

**The Second Best Time to  
Plant a Tree**

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*Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power  
at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we  
might ask or think.*

Ephesians 3:20

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## **Introduction**

When is the best time to plant a tree? When is the second best time? These questions may seem relevant only to those interested in planting a tree, but there is a great lesson to be learned from these questions. There is an old Chinese saying that answers these questions. “The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago. The second best time is now.”

Christians know that our time on earth is brief compared to the eternity that we will spend in heaven. This does not mean that our time on earth is unimportant. In the years that we will spend on earth, God has work that He wants us to do. He wants to use us in ways that will bring glory to Him and make His name known. Through this more people will come to know God as their Lord and Savior!

The old Chinese saying emphasizes that we should not put off till the future what can be done today. It also reinforces that if in the past we felt compelled to act or speak and did nothing, that is not too late to change. When the Holy Spirit guides us to speak, help, or pursue a God-given

passion then it is important that we act on these nudges.

When we do this, God's name is glorified!

There are many self-help books that address the topic of how to be successful. These books often have an inward focus on oneself. Success should not be defined by worldly things like money, power, appearance, or possessions.

Businessman and philanthropist, John D. Rockefeller, once said, "I have made millions, but they have brought me no happiness." Rockefeller knew what was truly important. He also said, "There is nothing in this world that can compare with the Christian fellowship; nothing that can satisfy but Christ."

True success is based on what God has done for us in Jesus' death and glorious resurrection. Because of this we are motivated to show His love to others. All glory should go to God in any good thing we do. Ephesians 3:20 states this. *Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.*

As humans we are sinful and there will be times we fail and do not do the right things. Pastor and author, Max



Lucado, describes how God uses us in spite of our failures. “His book is written for failures. It is full of folks who were foul-ups and flops. David was a moral failure, yet God used him. Elijah was an emotional train wreck after Mount Carmel, but God blessed him. Jonah was in the belly of a fish when he prayed his most honest prayer, and God heard it. Perfect people? No. Perfect messes? You bet. Yet God used them. A surprising and welcome discovery of the Bible is this: God uses failures.”<sup>1</sup>

When we stay focused on values that God would want us to pursue, we can limit our failures. In one of Pastor Mark Batterson’s books, he describes that his family has four values that they aspire to always live out. They are humility, generosity, gratitude, and courage.<sup>2</sup> I read this book several years ago and at the time it got me thinking about core values that everyone should aspire to live out.

I came up with what I call, “The three G’s.” The first “G” is for God. Faith in God is the most important. Because of His love we have eternal life in heaven and can show this love to others. *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but*

*have eternal life.* John 3:16. God's love can affect everything that a Christian does. This is the basis for all things and gives power and meaning to the next two "g's."

The second "g" is for a growth mindset. This is a belief that your basic qualities and abilities are things you can cultivate through effort. In other words, you can learn and improve through hard work and perseverance. God has given all of us wonderful bodies and minds that are capable of learning new things and improving. *I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.* Psalm 139:14.

The final "g" is for grit. Grit is passion and perseverance for long-term goals. Hebrews 12:1-2a describes this perfectly. *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith.* It is all about Jesus. God's love can fuel our passion to assist others and help us stay committed to His Word for our lives. Christians know that the long-term

goal is life everlasting in heaven. We want as many people as possible to persevere in the faith to join us in heaven.

As I was thinking about how to organize my ideas for this book, the three “G’s” came to mind. I realized that making the most of our lives to give glory to God has everything to do with the three “G’s”. President Jimmy Carter summarizes this view well. “I have one life and one chance to make it count for something...My faith demands that I do whatever I can, wherever I am, whenever I can, for as long as I can with whatever I have to try to make a difference.”

There are two chapters in this book for each of the three “G’s”. The first chapter focuses on God and the power and guidance that He can provide us our whole lives. The second chapter is about relationships. Our relationship with God affects our relationships with others. This is guided by our desire to share God’s love with others.

The two chapters connected to a growth mindset discuss how to stay committed to growing in all aspects of our lives and then how this leads to an abundance of energy to pursue God-given goals.

The two chapters on grit deal with getting used to a new normal of seizing the day and acting when nudged by the Holy Spirit. The chapters will also discuss the idea of being committed to persevere for long-term goals. Our goals in life should always be true to God's Word and give Him glory.

The final chapter in this book will provide a summary of important points and also reemphasize that it is all about God. God is at work in our lives and we need to be willing to listen to Him and go where He leads us. Mother Theresa had many great quotes and one is particularly relevant for this book. "Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not yet come. We have only today. Let us begin." The best time to plant a tree is twenty-years ago. The second best time is today. We cannot change the past but we can take advantage of today! Let us begin.

## Chapter 1: Ultimate

There is no one like God. There is no one equal to God. There is no one greater than God. There is no one more loving than God. There is no one more powerful than God. There is no one more caring than God. The list could go on and on! God is ultimate; the best that could be possible.

*There is no one holy like the Lord; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God.* 1 Samuel 2:2. With God's help there is nothing that cannot be done.

Take a moment and think about the greatest experience in your life. Maybe several experiences in your life come to mind and it is hard to pick just one. Maybe you have never thought of this before and it would take a while to think back on your life to see what experience has been your favorite. It is likely that you thought about experiences connected to family, friends, or travel.

If you were to search, "best experience in the world," there would be a number of opinions on what this would be. One of the answers is going on safari in Tanzania. Being able to watch elephants and other animals in their natural habitat is a memorable experience. Seeing the Northern lights is

another awe-inspiring experience. The variety of colors that light up the sky is something that would not be forgotten. Rafting on the Colorado river through the Grand Canyon is another experience that can provide many memories.

There is a common denominator to everyone's best experience and that is God. God created the universe and everything in it. He created the wonders of nature and He created humans. Without God we would not be in existence. His majesty and power is seen in the intricacies of His creation.

The average human body has about 30 trillion cells. Each cell is designed with a purpose and God took great care in making humans. As small and detailed as each cell is, also think about the size of the universe. The sun if it were hollow could hold over 1 million earths. The sun is one of over 100 billion stars in our galaxy. The galaxy also contains more than stars. It contains nebulae-which consist of the same stuff as stars but spread out over a much larger region of space. The Rosette Nebula is estimated to be more massive than 10,000 suns. The detail, size, and scope of creation is beyond our understanding! God created all this

and spoke it into existence. Psalm 33:9a states, *For He spoke, and it came to be.* Truly awe-inspiring!

God's creation was designed to give glory to God. *The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.* Psalm 19:1. Christians know that we as well are designed to give God glory. We can strive to live out God's love in our lives because of the great love we have received. God will provide us direction and encouragement as we try to make the most of each day by serving God with all our heart, soul, and mind.

We can rely on the power and strength of God through our whole life. When we keep God's Word in our hearts and minds throughout the day it changes everything. Believing in God as our Lord and Savior can affect all aspects of our lives.

We should not have the mindset that we need to prioritize our responsibilities to make time for God. It is not God then family, but God in our family. It is not God then work, but God in our work. The desire to know and follow God better should be the most important value that guides all aspects of our lives.

Knowing this can provide a sense of urgency as we do our best to take actions and speak words that will lift up others. God can also use this to bring more people to saving faith in Him. For the first, “G”, that is God, there are three things that we can keep in mind as we seek to know God better: what God can do, what faith can do, and what purpose can do.

### **What God can do**

What can God do? This is an easy question to answer. God can do anything. With God all things are possible! The introduction of this chapter described the amazing power, knowledge, and strength that God has. It is great encouragement that what we can accomplish does not depend on our abilities, but God’s power at work through us.

Pastor John Ortberg has a sign in his office that is the first thing that he looks at each day when he sits down. The sign has a saying in large block letters that his good friend, Pastor and author Dallas Willard, used to say. “Eternity is Now in Session.”<sup>2</sup>



God is not waiting for eternity to begin. God lives in it right now. It is the interactive fellowship and joy that exists between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Christians know that we will spend eternity in heaven. It will be greater than we can imagine. In our time on earth, when we seek God with our whole heart we can get a glimpse of what heaven will be like. The joy we can experience on earth from knowing God in our lives can uplift us and encourage us to serve God. It can also create in us a great sense of anticipation and hope for what heaven will bring.

Even in times of difficulties, Christians can still have inner joy and peace. It is a great comfort of God in our lives. When people realize that relying on God is what life is about it can make all the difference.

Sadly, Kobe Bryant recently passed away in a helicopter crash. He was a prolific basketball player. He won five NBA championships, was a 17 time NBA all-star, won two Olympic gold medals, and had many more sports accolades. In the prime of his NBA playing career, some would think that he was the definition of success and happiness. This was not the case. Kobe came to realize

where true joy comes from and what really matters most in life.

Kobe's life came crashing down when he was charged with a crime and cheated on his wife. His wife almost left him and he realized that he needed to put his focus on God for how to live his life. Several years after this, when he had repaired the relationship with his wife, he was interviewed and asked about what he had learned.

Kobe: "God is great."

Interviewer: "Is it that simple?"

Kobe: "God is great. It don't get no simpler than that bro."

Interviewer: "Did you know that? I mean everyone knows that. But the way you know it now, did you know it before that incident took place?"

Kobe: "You can know it all you want but until you have to pick up that cross that you can't carry. And He picks it up for you, and carries you and the cross. Then you know."<sup>3</sup>

God has the power that we do not have. There is not a heart that He cannot touch. He offers us forgiveness of sins and His great grace to carry us through this life to life everlasting in heaven. While Kobe's time on earth ended, his loved ones had great solace in the fact that he is in heaven because of his saving faith in Jesus as his Lord and Savior.

There is nothing that God cannot do. We need to remember to always give God glory for any good things and ensure that our lives are focused on Him. God always has something for you, a key for every problem, a light for every shadow, a relief for every sorrow, and a plan for every tomorrow! Trust God and let His love guide your life!

### **What faith in God can do**

Faith in God makes all the difference. Through all time any good things that have been done by Christians were done through faith in God. God wants us to know that nothing is impossible with Him on our side. Jesus stated the power of faith in His time on earth. *“Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”* Matthew 17:20. Jesus was letting us know that God has unlimited power and Christians can be energized by having faith in such an amazing God!

Faith is a prerequisite for pleasing God. Hebrews 11:6 states, *And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.* God created us

with a specific purpose in mind and that is to give Him glory. God wants us to experience the joy that comes from having Him in our lives. It stands to reason then if we do not believe in God, then this does not please God.

The second part of Hebrews 11:6 states that God rewards those who earnestly seek him. It is important that this is interpreted correctly. This verse is not making a promise of health and wealth. If we go back a chapter in Hebrews we can find further insight. *So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.* Hebrews 10:35-36.

There are three parts here in common with Hebrews 11:6. First, enduring faith in God. Second, doing the will of God through the power of faith. And third, receiving what is promised. What has God promised? He promises us eternal life in heaven! For our earthly life He also promises us peace, hope, joy, direction, purpose, comfort, encouragement, and much more! These are all a result of trusting in God as our Lord and Savior and striving to better know God's Word.

Faith in God changes our whole perspective on life.

Author John Maxwell notes what the result of fear is compared to the result of faith.

**Fear**

Weakens

Imprisons

Paralyzes

Disheartens

Sickens

**Faith**

Strengthens

Liberates

Empowers

Encourages

Heals'

Fear can stop us in our tracks and can lead to inactivity.

Faith on the other hand leads to confidence and action to help others.

Consider the following situation. Five frogs are sitting on a log. Four decide to jump off. How many are left on the log? This might seem like an easy question with an answer of one. There real answer is that we do not know at this point because there is a difference between deciding and doing. When God calls us to take action in our lives we need to move from thinking about to doing it.

In Genesis 12 God calls Abram to action. *The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.* Genesis 12:1.

Abram responded in faith and went. Pastor Charles

Swindoll provides a great explanation of this and how it can relate to our lives.

“All Abraham knew was that God wanted him to move. He didn’t have a clue about the final destination. Nothing about the weather or the crime rate in the area. No information about the neighborhood he’d live in or the problems he would have to face. Nothing. He knew only that God had told him to go. If you’re waiting on God to fill in all the shading in your picture, you will never take the first step in obeying His will. You must be prepared to trust His plan, *knowing* it will be full of surprises.”<sup>5</sup>

When God prompts us to do His will, like Abraham, we can respond in faith. We will not have all the details, but we can trust that God will be with us as our guide.

Several years ago Pastor Max Lucado had a sermon series on trusting in God and how God works on the behalf of Christians. In each sermon he had the congregation repeat several sentences with him. The sentences provide assurance of God’s direction and are a call to action.

These days are Glory Days.  
With God as my helper,  
I will be all He wants me to be,  
do all He wants me to do,  
and receive all He wants me to receive.  
My past is past,  
My future is bright,  
God’s promises are true and  
His word is sure.  
These days are Glory Days.<sup>6</sup>

With faith in God all is possible! God can move us from fear to faith. We can act with confidence knowing that God is on our side!

### **What purpose can do**

Christians know that a result of faith is purpose in our lives. Our purpose is to show God's love to others so that more people will come to faith in God. German philosopher and theologian, Johann Gottfried Von Herder, has an excellent quote about the importance of inspiration for purpose. "Without inspiration, the best powers of the mind are dormant. There is a tinder in us which needs to be quickened with sparks." For Christians, God's love in our lives is that spark and inspiration that burns within us.

Christians have a variety of different jobs, but all of us are in the salvation business. We can seek to know the Gospel message well and to share this with others. God is not asking us to be anyone but ourselves. Our own personal story of how God has affected our lives can make a difference because it has God's power behind it.

Christian author Lysa TerKeurst provides a simple prayer to start each day with. "God, I want to see You. God,

I want to hear You. God, I want to know You. So that I can follow hard after You. Please help me recognize Your presence in my day today.”<sup>7</sup> Each day we can offer God our willingness. Even if you feel that you are not in a position for God to use you, simply be willing to follow and listen to Him. God can use who you are and the gifts He has given you to make a difference in the lives of others. Be obedient to God’s will and watch Him accomplish amazing things through your life! You may not even know the full impact of the actions you take and the words you speak, but God is using them for good!

As we follow God’s purpose for our lives we will need to become comfortable with being uncomfortable. Change is a natural part of life. To follow God in our life we need to be willing to keep learning and keep growing. Dick Biggs, speaker and author, has a poem about the importance of having the right attitude towards change.

Life’s turning points are as sure as the tide  
Just a matter of when, so why not decide?  
To embrace these transitions as ways to grow  
’Tis folly to ignore what you already know.

Make a vow to adapt to the crises of life  
There’s no reason to suffer more stress or strife.



Quite often change becomes a blessing in time  
While making you wiser in pursuit of your prime.

No change is impossible, no one is exempt  
You can step out in faith or shrug with contempt.  
Life comes in cycles, no two are the same  
To claim nothing's new is a naïve game.

*Some* change is impractical, some things must endure  
You need worthwhile values, so profound and pure.  
Plus a noble purpose to guide you each day  
And give life meaning as you forge your way.

But *most* things do change, it's a natural law  
You can believe this is truth or stand there in awe.  
It may be uncomfortable, it may cause pain---  
Won't a regretful heart be a greater strain?

With *every* change, there's an outcome to bear  
So accept the challenge, for life's seldom fair.  
Be willing to risk and you're bound to find  
More courage and strength from a positive mind.

Be bold, be daring, be receptive to change  
For most things are better when you rearrange.  
Get out of the rut, seek a new vitality  
Move beyond the old to a fresh reality.

Ah, life has turning points, they won't disappear  
Rise up to greet them and conquer your fear.  
The choice is simple, it's as clear as can be:  
Will I master change or will change master me?

When asked to describe significant regrets in their lives,  
most people focus on actions they did *not* take rather than on  
actions that they *did*. When people do not have a clear  
passion or purpose it can lead to indecision and a lack of

direction. Christians know that we have a clear purpose for our lives. It is guided by God as the ultimate leader. Seek God and let Him direct your life. Know that with God all things are possible! Faith enables us to serve in God pleasing ways. Our purpose is to show God's love to others. With God as our guide, the second best time to plant a tree is now!

## **Chapter 2: Relationships**

When we receive God's love in our lives, a natural reaction is the desire to show this love to others. God's purpose for us in this life is based in community and helping others. There are many people in this world that are in need of support, encouragement, and friendship. We can encourage Christians through our words and actions. We can also witness to non-Christians by showing God's love to them.

It is important that we stay focused on what matters in life and that is people. Former first lady of the United States, Barbara Bush, once gave a graduation address at a high school in Maine on what can happen if we become too focused on ourselves. In her speech she compared the future to a train ride.

"We get on board that train at birth, and we want to cross the continent because we have in mind that somewhere out there is a station. We pass by sleepy little towns looking out the window of life's train, grain fields and silos, level grade crossings, buses full of people on the roads beside us. We pass by cities and factories, but we don't look

at any of it because we want to get to the station. We believe that out there is a station where a band is playing and banners are hung and flags are waving, and when we get there that will be life's destination. **We don't really get to know anybody on the train.** We pace up and down the aisles looking at our watches eager to get to the station because we know that life has a station for us.

This station changes for us during life. To begin with, for most of us, it's turning 18, getting out of high school. Then the station is that first promotion and then the station becomes getting the kids out of college, and then the station becomes retirement and then...all too late we recognize the truth--- that this side of that city whose builder is God, there really isn't a station. The joy is in the journey and the journey is the joy.

Sooner or later, you realize there is no station and the truth of life is the trip. Read a book, eat more ice cream, go barefoot more often, hug a child, go fishing, laugh more. The station will come soon enough. **And as you go, find a way to make this world more beautiful."**

When goals are too focused on “I” and not on “We” we can rush to the next station of life without considering others. In Bush’s speech, I highlighted two parts that I think are key. The first is ensuring that we build relationships with others so we keep our goals in line with how it can help others. Second, making the world a more beautiful place means bringing joy into others’ lives daily.

Generally, we need to be more intentional about celebrating, laughing, and enjoying the journey of life. Several years ago I was flying home from a conference. When the plane landed and parked at the gate the ground crew began to remove rivets from the compartment holding the checked baggage. As they used a drill to do this there was a ru-ru ru-ru sound. The person in the seat next to me started to laugh at this sound and could not stop. This caused me and others around her to smile and laugh as well. Sometimes, we need to look for more reasons to laugh and be happy instead of being in a rush to get to our next destination.

When we focus on building relationships with others, we will also be more likely to see the needs of others.

This can lead us to improve the lives of others we interact with. There are three main reasons why it is vital to focus on relationships: People need encouragement, to invite people to know Jesus, and teamwork makes the dream work.

### **People need encouragement**

There are challenges and difficulties in life that can zap people's energy and happiness. In a recent survey, only one third of Americans said they were happy. In the nine-year history of the Harris Poll Survey of American Happiness, the highest percentage ever was 35 percent.<sup>1</sup> There are some estimates that clinical depression is 10 times more rampant now than it was a century ago.<sup>2</sup>

One explanation is that people are looking for happiness in the wrong places. When people seek possessions, status, money, or recognition for happiness this will not lead to long lasting happiness. The more people that do this, the less encouragement and support we are providing for each other. Both of these things coupled together can lead to decreased happiness.

There are benefits of happiness that can also help people increase the happiness of others. Happy people enjoy

higher odds of a strong marriage, lower odds of divorce, and superior work performance. They are also healthier, resulting from a bolstered immune system.<sup>2</sup> When we are happy, we are in a better position to help and encourage others.

Christians know that true happiness comes from the love and grace of God in our lives. Psalm 28:7 states this well. *The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise him.* When we stay focused on God we come to understand that happiness happens when we give. We don't need to focus on what things we get in life; instead we can strive to serve and encourage others. When we do this, we will bring happiness to others and ourselves!

When we give our time and talents to encourage others we are doing work that God designed us to do. This work pleases God. It is not surprising then, that science backs up the idea that our bodies are designed to feel good when giving and encouraging others. Giving to help others triggers dopamine in our brains. Dopamine is a type of neurotransmitter. The nervous system uses it to send

messages between nerve cells. Dopamine helps us to strive, focus, and feel better. When we give, we encourage others and at the same time ourselves.

Author John Maxwell has a thought provoking list of questions to ask ourselves as we reflect on how we can do better at encouraging others.

1. Do I value people?
2. Do people know I value them?
3. How do I show it?
4. Am I a “plus” or a “minus” in my most important relationships?
5. What evidence do I have to confirm my opinion?
6. What is the love language of the people I love?
7. How can I serve them?
8. Do I need to forgive someone in my life who needs to be given grace?
9. Who in my life should I take time to thank?
10. Who in my life should be receiving more of my time?

Something I strive to keep in mind every day is to always leave a place better than when I arrived. This is as simple as ensuring that a room is clean and orderly. This applies to interactions with people as well. Always strive to leave a person better after they have an interaction with you. We can offer encouragement and support to others that brightens their day. One way to prepare to do this is to spend five minutes each evening thinking about the people



you will interact with the next day. Think about what you can say to others, give to them, or what you can do for them that will make your time together enjoyable, uplifting, and add value to their lives.

Leo Buscaglia was an author, motivational speaker, and professor of special education who was guided by his Christian faith. One of his famous sayings is excellent to remember as we seek to encourage others. "Choose the way of life. Choose the way of love. Choose the way of caring. Choose the way of hope. Choose the way of belief in tomorrow. Choose the way of trusting. Choose the way of goodness." Our goal for our relationship with others should be to show God's love to them. People are in need of encouragement. Motivated by God's love, Christians can bring light into the midst of any darkness or despair.

### **Inviting people to know Jesus**

God desires all people to be saved by believing in Him as their Lord and Savior. As you work to encourage others and build relationships it can provide opportunities to share about the impact God has on your life. Before Jesus left to go back to heaven He provided purpose for all

Christians. *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* Matthew 28: 19-20.

There is a great need and urgency to share the Gospel message with others. Jesus states in Matthew 24:42 to *“Keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.”* We do not know when Jesus will come again so we can strive to share the Good News of the free gift of eternal life so that more people can be saved.

There are many people we interact with regularly where we can look for opportunities to share the Good News. People at the gym, grocery store, at work, school, or friends and neighbors may be non-Christians. We can pray for these people, befriend them, and show God’s love to them.

When the time is right, we can invite people to church or share about our faith. There may be programs offered at church that could be of interest to non-believers as a way to invite people to learn more about God. Suggesting

Christian music or movies can be another way to start a conversation.

When there is an opportunity to share the Gospel message it should involve three parts. First, what Christ did for us. Second, the benefits of this saving love. And third, how a person can receive this grace in their lives. The well-known John 3:16 is an excellent verse for sharing the Gospel. *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

We can be prepared to share about God's love in our lives and do it in a way that is loving and shows care. 1 Peter 3:15 is a good verse to remember. *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.* God has shown us great love and there is no limit to His love. We can keep the words of Pastor Rick Warren in mind as we build relationships with others. "God wants everybody in His family. God has never made a person He didn't love. God has never made a person He didn't have a purpose for. God has never made a person that Jesus Christ didn't die for so God wants us to share that good news."

## Teamwork makes the dream work

When Christians work together in community, God can use this teamwork for a greater impact. There is much work to be done as Jesus implores in Luke 10:2. *“The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”* When Christians work together we encourage each other. Doing things together is a theme that occurs often in the Bible.

The New Testament contains more than fifty-one “one another” statements. Following, are a few of these statements.

Encourage one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

Bear with one another (Ephesians 4:2)

Regard one another as more important (Philippians 2:4)

Greet one another (Romans 16:16)

Pray for one another (James 5:16)

Serve one another (Galatians 5:13)

Accept one another (Romans 15:7)

Forgive one another (Ephesians 4:32)

Love one another (1 John 3:11)

God has made us to live and worship together. The church is a community that cares, loves, hosts, receives, honors, serves, instructs, forgives, motivates, builds up, encourages, comforts, prays, confesses sins, esteems, edifies, teaches, rejoices, weeps, restores, and shows kindness to one another.

We are strengthened when we work together to accomplish God's will. The community of believers have different gifts and form a strong body of Christ when united together.

The motivation to work together and share God's love comes from the love that God has shown us in our own lives. There is a true story that highlights this well. A seasoned preacher would stand by the door of the church to greet people as they left. There was a man, Matt, who attended the church regularly but the pastor did not know him well. Lines around Matt's eyes indicated he might have had some challenging years in his life, but his warm smile led the preacher to think that Matt was probably doing well right now.

One Sunday after the service, Matt shook the pastor's hand firmly and said, "Pastor, I want you to know that my answer is yes. Now what's the question?" The pastor looked at Matt curiously and was not sure what he meant. The pastor was not sure what to say so he responded with a smile and said, "Thank you, Matt. God bless you."

The next Sunday after church Matt approached the pastor and said the same thing. Matt looked the pastor

directly in the eye and said, "Pastor, I want you to know that my answer to you will always be yes. Now what's the question?" The pastor again was confused but smiled and nodded to keep the line moving.

The following Sunday Matt again said the same thing. This time the pastor knew that more conversation was needed to see what Matt meant. The pastor asked Matt if they could get coffee during the week. Matt replied, "Of course we can have coffee! I told you my answer is yes." On Tuesday of that week the two men met for coffee. After some initial small talk, the pastor leaned in slightly and said, "I've been wondering about what you said to me. What do you mean the answer is yes?"

Matt began talking slowly. "I was not always the man that I am today. I did a lot of bad things in my life, hurt a lot of people. I was addicted to alcohol, pornography, and gambling. Those addictions ruined my life. I betrayed my wife, crushed my children, caused so much pain." Tears began to form in Matt's eyes.

The pastor assumed that the tears were of pain and regret, so was surprised to hear what Matt said next. Matt

continued, "But I'm thankful now for those low times. Because that's what helped me to be open to Christ. You see, when I hit bottom, a friend invited me to church. And that's when I heard you preach about the grace of Christ."

The tears began to flow out of Matt's eyes when he said the word Christ. He continued, "At first, I just listened, not sure if I could believe it was true for me. But after a few months, I invited Christ into my life and he changed me." Feeling empathy and joy for the man who was lost and now had come to Christ, the pastor also had a few tears in his eyes.

Matt then said to the Pastor, "That's why I want you to know my answer to you is always yes. Because of how Jesus changed my life through our church. I will always be available to Him and to you. If you ask me to mow the church yard, I will be honored to do it. If you need money to help a single mom, I will give without hesitation. If you need someone to drive a widow to church, I'm your driver. Pastor, I want you to know that my answer is yes. So just let me know the question!"

That is a heart of a person that God can use. In our own lives, we can also take the motto that no matter where God leads us in life that the answer is yes. We do not know what God has in store for us. We do know that God cares for each of us and in turn wants us to care for each other. There are many people in need of help and encouragement. We can invite people to know Jesus so they can experience permanent satisfaction and peace. Strengthened by a community of believers, we can better know the needs of others and meet those needs. When we feel the Holy Spirit nudging us to serve, we can respond enthusiastically, "Yes!" In response to God's love in our lives, the second best time to plant a tree is now!



### Chapter 3: Growth

The previous two chapters described how we have God on our side and can be empowered by His love to share this love with others. The next two chapters will focus on how we can go about this work to serve God and learn more about Him and His creation through a growth mindset.

The second “g”, growth mindset, is the belief that skills and abilities can be cultivated through effort. On the opposite end of the spectrum, a fixed mindset is believing your qualities are set or fixed. Those with a growth mindset persevere in problem solving, try new approaches, use their resources, and continue to work when encountering setbacks or failures.<sup>1</sup> God has given us amazing minds that make us capable to continue to learn and grow our whole lives. This is what God desires for us. *But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.* 2 Peter 3:18.

We were created to give God glory and we do this by honoring God with how we spend our time and resources. When we approach life with a growth mindset we will strive to do our best. As we grow in our knowledge of God, it

affects all aspects of our lives. Our desire for improvement comes from God so that we can better serve Him.

Having a growth mindset means willing to be uncomfortable at times. In seeking to learn or try new things, there will be times of failure. Failure is okay. It just means that learning is occurring and with continued focused effort it will lead to improvement!

There was an ad several years ago by the clothing company, American Giant. The company's goal is to make the greatest sweatshirt ever made. The ad talks about the importance of willing to be uncomfortable.

Comfortable isn't comfortable  
Comfortable never got up before dawn  
Comfortable won't get its hands dirty  
Comfortable has nothing to prove  
Comfortable can't get the job done  
Comfortable doesn't have new ideas  
Comfortable won't dive in head first  
Comfortable isn't the American dream  
Comfortable has no guts  
Comfortable never dares to be great  
Comfortable falls apart at the seams  
Don't get comfortable

God desires for us to grow in our faith. This in turn causes growth in all areas of our life when we boldly follow God's will for our lives. With God in our lives, how we view

situations, circumstances, and other people changes for the better!

### **Changed mindset**

There is a peanuts cartoon where a fly ball is hit to Lucy. Lucy lines up under the ball to catch it, but at the last moment moves out of the way and the ball drops to the ground. She then goes to Charlie Brown and says, "I thought I had it, but suddenly I remembered all the others I've missed. The past got in my eyes."

Sometimes past mistakes can keep us from trying again or prevent success from occurring. We need to remember that God has designed us for a wonderful purpose. *For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.* Ephesians 2:10.

When we focus on God's Word and promises in our lives, we can be encouraged to keep learning and keep improving. Paul in Colossians 3:2 implores us to *Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.* The message from God, who is omnipresent, is that He will always be with us. With God's help we can pursue God pleasing goals and not

be discouraged by failure. As Jesus stated, “*Everything is possible for one who believes.*” Mark 9:23.

There is a saying that highlights the difference a mindset can make. Two men looked through prison bars; one saw mud, the other stars. We need to avoid thinking that we are trapped in a situation with no chance of improvement. Instead, we can make a decision to look for the stars and see the good in any situation. The happiest and most fulfilled people in life don’t necessarily *have* the best of everything. They just try to *make* the best of everything. Christians can always remember that since we have God in our life we have all that we need. When we meditate daily on the impact of His love in our lives, we can’t help but shoot for the stars for how God can use our life for good!

Instead of mistakes keeping us from improving we can use mistakes as learning opportunities. Leadership expert John Maxwell provides a list of quality reflection questions to ask when failure occurs.

What went wrong?  
When did it go wrong?  
Where did it go wrong?  
Why did it go wrong?  
How did I contribute to making it go wrong?

What can I learn from this experience?  
How will I apply what I've learned in the future?<sup>3</sup>

As we work on learning from failure, we can know that every time we learn something we are then in the position to help someone else who also is in a similar situation. We can encourage others by giving them timely advice that helps them keep learning and growing.

There are two valuable phrases to remember. The first is, whenever you fall down pick something up. This means that when we fail or make a mistake we should seek to learn from this to improve. In high school I received good grades and was awarded an academic scholarship for college. My freshmen year of college I took a college writing course. When I got my first paper back I was surprised to see that my grade was a F! After my initial shock wore off, I looked at the comments on my paper and figured I would do better on the next assignment.

For my second paper, my title was "Meal Time is Quality Time". I wrote about the importance of families having meals together. What do you think my grade was for this second paper? If you guessed an A, you are very wrong.

The professor agreed on the importance of family meals but not on the quality of my paper. On this paper, I received another F! At this point I started to have some doubts about whether I could do well in this class. I had thought that my writing abilities were pretty good, but was learning that I had a lot to work on. I decided not to give up but to put forth more deliberate practice and effort. I went to the professor's office hours, the writing center on campus, and spent more time writing and rewriting.

At the conclusion of the class, I ended up with a grade that I am the proudest of for any grade I have received. It was not because it was an A or A+, but because of what the grade represented in the hard work that I had put in. It was a grade of B.

When I failed, I did not give up. By putting in effort, I was able to pick something up by learning from failure. I came to realize that I enjoyed writing. Through further writing and feedback I have improved on my writing. In my job as a professor, writing is now a large part of my job. I have written many articles and twenty-three books now! Every time we fail it is an opportunity to overcome adversity

and learn something new. We can trust that God cares for us and made us to learn our whole lives. Because of this we can believe that with God's help we can overcome failure!

The second valuable phrase to remember is whenever you fall down pick someone up. When we are able to learn from failure to improve, we are in the prime position to help someone else in a similar situation. I took the lessons that I learned as a student into my career as a high school mathematics teacher. The following are some of the ideas I sought to convey to my students.

-I will never give up on you.

-You are not defined by your worst moments (behavior, grades, or in life). I want you in my classroom.

-I never tried to say what can you do differently. Instead it was what can we both do differently. Bot me as a teacher and you as a student.

-I tried to turn "me" into a "we". If it was just about me as a teacher, it was not going to work well with sometimes up to forty students in a class. I conveyed that all of us working together and helping each other is how we are going to build community and have the most success and impact.

When we fail, make mistakes, or are faced with adversity, we can approach it with the right mindset. This enables us to then help encourage and support others. God

made you for a great purpose! Look for the good in all situations and keep learning!

### **Fear the right thing**

Many people fear failure, but what we should really fear is the result of not trying. Why? Because if we do not move out of our comfort zone, we will not improve and grow. And when we improve and grow we are better able to help and encourage others. Staying in our comfort zones, does not help us overcome obstacles. It does not lead to progress.

A surprising and welcome discovery of the Bible is that God uses failures. The Bible is full of people with weaknesses who made mistakes but God's strength is shown as He used these people for good. Moses was afraid to talk in front of people. Peter denied knowing Christ. Jonah ran from God's will. God continued to work on these people and continues to work on us as well. None of us is perfect and we all have weaknesses. But empowered by God, we can move past fear to follow God's will for our lives.

Pushing ourselves to improve is something that is effortful. Many people need to be motivated and receive



positive feedback to continue working on it. Too often we want to seek comfort instead of letting ourselves feel vulnerable as we try something we may feel inadequate at first doing.

Noah probably felt uncomfortable and overwhelmed building an ark in the desert. Esther was willing to face possible death by speaking up to save others. David looked foolish attacking Goliath with a slingshot. All of these people moved past fear though, and responded with faith.

When God calls us to move outside of our comfort zones, His strength will be on display. Our best moments in life are not the days when we had nothing to do, but often when we face great challenges and are willing to persevere to overcome them. Journalist, George Lorimer, has an excellent quote about how to approach each day. "You've got to get up every morning with determination if you're going to go to bed with satisfaction." When we are willing to stretch our capabilities during the day, we will sleep better at night. God has made us to serve Him, and it is natural to feel good when we serve Him faithfully.

When we are willing to grow it enables us to grow others. The Christian community is strengthened when we move past fears of failure. Pastor and author, Norman Vincent Peale, provides a short but powerful prayer request we can make to God. "Ask the God who made you to keep remaking you." Colossians 2:6-7 reinforces this. *So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.* When fear comes knocking on your door, send faith to answer! God will provide what we need to overcome fear!

### **Growth comes from God**

Any good thing that we do is from God. It is only His power at work within us that enables people to make a difference. Jesus states this in John 15:5. *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."* The fruit of following Jesus is a new heart with a new mind, new desires, a new will, a new way of relating to people around you, and a new purpose.

God causes us to grow not for a self-centered purpose but so that we can better serve others. Remember that God loves you and longs to help you. In response to God's love we can make the right decisions so that we are able to show His love to others. Christian author C.S. Lewis stated, "You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream." All of us are capable of meditating on God's Word and then taking action based on how we feel God is leading us. God's Word is powerful and will change us for the better.

We can pray to God for wisdom and boldness to not seek comfort but to seek His will in our lives. Sir Francis Drake was an English sea captain who lived in the sixteenth century. He definitely had a growth mindset that was driven by his faith in God. One of his prayers was for God to continue pushing Christians for how we can be used to accomplish His will.

*Disturb us, Lord,* when we are too pleased with ourselves, when our dreams have come true because we have dreamed too little, when we arrived safely because we sailed too close to the shore.

*Disturb us, Lord,* when with the abundance of things we possess, we have lost our thirst for the waters of life; having

fallen in love with life, we have ceased to dream of eternity, and in our efforts to build a new earth, we have allowed our vision of the new heaven to dim.

*Disturb us, Lord*, to dare more boldly, to venture on wider seas, where storms will show your mastery; where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars. We ask you to push back the horizon of our hopes; and to push back the future in strength, courage, hope, and love.

This we ask in the name of our Captain, who is Jesus Christ.  
Amen!

If we stay focused on God's Word, God will cause us to grow. We do not need to fear new experiences or the unknown because God is with us. We can pray to God to remove our complacency and boldly follow where he guides us. Emboldened by the right mindset, the second best time to plant a tree is now!

## Chapter 4: Energy

The result of a growth mindset focused on God's glory is increased energy and vigor. We can be empowered by God when we strive to make the most out of our time, talent, and resources. Life is certainly not always easy, but when we stay in God's Word our strength will be renewed each day. Isaiah 40:28-31 states this beautifully.

*Do you not know?  
Have you not heard?  
The LORD is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.  
He will not grow tired or weary,  
and his understanding no one can fathom.  
He gives strength to the weary  
and increases the power of the weak.  
Even youths grow tired and weary,  
and young men stumble and fall;  
but those who hope in the LORD  
will renew their strength.  
They will soar on wings like eagles;  
they will run and not grow weary,  
they will walk and not be faint.*

God created us to give glory to Him so when we seek to do this our bodies and minds will function as intended. Purpose and passion is a big part of living an energized life. Christians know that God provides purpose and passion based on His amazing love for us. God's love empowers us,

gives a mindset for energy, and enables us to increase the energy of others around us.

### **Empowered by God**

True power comes from God. God's power is unending and unchanging. It does not depend on earthly things or the opinion of others. When we rely on God's power to strengthen us and guide our lives, we know that we can be empowered our whole lives. There are many motivational speakers who may make people feel energized for a day, but do not provide anything of lasting value. Jesus was a motivational teacher. A motivational teacher provides you energy and wisdom that will last your entire life.

There was a website that recently published a list of the "50 least powerful people in the world." This is a list of people who once held positions of power or esteem in the world but then lost their position or the public view of them changed for the worse. The introduction to the article provides a fitting illustration for people to see the folly of chasing worldly desires. "Fame, fortune, and power in all its forms are glorified in American culture...However, power can be fleeting. Circumstances can change rapidly; fortunes

can be lost overnight; and the masters of the universe today can wind up unemployable tomorrow.”<sup>1</sup>

If we rely on worldly values and ideals for how we get our sense of belonging and worth, it will never be lasting. If we draw our power from God at work in our lives, our power supply will be unending and able to withstand any difficulties that come. Colossians 1:11 notes the perseverance and power that comes from being a Christian. *Being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience.*

We can be full of energy because we know that we have the wonderful free gift of salvation given to us by Jesus’ great love and sacrifice for us. The energy that we can draw on is God’s energy, an energy that is firmly placed deep with us. In the early 1900s, S.D. Gordon was a prolific author and sought after speaker. One of his quotes perfectly describes the unending joy and energy we receive from God. “Joy is distinctly a Christian word and a Christian thing. It is the reverse of happiness. Happiness is the result of what happens of an agreeable sort. Joy has its springs deep down

inside. And that spring never runs dry, no matter what happens.”

S.D. Gordon wrote twenty-two books in a devotional series called “Quiet Talks”. His quiet manner, simplicity, and gentle spirit led him to be well-received wherever he spoke. It is a fitting lesson that true energy does not come from being boastful or a self-promoter. It comes from a right understanding of who God is, what He has done for us, and then how that affects how we live our life. Non-Christians take notice when Christians share God’s love by seeking to uplift others. We can be the light of the world and show where true power comes from!

### **A mindset of energy**

Life can bring difficulties for us or for loved ones so it is important to have a mindset of energy. God calls us to serve and help others, which is not always an easy task. If we keep God’s love at the forefront of our mind, we can wake up each day renewed for what the day will bring. Pastor John Ortberg notes how energy for service flows from the right mindset. “If God asks you to do a difficult thing, are you likely to say yes? If this is what your life is about –



pursuing comfort and trying to minimize problems and stress and maximize safety and security – does this idea make your heart beat faster? Would you be excited about getting out of bed every morning?”<sup>2</sup>

When we follow God’s will for our lives, it will not always be an easy path. We should strive to avoid any negative thinking. *Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.* Philippians 4:8.

Anytime we begin to feel discouraged or have negative self-talk we can refocus with God’s Word and truth to reassure us of our great worth.

Eliminating negative thinking can make a big difference. It is something that everyone can do. This does not mean that we have to always be positive. We can also practice neutral thinking because not everything in life should have a positive reaction. For example, if you lost your job a positive reaction would not be natural. A negative response to this would be to think that everything is hopeless and I should give up. A neutral response would be

that this is not good news, but God is still with me. I will continue to work hard and trust that God has a purpose for how He will use me. When we eliminate or reduce negative thinking, our minds are then freed to solve problems more clearly.

To avoid any negative thinking we can seek to cultivate great thoughts. This can be done by thinking great thoughts about God, yourself, others, your life, the future, and the past.<sup>3</sup> To accomplish this, the Bible provides ample resources. The following are a few examples.

#### Great thoughts about God

*No one is like you, Lord; you are great, and your name is mighty in power. Jeremiah 10:6.*

*Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. Lamentations 3:22-23.*

#### Great thoughts about yourself

*Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Matthew 6:26.*

*See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! 1 John 3:1.*

### Great thoughts about others

*As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another. Proverbs 27:17.*

*So in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. Romans 12:5-6.*

### Great thoughts about the future

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3:5-6.*

*“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?” John 14:1-2.*

### Great thoughts about the past

*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*

*Hebrews 13:8.*

*Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations.*

*Psalms 90:1.*

We can also meditate on the dreams that God wants us to pursue. We can write down these dreams, read them over regularly, pray about them, and listen for God's guidance on how and what we should pursue. As we experience the impact of God's power in our life, this will give us a great sense of purpose and joy. A mindset of energy leads to bold prayers and following God's will with vigor!

### **Encourage each other**

The community of believers is strengthened when we encourage each other. God uses other Christians as one way to uplift us and to keep us strong in the faith. As I am writing this, the world is in the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic. This has caused difficulties and more stress for many people. It has also provided an opportunity for people to refocus their lives.

Many people are home more often than in the past and there can be benefits to this in the midst of the difficulties. People have more time to think about what is most important. What is most important is God and encouraging others. People have more time to spend with

family at home. This can lead to stronger bonds and time for families to talk more. Since the pandemic has started, people are also thinking more about how to help others as there are more people in need. In these difficult times, people have the opportunity to think more about God and to seek His strength.

We all have days when we feel tired or lacking in energy. Sometimes all it takes is the right words from someone else to provide us a renewed spirit for our calling. In the eleventh century, King Henry III of Bavaria grew tired of court life and the pressures of being a monarch. He went to a local monastery, and asked to be accepted to spend the rest of his life in the monastery.

The leader of the monastery, Richard, replied to the King, "Your Majesty, do you understand that the pledge here is one of obedience? That will be hard because you have been a king."

"I understand," said Henry, "The rest of my life I will be obedient to you, as Christ leads you."

"Then I will tell you what to do," said Richard. "Go back to your throne and serve faithfully in the place where

God has put you." King Henry did just that and served until his death. When King Henry died, a statement was written: "The King learned to rule by being obedient."<sup>4</sup>

If we ever tire of our roles and responsibilities, it helps to remember God has placed us in a certain place and with certain people for a reason. God wants us to be faithful in the responsibilities He gives us. He will provide us strength and encouragement to do our work with joy. Nehemiah 8:10 states, *The joy of the Lord is your strength.*

God's love is more than enough for what we need in this life. In response to God's love we can strive for excellence, do small things well, care about others, work to improve ourselves, and give our full effort. With the right mindset and encouragement from others we will have energy for each day! Empowered by God, the second best time to plant a tree is now!

## Chapter 5: New Normal

The third “g”, grit, is passion and perseverance for long-term goals. This chapter and the next will discuss how God’s love in our lives leads to grit. Grit is having stamina. It is determined effort, day-in and day-out; not just for a week, not just for a month, but for years. Grit is the relentless resolve to keep pursuing a desired goal and not giving up.

Christians know that we can be gritty so that we persevere and grow in our faith of God. Hebrews 10:36 states this goal. *You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.* We also are gritty so that we can invite as many other people into God’s family as possible.

Research studies back up the benefits of grit. When cadets begin at West Point, the United States Military Academy, they need to pass the Beast. The Beast is initial training and a tough physical fitness test. After testing cadets with a grit scale, it was found that high scores on the grit scale reliably predicted who would pass the Beast. It has been concluded that no other commonly measured personality trait—including extroversion, emotional

stability, and conscientiousness—was as effective as grit in predicting job retention. Other things matter besides grit obviously. But all things being equal, grittier people will do better.<sup>1</sup>

Being gritty can become a natural outcome of life when Christians stay firmly focused on God's Word. First lady Eleanor Roosevelt was driven by her strong Christian faith. She had something of an encyclopedic memory of the New Testament, having memorized large portions of it. She described how we should spend our time on earth. "The purpose of life is to live it, to taste experience to the utmost, to reach out eagerly and without fear for newer and richer experience." This motto was shaped by Micah 6:8. *And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*

When we take this to heart each day, a life lived with a mindset of grit that originates from God can become our new normal. A new normal means a previously unfamiliar situation that has become standard, usual, or expected. The new normal is expected to remain. Going after new experiences and striving to continue to learn and grow is not



always easy. When we keep our focus on God and His love, we can be empowered to do this. Being gritty will keep us strong in the faith, allow us to encourage and help others, and provide us with opportunities to share our faith with others. God can change us to this new normal. He does this by changing us to embrace change, changing us for the better, and changing us over time.

### **God changes us to embrace change**

It has been said that the only person who likes is change, is a baby with a wet diaper. Those who have lived long lives know that change is inevitable. We can embrace change and improve, or avoid it. If we avoid improvement it is not living what God calls us to do. Prolonged inactivity dulls our senses, numbs our minds, and atrophies our muscles. God desires for us to seek continuous improvement motivated by His love.

It is important to note here that change does not refer to God or His Word. Malachi 3:6 states, *"I the Lord do not change."* We can trust that God's Word and His promises to us are true. 2 Corinthians 1:20 reads, *For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through*

him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God. Amen means, “so be it,” and it is an affirmation that what was spoken or written is true. We can wholeheartedly trust God in our lives!

The change that God wants us to embrace in our lives is change that strives to diminish sin in our lives. God desires for us to pursue change for the better so that we build our relationship with God which in turn enables us to better serve others in our life. When God’s will directs our life, our heart’s desire will align with God’s Word. *Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.* Psalm 37:4. God seeks to change us so that what we desire is what God desires. The next verse in Psalm 37 describes how to do this. *Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this.* Psalm 37:5.

Poet Deborah Ann Belka has a great poem, Change me Lord, that we can pray to seek God pleasing change in our lives.

Change me Lord,  
I know that I should be.  
A different kind of person,  
Than the one that I call me.

Change me Lord,  
There's so much You can do.  
Take this old life of mine,  
And make me someone new.

Change me Lord,  
From the inside out.  
To trust in only You,  
And never need I doubt.

Change me Lord,  
Make my heart grow true.  
Help me to see the sin,  
In the things I say and do.

Change me Lord,  
Show me the things I do wrong.  
Take away my weakness,  
And make me someone strong.

Change me Lord,  
So I can see You're all I need.  
To live my life like my Savior,  
In my every act and deed.<sup>2</sup>

There can be a variety of things in life that seek to influence us; advertisements, television shows, and co-workers to name a few. We can have long-term commitment to view any possible change in our lives through the lens of God's Word. When change is aligned with God's Word, then we can embrace this in our life!

## God changes us for the better

God knows what is best for us and longs to help us.

When we focus on God's Word, we will have wisdom in our daily decisions. Colossians 1:9-14 describes expertly what a long-term desire to follow God in our lives will bring. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

There is an old saying that our potential is one thing. What we do with it is quite another. The saying should really be that our potential is one thing. What God can do with it is quite another. With God's strength we have unlimited potential. It is important that we do not get caught

listening to the lies of the devil that tell us that we are no good and have no worth. God loves each one of us and each one of us is valuable to Him!

In 1921, Myra Brooks Welch wrote a wonderful poem that lets Christians know of their worth as a child of God.

### The Touch of the Master's Hand

Twas battered and scarred and the auctioneer  
Thought it scarcely worth his while  
To waste much time on the old violin,  
But he held it up with a smile.

“What am I bid, good folk?” he cried.  
“Who’ll start the bidding for me?  
A dollar, a dollar...now two...only two...  
Two dollars, and who’ll make it three?”

Three dollars once, three dollars twice,  
Going for three”...but no!  
From the room far back a gray-haired man  
Came forward and picked up the bow.

Then wiping the dust from the old violin  
And tightening up the strings,  
He played a melody pure and sweet,  
As sweet as an angel sings.

The music ceased, and the auctioneer,  
With a voice that was quiet and low,  
Said, “What am I bid for the old violin?”  
As he held it up with the bow.

“A thousand dollars...and who’ll make it two?  
Two...two thousand, and who’ll make it three?”

Three thousand once and three thousand twice...  
Three thousand and gone!" said he.

The people cheered, but some exclaimed  
"We do not quite understand...  
What changed it's worth?" And the answer came;  
"Twas the touch of the master's hand."

And many a person with soul out of tune  
And battered and scarred by sin  
Is auctioned cheap by the thoughtless crowd  
Just like the old violin.

But the Master comes, and the foolish crowd  
Never can quite understand  
The worth of a soul, and the change that is wrought  
By the touch of the master's hand.

O Master! I am the tuneless one  
Lay, lay Thy hand on me,  
Transform me now, put a song in my heart  
Of melody, Lord, to Thee!<sup>3</sup>

God has put you on earth for a special purpose that He wants to help you live out. We need to take to heart that we have great worth in God's eyes. At any time in life, we can trust God for help. God will continue to help us through any change to give Him glory.

Myra Brooks Welch was disabled in a wheelchair from arthritis, which later in life caused her to not be able to play music, such as the organ which she used to play. The arthritis affected her hands, but she wrote her poems on a

typewriter by pressing the keys with pencil erasers. She said that the joy of her writing outweighed the pain it caused from her arthritis.

God will be with us our whole life to life everlasting in heaven. In heaven, we will be changed and made perfect. There will be no more struggle or difficulties. Take to heart the words of the following verses of the hymn, I know that my Redeemer lives, and let it be comfort and motivation for your life.

He lives, my kind, wise heav'nly Friend.  
He lives and loves me to the end.  
He lives, and while he lives, I'll sing.  
He lives, my Prophet, Priest, and King.

He lives and grants me daily breath.  
He lives, and I shall conquer death.  
He lives my mansion to prepare.  
He lives to bring me safely there.<sup>4</sup>

### **God changes us over time**

God leads us where He wants us to be, but it may not be a quick process. It is important that you talk to Him daily through prayer and meditation on His Word to have guidance for what He wants you to work on. We can strive to make a difference by trusting in God's direction for our lives.

There are good examples in the Bible for people who kept their grit and preserved over time by trusting in God. Joseph waited for the fulfillment of God's promises for many years in an Egyptian prison and did not lose hope. Moses led the Israelites for forty years in the wilderness as he faithfully waited for God to bring His people to the promised land. During these difficult times, God was still helping them and changing them for the better.

Life can be hard and harder than we ever expected. Jesus told us this in advance. *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."* John 16:33. The Bible has many examples of people who experienced difficulty in life but trusted God and continued to seek His will. Trust that God's promises do not depend on your grip on God but on his grip on you! God is faithful and will help us!

The Bible also speaks of the need for grit. Our faith can become stronger as we face adversity. *For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.* Hebrews 10:36. God is with us for all



time. Our present situation does not need to affect our commitment to Christ. We can view any trials as opportunities that God is using to change us for His good. James 1:2-4 states what our attitude should be. *Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.* Notice the focus on perseverance leading to maturity and strength. God can lead us to greater faith in Him, which can help us better share God's love with others. Also, remember that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28).

Life is a marathon and not a sprint. But we have God on our side who never tires and is always near us. Drawing on God's strength we can embrace any needed God-pleasing change in our lives. This mindset can become our new normal. We can trust that God wants to change us for the better. When we have long-term commitment to God's will, we will be provided with long-term faith. With determined grit, the second best time to plant a tree is now!

## Chapter 6: Consistency

A key characteristic of grit is consistency. In order to pursue long-term goals it is important to strive to make the right decisions daily. Jim Tressel, National Championship winning Ohio State football coach, talks about the importance of consistency. “The hallmark of excellence, the test of greatness, is consistency.”

Christians know that we have the greatest and most consistent coach on our side and that is God. James 1:17 states, *Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.* God is consistent and faithful. He does what He promises. He is loving, all powerful, and always present. We can draw on His strength and consistency to help guide us in our lives.

In one of my previous books, *The World’s Greatest Coach*, I discuss how God gets the most out of people and always wins. There are many examples in the Bible about how God helps people do more than they are capable of on their own. Ruth was consistent in her support and commitment to help Naomi. Nehemiah went from a

cupbearer to rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. David defeated the mighty Goliath.

These examples show that when Christians daily make decisions with God as their guide, that God will use this to accomplish good. Pitcher Tom Seaver was a near unanimous selection to the Hall of Fame receiving 98.8 percent of the vote. He aimed to pitch the best he possibly could day after day, year after year. This goal affected all of his other decisions in life. Here's is how he described this.

“Pitching...determines what I eat, when I go to bed, what I do when I'm awake. It determines how I spend my life when I'm not pitching. If it means I have to come to Florida and can't get tanned because I might get a burn that would keep me from throwing for a few days, then I never go shirtless in the sun...If it means I have to remind myself to pet dogs with my left hand or throw logs on the fire with my left hand, then I do that, too. If it means in the winter I eat cottage cheese instead of chocolate chip cookies in order to keep my weight down, then I eat cottage cheese.”<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, for the Christian life our overarching goal is to give glory to God in all that we do and also to share

God's love with others. God's great love in our lives can affect all of our decisions that we make. The consistent and unchanging love of God can be our firm foundation throughout life.

There will be times when we make mistakes, but we can trust God's forgiveness and refocus our thoughts on His will for our lives. Even when we're unfaithful, God is faithful. Even when we're inconsistent, God is consistent. Even when we're unreliable, God is reliable. No matter what changes in the world, there is one thing that is consistent that can be counted on. God will always act the same toward us. His love is constant and unending!<sup>1</sup> In order to strive for consistency, planning for the day and the future is important. This work on a vision for life can be guided by God-given vision, long-term vision, and short-term vision.

### **God-given vision**

God's vision for our lives is that we lovingly serve Him in response to the love He has shown us. God created you. He has a plan for you and a purpose for your life. Ephesians 2:10 reinforces this. *For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for*

*us to do.* Knowing this can provide great motivation and joy as we approach each day! We can strive to make each day count for the glory of God!

Ludwig van Beethoven was a prolific composer and pianist. His music is among the most performed classical music of all time and he is one of the most admired composers in history. Over forty-five years of composing he created 722 compositions including nine symphonies. Beethoven drew on his Christian faith for motivation for this consistent effort. He described the aim of his music. "My chief aim was to awaken and permanently instill religious feelings not only into the singers but also in the listeners."

Beethoven sought to develop the abilities that God had given Him. He wanted to keep learning his whole life. He described this God-given vision quite well. "Then let us all do what is right, strive with all our might toward the unattainable, develop as fully as we can the gifts God has given us, and never stop learning."

There is a joke about how deeply committed Beethoven was towards this goal. When Beethoven passed away, he was buried in a churchyard. A couple days later,

the caretaker of the cemetery was working when he heard a strange noise coming from the area where Beethoven was buried. The caretaker quickly ran and got the priest to come and listen to it. The priest bent close to the grave and heard some faint, unrecognizable music coming from the grave. Unsure of what it could be, the priest ran and got a police officer.

When the officer arrived, he listened and did not know what it was. By this time others from the nearby church had come out to the cemetery. The church organist bent his ear to the grave, listened for a moment, and said, "Ah, yes, that's Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, being played backwards." He listened a while longer, and said, "There's the Eighth Symphony, and it's backwards, too. Most puzzling." So the organist kept listening. "There's the Seventh...the Sixth...the Fifth..."

Suddenly the realization of what was happening dawned on the organist. He stood up and announced to the crowd that had gathered in the cemetery, "My fellow citizens, there's nothing to worry about. It's just Beethoven decomposing."

We can seek to serve God our whole life. The Beethoven joke has a good message besides being funny. When we die, we know that death is not final. We will have eternal life in heaven where we will continue to praise and worship God. Psalm 23:6 describes this promise. *Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

In 1522 Martin Luther gave a brief, simple, but expressive eulogy for a pastor named Nicholas Haussmann. Luther said, "What we preach, he lived." We can strive to emulate this statement in our lives. What Jesus preached, we strive to live out!

### **Long-term vision**

Christians can keep long-term vision in mind by drawing on the sure hope of eternal life in heaven that awaits us. This blessed assurance of heaven brings inner joy and also motivates us to share about this amazing free gift with others.

We can provide encouragement to others in the everyday things we do. Taps is instantly recognizable as the somber 24-note bugle call played at American military

funerals and for memorial services. It is a song that Don Brittain has played on the trumpet every day for the past 10 years and counting.

Brittain was born into a family of musicians and started playing the trumpet around age 10. He eventually put the trumpet down, as parenthood and life responsibilities got in the way. Two daughters and many decades later, Brittain saw something on television that caught his eye. It was the uniformed trumpeters playing at a 9/11 memorial service. It moved the retired Boeing worker to dig out the old horn and start playing.

Brittain notes the importance of honoring those who have served in the military. "If it weren't for those folks, we may be living a completely different lifestyle than we're living right now, with a lot less freedom. They make the ultimate sacrifice."

Every morning he checks the newspaper to see when sunset begins. At sunset he steps outside and doesn't make any announcements or say anything. He just takes a couple of big breaths and begins to play. When the music begins his neighbors and any of those walking by stand at attention.



Several years after Don began playing Taps each evening, he lost his wife to cancer. He still hears her voice to keep him going in life and with his trumpet playing.

“Sometimes I think, ‘ah I don’t think I want to do it tonight.’ (But she would say), ‘You get your butt out there and you play.’”<sup>3</sup>

When Brittain plays, he strives to do the best he can. He describes, “I am in another zone when I am playing. I am not aware of anything but the fact that I am playing this and I am trying to play this as best as I can.”<sup>4</sup>

Those who hear his trumpet playing, use it as a time to reflect and think about the importance of life. When we take time to reflect, it makes us think about what we are doing and what we should be doing. Every life matters. We can use our time to provide encouragement and hope for others.

Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice for us. He had long-term vision when He came to earth. He knew that He would spend years on earth until it was the right time for Him to sacrifice Himself to pay for our sins. Because of Jesus’ glorious death and resurrection three days later there is

great comfort for those who die in the Lord. We can praise God for His great love and grace. As we strive to give glory to God with our time, it can lead others to know Jesus.

Psalm 96:1-4 are great verses that we can keep in mind as we plan for what we will do each day. *Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods.*

### **Short-term vision**

God-given vision affects our long-term vision and our short-term vision. There are many daily decisions that need to be made and it is important to keep God's Word in mind. We can become attuned with a moment-by-moment sensitivity to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. There is a good reason that Solomon asked for wisdom when God let him know he could ask for anything that he wanted. The wisdom that comes from God is more valuable than anything.

When we daily read, meditate on, and discuss God's Word we will have wisdom for our daily lives. This wisdom will keep us focused on the right things. *But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.* James 3:17. We can trust that God knows what is best for us. His consistency can provide us grittiness and guidance for each day. *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.* Hebrews 13:8.

It is not always easy to be consistent each day. We can draw on God's power to be filled with energy each day to do His calling for our lives. We can draw on the wisdom from Galatians 6:9-10 for our daily lives. *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*

Passion and perseverance for long term goals can affect all aspects of our lives. Our passion to share God's love and to give God glory can lead to consistent God-pleasing decisions. Empowered by God's love we can strive

to consistently seek and live out God's vision for our lives.

The second best time to plant a tree is now!

## Chapter 7: Yahweh

The three “G’s” are overarching principles that can guide Christians their whole lives. God is clearly the most important and should affect all aspects of a Christian’s life. Motivated by God’s love we can have a growth mindset to continue learning and persevere when faced with changes. We can also be gritty by passionately pursuing long-term goals of staying strong in the faith and sharing God’s love with others.

The last chapter in this book rightly brings the focus back on God and His amazing power and love. It is all about God. The Christian life can be a blessed existence by growing in our understanding of who God is and what He does for us. When we do this our minds will become fine-tuned to know His will for our lives.

In Exodus chapter 3 Moses asks God what to tell the Israelites if they ask who sent him to them. God responds, “*I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you.*” This name of God, I AM or Yahweh, has valuable insights into who God is and what that means for us. The name, Yahweh, lets us know that God is

unchanging, eternal, and keeps His promises. In the King James Version of the Bible, Yahweh is used in four Bible verses: Exodus 6:3, Psalm 83:18, Isaiah 12:2, and Isaiah 26:4.<sup>1</sup> These verses provide insight into who God is and how that can affect us.

### **God is eternal and all-powerful**

God has always existed and will for all time. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. Isaiah 26:4 states how we can respond to this. *Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD himself, is the Rock eternal.* God can be our firm foundation throughout life. God is strong and unchanging. We can always rely on Him to help and support us.

God is all-powerful and does not need anyone. Out of His great love, He created us and the entire universe. This is love that does not end and is pure self-sacrificing love. God is most worthy of our praise and dedication! *Let them know that you, whose name is the LORD—that you alone are the Most High over all the earth.* Psalm 83:18.

God is higher than us in all aspects. He is higher in intelligence, strength, authority, power, beauty, and much

more. He is superior in every way. People admire those who have accomplished great things and want to learn from them. God has accomplished far more than anyone could and knows all things. In society today, there is too much of a focus on following celebrities or getting other people to follow us on social media. Society needs to shift their focus on what is most important by whole-heartedly following the greatest influencer of all time, God!

### **Everything depends on God**

Everything that is not God depends totally on God. The entire universe and all people came into being by God. God does whatever He pleases and it is always right, beautiful, and true. We are not able to fully understand and comprehend the power, might, and knowledge of God. God said to Moses in Exodus 6:3, *I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but my name the LORD I did not make myself fully known to them.*

God is too great and majestic for us to completely comprehend and that is okay. God is God and we are not. While we cannot fully know God, God has given us what we need in this life. Through His Word in the Bible we are able

to grow in our faith and knowledge of Him. We can still actively seek Him and His will for our lives. God is most worthy of our interest, attention, admiration, and enjoyment!

His love is shown in Jesus' saving work as our Savior. We need to depend on God in this life and for life everlasting in heaven. *Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD, the LORD himself, is my strength and my defense.* Isaiah 12:2. God's love in our lives leads us to fear and love Him and in turn to show this love to others.

We are guided in our lives by God's Word. He is the absolute standard of truth and goodness. There is no other guide to determine what is true and excellent. God himself is the standard of what is right, pure, and beautiful. We can happily declare our dependence on God. Poet Margaret Cagle has an excellent poem that describes what this brings in our lives. It is all about God. We can seek to know this better every day and trust in Him!

My declaration of dependence

I declare my dependence on God,  
For I need Him each and every hour.  
My Lord is the God of my salvation.



He is my shield and my high tower.

I declare my dependence on God.  
In Him I do trust; He is my rock.  
The Lord is my good Shepherd.  
I am blessed to be in His flock.

I declare my dependence on God.  
I want to live within His favor.  
He sent Jesus, His Son to die for me,  
And I accepted Him as my Savior.

I declare my dependence on God.  
He gives me strength every day.  
With Christ, I can do all things.  
He guides me each step of the way.<sup>2</sup>

## **Urgency**

The second best time to plant a tree is now. If this sentence is taken to heart it creates a sense of urgency. Christians are motivated to make the most of each day based on the love that God has shown us. We also know that what matters the most is God's grace. Our time on earth is short compared to the eternity we will spend in heaven. Our lives can be lived to give glory to God so that more people can come to the saving faith of Christ Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Empowered by God we can have a drive to help and show God's love to others.

There is a humorous fictional story that has an important message about the importance of urgency. A preacher was walking down a country lane and came upon a young farmer struggling to load hay back onto a cart after it had fallen off. "You look hot, my son," said the pastor. "Why don't you rest a moment, and then I'll give you a hand."

"No thanks," said the young man. "My father wouldn't approve."

"Don't be silly," the minister said. "Everyone is entitled to a break. Come and have a drink of water." Again the young man protested that his father would be upset.

Losing his patience just a little, the clergyman said, "Your father must be too hard on you. Tell me where I can find him and I'll give him a piece of my mind!"

"Well," replied the young farmer, "you can tell him whatever you like just as soon as I get this hay off him."<sup>3</sup>

Though this story is humorous and not real, a similar situation is very real in the world. There are many people that are being crushed by the weight of sin in their lives. Some people realize this and others do not understand the

consequences of sin in our lives. Christians can be the light of the world to bring the Good News to unbelievers. The Gospel message is powerful and removes the heavy burden of sin in our lives! God's love can work in the lives of unbelievers to help them realize that the result of sin is death. *For sin is the sting that results in death, and the law gives sin its power. But thank God! He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ.* 1 Corinthians 15:56-57. The free gift of eternal life is ours through Christ Jesus. Thanks be to God!

With God all things are possible. It is freeing to know that the impact we can make does not depend on us, but on God's work through us. Ephesians 3:20 states this wonderful promise! *Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.*

We can dream big by seeking to follow God's will. With God all things are possible. Author Bob Moawad describes the attitude to avoid. "Most people don't aim too high and miss. They aim too low and hit." Worse than this is not aiming at all. God has a purpose for everyone. Life can

be an adventure by seeking to better understand God's purpose for us.

There are many people that need help and encouragement to stay strong in faith. There are also many people that need help and encouragement to come to faith in our great God. We can encourage and help others by building relationships and by being good stewards of our time, resources, and talents. This is important as there are three billion people in the world that get by on less than two dollars per day. Pastor and author, David Platt, describes what our mindset can be for encouraging others. "So let's incorporate the character of God, the sinfulness of man, the sufficiency of Christ, the necessity of faith, and the urgency of eternity into our everyday conversations."<sup>4</sup> We can ask God for specific people to encourage, disciple, and witness to.

As you reflect on the chapters in this book keep in mind the importance of urgency. The chapter titles make this easier to remember. The first letter of each title spells the word URGENCY.

Ultimate  
Relationships  
Growth  
Energy  
New normal  
Consistency  
Yahweh

God is the most important and the ultimate source of all good in the world. Because of the love God has shown us we in turn are motivated to share God's love by building relationships with others. We have a growth mindset because God has made each of us for a special purpose. We have capable minds and bodies to continue to learn new things and improve. A commitment to follow God's will for our life leads to energy for each day. Our new normal can become passion and perseverance for our long-term goal to give glory to God. This results in a desire for consistency in making God-pleasing decisions. God is *I AM*. He is eternal and unchanging. We are all dependent on God. Realizing this in our lives makes all the difference.

Billy Graham once shared the following story in a message that he preached. "Once while flying between cities on the African continent, I began to share my faith in Christ with some reporters who accompanied me. None seemed

interested in hearing the Gospel. Suddenly the plane entered a very turbulent storm. The plane shook and began to bounce up and down. After we successfully came through the storm, one of the reporters approached me and said, ‘What were you saying about life after death?’”<sup>5</sup>

We have an important message to share. And we should not put off till tomorrow what can be done today. In the years that we will spend on earth, God has work that He wants us to do. He wants to use us in ways that will bring glory to Him and make His name known. Through this more people will come to know God as their Lord and Savior! Keep the three “G’s” as the overarching values for your life: God, growth mindset, and grit. Empowered and strengthened by God’s love we can have passion to continue to grow and learn to better follow God’s will for our lives. The second best time to plant a tree is now!

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