And it introduced a lesson that would take the rest of my life to learn:

God is far more interested in teaching us to trust Him than He is in making our path easy.

The mountain was not the destination.

It was the beginning.

The beginning of a new way of seeing.

A new way of living.

A new way of trusting.

And a new understanding that would slowly transform everything that followed.

The years ahead would test that understanding repeatedly.

There would be moments when trusting seemed easy.

And moments when it seemed nearly impossible.

But the lesson had begun.

And God, the patient Teacher, was only getting started.

## 5. The Life I Thought I Wanted

One of the most difficult truths I have ever encountered is this:

The life we think we want is not always the life God intends for us.

When we are young, we begin constructing a picture of the future.

Some of it comes from our dreams.

Some from our experiences.

Some from our fears.

Some from the expectations of others.

Without realizing it, we create a blueprint.

We decide what success looks like.

What happiness looks like.

What fulfillment looks like.

What our future should look like.

Then we set out to build it.

I certainly did.

Like many people, I imagined a future shaped by achievement, accomplishment, and the realization of important goals.

I believed that if I worked hard enough and remained faithful enough, life would unfold according to a reasonably predictable plan.

Not perfectly.

But generally.

There would be challenges, of course.

Obstacles.

Setbacks.

Disappointments.

Yet underneath it all, I believed I was moving steadily toward a destination of my own design.

The problem with that belief is not that it lacks ambition.

The problem is that it leaves little room for God to surprise us.

And God is often full of surprises.

Looking back now, I can see that many of the most important developments in my life were never part of my original plan.

Some opportunities arrived unexpectedly.

Some dreams emerged from places I never anticipated.

Some of the most important people entered my life through circumstances I could not have orchestrated.

Even some of the greatest challenges eventually became blessings I would never have chosen, yet would not wish away.

At the time, however, I often struggled when life refused to follow my script.

I suspect most people do.

We become attached to our plans.

Attached to our timelines.

Attached to our expectations.

Attached to our understanding of how things should unfold.

Then reality intervenes.

A door closes.

An opportunity disappears.

A relationship changes.

A dream is delayed.

A plan unravels.

And we find ourselves asking difficult questions.

Why?

Why now?

Why this?

Why not that?

Why would God allow this to happen?

These questions are natural.

I have asked many of them myself.

Yet with the benefit of hindsight, I have come to appreciate something that was impossible to see in the moment.

Many of the disappointments that frustrated me were actually redirections.

Many of the delays that angered me were preparations.

Many of the closed doors that confused me were protections.

At the time, I viewed them as obstacles.

God viewed them as guidance.

The difference was perspective.

One of the reasons we struggle with God's timing is that we see only the immediate situation.

God sees the entire landscape.

We see today.

God sees generations.

We see the next step.

God sees the destination.

Imagine a child working on a thousand-piece puzzle.

The child studies one piece and becomes frustrated because it seems meaningless.

The parent standing above can see the entire picture.

The child sees confusion.

The parent sees purpose.

In many ways, that is how our relationship with God often unfolds.

We become frustrated because we cannot understand a particular event.

A particular delay.

A particular disappointment.

Meanwhile, God sees how that single piece fits within a much larger design.

The challenge is that we usually do not receive that perspective immediately.

We must learn to trust.

Trust that God knows what He is doing.

Trust that His timing is purposeful.

Trust that His plans are wiser than our own.

Trust that even when we cannot understand, He remains at work.

That trust does not come naturally.

At least it did not for me.

My instinct was often to push harder.

Work harder.

Plan more carefully.

Try another strategy.

Force progress.

Make something happen.

Many of us operate this way.

When life becomes difficult, we respond by increasing effort.

Sometimes that is appropriate.

Sometimes perseverance is exactly what is needed.

But sometimes God is not asking us to push harder.

Sometimes He is asking us to listen more carefully.

There is a difference.

One of the great turning points in spiritual growth occurs when we stop asking only, "How can I make this happen?" and begin asking, "God, what are You trying to teach me?"

That question changes everything.

Because it shifts our focus from control to trust.

From outcomes to growth.

From achievement to understanding.

From our plans to His purposes.

As I reflected upon my own journey, I gradually realized that many of my greatest frustrations had emerged from resisting realities God was attempting to use for my benefit.

I wanted certainty.

God was teaching faith.

I wanted speed.

God was teaching patience.

I wanted achievement.

God was teaching surrender.

I wanted control.

God was teaching trust.

The lessons were not always comfortable.

In fact, they were often uncomfortable.

Growth usually is.

Yet over time, I began noticing something remarkable.

Whenever I surrendered a particular expectation to God, peace followed.

Not immediately in every case.

Not perfectly.

But consistently.

The more tightly I clung to my plans, the more anxious I became.

The more willingly I placed them in God's hands, the lighter the burden felt.

This was not because the circumstances necessarily changed.

It was because I changed.

Trust was beginning to replace fear.

Faith was beginning to replace control.

Surrender was beginning to replace striving.

And with each step, God seemed to reveal a little more of His goodness.

One of the greatest misconceptions about surrender is that it means giving up.

In reality, surrender is not giving up.

It is giving over.

Giving over our fears.

Giving over our timelines.

Giving over our expectations.

Giving over our future.

Placing them into hands far wiser than our own.

This is not weakness.

It is one of the greatest acts of courage a human being can perform.

Because surrender requires faith.

It requires believing that God's plans are better than our own, even when we cannot yet see them.

It requires believing that delays have purpose.

That obstacles have meaning.

That closed doors may be expressions of love rather than rejection.

That what appears to be loss may eventually reveal itself as gain.

Most importantly, it requires believing that God is good.

Not occasionally good.

Not conditionally good.

But always good.

The years following the mountain would provide countless opportunities to test that belief.

Some dreams would flourish.

Others would be delayed.

Some prayers would appear to be answered immediately.

Others would require extraordinary patience.

Again and again, God would place before me the same question:

Ross, do you trust Me?

Not with the easy things.

Not with the things that are already working out.

Do you trust Me with the things you cannot control?

Do you trust Me with your disappointments?

Your dreams?

Your future?

Your timing?

Your life?

That question lies at the heart of every spiritual journey.

And if I am honest, it is a question I continue to answer each day.

Because learning to trust God is not a single decision.

It is a lifelong practice.

A daily choice.

A moment-by-moment surrender.

A continual invitation to release our grip and rest in His care.

The beautiful thing is that God does not demand perfection.

He simply asks for willingness.

A willingness to trust.

A willingness to follow.

A willingness to believe that His vision for our lives is greater than anything we could construct on our own.

That realization changed the direction of my life.

And it prepared me for one of the most important lessons of all:

God's vision and God's timing are not the same thing.

And understanding that difference would become one of the greatest challenges—and greatest blessings—of my life.

## **PART II**

# **THE LESSONS OF SURRENDER**

## 6. The Difference Between Vision and Timing

If there is one lesson I wish I could have learned sooner, it is this:

A vision from God and the timing of God are not the same thing.

For much of my life, I assumed they were.

If God placed a dream in my heart, surely He intended it to happen soon.

If He revealed a direction, surely He would open the doors immediately.

If He showed me a possibility, surely the path toward it would become clear.

That seemed logical to me.

It also turned out to be wrong.

One of the most challenging aspects of faith is that God often reveals the destination long before He reveals the road.

He provides a glimpse.

A promise.

A possibility.

A vision.

Then He asks us to walk forward without seeing the entire map.

At first, this can feel frustrating.

We want details.

We want schedules.

We want certainty.

We want to know exactly how things will unfold and exactly when they will happen.

God rarely works that way.

Instead, He often provides enough light for the next step and asks us to trust Him with the rest.

Looking back across my life, I can see this pattern everywhere.

There were dreams that appeared long before the resources existed to support them.

Ideas that arrived before the people necessary to help build them.

Possibilities that emerged years before circumstances were ready.

At the time, I frequently interpreted these delays as obstacles.

I assumed something had gone wrong.

Perhaps I was not working hard enough.

Perhaps I was missing opportunities.

Perhaps I needed a better strategy.

Perhaps I needed to push harder.

The truth was far simpler.

God was not saying no.

He was saying not yet.

The difficulty with "not yet" is that it sounds remarkably similar to "no" when we are impatient.

Most of us prefer immediate answers.

Immediate results.

Immediate progress.

Immediate fulfillment.

Yet God's timetable often unfolds according to a different rhythm.

A farmer understands this.

Seeds are planted long before harvest arrives.

The planting matters.

The watering matters.

The tending matters.

But growth itself occurs largely unseen.

The farmer cannot force the crop to mature.

He can only remain faithful to the process.

Much of life operates the same way.

God plants seeds.

Dreams.

Ideas.

Callings.

Visions.

Then He allows them to grow beneath the surface long before they become visible.

The challenge is that we often mistake invisibility for inactivity.

Because we cannot see progress, we assume nothing is happening.

Yet some of God's most important work occurs underground.

In hidden places.

Within our character.

Within our understanding.

Within our relationships.

Within our faith.

Before God entrusts us with greater responsibilities, He often prepares us to carry them.

Preparation is one of God's favorite tools.

Unfortunately, it is rarely one of our favorite experiences.

We want the fulfillment.

God often emphasizes the preparation.

We want the fruit.

God focuses on the roots.

We want the outcome.

God develops the person.

The older I become, the more grateful I am for this reality.

There were many things I believed I was ready for that, in truth, I was not.

Many opportunities I wanted immediately that would have overwhelmed me had they arrived too soon.

Many responsibilities I desired before I possessed the wisdom required to carry them.

God knew this.

I did not.

One of the advantages of hindsight is that it allows us to see connections that were invisible while we were living them.

Events that once appeared unrelated begin forming a pattern.

Delays reveal purpose.

Setbacks reveal preparation.

Detours reveal direction.

What once looked like wasted time reveals itself as essential training.

I have often reflected upon the years following my experience on the mountain.

There were moments when I expected certain developments to unfold quickly.

Visions that seemed clear.

Ideas that felt compelling.

Dreams that appeared ready.

Yet the years passed.

Sometimes far more slowly than I expected.

At first, this puzzled me.

Then it frustrated me.

Eventually, it humbled me.

Finally, it taught me.

I began realizing that God was not merely interested in accomplishing a vision.

He was interested in shaping the person carrying it.

That distinction changed everything.

Because if God's primary concern is our transformation, then delays are not interruptions.

They are opportunities.

Waiting is not wasted.

It is productive.

Preparation is not punishment.

It is love.

This realization does not eliminate impatience entirely.

At least it has not eliminated mine.

There are still moments when I wish certain things would happen faster.

Moments when I look at a vision and wonder why it remains unfinished.

Moments when I ask God questions about timing.

Yet those questions no longer carry the same anxiety they once did.

Because experience has taught me something valuable.

God has never been late.

Not once.

He may not operate according to my schedule.

He may not fulfill expectations in the order I prefer.

He may not reveal His plans as quickly as I would like.

But He has never been late.

Not in my life.

Not in yours.

Not in history.

Never.

The problem is that we often define timing according to our desires rather than according to God's purposes.

We assume that sooner is better.

God understands that readiness is better.

There is wisdom in that distinction.

A child may desire the responsibilities of adulthood long before possessing the maturity to handle them.

An athlete may desire championship opportunities before developing championship discipline.

An entrepreneur may desire success before developing the character necessary to steward it wisely.

Likewise, we often desire outcomes before we are fully prepared for them.

God, in His mercy, sometimes delays the outcome while developing the person.

At the time, such delays can feel difficult.

Later, they often feel merciful.

One of the most comforting truths I have discovered is that God's delays are not evidence of His absence.

Quite the opposite.

Often they are evidence of His involvement.

The God who cares enough to guide our lives also cares enough to prepare us for what lies ahead.

He sees dangers we cannot see.

Opportunities we cannot yet recognize.

Responsibilities we are not yet ready to carry.

And because He loves us, He works patiently.

Thoroughly.

Wisely.

This understanding gradually transformed how I viewed waiting.

Instead of asking, "Why is nothing happening?" I began asking, "What is God doing that I cannot yet see?"

That question changed everything.

Because it shifted my attention from the visible to the invisible.

From outcomes to preparation.

From frustration to trust.

From control to surrender.

The irony is that many of the greatest blessings in life arrive only after we have learned to stop demanding immediate fulfillment.

Only after we have learned patience.

Only after we have learned trust.

Only after we have learned that God's timing is not an obstacle to His plan.

It is part of His plan.

And perhaps that is one of the most important lessons of faith.

Not merely believing that God has given us a vision.

But trusting Him enough to wait for His timing.

The vision may come in a moment.

The fulfillment may require years.

Sometimes decades.

The difference between the two is where much of life's most important growth occurs.

And it is there, in the waiting, that God often performs His greatest work.

## **7. When God Says Wait**

Few words test our faith more than the word wait.

We do not mind hearing "yes."

Even "no" can be easier to accept because at least it provides clarity.

But wait?

Wait can feel like standing in a doorway that refuses to open.

Wait can feel like watching the clock while nothing appears to move.

Wait can feel like praying the same prayer over and over while heaven remains silent.

At least, that is how it often feels.

Yet I have come to believe that some of God's most important work happens during the seasons we would rather skip.

The waiting seasons.

The seasons when progress appears slow.

The seasons when dreams seem distant.

The seasons when prayers remain unanswered.

The seasons when we wonder whether God has forgotten.

The truth, of course, is that He has not.

He never does.

But while we are living through those periods, that truth can sometimes be difficult to remember.

I know because I have lived through many such seasons myself.

There were times when I believed certain doors would open quickly.

Times when I expected a vision to gain momentum.

Times when I thought a breakthrough was just around the corner.

Times when I felt certain that God was about to move.

Then nothing happened.

Or at least it appeared that nothing happened.

Days became weeks.

Weeks became months.

Months became years.

The dream remained.

The vision remained.

The desire remained.

But the visible progress seemed absent.

Those are dangerous moments for faith.

Not because God is absent.

But because our assumptions begin to speak louder than His promises.

We begin asking difficult questions.

Did I misunderstand?

Was I mistaken?

Did I imagine it?

Have I failed somehow?

Have I missed an opportunity?

Has God changed His mind?

Many faithful people have asked such questions.

Perhaps you have.

I certainly have.

The remarkable thing is that God rarely answers these questions in the way we expect.

Instead of providing a detailed explanation, He often provides an invitation.

Trust Me.

That invitation sounds simple.

In practice, it can be extraordinarily difficult.

Because trust requires us to move forward without possessing all the information we desire.

Trust requires us to believe that God is working even when we cannot see evidence of His activity.

Trust requires us to surrender our demand for immediate understanding.

That surrender does not come naturally.

Human beings prefer certainty.

We prefer plans.

We prefer timelines.

We prefer visible progress.

We want confirmation.

We want reassurance.

We want guarantees.

God often offers something better.

His presence.

The difference is significant.

A guarantee focuses on outcomes.

God focuses on relationship.

A guarantee says, "Everything will happen exactly as you expect."

God says, "I will be with you regardless of what happens."

The first appeals to our desire for control.

The second invites us into faith.

Faith grows in waiting.

Not because waiting is pleasant.

But because waiting exposes what we truly trust.

When everything is moving smoothly, faith can remain largely theoretical.

When life becomes uncertain, faith becomes practical.

Real.

Necessary.

It is easy to trust God when every door is opening.

It is harder to trust Him when the hallway seems empty.

Yet those empty hallways often become sacred places.

Because they reveal whether our trust rests in God's activity or in God Himself.

That distinction matters.

Many people trust God as long as He appears to be moving according to their expectations.

Fewer learn to trust Him when expectations are not being met.

The deeper faith is found in the second group.

Not because they possess greater certainty.

But because they have learned that God's goodness is not dependent upon visible results.

One of the greatest transformations in my own life occurred when I stopped viewing waiting as a problem to solve and began viewing it as a classroom.

A classroom where God was teaching patience.

Teaching trust.

Teaching humility.

Teaching surrender.

Teaching dependence.

The lessons were not always enjoyable.

In fact, some were quite uncomfortable.

Waiting exposes our impatience.

Our fears.

Our need for control.

Our attachment to specific outcomes.

Yet it also reveals something beautiful.

It reveals that God's faithfulness does not depend upon our understanding.

He remains faithful whether we comprehend His timing or not.

He remains present whether we feel His presence or not.

He remains active whether we see evidence of His activity or not.

The sun does not cease to exist because clouds temporarily obscure it.

Likewise, God's work does not cease simply because we cannot see it.

This realization changed the way I viewed many seasons of my life.

There were periods I once considered unproductive.

Years I once viewed as delays.

Experiences I once regarded as interruptions.

Looking back now, I see them differently.

They were preparation.

Not wasted years.

Necessary years.

Not empty seasons.

Foundational seasons.

Not delays.

Development.

God was building things I could not yet see.

Character.

Understanding.

Patience.

Perspective.

Faith.

Many of those qualities cannot be developed during periods of rapid success.

They emerge through waiting.

Through uncertainty.

Through trust.

One of the reasons waiting feels difficult is because we tend to measure progress externally.

We look at circumstances.

Achievements.

Results.

Movement.

God often measures progress internally.

He looks at who we are becoming.

Not simply what we are accomplishing.

This difference explains why waiting can be so productive even when it appears unproductive.

God may be accomplishing His most important work within us while we remain focused on what is happening around us.

The older I become, the more grateful I am for the seasons that once frustrated me.

Not because they were easy.

They were not.

Not because they were enjoyable.

Many were not.

But because they taught lessons I could not have learned any other way.

They taught me that God's timing can be trusted.

They taught me that faith grows strongest when certainty is absent.

They taught me that waiting is not evidence of abandonment.

And perhaps most importantly, they taught me that God's presence is enough.

Not because all questions are answered.

Not because every dream has been fulfilled.

Not because every uncertainty has disappeared.

But because He is faithful.

Always.

The world often tells us that progress means movement.

God sometimes teaches that progress means trust.

The world tells us that waiting is weakness.

God reveals that waiting can be strength.

The world urges us to make something happen.

God occasionally asks us to be still long enough to recognize what He is already doing.

That may be one of the greatest lessons waiting can teach.

We are not responsible for forcing God's plan into existence.

We are responsible for remaining faithful while He unfolds it.

That distinction changed my life.

And it prepared me for another important discovery.

Sometimes God does not merely ask us to wait.

Sometimes He closes a door entirely.

And when He does, it may be one of the greatest gifts He ever gives us.

## **8. Closed Doors and Better Paths**

Few experiences are more disappointing than a closed door.

Especially when we are convinced that what lies behind it is exactly what we need.

We pray.

We plan.

We work.

We prepare.

We invest our time, energy, and hope.

Then the answer comes.

No.

The opportunity disappears.

The relationship changes.

The funding never arrives.

The business deal falls apart.

The dream stalls.

The path we were certain would open remains firmly shut.

In those moments, disappointment can feel overwhelming.

We naturally focus on what has been lost.

What might have been.

What should have happened.

What we believed was just within reach.

It is difficult to celebrate a closed door while standing in front of it.

I know this because I have stood before many of them.

Like most people, I have experienced opportunities that seemed perfect.

Plans that appeared promising.

Dreams that felt ready to unfold.

Only to watch them dissolve.

At the time, I often viewed these experiences as setbacks.

Sometimes even failures.

Occasionally, if I am being honest, I viewed them as evidence that God was not moving as I hoped He would.

Yet the perspective that comes with time has taught me something remarkable.

Many of the doors I most desperately wanted opened would have led me away from the life God was preparing.

At the time, I could not see that.

How could I?

I was standing too close to the situation.

My perspective was limited.

My understanding incomplete.

I was looking at one chapter.

God was looking at the entire story.

One of the great privileges of growing older is that hindsight occasionally reveals what faith struggled to believe.

We begin connecting dots that once appeared unrelated.

We see how one event led to another.

How one disappointment redirected us.

How one setback prepared us.

How one closed door protected us.

Many of the blessings in my life arrived because another path had first been blocked.

Had certain events unfolded exactly as I intended, I would never have encountered some of the opportunities, people, lessons, and experiences that ultimately shaped my journey.

What once appeared to be loss was actually guidance.

What once appeared to be rejection was actually protection.

What once appeared to be failure was actually redirection.

This does not mean every disappointment feels good.

It does not mean every closed door becomes immediately understandable.

Some remain mysteries for years.

Perhaps even decades.

Faith is not the ability to instantly understand every circumstance.

Faith is the willingness to trust God before understanding arrives.

That distinction matters.

Many people believe they need understanding before they can trust.

In reality, trust often comes first.

Understanding follows later.

Sometimes much later.

One of the reasons closed doors hurt so much is because they challenge our assumptions.

We become attached to particular outcomes.

We convince ourselves that happiness depends upon a certain opportunity.

That success depends upon a particular result.

That fulfillment depends upon a specific path.

Then God closes the door.

Not because He wishes to hurt us.

But because He sees what we cannot.

A loving parent occasionally says no to a child.

Not because the parent enjoys disappointing the child.

Because the parent sees a larger picture.

Likewise, God's closed doors are often expressions of wisdom rather than rejection.

At the time, however, they rarely feel that way.

At first, they simply hurt.

That is why patience becomes so important.

Patience creates space for perspective.

Perspective creates room for understanding.

Understanding often reveals God's wisdom.

Without patience, we risk judging a chapter before the story is complete.

I have certainly done that.

There were moments in my life when I believed a particular outcome was essential.

When events unfolded differently, disappointment followed.

Yet years later, I found myself profoundly grateful that things had not happened according to my original plan.

The very outcome I once desired would have prevented something far better.

Not necessarily easier.

Not necessarily more comfortable.

But better.

More aligned with God's purposes.

More aligned with growth.

More aligned with who He was calling me to become.

That last point is crucial.

God's highest priority is not our comfort.

Nor is it our convenience.

Nor even our success as the world defines success.

His highest priority is our transformation.

He is shaping character.

Building faith.

Developing wisdom.

Cultivating trust.

Preparing us for purposes we may not yet understand.

When viewed through that lens, closed doors take on new meaning.

Instead of asking, "Why did this happen to me?" we begin asking, "What is God teaching me through this?"

Instead of focusing entirely on what was lost, we become curious about what may be emerging.

Instead of seeing only an ending, we begin looking for a beginning.

This shift in perspective does not eliminate disappointment.

But it redeems it.

It transforms disappointment from a dead end into a doorway.

A doorway toward deeper faith.

A doorway toward greater trust.

A doorway toward possibilities we could not previously see.

One of the most beautiful aspects of God's guidance is that He rarely removes something without making room for something else.

The timing may differ.

The replacement may not resemble our expectations.

The new path may initially seem less impressive than the old one.

Yet God is never merely taking away.

He is leading.

Directing.

Guiding.

Preparing.

The challenge is that we often focus so intensely on the door that closed that we fail to notice the path opening beside it.

I have done that.

Perhaps you have too.

We become fixated on what might have been.

Meanwhile, God is inviting us toward what can be.

The invitation requires trust.

It requires releasing our grip on a future that no longer exists and embracing the future God is creating.

That is not always easy.

Sometimes it feels impossible.

Yet over time, I have discovered that some of the greatest blessings in life begin disguised as disappointments.

The promotion that never happened.

The opportunity that disappeared.

The relationship that ended.

The plan that failed.

The dream that stalled.

Viewed through the lens of the moment, they appear tragic.

Viewed through the lens of years, they often reveal themselves as turning points.

Not away from God's plan.

Toward it.

One of the reasons we struggle to accept closed doors is because we assume God's guidance will always feel positive.

We expect clear signs.

Excitement.

Momentum.

Visible progress.

Yet sometimes God's guidance appears in the form of resistance.

Not because He is against us.

Because He is protecting us.

There is a profound difference.

The older I become, the more grateful I am for prayers God did not answer the way I requested.

For opportunities that never materialized.

For paths that remained blocked.

For doors that stayed closed.

At the time, I saw disappointment.

Now I see mercy.

At the time, I saw obstacles.

Now I see guidance.

At the time, I saw rejection.

Now I see love.

The lesson is not that every closed door will eventually make perfect sense.

Some may remain mysteries this side of eternity.

The lesson is that God's goodness is not dependent upon our understanding.

He remains good when the door opens.

He remains good when the door closes.

He remains good when the path is clear.

He remains good when the way forward seems hidden.

Trusting that truth has become one of the foundations of my faith.

And it has helped me recognize another important reality.

Sometimes the doors that close are not failures at all.

Sometimes what we call failure is one of God's most effective teachers.

And that is where our journey goes next.

## **9. Failure as a Teacher**

If success is a wonderful encourager, failure is often a remarkable teacher.

The problem, of course, is that most of us would gladly accept the encouragement while declining the lesson.

We enjoy success.

We celebrate success.

We share success.

Failure is different.

Failure humbles us.

Exposes us.

Challenges us.

Forces us to confront realities we might otherwise prefer to avoid.

Yet when I look back across my life, I am struck by a surprising truth:

Some of the lessons that have helped me most came not through success, but through failure.

Not through victories.

Through disappointments.

Not through achieving my goals.

Through falling short of them.

At first, this realization seems counterintuitive.

After all, we spend much of our lives trying to avoid failure.

We are taught to succeed.

To achieve.

To win.

To overcome.

Very few people encourage us to embrace failure.

Yet God often uses failure in ways success cannot.

Success tends to confirm what we already believe.

Failure forces us to examine it.

Success strengthens confidence.

Failure develops humility.

Success celebrates results.

Failure reveals character.

Both have value.

But only one consistently drives us toward deeper dependence upon God.

One of the reasons failure can become such a powerful teacher is that it strips away illusions.

It reveals weaknesses.

Assumptions.

Blind spots.

Pride.

Fear.

Attachments.

Things we might never recognize during periods of uninterrupted success.

Failure has a way of showing us ourselves.

Not the image we project.

Not the story we tell.

The truth.

And while truth can sometimes be uncomfortable, it is always valuable.

I have experienced enough setbacks in my life to know that failure rarely feels helpful in the moment.

When plans collapse, lessons are not usually the first thing we notice.

When opportunities disappear, wisdom often feels secondary.

When dreams encounter obstacles, growth is not our primary focus.

We simply hurt.

We grieve.

We question.

We wonder.

That is normal.

God does not expect us to celebrate disappointment while we are living through it.

But He does invite us to learn from it.

One of the most significant shifts in my own life occurred when I stopped viewing failure primarily as a verdict and began viewing it as information.

A verdict says:

You are not enough.

Information says:

There is something here to learn.

A verdict ends the story.

Information begins a new chapter.

That distinction changed everything.

Because once failure becomes a teacher rather than a judge, fear begins losing its power.

We no longer need to pretend.

No longer need to protect our image.

No longer need to avoid every mistake at all costs.

Instead, we become students.

Curious.

Teachable.

Open.

Growth becomes possible.

One of the beautiful things about God is that He wastes nothing.

Not our victories.

Not our mistakes.

Not our successes.

Not our failures.

Nothing.

He is able to use every experience for our growth if we are willing to place it in His hands.

I have seen this pattern repeatedly throughout my life.

Events that initially appeared disastrous eventually revealed hidden gifts.

Disappointments exposed unhealthy assumptions.

Setbacks redirected priorities.

Failures uncovered lessons I desperately needed to learn.

At the time, I would never have described these experiences as blessings.

Years later, I often did.

Not because the experiences themselves were pleasant.

Because of what they produced.

Wisdom.

Humility.

Perspective.

Compassion.

Patience.

Trust.

Many of the qualities we most admire in others are developed through hardship rather than success.

Think about the wisest people you know.

The most compassionate.

The most patient.

The most understanding.

Rarely did those qualities emerge from lives without difficulty.

More often, they emerged from lives that endured challenges and allowed God to work through them.

Failure plays an important role in that process.

Not because God delights in our struggles.

But because struggles often create openness.

When everything is working, we tend to rely on ourselves.

When things fall apart, we become more receptive to God's guidance.

That was certainly true in my own experience.

Some of my greatest spiritual growth occurred not during periods of triumph but during seasons of uncertainty.

Times when I did not know what to do.

Times when I lacked answers.

Times when plans failed.

Times when I felt vulnerable.

Those seasons forced me to ask deeper questions.

Questions success had allowed me to avoid.

Questions about purpose.

Questions about trust.

Questions about identity.

Questions about where my confidence truly rested.

The answers gradually transformed my understanding of failure.

I began realizing that failure is not the opposite of success.

Sometimes it is part of success.

Part of preparation.

Part of growth.

Part of learning.

Part of becoming.

God often uses apparent failure to build future faithfulness.

What appears to be a setback today may become essential preparation tomorrow.

What feels like defeat may become training.

What looks like loss may become wisdom.

We rarely see this immediately.

That is why faith remains so important.

Faith allows us to trust that God is still working even when circumstances seem discouraging.

Faith reminds us that a chapter is not the entire book.

Faith keeps us moving forward while understanding catches up.

One of the most freeing realizations of my life has been this:

My worth is not determined by my successes.

And neither is it determined by my failures.

My worth comes from God.

Always has.

Always will.

Success cannot increase it.

Failure cannot diminish it.

When that truth begins to settle into the heart, something remarkable happens.

We become less afraid.

Less defensive.

Less attached to outcomes.

More willing to learn.

More willing to grow.

More willing to trust.

Failure loses much of its power because it no longer defines us.

It simply teaches us.

Of course, this does not mean every failure is easy to accept.

There are still disappointments.

Still regrets.

Still moments when we wish things had unfolded differently.

Yet even those experiences can become gifts when placed in God's hands.

The God who turns ashes into beauty is remarkably skilled at redeeming failure.

He specializes in restoration.

In renewal.

In second chances.

In new beginnings.

And often the first step toward that renewal is simply the willingness to learn.

To ask:

God, what are You teaching me here?

That question has transformed many difficult experiences in my life.

Because it shifts the focus from blame to growth.

From regret to wisdom.

From failure to formation.

And perhaps that is one of God's greatest purposes in allowing setbacks.

Not to discourage us.

Not to punish us.

But to shape us into people capable of carrying greater trust, greater wisdom, and greater love.

Looking back now, I would not choose every failure I experienced.

But neither would I erase them.

Because many of them became teachers.

And some of the lessons they taught continue to guide me to this day.

Yet there remained another lesson God wanted me to learn.

A lesson that challenged my desire for certainty itself.

A lesson about living faithfully without possessing all the answers.

A lesson about embracing mystery.

A lesson about the gift of not knowing.

And that lesson would become one of the most liberating of all.

## 10. The Gift of Not Knowing

There was a time in my life when I believed certainty was one of the highest goals a person could achieve.

I wanted answers.

I wanted clarity.

I wanted understanding.

I wanted to know where I was going, how I would get there, what obstacles lay ahead, and how everything would ultimately unfold.

In many ways, this desire seemed reasonable.

Who does not prefer certainty to uncertainty?

Who does not want to know that everything will work out?

Who does not wish for a map that clearly identifies every turn in the road ahead?

Yet as the years passed, I gradually discovered something surprising.

Life does not offer that kind of certainty.

At least not very often.

And God, for reasons that took me many years to understand, rarely provides it either.

Instead, He offers something different.

He offers Himself.

At first, that distinction may seem subtle.

In reality, it changes everything.

When we seek certainty, we are often seeking control.

We want assurance that our plans will succeed.

That our future is secure.

That our fears will not come to pass.

That our dreams will be fulfilled.

God's invitation is different.

He says:

Trust Me.

Not because you understand everything.

Not because you know the future.

Not because all your questions have been answered.

Trust Me because I am with you.

The younger version of myself found this difficult.

I liked plans.

Goals.

Strategies.

Timelines.

I wanted to understand how everything fit together.

I wanted to see the road before I started walking.

God often seemed content to show me only the next step.

That approach frequently frustrated me.

I would pray for direction and receive patience.

Pray for answers and receive trust.

Pray for certainty and receive another opportunity to surrender.

At the time, it felt as though God was avoiding my questions.

Now I believe He was answering them in a deeper way.

The truth is that certainty can become a substitute for faith.

If we know exactly how everything will unfold, trust becomes unnecessary.

If the future is fully visible, faith becomes optional.

If every outcome is guaranteed, surrender loses much of its meaning.

God desires something greater than certainty.

He desires relationship.

And relationships are built through trust.

Not complete information.

Trust.

One of the most significant realizations of my life came when I began noticing how little I actually knew.

At first, this may sound discouraging.

It was not.

It was liberating.

For years I had carried the unspoken belief that I needed answers for everything.

I needed to understand every delay.

Every disappointment.

Every challenge.

Every unanswered prayer.

Every twist in the road.

Gradually, God revealed a simple truth:

I did not need to understand everything.

I only needed to trust Him.

The difference was profound.

Understanding places the burden upon our intellect.

Trust places the burden upon God.

Understanding says:

I will move forward when I have enough answers.

Trust says:

I will move forward because God is faithful.

The first depends upon certainty.

The second depends upon relationship.

Looking back now, some of the most meaningful chapters of my life unfolded during periods when I possessed very little clarity.

The path was uncertain.

The destination unclear.

The future hidden.

Yet God continued guiding.

One step at a time.

One lesson at a time.

One day at a time.

At the time, I often viewed uncertainty as a problem.

Now I frequently see it as an invitation.

An invitation to trust.

An invitation to depend.

An invitation to walk by faith rather than sight.

The irony is that uncertainty often creates space for miracles.

When we think we know exactly how things must happen, we become attached to specific outcomes.

We limit possibilities.

We constrain God to our expectations.

When we acknowledge that we do not know, possibilities expand.

We become open.

Flexible.

Teachable.

Available.

God can lead us in directions we never anticipated.

Many of the greatest blessings in my life arrived through pathways I never would have predicted.

Had I insisted upon certainty, I might have missed them.

Had I demanded complete understanding, I might have resisted them.

Had I required guarantees, I might never have taken the first step.

The older I become, the more comfortable I am with mystery.

Not because I enjoy unanswered questions.

I still like answers.

I still appreciate clarity.

I still enjoy understanding.

But I no longer require those things before moving forward.

Experience has taught me that God is trustworthy even when circumstances remain unclear.

In fact, some of the strongest evidence of His faithfulness has emerged during periods when I understood the least.

There is something deeply humbling about recognizing the limits of our knowledge.

We do not know what tomorrow holds.

We do not know how every prayer will be answered.

We do not know why certain events occur.

We do not know how every chapter of our story will unfold.

Yet God knows.

Completely.

Perfectly.

Lovingly.

And that knowledge belongs to Him, not to us.

For many years I viewed this as a limitation.

Today I increasingly view it as a gift.

Imagine carrying the full weight of the future.

Imagine knowing every challenge before it arrived.

Every disappointment.

Every loss.

Every obstacle.

Every difficulty.

Could we bear it?

Perhaps God's decision to reveal life gradually is itself an act of mercy.

He gives us what we need for today.

Tomorrow will arrive in its own time.

Jesus understood this truth when He spoke about not worrying about tomorrow.

Not because tomorrow does not matter.

Because today's grace is sufficient for today.

Tomorrow's grace will arrive tomorrow.

That principle has become increasingly important in my own life.

Whenever I attempt to live too far ahead, anxiety tends to grow.

Whenever I return to the present moment and trust God with what lies ahead, peace tends to return.

The present is where God meets us.

Not in imagined futures.

Not in rewritten pasts.

Here.

Now.

Today.

This moment.

That realization changed the way I approached many challenges.

Instead of asking:

How will everything work out?

I began asking:

What is God asking of me today?

Instead of demanding certainty about the future, I focused on faithfulness in the present.

The future belongs to God.

Today belongs to us.

That is enough.

Perhaps one of the greatest freedoms in life comes when we stop demanding answers God has chosen not to provide.

When we stop insisting upon certainty before obedience.

When we stop requiring visibility before faith.

When we become willing to walk with God even when we cannot see very far ahead.

That willingness creates room for peace.

Not because uncertainty disappears.

Because trust grows.

And trust is stronger than certainty.

Certainty depends upon circumstances.

Trust depends upon God.

Circumstances change.

God does not.

That truth has carried me through many seasons.

And it prepared me for another lesson God would teach repeatedly throughout my life.

A lesson learned not through certainty.

Not through understanding.

But through walking faithfully when nothing appeared to be happening at all.

A lesson about the wilderness.

A lesson about hidden growth.

A lesson about trusting God when the landscape seems empty and the destination remains unseen.

And it is there, in the wilderness, that some of faith's deepest roots are formed.

## **11. Trusting God in the Wilderness**

If I could remove one season from my life, there were times when I would have chosen the wilderness.

The wilderness is uncomfortable.

It is uncertain.

It feels unproductive.

It often appears endless.

And perhaps most difficult of all, it rarely makes sense while we are living through it.

Yet as I look back now, I have come to believe that some of the most important work God performs in our lives takes place in the wilderness.

Not on the mountaintop.

Not during times of abundance.

Not when everything is unfolding according to plan.

But in those long stretches when we cannot clearly see what He is doing.

The word wilderness means different things to different people.

For some, it is a financial struggle.

For others, a health challenge.

A broken relationship.

An unanswered prayer.

A delayed dream.

A season of loneliness.

A period of confusion.

A time when the future seems hidden and progress feels impossible to measure.

Almost everyone encounters a wilderness eventually.

The details differ.

The experience is universal.

What makes the wilderness difficult is not simply the hardship itself.

It is the uncertainty.

If we knew exactly when the season would end, we could endure it more easily.

If we knew precisely what God was accomplishing, patience would come naturally.

If we could clearly see the destination, the journey would feel manageable.

Instead, the wilderness often asks us to walk without such assurances.

And that is why it becomes a school for faith.

Many years ago, I would have viewed wilderness seasons as interruptions.

Detours.

Periods when life was temporarily off track.

Now I see them differently.

They were not interruptions.

They were part of the journey.

In fact, some of them became the most formative chapters of all.

One of the reasons we struggle with wilderness seasons is because we tend to evaluate our lives according to visible progress.

We like movement.

Momentum.

Results.

Achievements.

Evidence.

The wilderness often offers very little of these things.

Instead, it offers silence.

Waiting.

Questions.

Reflection.

Dependence.

At first glance, these may seem less valuable.

Yet they often produce deeper growth than visible success ever could.

Consider a tree.

The most important part of its development occurs beneath the surface.

Roots expand before branches.

Strength develops before height.

Stability precedes growth.

Without roots, the tree cannot survive the storms that inevitably come.

God understands this principle.

That is why He sometimes allows us to spend extended periods developing roots.

Patience.

Humility.

Trust.

Perseverance.

Faith.

Character.

These qualities are rarely built quickly.

Nor are they usually built comfortably.

They are cultivated through experience.

Through waiting.

Through uncertainty.

Through dependence upon God.

The wilderness excels at teaching dependence.

When everything is working, it is easy to rely upon ourselves.

When resources are abundant, we often place confidence in the resources.

When opportunities are plentiful, we trust the opportunities.

When plans are succeeding, we trust the plans.

The wilderness strips away many of those supports.

It reveals what we truly depend upon.

That revelation can be unsettling.

But it can also be transformative.

I have experienced seasons when it seemed as though little was happening.

The vision remained.

The desire remained.

The calling remained.

Yet the visible progress appeared minimal.

During those periods, I often found myself wrestling with familiar questions.

Am I moving in the right direction?

Has God forgotten?

Is anything actually happening?

What I could not see at the time was that God was working in ways invisible to me.

Preparing circumstances.

Preparing people.

Preparing opportunities.

Preparing me.

The preparation of the heart is often God's first priority.

We tend to focus on external outcomes.

God focuses on internal transformation.

We look at what we are doing.

God looks at who we are becoming.

That distinction changes everything.

Because once we understand it, the wilderness no longer appears empty.

It becomes purposeful.

Not pleasant, necessarily.

But meaningful.

One of the great mistakes we make is assuming that God's presence is measured by visible activity.

When prayers are answered quickly, we feel encouraged.

When doors open, we feel confident.

When progress is obvious, we assume God is near.

Yet some of the deepest experiences of God's presence occur during periods when little appears to be happening.

The reason is simple.

In the wilderness, we begin seeking God Himself rather than merely His blessings.

That is a profound shift.

Many people initially approach God because they need something.

Guidance.

Help.

Healing.

Provision.

Direction.

There is nothing wrong with this.

God welcomes such prayers.

Yet over time, a deeper relationship begins to emerge.

We discover that God's greatest gift is not merely what He provides.

It is His presence.

The wilderness often teaches this lesson better than any other environment.

When many distractions are removed, we begin noticing what truly matters.

When many supports disappear, we discover what remains.

And when many answers are absent, we learn to treasure the One who never leaves.

Looking back now, I would not erase the wilderness seasons from my life.

That statement would have surprised my younger self.

There were times when I desperately wanted those seasons to end.

Times when I questioned their purpose.

Times when I wondered what God was doing.

Now I see what I could not see then.

The wilderness taught me trust.

Not theoretical trust.

Real trust.

The kind of trust that continues walking when certainty is absent.

The kind of trust that continues believing when evidence is limited.

The kind of trust that rests in God's character rather than circumstances.

That trust has become one of the greatest treasures of my life.

Because circumstances will always change.

Dreams will evolve.

Plans will shift.

Opportunities will come and go.

The future will remain uncertain.

But God remains faithful.

Always.

The wilderness helped me discover that truth.

Not through explanation.

Through experience.

And experience creates a kind of confidence that explanations alone cannot provide.

The confidence that God is present.

That God is working.

That God is faithful.

Even when we cannot yet see the results.

Perhaps especially then.

The older I become, the more convinced I am that God never wastes a wilderness.

Every season has purpose.

Every delay contains lessons.

Every challenge offers opportunities for growth.

Every wilderness prepares us for something.

The challenge is that we usually discover what it was preparing us for only after we have passed through it.

That requires trust.

The same trust God has been teaching His people throughout history.

The same trust He continues teaching each of us today.

Trust Him in abundance.

Trust Him in uncertainty.

Trust Him on the mountaintop.

Trust Him in the wilderness.

Because His faithfulness is not dependent upon the landscape.

It remains constant through every season.

And once we begin to understand that truth, another realization begins to emerge.

The life God calls us to is not built through giant leaps.

It is built through countless small acts of faithfulness.

One step.

One choice.

One day at a time.

And those small steps, repeated consistently, often become the pathway through which God accomplishes extraordinary things.

## **12. The Power of Small Steps**

One of the greatest misconceptions I have ever held was the belief that extraordinary lives are built through extraordinary moments.

For many years, I was fascinated by the big events.

The breakthrough.

The victory.

The opportunity.

The vision.

The turning point.

The dramatic story.

And certainly, such moments have their place.

Most lives contain a handful of moments that alter their direction forever.

Yet as I have grown older, I have come to appreciate something I once overlooked.

The extraordinary is almost always built upon the ordinary.

The great moments we celebrate are usually supported by thousands of small moments no one ever sees.

A championship is built through countless practices.

A business is built through countless decisions.

A marriage is built through countless acts of love.

A life of faith is built through countless choices to trust God one day at a time.

The mountain may capture our attention.

The daily walk is what gets us there.

This truth became increasingly clear to me as I reflected upon my own journey.

When people look back on a life, they often focus on the visible milestones.

The accomplishments.

The achievements.

The defining events.

Yet those moments represent only a tiny fraction of the story.

The real story is found in the ordinary days.

The mornings.

The conversations.

The choices.

The habits.

The moments when no one is watching.

The moments when nothing dramatic appears to be happening.

Those are the moments that quietly shape a life.

One of the reasons God often asks us to focus on the next step rather than the entire journey is because the next step is where faith becomes practical.

Anyone can dream about a destination.

Faith takes the next step.

Anyone can imagine a better future.

Faith acts today.

Anyone can envision a great purpose.

Faith remains faithful in the present moment.

That distinction changed how I viewed many aspects of my life.

For years, I occasionally found myself looking toward large goals and wondering how they could possibly be accomplished.

The vision seemed enormous.

The challenges significant.

The resources insufficient.

The timeline uncertain.

The gap between present reality and future possibility appeared overwhelming.

Perhaps you have experienced this yourself.

A dream that seems too large.

A challenge that seems too difficult.

A calling that appears impossible.

A future that feels beyond your reach.

When viewed as a whole, such things can become intimidating.

God's response is often surprisingly simple.

Take the next step.

Not ten steps.

Not one hundred.

The next one.

That is how faith grows.

One step at a time.

One day at a time.

One decision at a time.

One act of obedience at a time.

The beauty of this approach is that it removes much of the pressure we place upon ourselves.

We do not need to solve the entire future.

We only need to be faithful today.

We do not need to carry tomorrow's burdens.

We only need to carry today's responsibilities.

We do not need to understand every detail of God's plan.

We only need enough trust to take the next step.

This principle appears throughout life.

The athlete trains one workout at a time.

The writer completes one page at a time.

The builder lays one stone at a time.

The gardener plants one seed at a time.

The believer walks one step at a time.

Yet somehow we often forget this.

We become overwhelmed by the size of the vision.

We focus on the distance remaining.

We worry about everything that has not yet happened.

In doing so, we sometimes overlook the power of today's faithfulness.

God rarely asks us to accomplish everything at once.

He asks us to remain faithful where we are.

That faithfulness possesses tremendous power.

Not because each individual step appears significant.

Because small steps compound over time.

A single day may not seem remarkable.

A thousand faithful days can transform a life.

One kind word may seem insignificant.

Thousands can transform relationships.

One act of service may appear small.

Repeated over years, it can transform a community.

One prayer may seem simple.

A lifetime of prayer can transform a heart.

God's kingdom often grows this way.

Quietly.

Gradually.

Steadily.

Seed by seed.

Step by step.

Day by day.

The world tends to celebrate sudden success.

God often works through gradual faithfulness.

That difference is important.

Because sudden success can tempt us to focus on outcomes.

Gradual faithfulness teaches us to value the process.

And the process is where transformation occurs.

As I look back across my own life, many of the developments that seem significant today emerged from small decisions made consistently over long periods of time.

Showing up.

Trying again.

Learning.

Growing.

Trusting.

Continuing.

There were many days when nothing dramatic appeared to happen.

Many days that felt entirely ordinary.

Yet those ordinary days accumulated.

And over time, God used them to build something far greater than I could see while living through them.

The same is true for all of us.

Most of life is not lived in extraordinary moments.

It is lived in ordinary ones.

The question is not whether today feels dramatic.

The question is whether we are being faithful.

Faithful in our relationships.

Faithful in our work.

Faithful in our responsibilities.

Faithful in our trust.

Faithful in our walk with God.

Those small acts of faithfulness matter more than we realize.

Because God sees what we often overlook.

He sees the prayer no one else hears.

The kindness no one else notices.

The perseverance no one else appreciates.

The trust exercised during difficult seasons.

The courage displayed in ordinary circumstances.

Nothing is wasted.

Nothing is unseen.

Nothing is insignificant.

One of the greatest comforts in my life has been realizing that God is not asking me to accomplish everything today.

He is simply asking me to trust Him today.

Tomorrow will bring its own opportunities.

Its own challenges.

Its own lessons.

Its own grace.

Today is enough.

That truth has brought tremendous freedom.

Freedom from anxiety.

Freedom from striving.

Freedom from believing that everything depends upon me.

The future belongs to God.

My responsibility is faithfulness.

And faithfulness, fortunately, is measured one step at a time.

The older I become, the more I appreciate the quiet power of small steps.

Because they remind me that God's work is rarely rushed.

A tree grows gradually.

A river shapes a canyon slowly.

A life is formed over years.

A soul matures through seasons.

Faith develops through daily trust.

The process may appear slow.

Yet slow does not mean insignificant.

In fact, some of God's most beautiful work unfolds gradually.

Almost invisibly.

Until one day we look back and realize that while we were focused on individual steps, God was creating a path.

While we were focused on daily faithfulness, God was shaping a life.

While we were simply trying to trust Him today, He was preparing us for tomorrow.

And perhaps that is one of the greatest gifts of all.

To discover that God does not require extraordinary strength.

He does not require perfect understanding.

He does not require flawless performance.

He simply asks for faithfulness.

A willingness to take the next step.

A willingness to trust Him with the rest.

As Part II comes to a close, I find myself looking back upon the lessons God taught through waiting, wilderness, uncertainty, failure, and surrender.

At the time, many of those experiences seemed disconnected.

Now they form a pattern.

A pattern revealing God's hand.

A pattern revealing His faithfulness.

A pattern revealing that He was present all along.

And that realization opens the door to the next stage of the journey.

Because once we begin recognizing God's hand in our lives, we start seeing something remarkable.

We begin noticing that He has been guiding us far longer —and far more faithfully— than we ever imagined.

And that is where our story now turns.

## **PART III**

# **DISCOVERING GOD'S HAND**

### **13. Looking Backward**

There is an old saying that we live life forward but understand it backward.

The older I become, the more truth I find in those words.

When we are living through an experience, we rarely understand its full significance.

We see only the moment.

The challenge.

The opportunity.

The disappointment.

The uncertainty.

The next step.

Life unfolds one day at a time, and while we are moving through it, the larger picture often remains hidden.

Yet something remarkable happens when we pause and look backward.

Patterns begin to emerge.

Connections become visible.

Events that once appeared unrelated suddenly fit together.

Moments that seemed random reveal purpose.

And what once looked like coincidence begins to resemble guidance.

Looking backward has become one of the most important spiritual practices in my life.

Not because I wish to live in the past.

But because the past often reveals evidence of God's faithfulness.

Evidence that can strengthen our trust for the future.

When I reflect upon my own journey, I see countless examples.

At the time, many of them appeared ordinary.

Some appeared frustrating.

Some seemed disappointing.

A few felt painful.

Yet viewed from the perspective of years, they tell a very different story.

I see people who arrived in my life at exactly the right moment.

Not according to my timing.

According to God's.

I see opportunities that appeared unexpectedly.

Conversations that altered directions.

Introductions that opened doors.

Lessons that arrived precisely when I needed them.

I see dreams that emerged long before I understood their purpose.

And I see challenges that prepared me for responsibilities I had not yet imagined.

The fascinating thing is that while these events were occurring, I rarely recognized their significance.

I was too close to them.

Too focused on immediate concerns.

Too occupied with daily life.

Only later did their meaning become clear.

That realization has taught me something important.

If God was guiding me then, perhaps He is guiding me now.

If He was faithful through circumstances I did not understand, perhaps He remains faithful through circumstances I do not yet understand.

The evidence of yesterday becomes the foundation for trusting tomorrow.

One of the reasons many people struggle with faith is because they evaluate God's activity according to immediate results.

If prayers are answered quickly, faith feels easy.

If doors open immediately, confidence grows.

If progress becomes visible, trust seems natural.

Yet much of God's work only becomes obvious in retrospect.

Years later.

Sometimes decades later.

This is not because God is hiding.

It is because His perspective extends beyond our own.

We see individual brushstrokes.

He sees the entire painting.

Imagine standing inches away from a mural.

You would see colors.

Shapes.

Fragments.

But the full picture would remain hidden.

Only by stepping back could you appreciate the design.

Looking backward allows us to step back.

To see more clearly.

To recognize that what once appeared chaotic often contained order.

That what once appeared random often contained purpose.

That what once appeared accidental often reflected providence.

Providence is a word we do not hear often today.

Yet I love it.

Providence speaks of God's guidance operating quietly within ordinary life.

Not necessarily through dramatic miracles.

Not necessarily through spectacular events.

But through countless subtle influences that gently shape the direction of our journey.

A conversation.

A friendship.

A delay.

A closed door.

A new opportunity.

A change in direction.

A chance meeting.

Each may seem insignificant by itself.

Together they tell a story.

A story of guidance.

A story of care.

A story of a God who is far more involved in our lives than we often realize.

The older I become, the more I see evidence of this involvement everywhere.

I see it in my athletic journey.

I see it in business.

I see it in relationships.

I see it in disappointments.

I see it in victories.

I see it in moments that made sense immediately and moments that required years to understand.

One of the greatest gifts of looking backward is that it softens our tendency to judge circumstances too quickly.

When we are young, we often categorize events immediately.

This is good.

This is bad.

This is success.

This is failure.

This is progress.

This is setback.

Life eventually teaches us that such judgments are often premature.

Many things that initially appeared beneficial eventually proved harmful.

Many things that initially appeared painful eventually proved valuable.

The story was not complete.

And because the story was incomplete, our conclusions were incomplete as well.

Looking backward teaches humility.

It reminds us that we do not always know what God is doing.

It reminds us that apparent setbacks may contain hidden blessings.

It reminds us that delays may contain preparation.

It reminds us that disappointment may contain redirection.

Most importantly, it reminds us that God is still writing the story.

One of the questions I occasionally ask myself is this:

What would I have worried less about if I had known then what I know now?

The answer is simple.

Almost everything.

So many things that once seemed overwhelming eventually resolved themselves.

So many fears never materialized.

So many questions found answers.

So many concerns lost their power with time.

This does not mean life became easy.

It did not.

It means God remained faithful.

Again and again.

Through every season.

Through every challenge.

Through every uncertainty.

The evidence is overwhelming when viewed across the span of years.

That evidence has become one of the foundations of my faith.

Not abstract belief.

Not theory.

Experience.

The accumulated testimony of a lifetime.

The recognition that God has been present far more often than I realized.

Perhaps that is why gratitude grows naturally when we look backward.

Gratitude is the appropriate response to faithfulness.

The more clearly we see God's hand in the past, the more grateful we become.

And the more grateful we become, the easier it becomes to trust Him with the future.

Trust grows from memory.

Faith grows from remembrance.

Hope grows from evidence.

Looking backward provides all three.

Yet as I reflected upon God's faithfulness throughout my life, another realization began to emerge.

God rarely works alone.

Again and again, He accomplishes His purposes through people.

Ordinary people.

Unexpected people.

People who arrive precisely when needed.

People who encourage, teach, challenge, support, and guide us.

Looking backward helped me recognize God's hand.

It also helped me recognize the remarkable people He placed along the way.

And those people became some of His greatest gifts.

Because often, when God wishes to bless us, teach us, or guide us, He sends a person.

And when we begin to notice that pattern, we discover that our lives have been filled with divine appointments all along.

## **14. The People God Sends**

One of the greatest mistakes we can make is believing that we walk through life alone.

At first glance, it may appear that way.

We make our own decisions.

Face our own challenges.

Carry our own responsibilities.

Travel our own path.

Yet when we pause and look backward, a different picture often emerges.

We begin to notice the people.

The people who encouraged us.

The people who challenged us.

The people who believed in us.

The people who helped us.

The people who loved us.

The people who appeared at precisely the right moment.

The people God sent.

The older I become, the more convinced I am that God frequently works through people.

Not always through famous people.

Not always through powerful people.

Most often through ordinary people who simply arrive at the right time with exactly what we need.

Sometimes it is wisdom.

Sometimes encouragement.

Sometimes opportunity.

Sometimes correction.

Sometimes friendship.

Sometimes love.

And sometimes it is simply their presence.

Looking back across my own life, I see countless examples.

Teachers who saw potential I could not yet see in myself.

Coaches who challenged me to grow.

Friends who stood beside me through difficult seasons.

Business associates who opened doors.

Mentors who shared wisdom.

Family members whose support never wavered.

Strangers whose words arrived at exactly the right moment.

At the time, many of these encounters appeared ordinary.

Now they seem extraordinary.

Because I can see how much influence they carried.

One conversation can alter a life.

One introduction can change a career.

One friendship can transform a future.

One act of encouragement can restore hope.

One expression of belief can inspire courage.

God understands this.

That is why He so often works through relationships.

Human beings were created for connection.

We are not meant to navigate life entirely on our own.

Even the strongest among us require encouragement.

Guidance.

Support.

Love.

Community.

The myth of self-sufficiency is one of the great deceptions of modern life.

We celebrate independence.

We admire individual achievement.

We praise those who appear to need no one.

Yet beneath the surface, every meaningful accomplishment rests upon relationships.

No one succeeds alone.

No one grows alone.

No one heals alone.

No one fulfills God's purposes alone.

The older I become, the more grateful I am for the people God placed in my path.

Some remained for decades.

Others appeared only briefly.

Yet each contributed something important.

A lesson.

A perspective.

An opportunity.

A challenge.

A blessing.

One of the beautiful things about God's guidance is that He often uses people to provide exactly what we need before we know we need it.

There were times in my life when someone offered advice that seemed only mildly interesting.

Years later, I realized it had prepared me for a future challenge.

There were relationships that appeared coincidental at first.

Later, they proved essential.

There were conversations that seemed ordinary.

Later, they became turning points.

This pattern appears so frequently that I no longer regard it as coincidence.

I see providence.

God quietly arranging circumstances.

Connecting lives.

Creating opportunities.

Opening pathways.

Providing support.

Not always dramatically.

Often subtly.

One relationship at a time.

One conversation at a time.

One connection at a time.

The challenge is that we often fail to recognize these gifts while they are occurring.

We are focused on our goals.

Our plans.

Our concerns.

Meanwhile, God is sending people into our lives who will help shape our future.

Only later do we appreciate their significance.

One of the greatest examples of this principle is found in encouragement.

Encouragement may seem small.

It is not.

A single encouraging word can change someone's direction.

A single expression of belief can restore confidence.

A single act of kindness can rekindle hope.

We rarely know the full impact of our words upon others.

Nor do we fully understand the impact of their words upon us.

God does.

That is why He uses encouragement so frequently.

Looking back, I can remember people who offered encouragement at moments when I desperately needed it.

They may never know how much their words mattered.

Yet those words became part of my journey.

Part of my story.

Part of God's provision.

The same is true of correction.

Most of us enjoy encouragement more than correction.

Yet some of the people God sends challenge us as much as they support us.

They ask difficult questions.

They expose blind spots.

They speak uncomfortable truths.

At the time, such interactions can feel frustrating.

Later, they often prove invaluable.

A loving mentor does not simply tell us what we want to hear.

A loving mentor tells us what we need to hear.

God understands this.

Which is why He sometimes sends teachers disguised as critics.

Guides disguised as challengers.

Blessings disguised as obstacles.

Not everyone who helps us feels comfortable.

Yet many contribute to our growth.

One of the most profound realizations of my life has been understanding that every person carries a lesson.

Every person.

The successful.

The struggling.

The wise.

The foolish.

The generous.

The difficult.

The inspiring.

The discouraging.

Every encounter offers something.

A lesson to embrace.

Or a lesson to avoid.

God can teach through all of them.

This realization transformed how I viewed relationships.

Instead of asking, "What can this person do for me?" I increasingly found myself asking, "What might God be teaching me through this person?"

That question opened my eyes.

It revealed opportunities for learning everywhere.

Wisdom everywhere.

Guidance everywhere.

The world became a classroom filled with teachers.

Some intentional.

Some unaware.

All valuable.

Of course, among all the people God sends, a few occupy especially important places in our lives.

Family members.

Close friends.

Spouses.

Partners.

The people who walk beside us through entire seasons.

Perhaps even entire lifetimes.

Their influence is immeasurable.

They see us at our best and our worst.

They celebrate our victories.

Endure our struggles.

Share our burdens.

Strengthen our faith.

Support our dreams.

Challenge our assumptions.

Love us through every season.

Such relationships are among God's greatest gifts.

Not because they are perfect.

But because they reflect His care.

His provision.

His presence.

Through them, we experience something of His love.

As I reflect upon the people God has sent into my life,  
gratitude fills my heart.

Not because every relationship was easy.

Some were difficult.

Not because every interaction was pleasant.

Some were painful.

But because every person contributed something.

Every encounter left a mark.

Every relationship became part of God's larger work.

The truth is that none of us becomes who we are alone.

God uses people.

Always has.

Always will.

And perhaps one of the greatest signs of His involvement in our lives is the remarkable timing with which certain people appear.

Just when we need encouragement.

Just when we need wisdom.

Just when we need support.

Just when we need a friend.

They arrive.

Not by accident.

By grace.

The more I recognize this pattern, the more grateful I become.

Because it reminds me that God cares not only about our destination.

He cares about our companions.

He understands that the journey matters.

And so does the company we keep along the way.

Yet even beyond the people He sends, there is another aspect of God's faithfulness that often escapes our attention.

It is found in the small moments.

The unexpected blessings.

The quiet provisions.

The seemingly ordinary events that reveal His presence.

Moments we almost overlook.

Miracles we almost miss.

And once we begin noticing them, we realize that God has been speaking far more often than we imagined.

## **15. The Miracles We Almost Miss**

When most people hear the word miracle, they imagine something dramatic.

Something undeniable.

Something extraordinary.

A sea parting.

A disease disappearing.

A life saved against impossible odds.

A supernatural intervention that leaves no room for explanation.

Certainly, such miracles can happen.

I would never suggest otherwise.

God is capable of far more than we can imagine.

Yet as I have grown older, I have come to appreciate another category of miracle.

The quiet miracle.

The unnoticed miracle.

The miracle hidden within ordinary life.

The miracle we almost miss.

These miracles rarely make headlines.

They do not attract crowds.

They often arrive so gently that we can easily dismiss them as coincidence.

Yet once we begin paying attention, they seem to appear everywhere.

A phone call arriving at exactly the right moment.

A chance conversation that answers a question we have been carrying.

An unexpected opportunity.

A word of encouragement when hope is fading.

A problem resolved in a way we could never have orchestrated.

A door opening just as another closes.

A provision arriving precisely when needed.

Small things.

Ordinary things.

Yet somehow perfectly timed.

Looking back across my life, I see countless examples.

At the time, many appeared insignificant.

Now they seem remarkable.

Not because any single event was dramatic.

But because of the pattern they reveal.

Again and again, God provided exactly what was needed.

Not always what I wanted.

Not always when I expected.

But what was needed.

And when it was needed.

One of the reasons we miss so many miracles is because we are looking for spectacle.

We expect lightning.

God often works through sunlight.

We expect the extraordinary.

God often works through the ordinary.

We expect interruption.

God often works through integration.

His activity becomes woven into the fabric of everyday life.

So naturally.

So seamlessly.

That we sometimes fail to recognize it.

Imagine walking through a garden every day.

At first, growth appears invisible.

Nothing seems to change.

Yet if you compare today's garden with the garden six months ago, the transformation becomes obvious.

The growth was real.

It was simply gradual.

Many miracles operate in the same way.

They unfold quietly.

Patiently.

Faithfully.

Until one day we look back and realize that God has been working all along.

One of the greatest gifts of spiritual maturity is learning to notice.

To notice blessings.

To notice provision.

To notice timing.

To notice grace.

To notice the countless ways God participates in our lives.

This requires a shift in perspective.

Instead of constantly asking, "Where is God?"

We begin asking, "Where is God already working?"

The second question produces very different answers.

Because God is always working.

Always.

Not occasionally.

Not only during crises.

Not only during moments of dramatic intervention.

Always.

The challenge is not His activity.

The challenge is our awareness.

Many years ago, I began reflecting upon events in my life that had once seemed coincidental.

The more I reflected, the more difficult coincidence became to believe.

Too many people appeared at exactly the right time.

Too many opportunities emerged unexpectedly.

Too many conversations provided precisely the guidance I needed.

Too many apparent setbacks later revealed hidden blessings.

The pattern became impossible for me to ignore.

What I once called luck increasingly appeared to be providence.

What I once called coincidence increasingly appeared to be guidance.

What I once viewed as random increasingly appeared intentional.

This realization did not make life easier.

Challenges still existed.

Disappointments still occurred.

Questions still remained.

Yet it changed the atmosphere in which I experienced those things.

Life felt less random.

Less chaotic.

Less disconnected.

I began recognizing a Presence moving through the story.

A loving God quietly participating in the details.

One of the reasons these small miracles matter so much is because they build trust.

Every instance of faithfulness becomes evidence.

Evidence that God can be trusted.

Evidence that He is paying attention.

Evidence that He is involved.

Evidence that He cares.

And over time, this evidence accumulates.

Like stones gathered beside a river.

Like markers along a trail.

Like memories stored within the heart.

Together they form a testimony.

A testimony of God's goodness.

A testimony of His presence.

A testimony of His faithfulness.

The older I become, the more valuable these memories become.

Whenever uncertainty arises, I can look backward.

Whenever questions emerge, I can remember.

Whenever fear begins to grow, I can revisit the evidence.

Not theoretical evidence.

Personal evidence.

The record of God's faithfulness in my own life.

That record has become one of my greatest sources of peace.

Because it reminds me that the God who guided yesterday remains capable of guiding tomorrow.

One of the simplest practices I have developed is gratitude.

Not merely gratitude for major blessings.

Gratitude for small ones.

A conversation.

A friendship.

A beautiful day.

An unexpected kindness.

A solution.

A provision.

A moment of joy.

The more grateful I become, the more miracles I seem to notice.

Perhaps that is because gratitude sharpens awareness.

It trains us to recognize gifts we might otherwise overlook.

It helps us see abundance where we once saw scarcity.

Presence where we once saw absence.

Grace where we once saw coincidence.

The truth is that life is filled with miracles.

Not necessarily the kind that suspend the laws of nature.

The kind that reveal the heart of God.

A sunrise.

A friendship.

A healed relationship.

A timely encouragement.

A door opening.

A burden lifted.

A prayer answered.

A lesson learned.

A life transformed.

These things may not attract headlines.

Yet they change lives every day.

Including mine.

As I reflect upon the countless quiet miracles scattered throughout my journey, one feeling rises above all others.

Gratitude.

Gratitude for God's patience.

Gratitude for His provision.

Gratitude for His guidance.

Gratitude for His presence.

Gratitude for the ways He has cared for me even when I failed to notice.

The miracles we almost miss are often the most beautiful of all.

Because they remind us that God is not merely present during extraordinary moments.

He is present during ordinary ones as well.

He walks with us through daily life.

Through conversations.

Through opportunities.

Through challenges.

Through relationships.

Through every season.

And among all the relationships through which God has revealed His faithfulness, one stands out in a particularly profound way.

A relationship that has taught me more about perseverance, grace, courage, and unconditional love than perhaps any other.

The story of Christy.

A story not merely of suffering, but of faith.

Not merely of endurance, but of hope.

Not merely of surviving, but of continuing to trust God through circumstances that would have discouraged many others.

And it is through her journey that some of the deepest lessons of all begin to emerge.

## **16. Christy's Journey**

Some of life's greatest lessons do not come through our own experiences.

They come through walking beside someone we love.

Watching.

Listening.

Learning.

Supporting.

Praying.

And slowly discovering strengths we might never have understood otherwise.

For me, one of those lessons has been Christy's journey.

When people meet Christy, one of the first things they notice is her warmth.

Her kindness.

Her gentleness.

Her caring nature.

She possesses a remarkable ability to make people feel welcomed and valued.

What many do not immediately see is the courage that lies beneath those qualities.

Because for much of her adult life, Christy has lived with pain.

Not occasional discomfort.

Not temporary hardship.

Chronic, persistent, life-altering pain.

The kind of pain that quietly accompanies a person through days, months, years, and eventually decades.

Many years ago, an accident changed the course of her life.

Her beloved horse, Grand Blanc, slipped on a wet course and fell with full force upon her.

In an instant, everything changed.

What followed was a journey few people would have chosen.

Medical appointments.

Treatments.

Therapies.

Medications.

Questions.

Frustrations.

Periods of hope.

Periods of disappointment.

An ongoing search for relief.

Anyone who has experienced chronic pain understands that it affects far more than the body.

It affects energy.

Sleep.

Plans.

Possibilities.

Daily routines.

Sometimes even hope itself.

Pain has a way of narrowing life.

Limiting choices.

Stealing attention.

Demanding constant accommodation.

Yet through all of this, Christy continued moving forward.

Not perfectly.

No one could.

Not without difficult days.

There were many.

But she continued.

And in that continuation, I witnessed something extraordinary.

Perseverance.

The world often associates courage with dramatic acts.

Heroic moments.

Spectacular achievements.

Public victories.

Yet some of the greatest courage I have ever witnessed has been quiet.

Private.

Unseen.

The courage to get out of bed when your body hurts.

The courage to keep hoping after disappointment.

The courage to continue searching for answers.

The courage to smile when circumstances offer every excuse not to.

The courage to trust God through uncertainty.

That kind of courage rarely receives applause.

Yet it may be among the purest forms of courage that exist.

Walking beside Christy taught me this.

It also taught me something about faith.

Many people imagine faith as certainty.

As confidence.

As unwavering conviction.

Sometimes it is.

But often faith looks much simpler.

Faith is continuing.

Faith is showing up.

Faith is taking the next step when the road remains difficult.

Faith is trusting God one day at a time.

Not because all questions have been answered.

Because God remains faithful.

One of the remarkable things about Christy is her ability to continue finding beauty.

Despite challenges.

Despite pain.

Despite disappointments.

Beauty still captures her attention.

Beauty still inspires her.

Beauty still brings joy.

Over the years, one expression of this became especially meaningful.

Painting.

What began as a creative outlet gradually became something more.

A refuge.

A sanctuary.

A place where attention shifted away from pain and toward creation.

Hours would pass.

Concentration would deepen.

The burden of physical suffering would temporarily loosen its grip.

Something beautiful would emerge.

Not only on the canvas.

Within the soul.

Watching this unfold taught me another lesson.

God often provides unexpected pathways toward healing.

Not always complete healing.

Not always the healing we initially seek.

But healing nonetheless.

Sometimes through people.

Sometimes through relationships.

Sometimes through creativity.

Sometimes through purpose.

Sometimes through simple moments of peace.

The challenge is that such gifts often arrive in forms we do not anticipate.

We pray for one thing.

God provides another.

Not because He is ignoring us.

Because He understands what we need.

One of the most encouraging developments in recent years came through an osteopath who provided more relief than anything Christy had experienced in decades.

For the first time in many years, genuine progress seemed possible.

Hope expanded.

Possibilities returned.

The improvement was significant.

Not perfect.

But significant.

Watching this unfold reminded me once again that God's timing often differs from our own.

For years, answers seemed elusive.

Then suddenly, a door opened.

Not because God had forgotten.

Because the timing was right.

Looking back, I see God's faithfulness woven throughout the entire journey.

Not because every prayer was answered immediately.

Not because every challenge disappeared.

Not because every question found a quick solution.

But because God never abandoned us.

Never.

His presence remained.

His provision continued.

His grace sustained.

Again and again.

One of the greatest lessons I learned through Christy's journey is that suffering does not automatically destroy faith.

Sometimes it deepens it.

Not because suffering is desirable.

It is not.

Not because pain is good.

It is not.

But because hardship often strips away illusions.

It reveals what truly matters.

It exposes what endures.

It teaches dependence.

Compassion.

Perspective.

Trust.

Many of the people I most admire are not those who avoided suffering.

They are those who continued loving, trusting, and serving despite it.

Christy belongs in that category.

Her life has reminded me that strength is not always loud.

Sometimes strength is gentle.

Sometimes strength is patient.

Sometimes strength is found in persistence.

Sometimes strength is simply refusing to surrender hope.

That kind of strength has inspired me repeatedly.

It has also challenged me.

Because when I observe her perseverance, I find fewer excuses for my own doubts.

When I witness her courage, I am reminded that faith is not measured by circumstances.

It is measured by response.

How do we respond when life becomes difficult?

How do we respond when answers are delayed?

How do we respond when the future remains uncertain?

These questions reveal much about our faith.

They also reveal much about our character.

One of the beautiful truths I have discovered is that God often uses the people closest to us as teachers.

Not through formal instruction.

Through example.

Their lives become lessons.

Their journeys become classrooms.

Their courage becomes inspiration.

Christy's journey has been one of those classrooms for me.

Through her, I have learned about perseverance.

Patience.

Compassion.

Hope.

Trust.

And perhaps most importantly, I have learned that God's faithfulness is not measured by the absence of hardship.

It is measured by His presence within it.

That realization changes everything.

Because it means we do not have to wait for perfect circumstances to experience God's goodness.

We do not have to wait until every prayer is answered.

We do not have to wait until every burden is removed.

God is present now.

Here.

In the middle of the journey.

In the midst of the struggle.

In the midst of the waiting.

In the midst of the uncertainty.

Always.

And once we begin to understand that truth, another realization follows.

Many of the trials we would never have chosen eventually reveal unexpected blessings.

Not blessings because of the pain.

Blessings that emerge through it.

Lessons.

Growth.

Compassion.

Wisdom.

Perspective.

Gifts hidden within the struggle itself.

And it is there that we discover one of God's most mysterious and beautiful realities:

The blessing hidden in every trial.

## **17. The Blessing Hidden in Every Trial**

If someone had asked me many years ago whether I wanted trials in my life, the answer would have been immediate.

No.

Like most people, I preferred progress to setbacks.

Comfort to hardship.

Certainty to uncertainty.

Success to failure.

Blessings to burdens.

It seemed like a simple choice.

And yet, as I look back now, I find myself confronted by a surprising truth.

Many of the experiences that shaped me most deeply were experiences I never would have chosen.

The trials.

The disappointments.

The delays.

The uncertainties.

The seasons when life unfolded very differently than I had planned.

At the time, I often viewed these experiences as obstacles.

Now I increasingly see them as teachers.

Not because the pain was good.

Not because suffering should be romanticized.

But because God has an extraordinary ability to bring blessings from places where we would never think to look.

One of the reasons trials are so difficult is that they challenge our expectations.

We create plans.

Life unfolds differently.

We anticipate one outcome.

Another appears.

We expect the road to be smooth.

Suddenly it becomes steep.

The trial itself is often not the only challenge.

The gap between expectation and reality creates suffering of its own.

Many years ago, I believed that faith would eventually eliminate most of life's difficulties.

I thought that if I trusted God enough, understood enough, and followed faithfully enough, life would become increasingly predictable.

Experience taught me otherwise.

Faith does not eliminate trials.

It changes how we walk through them.

That distinction became one of the most important lessons of my life.

God never promised a life without storms.

He promised His presence within them.

At first, that may seem like a smaller promise.

In reality, it is a far greater one.

Because circumstances come and go.

God remains.

The challenge, of course, is that we rarely recognize the blessings hidden within a trial while we are living through it.

Trials are like seeds.

When planted, they disappear into darkness.

Nothing appears to happen.

Growth remains invisible.

Only later does the harvest emerge.

The same principle often applies to hardship.

While we are experiencing it, all we see is the struggle.

Only later do we recognize the growth.

The wisdom.

The compassion.

The patience.

The faith.

The perspective.

The blessings that emerged from the experience.

Looking back, I can identify numerous examples in my own life.

There were disappointments that redirected me toward better opportunities.

Failures that taught lessons success never could.

Delays that prepared me for responsibilities I was not yet ready to carry.

Challenges that strengthened qualities I did not even realize I lacked.

At the time, none of these felt like blessings.

Quite the opposite.

Some felt frustrating.

Some painful.

Some deeply confusing.

Yet years later, many revealed gifts hidden beneath the surface.

One of the greatest gifts trials offer is perspective.

When life proceeds smoothly, it is easy to take blessings for granted.

Health.

Friendship.

Family.

Opportunity.

Faith.

Simple joys.

We often notice them most clearly when they are challenged.

Trials sharpen appreciation.

They remind us what truly matters.

They separate essentials from distractions.

They clarify priorities.

In many ways, trials simplify life.

Not because they make life easier.

Because they reveal what is most important.

Another blessing hidden within hardship is compassion.

People who have never struggled can sympathize.

People who have struggled can empathize.

There is a difference.

Empathy emerges from experience.

It grows from understanding.

From having walked a difficult road ourselves.

Some of the most compassionate people I know are people who have endured significant hardship.

Not because suffering automatically produces compassion.

But because suffering often expands the heart.

It teaches gentleness.

Patience.

Understanding.

Mercy.

God uses our struggles not only for our own growth but often for the benefit of others.

The comfort we receive becomes comfort we can offer.

The lessons we learn become lessons we can share.

The encouragement we needed becomes encouragement we provide.

In this way, nothing is wasted.

Nothing.

Not even pain.

This realization transformed how I viewed many difficult experiences.

Instead of asking only, "Why is this happening?" I gradually began asking, "How might God use this?"

The second question does not remove the challenge.

But it introduces purpose.

Purpose changes everything.

A burden carried without purpose feels unbearable.

A burden connected to purpose becomes meaningful.

God is remarkably skilled at creating meaning.

He can take circumstances that appear pointless and weave them into something beautiful.

Not always immediately.

Not always obviously.

But eventually.

One of the most powerful examples of this principle is found in trust itself.

Trials reveal where our trust truly rests.

When everything is going well, it is easy to say we trust God.

When plans collapse, trust becomes visible.

When prayers seem unanswered, trust becomes practical.

When the future feels uncertain, trust becomes necessary.

The trial becomes a mirror.

Showing us where our confidence truly lies.

This is not always comfortable.

But it is always valuable.

Because growth begins with honesty.

And trials are remarkably effective at revealing truth.

The older I become, the less I ask God to remove every challenge.

That statement would have surprised my younger self.

Of course, I still pray for healing.

Still pray for provision.

Still pray for solutions.

Still pray for relief.

Yet I also pray for wisdom.

Perspective.

Growth.

Faithfulness.

Because I have learned that God often accomplishes His deepest work through the very experiences I once wished to avoid.

This does not mean we should seek suffering.

Far from it.

It means that when suffering arrives, it need not be meaningless.

God remains present.

God remains active.

God remains capable of bringing beauty from ashes.

Again and again.

Perhaps that is one of the most comforting truths in all of life.

No experience is beyond redemption.

No circumstance is beyond God's ability to use.

No trial is beyond His ability to transform.

The blessing may not be immediately visible.

It may remain hidden for years.

But it is often there.

Waiting.

Growing.

Preparing to emerge.

The challenge is learning to trust before we can see it.

And trust, as I have discovered repeatedly, becomes easier when we remember another important truth:

Nothing is ever wasted.

Not a single experience.

Not a single lesson.

Not a single tear.

Not a single prayer.

Nothing.

Everything can be gathered into God's hands and woven into His purposes.

And that realization became one of the most encouraging discoveries of my life.

## **18. Nothing Is Ever Wasted**

If there is one truth that has brought me increasing comfort as the years have passed, it is this:

Nothing is ever wasted in the hands of God.

Nothing.

Not our successes.

Not our failures.

Not our victories.

Not our disappointments.

Not our strengths.

Not our weaknesses.

Not even our mistakes.

For much of my life, I viewed events individually.

A success was a success.

A setback was a setback.

A disappointment was a disappointment.

Each experience stood alone.

Or so it seemed.

Yet as the years unfolded and I began looking backward, a different picture emerged.

The individual pieces began connecting.

The separate chapters began forming a story.

Events that once appeared unrelated revealed hidden relationships.

Lessons learned in one season became essential in another.

People encountered years earlier suddenly became important again.

Experiences that once seemed meaningless acquired profound significance.

Gradually, I began realizing that God had been weaving threads together all along.

Threads I could not see while living through them.

One of the reasons we struggle to believe this is because we tend to judge experiences too quickly.

Something happens.

We immediately assign a label.

Good.

Bad.

Success.

Failure.

Blessing.

Burden.

Yet life has repeatedly shown me how unreliable such judgments can be.

Many things I once considered setbacks eventually became blessings.

Many things I once celebrated as victories eventually revealed hidden challenges.

The story was not finished.

And because the story was unfinished, my conclusions were incomplete.

God, however, sees the entire story.

The beginning.

The middle.

The ending.

Every chapter.

Every connection.

Every lesson.

Every opportunity.

Nothing escapes His attention.

That perspective changes how we view our lives.

Instead of seeing isolated events, we begin seeing a tapestry.

A tapestry woven over years.

Perhaps decades.

Each thread contributes something.

Some bright.

Some dark.

Some beautiful.

Some difficult.

Yet all essential to the finished work.

Remove a thread and the pattern changes.

This is one of the reasons I no longer wish to erase parts of my journey.

There was a time when I might have.

Certain disappointments.

Certain mistakes.

Certain painful seasons.

Certain failures.

Certain delays.

If given the opportunity, I might have chosen differently.

Today, I am less certain.

Because I can see how many of those experiences contributed to who I became.

Not despite the difficulty.

Partly because of it.

The failure taught humility.

The delay taught patience.

The disappointment taught trust.

The struggle taught perseverance.

The uncertainty taught faith.

The mistake taught wisdom.

God used all of it.

Nothing was wasted.

One of the most beautiful aspects of God's character is His ability to redeem.

Redemption is one of the central themes of faith.

The transformation of something broken into something beautiful.

The restoration of what appeared lost.

The creation of new purpose from old pain.

We often associate redemption with dramatic stories.

Yet redemption occurs every day.

A lesson learned.

A relationship restored.

A wound healed.

A heart softened.

A life redirected.

God is constantly redeeming.

Constantly restoring.

Constantly creating beauty from brokenness.

I have seen this repeatedly in my own life.

Experiences that once seemed painful later became sources of wisdom.

Challenges that once appeared meaningless later became opportunities to help others.

Failures that once felt devastating later revealed important lessons.

The passage of time uncovered purposes that were invisible in the moment.

This is one of the reasons hope remains possible even during difficult seasons.

Because we do not yet know how God intends to use today's experience.

We do not yet know which lesson will prove important.

Which relationship will become significant.

Which setback will become preparation.

Which disappointment will become redirection.

Which challenge will become strength.

The story is still unfolding.

One of the greatest mistakes we make is assuming that today's chapter defines the entire book.

It does not.

A difficult chapter is still only a chapter.

An unfinished chapter is still unfinished.

God is still writing.

Still working.

Still redeeming.

Still weaving threads together.

Many years ago, I began noticing a pattern.

Experiences I initially regarded as obstacles often became stepping stones.

Events I considered detours often became pathways.

Situations I viewed as interruptions often became preparation.

Again and again, God transformed apparent setbacks into opportunities for growth.

At first, this seemed surprising.

Eventually, it became expected.

Not because life became predictable.

Because God became trustworthy.

There is a difference.

Trust does not require knowing exactly what will happen.

Trust requires confidence in the One guiding the journey.

And the more I observed God's ability to redeem circumstances, the more my confidence grew.

Not in outcomes.

In Him.

One of the most liberating realizations of my life has been understanding that God can use even our mistakes.

This truth does not excuse poor decisions.

Nor does it eliminate consequences.

Yet it does provide hope.

Many people carry regret.

Regret about choices.

Missed opportunities.

Words spoken.

Actions taken.

Roads not traveled.

I understand that feeling.

Most people do.

Yet God is not intimidated by our mistakes.

He is not standing helplessly beside them.

He is capable of weaving even those experiences into His purposes.

That realization changed how I viewed regret.

Instead of dwelling endlessly upon what could have been, I began focusing upon what God could still do.

The future remained open.

The story remained unfinished.

Redemption remained possible.

Always.

One of the reasons this truth matters so much is because it frees us from the burden of perfection.

Many people live as though one wrong decision can permanently derail God's plans.

I no longer believe that.

Our choices matter.

Greatly.

But God's grace is greater.

His wisdom is greater.

His ability to redeem is greater.

He remains capable of bringing good from circumstances we would never have chosen ourselves.

Again and again.

The older I become, the more evidence I see.

Lives restored.

Relationships healed.

New beginnings emerging from painful endings.

Unexpected blessings appearing after seasons of loss.

God's fingerprints appear everywhere.

Not because life is perfect.

Because redemption is real.

Perhaps that is why gratitude has become such an important part of my faith.

Gratitude allows me to see the threads.

To appreciate the connections.

To recognize God's faithfulness.

To acknowledge His guidance.

To celebrate His redemption.

When I look backward, gratitude comes naturally.

The evidence is overwhelming.

God has been at work.

Always.

Even when I could not see it.

Especially when I could not see it.

And if He has been faithful throughout every chapter thus far, there is every reason to believe He will remain faithful through the chapters yet to come.

That realization marks an important turning point.

Because once we truly believe that nothing is wasted, we become more willing to release our grip upon the future.

We stop trying to control every outcome.

We stop demanding complete understanding.

We stop carrying burdens that were never ours to carry.

We begin surrendering.

Not because we have become passive.

Because we have become trusting.

And that trust leads us into the final stage of this journey.

A stage not focused on discovering God's hand in the past.

But on learning to place our lives completely into His hands today.

The lessons of surrender have prepared us.

The evidence of His faithfulness has strengthened us.

Now comes the invitation.

The invitation to live differently.

The invitation to release what we cannot control.

The invitation to walk forward with open hands.

The invitation to truly let go and let God.

## **PART IV**

# **LET GO AND LET GOD**

## **19. The End of Striving**

For much of my life, I believed that progress required striving.

If I wanted something badly enough, I should work harder.

Push harder.

Plan more carefully.

Persist longer.

Refuse to quit.

In many situations, those instincts served me well.

They helped me develop as an athlete.

They helped me in business.

They helped me overcome obstacles and pursue ambitious goals.

There is value in determination.

There is value in discipline.

There is value in perseverance.

God does not ask us to become passive observers of our lives.

He calls us to participate.

To serve.

To build.

To contribute.

Yet somewhere along the way, I discovered that there is a difference between working faithfully and striving endlessly.

At first, I did not recognize the difference.

Both looked similar from the outside.

Both involved effort.

Both involved commitment.

Both involved action.

The difference existed within.

Faithful effort is rooted in trust.

Striving is rooted in anxiety.

Faithful effort says:

I will do my part and trust God with the outcome.

Striving says:

Everything depends upon me.

Faithful effort creates peace.

Striving creates exhaustion.

For years, I carried burdens God never intended me to carry.

The burden of making everything happen.

The burden of controlling outcomes.

The burden of ensuring success.

The burden of figuring everything out.

The burden of protecting every dream.

At the time, I viewed these burdens as responsibility.

Now I recognize that many of them were actually expressions of fear.

Fear that things would not work out.

Fear that opportunities would disappear.

Fear that dreams would remain unfulfilled.

Fear that God might not come through.

Fear often disguises itself as responsibility.

That is one of its favorite disguises.

It sounds noble.

Responsible people prepare.

Responsible people work hard.

Responsible people plan.

All true.

Yet responsible people are not called to carry the weight of the universe.

That responsibility belongs to God.

One of the most important moments in my spiritual journey occurred when I began recognizing how much energy I was spending trying to manage things beyond my control.

It was exhausting.

Not physically.

Emotionally.

Mentally.

Spiritually.

I was attempting to solve tomorrow's problems today.

Trying to predict outcomes.

Trying to guarantee results.

Trying to protect myself from uncertainty.

The strange thing is that none of it worked.

The future remained uncertain.

Life remained unpredictable.

Questions remained unanswered.

The striving accomplished very little.

Except exhaustion.

God, however, continued teaching a different lesson.

Again and again.

Trust Me.

Not because everything is clear.

Not because every outcome is guaranteed.

Not because every obstacle has disappeared.

Trust Me because I am faithful.

At first, that lesson felt uncomfortable.

Striving creates the illusion of control.

Trust requires surrender.

And surrender feels risky.

Many people imagine surrender as weakness.

I once did.

Now I see it differently.

Surrender is not weakness.

It is courage.

The courage to release what we cannot control.

The courage to acknowledge our limitations.

The courage to trust God with unanswered questions.

The courage to place our future in His hands.

That kind of courage transforms a life.

One of the most significant shifts in my thinking occurred when I realized that God had never asked me to carry the outcome.

He had only asked me to carry obedience.

That distinction changed everything.

The outcome belongs to God.

The effort belongs to me.

The timing belongs to God.

The faithfulness belongs to me.

The future belongs to God.

Today's responsibilities belong to me.

Once I understood this, a tremendous burden began lifting.

Not all at once.

Gradually.

Like a backpack being emptied one stone at a time.

Each stone represented something I was never meant to carry.

Fear.

Control.

Anxiety.

Perfectionism.

The need to know.

The need to guarantee.

The need to manage every possibility.

God gently invited me to place each burden in His hands.

Not because He wanted less from me.

Because He wanted more for me.

More peace.

More freedom.

More trust.

More joy.

One of the great paradoxes of faith is that letting go often creates more effectiveness, not less.

When we stop obsessing over outcomes, we become more present.

More focused.

More available.

More faithful.

We stop wasting energy fighting battles that belong to God.

We invest that energy where it actually matters.

In today's responsibilities.

In today's opportunities.

In today's relationships.

In today's acts of service.

This shift does not eliminate ambition.

It purifies ambition.

The goal is no longer proving ourselves.

The goal becomes serving faithfully.

The goal is no longer controlling results.

The goal becomes honoring God.

The goal is no longer achieving personal security.

The goal becomes trusting divine guidance.

Everything changes.

Not necessarily externally.

Internally.

The peace that follows is difficult to describe.

It does not mean life becomes easy.

Challenges remain.

Dreams still require effort.

Obstacles still arise.

Yet beneath everything exists a growing confidence.

A confidence not rooted in circumstances.

A confidence rooted in God's faithfulness.

I no longer need to know exactly how everything will unfold.

I no longer need every question answered.

I no longer need every door opened immediately.

God has proven Himself trustworthy.

Again and again.

That evidence has become stronger than my fears.

Perhaps that is what maturity looks like.

Not possessing all the answers.

Not achieving complete certainty.

But gradually learning to rest in God's character.

To trust His heart when His plans remain unclear.

To trust His timing when delays occur.

To trust His wisdom when doors close.

To trust His love when life becomes difficult.

That trust brings freedom.

The freedom to stop striving.

The freedom to stop carrying burdens that belong to God.

The freedom to live with open hands.

And open hands, I have discovered, are exactly where God loves to place His greatest gifts.

For hands tightly clenched around control cannot easily receive.

But hands opened in trust become available.

Available for blessing.

Available for purpose.

Available for grace.

Available for God.

The end of striving is not the end of effort.

It is the end of unnecessary burden.

It is the end of believing that everything depends upon us.

It is the beginning of living differently.

Working faithfully.

Trusting deeply.

Walking peacefully.

Living with open hands.

And it is there, with those open hands, that the next lesson begins.

A lesson that may be one of the most practical and transformative of all.

The lesson of learning to live with open hands every day.

Not occasionally.

Not during special moments.

Every day.

Because surrender is not a single event.

It is a way of life.

## 20. Living With Open Hands

There was a time when I thought surrender was a single moment.

A decision.

A prayer.

A turning point.

Something you did once and then moved on from.

Experience has taught me otherwise.

Surrender is not a destination.

It is a practice.

A daily practice.

Sometimes an hourly practice.

Occasionally a moment-by-moment practice.

Because life has a way of continually presenting us with new opportunities to either trust God or attempt to take control.

Every day we are faced with choices.

Will I trust or will I worry?

Will I release or will I cling?

Will I surrender or will I strive?

Will I place this in God's hands or insist on carrying it myself?

These questions appear in countless forms.

A financial concern.

A family issue.

A health challenge.

A delayed dream.

A difficult conversation.

An uncertain future.

A closed door.

An unanswered prayer.

Life continually invites us to choose.

And what I have discovered is that the choice to trust God is rarely made once.

It is made repeatedly.

That realization changed the way I viewed surrender.

Instead of seeing it as a dramatic spiritual event, I began seeing it as a way of living.

A posture.

An attitude.

A daily orientation of the heart.

The image that best describes this posture for me is open hands.

There is something powerful about that image.

Open hands are relaxed.

Receptive.

Available.

Trusting.

Closed fists communicate something different.

Control.

Fear.

Protection.

Possession.

Resistance.

Many years ago, I began noticing how often I lived with clenched fists.

Not physically.

Spiritually.

I was gripping plans.

Timelines.

Expectations.

Dreams.

Outcomes.

I wanted things to unfold in particular ways.

On particular schedules.

According to particular expectations.

Whenever reality differed from those expectations, frustration followed.

Anxiety followed.

Disappointment followed.

God, however, seemed to be inviting me toward a different way of living.

Open your hands.

Trust Me.

At first, this sounded simple.

In practice, it proved remarkably challenging.

Because opening our hands means releasing control.

And releasing control can feel frightening.

We fear what might happen.

We fear losing something important.

We fear uncertainty.

We fear disappointment.

Yet beneath those fears lies a deeper question.

Do we trust God?

Not theoretically.

Practically.

Do we trust Him with our dreams?

Do we trust Him with our relationships?

Do we trust Him with our finances?

Do we trust Him with our health?

Do we trust Him with our future?

Do we trust Him with our lives?

These questions reveal where surrender becomes real.

One of the most important discoveries of my life has been that God never asks us to open our hands so that He can take something away.

He asks us to open our hands so that He can place something better within them.

Not necessarily easier.

Not necessarily what we expected.

But better.

More aligned with His purposes.

More aligned with our growth.

More aligned with who He created us to become.

This realization transformed the way I viewed surrender.

Surrender was no longer loss.

It became trust.

An act of confidence in God's goodness.

An expression of faith in His wisdom.

A declaration that He knows more than I do.

And that His plans are worthy of trust.

One of the reasons living with open hands brings such freedom is because it relieves us of responsibilities we were never meant to carry.

We are not responsible for controlling outcomes.

We are not responsible for guaranteeing success.

We are not responsible for orchestrating every detail of the future.

Those responsibilities belong to God.

Our responsibility is faithfulness.

To show up.

To love.

To serve.

To trust.

To obey.

To take the next step.

That is enough.

In fact, it is more than enough.

The older I become, the more I appreciate the simplicity of this truth.

For years, I complicated faith.

I thought I needed greater certainty.

Greater understanding.

Greater clarity.

What God repeatedly offered was trust.

Trust Him today.

Trust Him with this decision.

Trust Him with this concern.

Trust Him with this dream.

Trust Him with this burden.

One burden at a time.

One decision at a time.

One day at a time.

Living with open hands does not mean becoming passive.

This is important.

Some people hear surrender and imagine inactivity.

Resignation.

Withdrawal.

That is not what I mean.

Open hands remain active.

They simply operate from trust rather than fear.

A farmer still plants.

A builder still builds.

A writer still writes.

An athlete still trains.

A believer still acts.

The difference is that the outcome has been entrusted to God.

The effort remains.

The anxiety diminishes.

The work continues.

The burden lifts.

This distinction changed my life.

I still dream.

Still plan.

Still work.

Still pursue meaningful goals.

But I increasingly hold them differently.

Loosely.

Openly.

Prayerfully.

With the understanding that God's plans may differ from my own.

And that His plans are ultimately better.

That understanding has brought tremendous peace.

Not because every question has been answered.

Because the need for every answer has diminished.

Not because uncertainty has disappeared.

Because trust has grown.

Not because life has become predictable.

Because God's faithfulness has become familiar.

Again and again, He has proven Himself trustworthy.

Again and again, He has carried burdens I could not carry myself.

Again and again, He has provided guidance, strength, wisdom, and grace.

The evidence is overwhelming.

Why would I not trust Him?

And yet, if I am honest, surrender remains a daily choice.

Some mornings I wake up and immediately begin trying to manage things that belong to God.

Some days I catch myself worrying about outcomes I cannot control.

Some days I find my fists tightening again.

That is why surrender remains a practice.

A continual return.

A continual release.

A continual reminder that I am not God.

And thankfully, I do not need to be.

God is perfectly capable of handling responsibilities that overwhelm me.

He always has been.

He always will be.

My role is simpler.

Trust.

Follow.

Love.

Serve.

Be faithful.

Leave the rest to Him.

There is tremendous freedom in that.

Freedom I wish I had discovered earlier.

Freedom that continues growing with each passing year.

Freedom that allows life to be lived more lightly.

More joyfully.

More peacefully.

The truth is that God does some of His best work through people whose hands are open.

Open to guidance.

Open to change.

Open to growth.

Open to opportunity.

Open to blessing.

Open to Him.

And perhaps the greatest thing He places into those open hands is courage.

The courage to trust Him when circumstances make no sense.

The courage to move forward when certainty is absent.

The courage to believe that His goodness remains present even when the road ahead is hidden.

Because trust requires courage.

And courage, I have learned, is one of the greatest expressions of faith.

## **21. The Courage to Trust**

Of all the lessons God has taught me, trust may be the one that requires the greatest courage.

Not because trust is complicated.

Its simplicity is precisely what makes it difficult.

Trust asks us to place our confidence in God when circumstances suggest we should place it elsewhere.

Trust asks us to keep moving forward when we cannot see very far ahead.

Trust asks us to believe that God is at work even when visible evidence appears limited.

Trust asks us to release certainty and embrace faith.

None of these things come naturally.

At least they did not come naturally to me.

Like many people, I wanted reassurance.

I wanted answers.

I wanted visible signs that everything was unfolding according to plan.

I wanted confirmation.

Yet time and again, God seemed less interested in providing certainty than in developing trust.

At first, this frustrated me.

Now I understand why.

Certainty creates dependence upon information.

Trust creates dependence upon God.

And God desires relationship more than reassurance.

One of the greatest misconceptions about courage is that courageous people do not experience fear.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

Courage is not the absence of fear.

It is the decision to move forward despite it.

The same principle applies to faith.

People of faith are not people who never experience doubt.

They are people who continue trusting despite uncertainty.

They continue believing despite unanswered questions.

They continue walking despite limited visibility.

That is courage.

And every meaningful life requires it.

When I look back across my own journey, I see countless moments when trust required courage.

Moments when the future appeared unclear.

Moments when dreams seemed distant.

Moments when circumstances failed to cooperate with my expectations.

Moments when doors remained closed.

Moments when waiting felt endless.

Moments when I genuinely did not know what would happen next.

During such seasons, fear often whispers.

What if nothing changes?

What if the dream never happens?

What if you fail?

What if you are wrong?

What if God does not come through?

Fear is remarkably creative.

It specializes in imagining futures that do not exist.

It projects worst-case scenarios.

Magnifies uncertainty.

Exaggerates obstacles.

And quietly invites us to trust our fears more than we trust God.

Many people spend their lives listening to those voices.

I know because I have listened myself.

The challenge is not eliminating fear entirely.

The challenge is deciding which voice deserves our attention.

Fear says:

What if everything goes wrong?

Faith says:

What if God is faithful?

Fear says:

You cannot handle this.

Faith says:

God can.

Fear says:

The future is uncertain.

Faith says:

God is not.

That distinction has become increasingly important to me over the years.

Because uncertainty is unavoidable.

The future will always contain unknowns.

Questions will remain.

Outcomes will remain hidden.

The road ahead will rarely become fully visible.

If trust depends upon certainty, we will spend much of our lives waiting.

Waiting for enough information.

Waiting for enough reassurance.

Waiting for enough confidence.

Waiting for guarantees that never arrive.

God invites us to a different path.

A path of courageous trust.

Trust that moves forward despite uncertainty.

Trust that remains faithful despite delays.

Trust that continues believing despite obstacles.

Trust that rests in God's character rather than circumstances.

One of the reasons courageous trust becomes possible is because of what we discussed in earlier chapters.

The evidence.

The accumulated evidence of God's faithfulness.

Every answered prayer.

Every provision.

Every lesson.

Every redirection.

Every miracle we almost missed.

Every person God sent.

Every wilderness He carried us through.

Together they create a foundation.

A foundation strong enough to support trust even when circumstances become difficult.

Looking backward strengthens our ability to move forward.

Because memory fuels faith.

The more clearly I remember God's faithfulness, the easier it becomes to trust Him again.

Not because I know exactly what He will do.

Because I know who He is.

And ultimately, faith rests not upon predictions.

It rests upon character.

God's character.

His goodness.

His wisdom.

His love.

His faithfulness.

Those qualities remain constant even when circumstances change.

That realization transformed my understanding of trust.

I no longer trust because I expect every outcome to unfold exactly as I desire.

I trust because God is trustworthy.

There is a profound difference.

One approach depends upon circumstances.

The other depends upon God.

Circumstances fluctuate.

God does not.

The older I become, the more valuable this distinction becomes.

Because life continues presenting situations beyond my understanding.

Questions without immediate answers.

Challenges without obvious solutions.

Opportunities without guarantees.

Trust remains necessary.

Always.

One of the most surprising discoveries of my life is that trust often grows strongest during seasons when certainty is weakest.

At first glance, this seems backwards.

Yet it makes perfect sense.

Trust that requires no risk is not really trust.

Trust becomes visible when risk is present.

When questions remain.

When outcomes are unclear.

When the future remains hidden.

That is where faith comes alive.

Not in certainty.

In uncertainty.

Not in control.

In surrender.

Not in knowing.

In trusting.

The courage to trust is not something we achieve once and for all.

It is a daily decision.

A repeated choice.

A continual willingness to place our lives in God's hands.

Some days this feels easy.

Other days it feels difficult.

Yet every act of trust strengthens the next one.

Every step of faith increases our confidence.

Every experience of God's faithfulness deepens our willingness to trust again.

Slowly.

Gradually.

One day at a time.

This is how God builds faith.

Not through lectures.

Through experience.

Not through theory.

Through relationship.

Not through guarantees.

Through trust.

As I reflect upon my own journey, I realize that many of the things I once feared never happened.

Many of the worries that occupied my mind proved unnecessary.

Many of the concerns that felt overwhelming eventually resolved themselves.

God carried me through them.

Just as He always had.

Just as He always will.

That realization brings tremendous peace.

Not because life becomes predictable.

Because God remains faithful.

And faithful is enough.

Perhaps that is the true courage of trust.

The willingness to walk forward without possessing all the answers.

The willingness to release control.

The willingness to place our future in God's hands.

The willingness to believe that His wisdom exceeds our own.

The willingness to rest in His care.

That kind of trust changes a person.

It changes how we view challenges.

How we view opportunities.

How we view uncertainty.

How we view success itself.

Because eventually we begin realizing that success may not be what we once thought it was.

The world offers one definition.

God offers another.

And learning the difference may be one of the most important discoveries of all.

## **22. A New Definition of Success**

If someone had asked me many years ago to define success, my answer would have been very different from the answer I would give today.

Like many people, I once measured success largely through accomplishment.

Goals achieved.

Victories earned.

Dreams realized.

Businesses built.

Challenges overcome.

Results produced.

The world encourages this way of thinking.

In many respects, it rewards it.

Achievement is celebrated.

Recognition is admired.

Accomplishment is applauded.

There is nothing inherently wrong with any of these things.

Achievement can be wonderful.

Success can create opportunities.

Accomplishment can be deeply satisfying.

God has given human beings remarkable abilities, and we are called to use them wisely.

Yet over time, I began noticing something important.

Many people who appear successful by the world's standards remain restless.

Still searching.

Still striving.

Still wondering whether they have done enough.

Still wondering whether they are enough.

That observation troubled me.

Because if success cannot bring peace, perhaps it is not the whole story.

The older I became, the more I found myself asking a different question.

What if success is not primarily about what we accomplish?

What if it is about who we become?

That question changed everything.

Because God seems far more interested in character than accomplishment.

Far more interested in faithfulness than recognition.

Far more interested in obedience than outcomes.

The world often asks:

How much did you achieve?

God often asks:

How faithfully did you live?

The difference is profound.

One focuses on results.

The other focuses on relationship.

One depends heavily upon circumstances.

The other remains available to everyone.

Not everyone becomes wealthy.

Not everyone becomes famous.

Not everyone builds a business.

Not everyone wins championships.

Not everyone achieves public recognition.

Yet every person can be faithful.

Every person can love.

Every person can serve.

Every person can trust God.

Every person can live with integrity.

Every person can make a difference.

In God's eyes, those things matter deeply.

Looking back across my own life, some of the moments I once considered most important now seem surprisingly small.

And some moments I barely noticed at the time now seem profoundly significant.

A conversation.

An act of kindness.

A prayer.

A word of encouragement.

A moment of forgiveness.

A simple act of faithfulness.

These moments rarely attract attention.

Yet they often carry eternal value.

One of the reasons God measures success differently is because He sees what we cannot.

We tend to evaluate outcomes.

God evaluates hearts.

We focus on appearances.

God focuses on motives.

We celebrate visibility.

God values faithfulness.

This realization brought tremendous freedom.

For many years, I carried an unspoken pressure to accomplish more.

Do more.

Build more.

Achieve more.

Become more.

The finish line always seemed to move.

No matter what had been accomplished, another goal appeared.

Another mountain emerged.

Another challenge waited.

The pursuit never ended.

Eventually I began realizing that if my sense of success depended entirely upon achievement, I would never arrive.

There would always be another target.

Another objective.

Another dream.

God was inviting me toward something better.

Not the abandonment of goals.

The reordering of priorities.

The understanding that faithfulness matters more than outcomes.

This does not mean outcomes are unimportant.

They matter.

But they are not ultimate.

We control effort.

God controls results.

We control obedience.

God controls outcomes.

We control today's choices.

God controls tomorrow's opportunities.

Once I understood this, success became far less stressful.

Because I no longer needed to carry responsibilities that belonged to God.

My task was simple.

Be faithful.

Love people.

Serve others.

Use the gifts God has provided.

Trust Him with the rest.

That is success.

At least it is the definition that increasingly guides my life.

One of the most beautiful aspects of this definition is that it remains available regardless of circumstances.

A person experiencing abundance can be successful.

A person enduring hardship can be successful.

A person leading thousands can be successful.

A person quietly helping one neighbor can be successful.

A person building a business can be successful.

A person caring for a loved one can be successful.

Success is no longer limited to visible achievement.

It becomes a matter of faithfulness.

This perspective transformed the way I view many people.

Some of the most successful individuals I know would never appear on magazine covers.

They will never become famous.

They may never accumulate wealth.

Yet they love deeply.

Serve faithfully.

Trust consistently.

Give generously.

Encourage others.

Bring light wherever they go.

In God's economy, that is extraordinary success.

Perhaps the greatest example is Jesus Himself.

The world measures influence through power.

Jesus measured influence through service.

The world pursues status.

Jesus pursued humility.

The world seeks recognition.

Jesus sought obedience to His Father.

The contrast is striking.

And it reveals something important.

God's definition of success often runs contrary to the world's definition.

The world says:

Become great.

God says:

Become faithful.

The world says:

Be first.

God says:

Serve.

The world says:

Accumulate.

God says:

Give.

The world says:

Control.

God says:

Trust.

The older I become, the more appealing God's definition becomes.

Not because achievement has lost all value.

Because achievement has found its proper place.

A tool.

Not an identity.

A blessing.

Not a foundation.

An opportunity.

Not a source of worth.

My worth comes from God.

My purpose comes from God.

My identity comes from God.

Achievement can neither add to nor subtract from those truths.

That realization has brought a peace I spent years searching for.

The peace of knowing that I do not need to prove myself.

The peace of knowing that God's love is not performance-based.

The peace of knowing that faithfulness matters more than perfection.

The peace of knowing that success is available every day.

Not because every day contains great accomplishments.

Because every day offers opportunities to trust.

To love.

To serve.

To obey.

To walk with God.

And that, increasingly, is how I define success.

Not by what I have accomplished.

But by whether I have remained faithful.

Not by how much I have accumulated.

But by how much I have trusted.

Not by how far I have climbed.

But by how closely I have walked with God.

The beautiful thing about this definition is that it grows richer with time.

Because every year provides additional evidence that God knows what He is doing.

Every year reveals new examples of His faithfulness.

Every year strengthens confidence in His timing.

And eventually, if we pay attention, we begin to discover something remarkable.

God's timing is not merely acceptable.

It is beautiful.

The delays we once questioned reveal wisdom.

The waiting we once resisted reveals purpose.

The path we once doubted reveals love.

And we begin to experience something unexpected.

Joy.

Not merely joy in God's blessings.

Joy in God's timing itself.

A joy that emerges from trust.

A joy that grows from surrender.

A joy that can only be discovered by those who have learned to let go and let God.

## **23. The Joy of God's Timing**

There was a time when I viewed God's timing as something to be endured.

A necessary inconvenience.

An obstacle standing between me and the things I hoped would happen.

I trusted God, but if I am honest, I often wished He would move a little faster.

Perhaps much faster.

I believed in His plans.

I simply preferred my schedule.

Looking back now, I smile at that thought.

Not because my desires were wrong.

Most were sincere.

Many were noble.

Some were even inspired.

The problem was not the vision.

The problem was my assumption that I knew when everything should happen.

Experience has taught me otherwise.

Again and again.

The older I become, the more clearly I see that God's timing is not merely different from mine.

It is better.

That realization did not arrive overnight.

It emerged slowly.

Year after year.

Experience after experience.

Lesson after lesson.

Like many of the truths in this book, it was learned by looking backward.

Looking backward and recognizing how many events unfolded at precisely the right time.

Not my preferred time.

The right time.

One of the reasons we struggle with God's timing is because we live within moments.

God lives beyond them.

We see today.

God sees generations.

We see the immediate challenge.

God sees the ultimate purpose.

We see the delay.

God sees the preparation.

We see the waiting.

God sees the growth.

What appears frustrating from our perspective often appears beautiful from His.

The challenge is that we rarely possess His perspective while we are living through the experience.

That is why trust remains so important.

Trust bridges the gap between our limited understanding and God's infinite wisdom.

As I reflected upon my own journey, I began noticing something remarkable.

Many of the things I desperately wanted at one stage of life would have been problematic had they arrived then.

I lacked the experience.

The perspective.

The maturity.

The preparation.

At the time, I did not know this.

I simply wanted the outcome.

God, however, was preparing the person.

That distinction appears repeatedly throughout life.

We focus on what we want.

God focuses on who we are becoming.

And because He loves us, He often prioritizes preparation over speed.

One of the beautiful things about maturity is that it gradually transforms how we experience waiting.

In earlier years, waiting often felt frustrating.

Now it increasingly feels purposeful.

Not because I enjoy delays.

Because I trust the One overseeing them.

There is a tremendous difference.

Waiting becomes far less burdensome when we believe there is wisdom behind it.

A child waiting for Christmas sees delay.

A parent sees anticipation.

A student waiting for graduation sees impatience.

A teacher sees development.

Likewise, we often experience waiting differently than God does.

We focus on the time.

He focuses on the transformation.

One of the greatest gifts God has given me is the ability to look back and see how often His timing proved perfect.

Not occasionally.

Repeatedly.

So many situations that once confused me now make sense.

So many delays reveal purpose.

So many disappointments reveal protection.

So many unanswered prayers reveal wisdom.

At the time, I wanted immediate understanding.

Now I have something better.

Perspective.

Perspective allows us to appreciate what trust made possible.

Perspective reveals the beauty hidden within God's timing.

One of the reasons God's timing eventually produces joy is because it continually reminds us that we are not carrying life alone.

There is comfort in knowing that someone wiser is guiding the journey.

Someone who sees more than we see.

Someone who understands what we cannot yet understand.

Someone who loves us enough to delay certain things until the proper season.

That knowledge creates peace.

And peace creates joy.

Not the fleeting joy that depends upon circumstances.

A deeper joy.

A joy rooted in confidence.

Confidence that God is faithful.

Confidence that His plans are good.

Confidence that His timing can be trusted.

The older I become, the more I appreciate the seasons that once frustrated me.

Not because they were easy.

Many were not.

Not because they were enjoyable.

Many were difficult.

But because they reveal God's wisdom so clearly in retrospect.

Had events unfolded according to my schedule, many important lessons would have been missed.

Many relationships would not have developed.

Many opportunities would never have appeared.

Many blessings would have arrived before I was prepared to receive them.

God knew this.

I did not.

That realization has made me more patient.

Not perfectly patient.

But more patient.

It has made me less anxious.

Less demanding.

Less determined to force outcomes.

Because I have seen too much evidence of God's faithfulness to believe that rushing Him would improve His plans.

One of the great surprises of spiritual growth is discovering that surrender eventually becomes joyful.

At first, surrender feels like loss.

We release control.

Release certainty.

Release expectations.

Release timelines.

It feels costly.

Yet over time, we begin discovering what arrives in exchange.

Peace.

Freedom.

Trust.

Confidence.

Rest.

Joy.

The exchange is remarkable.

We surrender burdens and receive peace.

We surrender control and receive freedom.

We surrender anxiety and receive trust.

We surrender our timetable and receive God's wisdom.

That is a wonderful trade.

Perhaps the reason God's timing eventually becomes a source of joy is because it reveals His heart.

A careless God would not bother with timing.

A distant God would not concern Himself with preparation.

A loving God does both.

He prepares.

He guides.

He protects.

He teaches.

He waits when waiting is necessary.

He moves when moving is appropriate.

Everything serves a purpose.

Everything contributes to growth.

Everything reflects His care.

Once we begin seeing this, joy becomes natural.

Not because every circumstance is pleasant.

Because God's faithfulness becomes undeniable.

The joy is not rooted in perfect outcomes.

It is rooted in a perfect God.

A God who knows what He is doing.

A God who loves His children.

A God whose timing is wiser than ours.

A God who has proven Himself trustworthy over and over again.

The evidence is overwhelming.

Looking backward, I see it everywhere.

And because I see it everywhere behind me, I find it easier to trust Him with what lies ahead.

That trust has transformed the way I view the future.

The future no longer feels like something I must control.

It feels like an adventure I am invited to join.

An adventure guided by God.

An adventure unfolding one day at a time.

An adventure filled with opportunities to trust, to serve, to grow, and to love.

The destination matters.

But increasingly, I have discovered that the journey matters too.

Perhaps even more than I once realized.

Because life with God is not merely about arriving somewhere.

It is about walking with Someone.

And once we understand that, every day becomes part of the adventure.

An adventure of following.

An adventure of faith.

An adventure of trust.

An adventure that continues for as long as God grants us breath.

And it is there, within that adventure, that the final practical lesson of this book begins to emerge.

The lesson of following.

Not forcing.

Not controlling.

Not striving.

Following.

One step at a time.

One day at a time.

With God.

## **24. The Adventure of Following**

For many years, I approached life as a problem to solve.

There were goals to achieve.

Challenges to overcome.

Dreams to pursue.

Obstacles to remove.

Plans to create.

The future felt like something that required constant management.

Constant attention.

Constant effort.

And while there is certainly value in responsibility, I eventually discovered something that changed the way I view life itself.

Life is not primarily a problem to solve.

It is an adventure to live.

More specifically, it is an adventure of following God.

That realization transformed everything.

Because adventures are experienced differently than problems.

Problems create tension.

Adventures create anticipation.

Problems focus on obstacles.

Adventures focus on possibilities.

Problems generate anxiety.

Adventures invite trust.

The circumstances may be identical.

The perspective changes completely.

One of the reasons many people struggle to experience joy is because they are carrying responsibilities that belong to God.

They feel responsible for controlling the future.

Responsible for guaranteeing success.

Responsible for making everything work out exactly as planned.

I understand this mindset because I lived it.

For years.

Perhaps decades.

Yet as I gradually learned to surrender those burdens, something remarkable happened.

Life became lighter.

Not easier.

Lighter.

There is a difference.

Challenges still existed.

Questions still remained.

Uncertainty still accompanied the future.

But the weight changed.

Because I no longer believed I was carrying the journey alone.

The older I become, the more I appreciate the simplicity of Jesus' invitation:

"Follow Me."

Not control everything.

Not understand everything.

Not predict everything.

Follow Me.

There is tremendous freedom in those words.

Following implies trust.

Following implies relationship.

Following implies movement.

But it does not require complete understanding.

When a child follows a loving parent through an unfamiliar place, the child does not need a detailed map.

The child trusts the parent.

The relationship provides security.

The same principle applies spiritually.

God rarely provides a complete map.

He provides Himself.

And that is enough.

One of the most beautiful discoveries of my life has been realizing that God delights in surprising us.

Not because He enjoys confusion.

Because He enjoys possibility.

Again and again, opportunities have appeared that I never could have planned.

People have entered my life unexpectedly.

Doors have opened unexpectedly.

Ideas have emerged unexpectedly.

Blessings have arrived unexpectedly.

Had I insisted upon controlling every detail, many of those blessings might have been missed.

Following requires openness.

An openness to possibilities we did not anticipate.

An openness to paths we did not design.

An openness to blessings arriving in unfamiliar forms.

This openness has become one of the great joys of my life.

Because it transforms ordinary days into opportunities for discovery.

Every conversation matters.

Every encounter matters.

Every opportunity matters.

God may be working through any of them.

One of the great ironies of life is that we often become so focused on the destination that we forget to enjoy the journey.

We tell ourselves:

"I will be happy when..."

When the project succeeds.

When the dream unfolds.

When the challenge ends.

When the goal is reached.

When the future arrives.

The problem is that life is happening now.

Not someday.

Now.

The future eventually becomes the present.

And if we have spent our lives postponing joy, we may discover that we have overlooked much of the beauty along the way.

God has taught me this repeatedly.

Through friendships.

Through conversations.

Through simple moments.

Through unexpected blessings.

Through everyday experiences that might once have seemed insignificant.

The adventure is not waiting somewhere in the future.

The adventure is today.

Today is part of the story.

Today is part of the journey.

Today is part of God's unfolding plan.

The older I become, the more grateful I am for this realization.

Because it allows me to appreciate things I once overlooked.

A morning coffee.

A conversation with a neighbor.

A walk through the community.

Time spent with Christy.

A kind word.

A beautiful sunset.

A moment of gratitude.

A simple prayer.

These moments matter.

Not because they are dramatic.

Because they are life.

And life itself is God's gift.

One of the greatest blessings of learning to follow is discovering that God's presence can be found almost anywhere.

Not only in churches.

Not only during worship.

Not only during extraordinary spiritual experiences.

Everywhere.

In ordinary conversations.

In acts of service.

In moments of beauty.

In opportunities to encourage others.

In opportunities to love.

God is constantly inviting us into deeper relationship.

The challenge is not His absence.

The challenge is our attention.

When we begin paying attention, the world becomes richer.

More meaningful.

More connected.

More alive.

We begin noticing God's fingerprints everywhere.

One of the reasons following God becomes such an adventure is because He is endlessly creative.

He rarely repeats Himself.

He continually introduces new opportunities for growth, learning, service, and trust.

The journey remains fresh.

Alive.

Dynamic.

Filled with possibility.

The future is no longer something to fear.

It becomes something to anticipate.

Not because we know exactly what will happen.

Because we know who is leading.

And that changes everything.

If I could summarize the lessons of this book in a single sentence, it might be this:

God is far better at being God than I am.

That realization has brought tremendous peace.

It has also brought tremendous freedom.

Freedom to stop striving.

Freedom to stop carrying unnecessary burdens.

Freedom to stop demanding certainty.

Freedom to trust.

Freedom to follow.

Freedom to enjoy the journey.

The adventure of following God is not always easy.

There are still challenges.

Still losses.

Still disappointments.

Still unanswered questions.

Yet even these become part of the adventure.

Because God wastes nothing.

Everything contributes.

Everything teaches.

Everything prepares.

Everything belongs.

And through it all, He remains faithful.

Always.

As I look toward the future, I find myself less interested in controlling where the road leads and more interested in enjoying the journey itself.

Because I have discovered something wonderful.

The greatest gift is not the destination.

The greatest gift is the companionship of God along the way.

That companionship transforms every mile.

Every season.

Every chapter.

Every day.

And it brings us at last to the final lesson.

The lesson that has been quietly unfolding throughout every page of this book.

The lesson God has been teaching me for years.

The lesson I am still learning today.

The lesson of truly letting go.

And letting God.

## **25. Let Go and Let God**

If you remember nothing else from this book, I hope you remember this:

God can be trusted.

Not occasionally.

Not only when circumstances are favorable.

Not only when prayers are answered the way we hope.

Always.

He can be trusted.

That simple truth has taken me a lifetime to learn.

And if I am completely honest, it is a lesson I am still learning.

Perhaps that is true for all of us.

Trust is not a destination we reach once and for all.

It is a relationship we grow into.

A relationship built one day at a time.

One prayer at a time.

One act of surrender at a time.

When I began writing this book, I reflected upon the many seasons of my life.

The athletic journey.

The business journey.

The dreams.

The victories.

The disappointments.

The waiting.

The wilderness.

The relationships.

The mountain.

The lessons.

The miracles.

The people God sent.

The doors that opened.

The doors that closed.

The prayers that were answered.

The prayers that seemed unanswered.

Looking across all of it, one truth emerged above every other.

God was there.

Always.

Not just during the obvious moments.

Not just during the spiritual moments.

Not just during the successful moments.

Always.

The remarkable thing is that I did not always recognize His presence.

Often I was too busy.

Too focused.

Too concerned.

Too determined to accomplish my own plans.

Yet even when I failed to notice Him, He remained faithful.

Guiding.

Protecting.

Teaching.

Preparing.

Loving.

Patiently leading me toward deeper trust.

The older I become, the more I appreciate God's patience.

He never forced lessons upon me.

He allowed me to learn.

Sometimes slowly.

Sometimes stubbornly.

Sometimes through joy.

Sometimes through hardship.

Yet always through love.

Looking back now, I can see how many burdens I carried that were never mine to carry.

The burden of controlling outcomes.

The burden of guaranteeing success.

The burden of understanding everything.

The burden of knowing the future.

The burden of making life unfold according to my timetable.

Those burdens were heavy.

Far heavier than I realized at the time.

God never asked me to carry them.

He simply asked me to trust Him.

There is tremendous freedom in that realization.

Because trust is lighter than control.

Faith is lighter than fear.

Surrender is lighter than striving.

Hope is lighter than anxiety.

Many people spend their lives carrying burdens God has already offered to carry for them.

Financial worries.

Relationship worries.

Health worries.

Future worries.

Endless worries.

I understand.

I have carried many of them myself.

But I have also learned something wonderful.

The more we release those burdens into God's hands, the more room we create for peace.

Not perfect peace.

Life remains life.

Challenges remain.

Questions remain.

But beneath everything runs a deeper current.

A quiet confidence.

A settled trust.

A growing awareness that we are not alone.

One of the greatest misconceptions about letting go is that it means giving up.

It does not.

Letting go is not giving up.

It is giving over.

Giving over our fears.

Giving over our expectations.

Giving over our timelines.

Giving over our dreams.

Giving over our future.

Entrusting them to God.

The difference is profound.

Giving up produces despair.

Giving over produces peace.

Giving up says:

Nothing matters.

Giving over says:

God is in control.

Giving up is hopeless.

Giving over is faith.

Throughout this book, we have explored many lessons.

Waiting.

Trust.

Failure.

Surrender.

Timing.

Faithfulness.

Hope.

Yet all of them ultimately point toward the same destination.

Trusting God.

That is the heart of it.

Not understanding everything.

Trusting.

Not controlling everything.

Trusting.

Not achieving perfection.

Trusting.

Not eliminating uncertainty.

Trusting.

Trusting God with our lives.

One of the beautiful things about trust is that it grows.

Every experience of God's faithfulness strengthens the next act of trust.

Every answered prayer builds confidence.

Every lesson deepens understanding.

Every wilderness survived increases courage.

Every burden surrendered creates additional freedom.

Over time, trust becomes less of an effort and more of a habit.

Less of a struggle and more of a way of life.

The phrase "Let Go and Let God" is often spoken casually.

Yet I have come to believe it contains profound wisdom.

Not because life becomes easy when we surrender.

Life remains wonderfully complicated.

Dreams still require effort.

Relationships still require work.

Challenges still require courage.

But surrender changes the atmosphere in which we experience those things.

We stop carrying responsibilities that belong to God.

We begin focusing on the responsibilities He has actually given us.

Love people.

Serve faithfully.

Use your gifts.

Trust Him.

Take the next step.

Leave the rest in His hands.

There is remarkable freedom in that.

The older I become, the less interested I am in controlling the future.

Not because the future does not matter.

Because God already has it.

That realization allows me to live more fully in the present.

To appreciate today's blessings.

To enjoy today's opportunities.

To embrace today's relationships.

To notice today's miracles.

To trust today's God.

Tomorrow will arrive when it arrives.

God will already be there.

He always is.

If I could sit across from every person reading this book and share one final thought, it would be this:

You do not have to carry your life alone.

You never did.

The God who created you loves you.

The God who loves you guides you.

The God who guides you can be trusted.

Even when the road is uncertain.

Even when the answers are delayed.

Even when the future remains hidden.

Even when life becomes difficult.

He can be trusted.

And because He can be trusted, you are free.

Free to stop striving.

Free to stop worrying about things beyond your control.

Free to release the burdens you were never meant to carry.

Free to live.

Free to love.

Free to serve.

Free to hope.

Free to follow.

Free to trust.

Free to let go.

And let God.

As I look back upon the journey that brought me here, I find that one word rises above all others.

Gratitude.

Gratitude for God's patience.

Gratitude for His faithfulness.

Gratitude for His guidance.

Gratitude for His provision.

Gratitude for His love.

Gratitude that even when I was holding on tightly, He never let go.

And perhaps that is the greatest truth of all.

We spend much of our lives learning how to let go and let God.

Only to discover that throughout the entire journey, God was never letting go of us.

Never.

Not for a moment.

Not for a day.

Not for a season.

Never.

And He never will.

## **EPILOGUE**

### **The Life Beyond Fear**

As I write these final pages, I find myself thinking about fear.

Not because fear has disappeared from my life.

It has not.

But because it no longer occupies the place it once did.

For many years, I did not realize how much of life was being shaped by fear.

Fear of failure.

Fear of disappointment.

Fear of making mistakes.

Fear of missing opportunities.

Fear of not having enough.

Fear of what might happen tomorrow.

Fear is remarkably persuasive.

It rarely announces itself loudly.

More often, it whispers.

Quietly.

Patiently.

Persistently.

It encourages us to hold tighter.

Plan more.

Control more.

Worry more.

Protect ourselves more.

It convinces us that peace will come when we finally gain enough certainty.

Enough security.

Enough control.

Yet the older I become, the more I realize that peace is found elsewhere.

Peace is not found through control.

Peace is found through trust.

That simple realization has transformed my life.

Not because all fear vanished.

But because trust gradually became stronger.

The journey described throughout this book has really been a journey from fear toward trust.

From striving toward surrender.

From control toward faith.

From carrying burdens toward releasing them.

And while I still have much to learn, I can say this with confidence:

Life becomes lighter when we trust God.

Not easier.

Lighter.

There is a difference.

Challenges still arise.

Loss still occurs.

Questions still remain.

Yet beneath those realities exists a deeper foundation.

The foundation of knowing that God is faithful.

That He is present.

That He is good.

That He is at work.

And that He can be trusted.

The life beyond fear is not a life without uncertainty.

It is a life that refuses to allow uncertainty to dominate.

It is a life that recognizes that God's presence is greater than our questions.

His wisdom is greater than our understanding.

His strength is greater than our weakness.

His plans are greater than our fears.

The wonderful thing is that this life is available to everyone.

Not just pastors.

Not just saints.

Not just people with extraordinary faith.

Everyone.

Every ordinary person living an ordinary life can experience extraordinary peace.

Not because life becomes perfect.

Because God remains faithful.

Every day.

One of the greatest gifts God has given me is the understanding that I do not need to know everything.

I do not need to control everything.

I do not need to carry everything.

I simply need to trust Him.

That trust has brought freedom.

Freedom to enjoy the present.

Freedom to release the future.

Freedom to appreciate small blessings.

Freedom to embrace uncertainty.

Freedom to love more fully.

Freedom to live more joyfully.

Perhaps that is what Heaven on Earth truly begins with.

Not perfect circumstances.

Not the fulfillment of every dream.

Not the elimination of every problem.

But hearts at peace because they have learned to trust their Creator.

The more I observe life, the more convinced I become that God desires peace for His children.

Not a superficial peace dependent upon circumstances.

A deeper peace.

A peace rooted in relationship.

A peace rooted in trust.

A peace that remains steady through changing seasons.

That peace is available.

Right now.

Not someday.

Today.

If you have read this far, perhaps God is inviting you to consider a simple question:

What burden are you carrying that was never meant to be yours?

Perhaps it is worry.

Perhaps it is regret.

Perhaps it is fear.

Perhaps it is uncertainty.

Perhaps it is a dream you are trying desperately to force into existence.

Perhaps it is a future you are trying to control.

Whatever it may be, I invite you to place it before God.

Not once.

As often as necessary.

Place it in His hands.

And when you find yourself picking it up again—as we all do from time to time—simply place it back once more.

Trust grows through practice.

One surrender at a time.

One prayer at a time.

One day at a time.

The truth is that God does not ask us to carry tomorrow.

He asks us to trust Him today.

That is enough.

Today is enough.

His grace is enough.

His love is enough.

His faithfulness is enough.

As I close this book, I do not feel as though I have arrived at some final destination.

Quite the opposite.

I feel as though I remain a student.

Still learning.

Still growing.

Still discovering new reasons to trust.

Perhaps that is how it should be.

Life with God is not a problem to solve.

It is a relationship to enjoy.

An adventure to experience.

A journey to share.

And what a remarkable journey it is.

If there is one blessing I would leave with you, it would be this:

May you discover the freedom that comes from releasing what you cannot control.

May you discover the peace that comes from trusting God's timing.

May you discover the joy that comes from recognizing His presence.

May you discover the courage that comes from walking by faith.

May you discover the gratitude that comes from seeing His hand in your life.

And above all, may you discover that God is far more faithful than you ever imagined.

The future will contain surprises.

Challenges.

Opportunities.

New chapters.

New lessons.

New blessings.

But whatever the future holds, you do not walk into it alone.

God goes before you.

God walks beside you.

God remains within you.

And because of that, you can move forward with confidence.

Not confidence in yourself.

Confidence in Him.

The God who carried you yesterday.

The God who sustains you today.

The God who will guide you tomorrow.

The God who has never let go.

And never will.

So take a deep breath.

Look toward the horizon.

Smile.

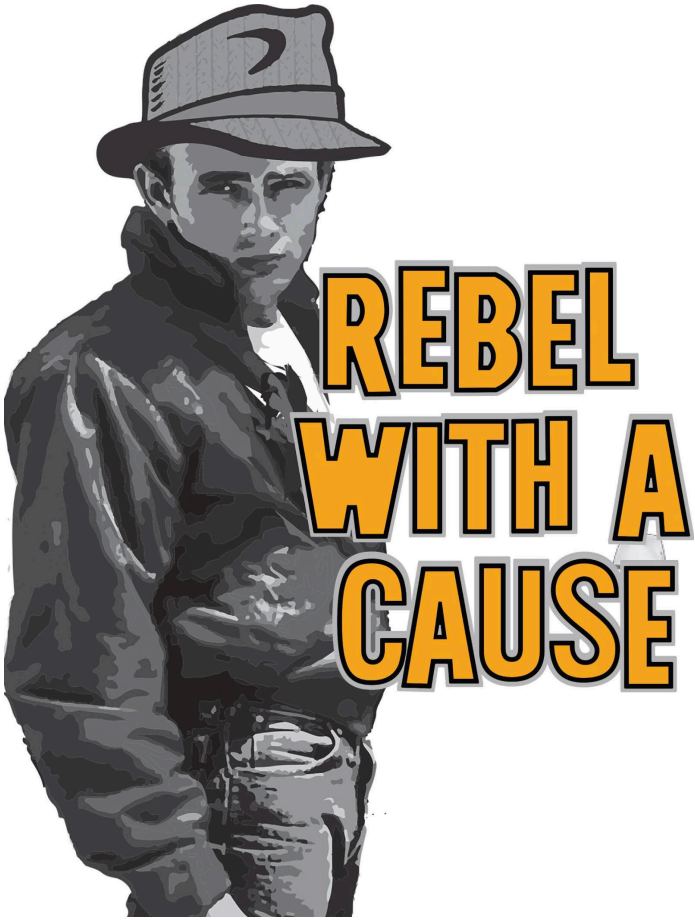
And walk forward.

The journey continues.

God is with you.

And everything is going to be alright.

The End



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