

by Berni Dymet

YOUR ROAD TO A
**STUNNING
LIFE**

*If God loves you so much that He'd send His
Son to die for you, then what sort of a life
do you imagine that He wants you to live?*

Berni Dymet

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**STUNNING
LIFE**

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*Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain,
some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.
Let anyone with ears listen!
(Matthew 13:8)*

- Jesus

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Why Should I Read This Book?

There are lots and lots and lots of books out there, and the question each of us needs to ask in this time-poor generation is: *Why should I read this book?*

And so, when it comes to *this* book – *Your Road to a Stunning Life* – the answer to *that* question is quite simply this:

You and I, we get one chance at life. Just one. Yes, if you believe in Jesus, you will have all eternity to spend with Him. But our life here on this earth, this time round, is a one-time gig.

And it's a life that for all too many, slips away all too quickly.

There are so many people who believe in Jesus, for whom life isn't all that God seems to promise. And there are so many people who aren't quite there yet (when it comes to believing in Jesus), for whom ... well, life isn't all that they know it should be.

There's a reason for that.

Wanting to live a stunning life is one thing. Knowing *how* to live it is another thing entirely.

You often hear people (mis)quoting Jesus along these lines:

The truth will set you free. (John 8:32)

Well of course He did say that but that's only half of what He said in that breath, and a half-truth is as good as a lie (half-truths are a specialty, after all, of Satan, the father of lies).

The whole of what Jesus said is this:

If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. (John 8:31, 32)

This book is about discovering the truth and knowing the truth through God's Word, because that's the only way that you and I can be set free to live the stunning life that God has planned for us.

Now this is deliberately not a long book. It's not Dymet's Systematic Theology on Living a Stunning Life. Because I know you don't have time for that!

What it is, is a simple, plain conversation about the key things that you need to know and do, in order to lay hold of the stunning life that Jesus died and rose again to give you.

Nothing more. Nothing less.

May you be blessed as you receive God's Word.

Berni Dymet

CHAPTER ONE

believe that He is

Let's imagine for a minute that God is God. That He created you and that He loves you completely. Okay - so what sort of life would that kind of God want for you?

CHAPTER ONE

believe that He is

In your heart of hearts, exactly what sort of a life do you believe that God wants for you?

Your answer to that is going to depend on a couple of things.

Firstly, whether or not you believe that God actually exists at all and secondly, what sort of a life you've had so far. Those two things, more than any others, are going to shape your answer to this all-important question.

Over the years I've thought a great deal about the life that I'm living and the lives that other people are living. That's because I have more opportunity than

most, to reflect on the lives of other people. As you can imagine, I receive a lot of feedback from listeners to the radio and television programs that I produce. People from all around the world send letters and emails, make phone calls, and leave messages on our website. I hear from a lot of people.

Their circumstances, the pain and oft times the abject misery of many of these people sometimes rocks my faith to the core. The woman in London who told me on Facebook how she sold her body on the street just to get food on the table. A man on the brink of suicide who called our office just the other day. The woman whose husband had just left her for another woman. The elderly man who'd lost his wife of 54 years.

AT SOME POINT, PEOPLE
FIND THEMSELVES
ASKING: HANG ON IS
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OF LOVE FOR REAL?
IN FACT, DOES HE
EXIST AT ALL?

So many people share the deepest despair of their lives with me. And at some point, people find themselves asking: *Hang on is God still on His throne? Is this God of love for real? In fact, does He exist at all?*

Am I suggesting that everybody's life is a "basket case"? No. Not at all.

But it's as plain as the nose on my face, that we all go through difficult times – times of tragedy in our lives – that leave us wondering about this so-called God.

Between the times of tragedy, there are certainly high points; there are times when things seem to be chugging along just fine, and then there's that dull monotony of the daily repetition of the same old routine.

So it doesn't seem to matter so much what particular part of this cycle of life you happen to be in: a trough, or a crest of the wave, on the up, or on the down. You come back to the questions – *What sort of life am I living?* and *What sort of life does God want me to live?*

That's why I've written this book, because I am *utterly convinced* that God wants you and me to live an absolutely stunning life! I know! I know – that may well be difficult for you to believe just at the moment. I understand that! But hear me out. Keep reading! Because as you hear God's Word I know that you'll

discover the truth ... and the truth will set you free to live that stunning life that He planned for you, before time even began!

So humour me just for the moment. If it *is* true, if God really does want you to live a stunning life – how do you actually get yourself on that road? The *what* is pretty meaningless without the *how*, wouldn't you agree?

Well that's what this book is about. How to get your feet walking down that road to that stunning life. No matter how bleak, or how empty, or how boring, or how painful or how whatever your life seems to be just at the moment, remember this:

The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. (Lao Tzu).

So here, as far as I am concerned is the first step; the very first step.

Simply believe that God is God. That He exists. That He is who He says He is.

I know what you're thinking. It sounds a bit ... trite, a bit too obvious, a bit too simplistic, doesn't it?

Oh, give me a break Berni. I don't need platitudes in my life! I need some real grass roots "how-to" help to get through the stuff I'm going through. It's hard going you know!

I know you do. And I know it is. And that's why I'm sharing this first step with you. Let me say it again.

The first step is believing that God exists. That He is who He says He is.

Because it's a step that has some significant consequences.

We live in a world of cause and effect. You do this ... then that happens. Sometimes the consequences are predictable. Sometimes, they're totally unpredictable. But in this case – believing that God actually exists and that He is who He says He is and that He will do what He promises to do – the consequences of taking this first step are absolutely, completely and totally predictable.

This is what God says will happen if you believe in Him:

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain's. Through this he received approval as righteous, God himself giving approval to his gifts; he died, but through his faith he still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken so that he did not experience death; and "he was not found, because God had taken him." For it was attested before he was taken away that "he had pleased God." And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. By faith Noah, warned by God about events as yet unseen, respected the warning and built an ark to save his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir to the righteousness that is in accordance with faith.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an

inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. (Hebrews 11:1-8)

When we step out on that road in faith – believing in God – God’s Word tells us that we receive four things: First His *approval and acceptance*. Second *freedom from death*. Third *His rewards*. And fourth *an inheritance*.

Just like Abraham, when we step out on that road, we have absolutely no idea, really, where we are headed. All we know is God’s promise to us: That if we do step out in faith He will approve of us, accept us, set us free from death, reward us, and give us the most amazing inheritance.

WHEN WE STEP
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SECOND
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DEATH. THIRD
HIS REWARDS.
AND FOURTH AN
INHERITANCE.

*Hang on a minute! If that’s not a stunning life ...
I don’t know what is!*

Yes, I know, I know – you’re going through all this *stuff*, right? It’s *hard*, right?! How does any of this make any difference whatsoever to all that ... *right*?

Well let me tell you something: when God promises you something – even something spectacular like this – He delivers. Always! Each and every time! And when He does, it makes all the difference. It completely changes your life!

All He asks you to do is simply to believe. To believe *in* Him. To believe that He is. To believe that He rewards those who diligently seek Him out. To actually live your life on the basis that He is, and that His promises are true (as distinct from sceptically believing that it might be true and waiting for Him to deliver).

So can I ask you this: *Do you believe?*

But before you answer, let me say that I’m not asking you this as a question of theory. I don’t want to know whether or not you give intellectual ascent to the existence of a Supreme Being. No, that’s not what I’m asking you at all.

Churches are full of pew-warming Christians who benignly believe in the existence of God, wondering if He will ever show up, and waiting for Him to deliver. It turns out that the devil is entirely happy for them to take up a place there in that nice warm church and keep someone else out in the cold. Because the devil knows that when it comes to the things that really matter, their lives won't really count for anything.

I'm sorry if that's a little blunt. And I'm sorry if you, like a man who heard me preach a message on this topic recently, are offended. This man said to me:

How can you say that to these people? It's enough that they showed up this Sunday at Church.

Hmm. If you can find that anywhere in the Bible, would someone please let me know. Because as far as I can tell, that's not what Jesus said at all!

The devil knows that the person who just ticks the box – *Yes, I believe that there's a God* – will never do anything of eternal significance in somebody else's life. Nor are they themselves likely to spend eternity with Christ, because:

... *faith without works is dead* (James 2:17, 26)
and

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.

(Mathew 7:21)

So that's not what I'm asking.

What I am asking you is this: do you believe in God with your very life? With everything you are? With everything you have? With every hope and every dream? Are you seeking Him out? Are you seeking to approach Him? To be with Him? To know Him?

Do you long for Him with all your heart?

Well ... do you?

Because when you seek Him with all your heart, you will find Him.

When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I

have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

(Jeremiah 29:13,14)

And when you find God (as He promises) you will discover that He *is* the God who accepts you, approves of you, rewards you, sets you free from death, and gives you the most amazing eternal inheritance.

And He *is* the God who will welcome you back from your exile and restore you to what He always intended for you; back to the Promised Land, the land flowing with milk and honey.

That is a complete game-changer. That is why it's the first step on the road to an utterly stunning life.

The Prayer of Faith

Lord, forgive me for trifling with Your Word. I know that there have been so many times that I've believed in You just in my head, and not with my life. I know that there have been so many times where my faith in You has wavered and weakened and fallen by the wayside and that it's in those times that I've grumbled and complained in my heart, wondering where the blazes You were.

When all along, You were right here with me. Beside me. In me. All around me. Waiting for me just to incline my heart towards You and believe – not perfectly, not completely, but just believe You with all that I am.

Father God, forgive me for that. I am so sorry. And I want to tell You today that I've heard Your Word here in my heart. I've heard Your promises of the things that come to those who believe in You.

And Lord – I believe, help my unbelief! (Mark 9:24)

From this day forward I am going to believe that You are the God who accepts and rewards and saves those who believe in You. From this day forward, that truth is the rock on which I stand.

I believe that You are that God. I believe that You are who You say You are, and that You will do what You promise to do.

Holy Spirit, enliven Your Word in my Heart that I may believe in You with every fibre of my being – not in my strength, but in Yours.

In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

CHAPTER TWO

Christ as your cornerstone

If I were to ask you - what is the single defining truth or reality around which your life is built - what would your answer be? Would you have an answer for me at all?

CHAPTER TWO

Christ as your cornerstone

Recently, I was invited to visit India to participate in the laying of the foundation stone of the Lutheran Central Cathedral in the city of Guntur in the state of Andhra Pradesh. Guntur isn't far from the Bay of Bengal; a bustling, thriving city of more than five million people.

The Lutheran parish is made up of over twenty-five thousand people.

I visited just one of the churches in the parish – St Matthew's in the suburb of Brodipet. There were, I'm guessing, somewhere between four and five thousand worshippers there that day. It was a day of great

celebration, because we were laying the foundation stone of a ten thousand-seat cathedral to be built over the ensuing two and a half years.

The service started at 9 am and finished at around 1 pm with the unveiling of the foundation stone, which, amongst several other names, had my name chiselled in gold letters in the granite. So when some young person looks at the stone in a hundred years time – when I am long gone – they’ll wonder who was that guy with the funny name (Sri Berni Dymet) from Australia and what he was doing there on that day?

I had the chance to meet the architect of the cathedral and he showed me the plans. What an amazing structure. Huge – as you can imagine, if it’s going to be seating ten thousand worshippers!

Early in the evening, when the crowds had disappeared and all the hubbub had died down, they asked me to come back out in this wide-open space, to share the Word of God with some of the young workers. They had been toiling away, non-stop behind the scenes for the last thirty-six hours, making the whole event happen.

They'd missed out on pretty much everything, so it was an honour and a privilege for me to be able to open God's Word with them. In fact, to be perfectly honest, I felt way, way more blessed to be able to spend this intimate time with these dozen or so young people, than to be able to preach the Gospel to the thousands who attended the big event.

So ... we chatted about their lives and their futures; the plans that God had for them. And it struck me in that moment, that here we were in this open field where a massive cathedral would one day stand. Yet it wasn't, strictly speaking an open field, because part of the cathedral was already in place. The construction had already commenced. It was, of course, the foundation stone, which we'd laid just a few hours earlier. One day, it would be part of the wall of this massive cathedral.

There it was, already concreted in place. Over the next thirty or so months, this massive, ten thousand-seat building would be constructed around it and on top of it.

SO LET ME AGAIN
ASK YOU THIS: WHO
OR WHAT IS THE
FOUNDATION
STONE OF YOUR LIFE?

Everything set out from this beginning – the foundation stone. The placement of that stone would define this whole structure. Amazing really!

So let me again ask you this: Who or what is the foundation stone of your life? What is the pervading truth or reality that defines your life?

That one thing which is your foundation stone, around which day by day as each brick of your thoughts, your actions, your reactions is laid down to construct that thing which one day, you will be able to look back on and call “your life”?

What is your foundation stone? The rock on which you stand?

Choose the wrong one, put it in the wrong place, point it in the wrong direction ... and your life simply won't be what it was meant to be. Way too many people get this wrong and so, they end up constructing for themselves lives which are less than what they could have been.

Much, much, much less!

Have a listen to this amazing piece of wisdom from

the Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Ephesian church almost two thousand years ago:

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.

So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God. (Ephesians 2:13-22)

IS THERE ANYTHING
MORE SUBLIME THAN
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COMMODITY MORE
VALUABLE THAN PEACE?

The central truth that Paul's talking about here, is the fact that Jesus died for you and for me, to end the hostilities between God and us; hostilities that were brought about by our own rebellion against Him. Through Jesus – and His death on that Cross – you and I can finally have peace.

Is there anything more sublime than peace? Is there any commodity more valuable than peace?

And through that peace, you and I – who were once far off from God – have been drawn near, into His very bosom. And so everything else flows from this. Christ is the cornerstone of the church, the stone from which everything else is set out. That's what Paul's saying here.

And not only is Jesus the cornerstone, or the foundation stone of the Church, He is meant to be the cornerstone of our lives. It's at this point that a simplistic, distant, intellectual belief in some "Supreme Being" fails us. Because it's at this point that we

discover the vast difference between a theoretical, intellectual belief in “God”, and a practical, boots-and-all, “with all my life” belief in Jesus.

Your life isn't a theory; it's not an idea. It's as big and as tangible and even more magnificent than any ten thousand-seat cathedral and it needs something much more than a theory on which to rest. It needs a real, tangible, powerful, rock-solid foundation stone around which to be built. For without it, our lives will go awry; they won't end up being what we wanted them to be.

IT'S THE PERSON WHO ACCEPTS CHRIST NOT AS AN IDEA, BUT AS THE CORNERSTONE OF THEIR VERY LIFE AROUND WHICH EVERYTHING ELSE IS ARRANGED AND BUILT - WHO IS THE PERSON WHO WILL BE LIVING THE LIFE THAT GOD INTENDED THEM TO LIVE.

It's the person who accepts Christ not as an idea, but as the cornerstone of their very life around which everything else is arranged and built – who is the person who will be living the life that God intended them to live. This is the person who is on the road to the stunning life; the life of impact; the life of

meaning; the life of intense sacrifice and satisfaction, that God means for them to live.

So, might I ask you, very quietly, very kindly but very directly, are you that person ... or not?

What I mean to say is this: is your faith in this Jesus the sort of faith that causes you to arrange every aspect of your life around Him as your foundation stone, or is it more the wishy-washy insurance policy kind of faith that believes in God ... well, you know ... *just in case*.

Perhaps you're not quite sure. Perhaps you're wondering: *how can I tell the difference?* That's not unreasonable, so here are some ways for you to discern the difference in your life.

When you make big decisions, is your primary concern whether God wants you to decide this way or that? Or, instead, are you more concerned about what's in it for you?

When you hear one of the tough sayings of Jesus, things like *love your enemy ... or ... anyone who is angry with a brother or sister is subject to judgment ... or ... if somebody strikes you then turn the other cheek ... or*

... *if your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away* ... when you hear those words coming out of the mouth of the Son of God, does your heart struggle to figure out how to live them out, or do you just dismiss them as being for somebody else?

This is where the rubber hits the road. It's in each life decision; each relationship decision; each work decision; each financial decision – big and small – that we either set out our lives around the cornerstone of Christ, or choose to go our own way.

Is deciding in favour of Jesus, is going His way always easy? Not at all! In fact Jesus promised us that it would be anything but.

It often requires sacrifice and suffering. But going our own way, rejecting the cornerstone, planning our lives and building them according to our own plan, is the road to destruction. Sure, it appears easy at the time – but the downhill run always seems easy.

It's time for us each to sober up, and ask ourselves this one question: *Is Christ the cornerstone of my life, or not?*

Have I accepted Him as my cornerstone, my foundation stone, or have I rejected Him?

For it stands in scripture:

“See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe,

“The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner,”

and

“A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall.”

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:6-10)

Do you stumble because you reject Him and disobey His Word? Or are you one of God's people; part of His chosen race, the royal priesthood, His Holy Nation because you set your life out according to Christ as your cornerstone?

With all my heart, I believe that God wants you to live an extraordinary life; a stunning life. No, not a comfortable life. Not an easy life. Not a safe life.

Nothing worthwhile is ever comfortable or easy or safe, is it?

At that church in Guntur in India, they had these words written on the wall:

Expect Great Things from God, Attempt Great Things for God.

Nothing great is ever easy. But here's the thing – God created you with enormous ability and potential. You are the most amazing creation of His and He

made you to go and do the things that He's prepared already for you to do. (Ephesians 2:10)

The extraordinary life, the stunning life, is the life lived for Christ. Each thought, each dream, each decision for Him. That's the road to a stunning life.

A Prayer for Your Life

Father I know that there are so many times in my life when I've completely forgotten that Christ is meant to be my cornerstone; the foundation stone of my life. And I've headed off and done things in my own strength; things that seemed good to me at the time, and yet each time they've at best amounted to nothing and at worst ruined my life and the lives of those whom I love.

Forgive me Lord. Forgive me for so often rejecting the Cornerstone whom You have provided to me, to be the Rock on which my life should be built.

But I'm excited here today Lord, because I realise that it's never too late. I know that Your grace is sufficient for me. And I know that right now, I can turn my life back over to You – every part of my life, each brick that I lay can from this moment forward be laid around Christ as the centre of my life.

Father I don't have the wisdom or the strength to build this life on my own, but I guess that's the point isn't it? I need You. I need You so much.

Dear Holy Spirit fill me afresh this day with the joy of my salvation, with the righteousness of Christ and with the power that only You can give, that I may live a holy life.

I know I've asked a lot of You today Lord. And I know that it will mean making decisions that my flesh will want to rebel against. But I believe with all my heart that this is what You want me to ask of You.

So I ask it. In the mighty name of Jesus I ask. Amen.

CHAPTER THREE

putting first things first

When you have more on your to-do list than you can possibly get done in one day, which items do you choose to do, and which ones do you choose to leave for another day? Do you do the urgent ones first, or the important ones?

CHAPTER THREE

putting first things first

Deciding what to do next is probably one of the most difficult things to get right in life. The skill of prioritisation is absolutely critical to anyone who is going to achieve what they set out to achieve. I've spent over thirty years in business, working as a consultant with senior management in hundreds of organisations around the world.

From my experience I can tell you that the effective leaders I met along the way, were the ones who knew how to prioritise effectively. The problem with effective prioritisation however, is that so often the urgent tasks conflict with the important ones.

You know the story. The phone keeps on ringing, but what you really need to do is to write the report. That's true in business. It is also true in our home life.

The house needs cleaning, but our children want our attention – oh, and by the way, you just haven't had much time to yourself to relax and recharge your batteries lately either.

It seems that for many of us, there are always more things to do than we have time for, and so we have to make trade-offs. How we make those trade-offs, how we prioritise our time, is critical. Because the children

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do need our undivided attention, and yes, the house does need to be cleaned every now and then and each one of us needs to find some time for ourselves to rest and recuperate.

And yet, as critical as prioritisation is, we tend not to think too much about how we prioritise do

we? We simply react to the one that's screaming at us the loudest – or we do the one that we'd most like to do. And if we decide poorly like that, time after time after time, it's not too hard to see how our lives start heading in the wrong direction.

Sometimes we have to make big decisions, sure, and they can influence our lives greatly. But mostly, it's the accumulation of the little decisions that we make hundreds of times each week that shape the direction of our lives.

So, you might ask yourself: *How do I begin to start getting my prioritisation decision-making process in order? How do I start to make right decisions so that the accumulation of all my tiny decisions has me heading in the right direction – on the road towards that stunning life that Berni keeps talking about? Hmm?*

In the last couple of Chapters, we've been speaking about believing in God and setting Jesus as the corner stone of our lives. The whole point is that if we trust God with our lives, and have Christ as the cornerstonestone around which our lives are built, then we're going to be building the sort of life that, at the end, we'll be able to look back on (with all the ups

and downs that we went through) and quietly breath those words – *it was simply stunning*.

So in this Chapter, we're going to talk about *how* we make that happen on a day-to-day basis. *How* we actually implement our faith. *How* we live it out. *How* we make Christ the foundation of our lives.

Actually, Jesus told us exactly *how* ... by quoting God's Word:

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.'" This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."
(Matthew 22:34-40)

You see, the problem the lawyer had was that the Old Testament books of the law under which they lived their day-to-day lives, had some 613

commandments and prohibitions in them. Rather a lot to remember, I think you'll agree.

So the lawyer's saying: *Well, where do I start? What's the most important thing I have to do? Jesus – can you sum up the whole law in a nutshell for me?* And of course in doing so, he was trying to trip Jesus up, to see if he could find some technical weakness with Rabbi Jesus' understanding of the Law.

But instead of being befuddled as the lawyer had hoped, Jesus drops on him (and on us) some profound wisdom. Not just “theologically correct” wisdom. It was that of course, but practical, how-to-live-your-life-right wisdom.

Because right here, Jesus gives him the decision-making process for every prioritisation decision that he will ever have to make in his life and, incidentally, for every prioritisation decision that you and I will ever have to make in our lives too.

All too often we think of “love” as a noun – a thing that we receive or possess or give. And of course it is that. But “love” is also a verb – it's something that we do through what we say and how we behave.

SO JUST IMAGINE
FOR A MOMENT, WHEN
YOU'RE FACED WITH A
DECISION TO MAKE, IF
YOU APPLIED JESUS'
DECISION-MAKING
LITMUS TEST TO IT:
DOES THIS ACTION
DEMONSTRATE MY
LOVE FOR GOD WITH
ALL THAT I AM? AND
DOES IT DEMONSTRATE
MY LOVE FOR OTHERS?

So just imagine for a moment, when you're faced with a decision to make, if you applied Jesus' decision-making litmus test to it: *Does this action demonstrate my love for God with all that I am? And does it demonstrate my love for others?*

(Those two of course, are two sides of the one coin.)

Will I watch this movie? Does it honour God or doesn't it?

Will I walk into this bar for the fourth time this week and have a few drinks with my friends after work? Does it demonstrate your love for God or not? And what does it say to your wife (or husband, and/or children) waiting for you at home?

Will I send this email? Well – does what you have to say speak of your love for that difficult colleague, or not?

Will I check out Facebook while my daughter is telling me about her day at school, or will I give her my undivided attention?

Do you see how all of a sudden, the amazing words that Jesus spoke help us to make those dozens of daily, small prioritisation decisions in the right way? As we accumulate more and more right decisions, we start living a more and more stunning life.

There will always be trade-offs. A parent who spends all of their time playing with their child, and no time cleaning and tidying up the house, isn't doing that child any favours. But what we need is a guiding light to help us to build the sort of life that God has planned for us. Making prioritisation decisions – large or small – is something we do dozens of times each day.

Each prioritisation decision we make will either contribute to, or detract from, a stunning life. Will we get 100% of them correct? Of course not! But the more decisions we make in God's favour, the more that God

EACH PRIORITISATION
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has someone He can work with. The more God will bless us, as we honour Him. The more that one day, we will be able to look back on a life that was truly worth living. A life that was simply stunning.

Now if you're anything like me, there are just a few areas in your life where you're going to be struggling. We each have our Achilles heel don't we? That one thing that seems to defeat us every time. For some it's anger. For others it's gossiping. For others it's low self-esteem. For others it's lust. Or perhaps being a workaholic. It's rather a long list, and I'm sure you know what your Achilles heel is. (If you don't someone close to you will: a wife, a husband or close friend.)

In those particular areas of your life, you might find it useful to plan ahead.

Remember, good prioritisation decisions, God-honouring decisions, are going to contribute to your stunning life. Bad decisions will detract from your stunning life.

That's not to say that every God-honouring decision will immediately bear the sort of fruit that you may be looking for. Often it brings persecution. Often when you make God-honouring decisions,

people misunderstand your motives or don't appreciate your intentions. And you can be absolutely certain that the more God-honouring decisions you make, the more the devil will be on your case, trying to disrupt your life.

But in the long run, mark my words, God-honouring decisions will bring the blessing of God down on your life through the richness of the character that the Lord develops in you. A richness of character that inevitably comes through suffering:

... we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. (Romans 5:2-5)

So – if you know you have a weak spot, then let me encourage you to plan ahead. Know the situations where you so often stumble and come up with strategies, pre-planned responses, for dealing with them.

Victory comes one battle at a time. In fact, without the battle, there can be no victory. No military commander will go into battle without a well thought-out, well considered battle plan.

And nor should you or I!

It's amazing how when you pray and think it through, you can come up with a simple plan to make sure that when that decision point comes, when it's the choice say, between gossiping or not; between going out for a drink with friends or home to your family; between honouring your husband or wife or not ... you are ready with a pre-planned response that will swing things in the direction of honouring God, rather than falling to the temptation.

God develops our character one battle at a time, one decision at a time. When the crunch comes, the trick is being ready to love Him in word and in deed, rather than dishonouring Him:

... but now the Lord declares: 'Far be it from me; for those who honour me I will honour, and those who despise me shall be treated with contempt.'
(1 Samuel 2:30)

A Prayer About Priorities

You know Lord, I'd never looked at it quite like that – that each decision I make either contributes to or detracts from the stunning life that You have planned for me. But I guess it's true isn't it?

The decisions that I make that honour You and show my love for others are the right ones, and the ones that don't honour You ... are not.

Thinking about it Lord, I've made some bad decisions in my life.

[Why don't you share some of those with Him now?]

Forgive me for those Lord. And I know that there's this one area of my life [confess it to Him now] where I keep making bad decisions. Lord, I need Your help in that. I need Your wisdom and Your power to help me to start making the right decisions.

So Lord God, would You please show me through Your Word and by Your Spirit, how to make the right decisions; the ones that honour You. And Lord would You please give me the wisdom and the power to live them out, to follow through so that each day, decision by decision, choice by

choice, thought by thought, action by action, I will be living my life more and more for You.

I ask this in the name of Jesus, my Saviour and my Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER FOUR

don't let circumstances control you

One of the biggest mistakes that we can ever make in life, is to allow our circumstances - good or bad - to be the final arbiter of the life that we lead. If we allow our circumstances to dictate to us, we shall forever be like a forlorn cork, bobbing around on an unpredictable ocean.

CHAPTER FOUR

don't let circumstances control you

This is a tough one, because it doesn't matter who we are, our circumstances influence us to a greater or lesser degree.

When you lose a loved one, of course you're going to mourn that loss. That's natural. And when you get a promotion and a pay rise at work, of course you're going to feel like celebrating. When someone treats you badly, you'll be hurt. When someone treats you well, you'll be delighted.

None of us is divorced from the day-to-day realities of our lives. And sometimes those circumstances are for us; at other times they're against us. It's just the way it goes.

Rudyard Kipling was a well-known writer and one of his most famous poems is called "If".

*If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:*

*If you can dream—and not make dreams your
master;
If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:*

*If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;*

*If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'*

*If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!*

In fact two lines of that poem are inscribed above the players' entrance to centre court at Wimbledon. Those two lines are these:

*If you can meet Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two imposters just the same ...*

Interesting isn't it, that Kipling calls triumph and disaster both for what they are – imposters. Now, as far as we know, Kipling wasn't a Christian, but he was the son of two Methodist ministers, and no doubt his

parents' beliefs had a lot to do with shaping his philosophy on life.

Think about it. When you have a triumph – you win a race, or you get a promotion, or you succeed in some way – how long does it last? In Australia where I live, no sooner does a Prime Minister win an election, than the press and the electorate are chasing after him or her with a pickaxe.

It's so easy to be seduced by success – that pretty soon you start believing your own propaganda. But success is, by and large, fleeting. Even those who amass great fame and fortune often find themselves struggling in their lives; so much so that some of them end up taking their own lives. What is success really other than a narcotic? An imposter?

Jesus, when He was walking this earth, drew massive crowds to His rallies. Four or five thousand at a time. That means that whole regions and cities would all but close down, as people flocked to hear Him speak.

They were amazed at His teaching. They marvelled at His miracles. He had rock star status across Israel.

So, was He intoxicated by the adulation of the crowds and His apparent success?

When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone.

(John 2:23-25)

And just as well, because just a few chapters later in the same Gospel, we read this:

Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven' ...

Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him.

(John 6:41, 66)

And then of course we read:

So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them.

(John 19:16-18)

WE HAVE THIS
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FANTASY OF COURSE
AND WE KNOW IT, YET
WE CLING TO IT LIKE
NOTHING ELSE.

There is a fine line indeed between success and failure isn't there? Yet we seem to become so swept up by success – when the adulation of the crowd is really, just a fleeting aberration – and so overcome by failure when failure is, after all, one of the most common occurrences in life.

We have this sugary, fairy-floss expectation that our lives should always be fine, with never a cloud in the sky, let alone a howling storm. It's a complete fantasy of course and we know it, yet we cling to it like nothing else. We milk it when it's going our way, we beat ourselves up when it's going the other way.

You have to ask yourself, what's the matter with us when we let our emotions swing up and down based on a fabrication? Really!

If the truth be known, some of our greatest so-called “failures” in life can in fact be the greatest times of growth and learning and development of our character, that we will ever experience. Look at Jesus. When He was hanging there, nailed to that Cross, crying out *Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachtani – My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?* – He looked like the biggest failure in all of history; did He not?

Yet that moment of His death was in fact the greatest triumph of all time:

*... when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, **triumphing over them in it** (Colossians 2:13-15) (emphasis mine)*

If we believe that God is, that He exists, that He rewards those who seek Him; if we make Christ the foundation stone of our lives, if we start making our love for God and those around us our decision-

making litmus test – then little by little, our circumstances (whether favourable or adverse) matter to us less and less. Because God sets us free from them, to live the stunning life that He'd always planned – irrespective of our circumstances.

When I told people that I was writing a book called “*Your Road to A Stunning Life*” many immediately leapt to the (false) conclusion that this was another one of those prosperity doctrine, get-rich-quick-under-God books. But that's not what God promises. What He does promise is this:

I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world. (John 16:33)

WHAT JESUS PROMISES
US IS THAT IN THE
MIDDLE OF THE WORST
TIMES IN OUR LIVES,
WE CAN HAVE PEACE
AND COURAGE.

What Jesus promises us is that in the middle of the worst times in our lives, we can have peace and courage. What He promised, was His blessing despite and irrespective of our circumstances, good or bad. And that's the real thing, not an imposter.

So what circumstances are you going through – the good, the bad or the ugly – that are causing you to believe in *them* rather than in your God. If you're riding the crest of a wave, have you started to forget the God who blessed you and put you there?

When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock, and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good. (Deuteronomy 8:12-16)

If you're down in a dark valley what do you believe in? The awfulness of your circumstances or in the might and power and love of your God?

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for you are with me;

your rod and your staff—they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

(Psalm 23:4-6)

The overriding reality of your life is not your current set of circumstances. They come and go. Good and bad. The overriding reality of your life is your God who poured His love out for you through Jesus His Son.

Which one you choose to believe in – your circumstances or your God – is going to make a huge difference to the life that you end up living.

A Prayer of Power

Father God it's so true. When I'm going through trying times, the problems seem so much bigger than You. I guess it's because they're close and when they're so close, my faith goes all wobbly on me and I start believing that my problems are bigger than my God.

And when things are going well for me, how slow I am sometimes to give You the praise and the glory and the thanks. And how quick am I to forget about You, and to drift along on my boat of happiness, certain to crash on the rocks of despair when the wind changes; as it always does.

Father, I've decided that I want Your peace and Your joy in every part of my life. In the depths of despair, and on the mountaintops of triumph and celebration. I want somehow for my circumstances to matter less, and for You to matter more to me.

I don't quite know how I can make that happen. But what I do know is that You know. And I know that You want me to make You the greatest Reality in my life.

So, I'm asking You today to lead me in the right direction. I've learned a lot just from Your Word in this Chapter, but now I have to live it. That's going to require wisdom that I don't have.

So, bless me Lord with Your wisdom. That I may meet triumph and disaster and treat those imposters both the same. Not because I'm anything special. But because You are.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER FIVE

be delighted with who you are

So ... when you look in the mirror, do you like what you see or do you, like many people, loath what you see? Hmm? When you see yourself in a photo, or hear your voice in a recording or see yourself on a video, how do you react? What do you think ... of you?

CHAPTER FIVE

be delighted with who you are

So ... how *do* you react to seeing yourself or hearing yourself? I used to hate seeing myself in a photo. Part of that was the fact that I was carrying so much extra weight – that bit's changed over the last few years as I've slimmed down by rather a lot. But isn't it funny how we can cringe when we see what we look like, or hear how we speak.

I remember when I first started the whole radio gig – way back in 1998 I think it was – so it's been quite a while. I'd go into the recording studio, feeling quite uncertain about myself. Max my producer back then, and who is incidentally, still my producer today, is one of the most preached at people on the planet poor

fellow. He would record what I said, edit out the stumbles, and turn it into the radio programs that people listened to on air.

I distinctly remember the first time I listened to one of them myself. I was absolutely horrified. *Is that what I sound like?! You're kidding me!*

To me, my voice and how I spoke the words, well it didn't seem "normal"; the way other people speak. When I finally heard myself played back, I thought, I sounded, well ... weird. Odd! *Surely people wouldn't want to listen to this!*

HAVEN'T YOU EVER
THOUGHT ABOUT HOW
FUNNY IT IS THAT WE
CAN SEE OURSELVES IN
THE MIRROR - BLEARY
EYED EVERY MORNING,
HARDLY AT OUR BEST -
AND YET WHEN WE
SEE OURSELVES IN
A PHOTOGRAPH,
WE CRINGE?

Now of course we all sound different. We all look different – we're all distinctly different to one another. But layered over the top of that, when you think about it, is this sense of inadequacy through which we judge ourselves.

Haven't you ever thought about how funny

it is that we can see ourselves in the mirror – bleary eyed every morning, hardly at our best – and yet when we see ourselves in a photograph, we cringe? Or, the fact that we've been talking all our lives, hearing our own words as we speak them, but ... when we hear a recording of ourselves, we're horrified by what we hear?

This phenomenon that 99% of us are all too painfully familiar with, speaks of a sense of inadequacy, a sense of poor self-esteem. It's fed by the fact that we don't match up to the images of beauty and success that we see in the magazines and on the television. I, frankly, am never likely to have one of those rippling muscular bodies like the guys they plaster across the front of the men's health and fitness magazines. And for women, that sense of inadequacy can be even worse. Society tells them what they should look like – something that's pretty much impossible to achieve. (Remember, real women aren't flawless, and flawless women aren't real!!)

And in fact, it's that yawning gap between those ideal images of success and beauty on the one hand, and who we perceive ourselves to be on the other, that advertisers exploit ruthlessly to drive up sales for their

products. Next time you watch an ad on TV, watch it carefully, critically.

There's an implicit brand promise in the ad that goes a lot like this: *Buy this product or service and you can look like this, or have this, or be this, or have other people think of you like this.*

And then when that doesn't work, after spending our money, they dangle the next carrot under our noses. We do this in the name of economic prosperity.

NOW STOP AND THINK
ABOUT YOUR IMAGE
FOR ONE MOMENT.
WHEN YOU LOOK AT
YOURSELF, HOW HAPPY
ARE YOU WITH YOU?
ARE YOU FALLING
INTO THIS TRAP OF
COMPARING YOURSELF
WITH THOSE FALSE,
UNATTAINABLE IMAGES
OF SUCCESS; TRYING TO
ACHIEVE THEM, BUT
KNOWING THAT YOU
NEVER WILL?

Is it any wonder that so many people just don't like themselves; that so many people are so unhappy with who they are, and what they have, and where their life is headed?

Now stop and think about your image for one moment. When you look at yourself, how happy are you with you? Are you falling into this trap of comparing yourself with

those false, unattainable images of success; trying to achieve them, but knowing that you never will?

On a scale of zero to ten, how happy are you with yourself? How comfortable are you in your skin? Now I know that none of us is perfect and of course we need to think realistically and soberly about our flaws and weaknesses. We never stop growing and maturing and we should always be ready to make the changes that we need to make.

But that's different to having this nagging sense of inadequacy that so many people – *so* many people – live with day to day, fuelled by our flawed model of economic prosperity.

We're speaking in this book about living a stunning life. What sort of life are you going to be living if you're never happy with who you are? Well?!

The Bible – God's very Word to you and to me – tells us this about ourselves:

For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. My frame

was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed. How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! I try to count them—they are more than the sand; I come to the end—I am still with you. (Psalm 139:13-18)

In other words the psalmist who wrote that is saying to God – *I am amazed, totally gobsmacked at who I am, who You made me to be. I can't get my mind around it Lord!*

What a different view that is to the one that's reflected back from the distorted mirrors that the advertising industry puts before us.

God made you. He didn't make a mistake. He wasn't churning out sloppy work that day. The same hands that flung stars into space, the same hands that worked the timbers in the carpenters' shop in Nazareth ... the same hands that were nailed to that Cross for you – were the hands that laid down every strand of your DNA. Every gene, every chromosome

that defines who you are, is the sovereign choice of the living God.

How's that for redefining who you are? How's that for a completely different perspective?

According to God's Word – according to God Himself – you are utterly amazing. You are who God made you to be. So you have a choice here. You can either believe what the world is telling you about yourself, or you can start believing what God is telling you about yourself.

Which one do you think is the more reliable?
Which one do you think is telling you the truth?
Which one is going to set your feet on the road to living the stunning life that God planned for you?

I remember one of my lecturers at Bible College, Dr Barry Chant, talking about this to me years ago and he implored us to ditch our *self*-image and replace it with a *faith*-image. Not such bad advice when you think about it!

Because what happens when we start doing that, is that little by little we're set free from that burdensome sense of inadequacy. And what starts to come to life in

us is a quiet, godly confidence in who we are, and even more importantly I think, a contentedness in who we aren't.

YOU KNOW HOW IT
FEELS WHEN YOU
COMPARE YOURSELF
WITH SOMEONE ELSE -
YOU'RE NOT AS GOOD
LOOKING, OR AS SMART,
OR AS ARTICULATE,
OR AS WEALTHY, OR AS
WHATEVER. BUT THEN,
YOU WERE NEVER MEANT
TO BE ANYTHING LIKE
THE NEXT PERSON.
GOD MADE YOU
TO BE YOU.

You know how it feels when you compare yourself with someone else – you're not as good looking, or as smart, or as articulate, or as wealthy, or as whatever. But then, you were never meant to be anything like the next person. God made you to be you.

I used to feel so inadequate because of all the things I wasn't good at, until I started to wrap my mind around who God made me to be; until I let the Word of God – and let me tell you Psalm 139 remains one of my favourite passages of Scripture – do it's mighty work in me.

I realised just how much I'd changed in moving away from my self-image and adopting a faith-image

by believing what God has to say about me, when I started shooting television programs, and saw myself for the first time on the TV. That's a whole new experience let me tell you.

When the producer played the first program back to me, I was steeling myself for that awkward feeling of seeing *me* on the *TV*. But it didn't come. I really liked what I saw – sure a tweak here, and an improvement there. You can always do better. And that's fine.

But I realised in that moment how wonderful it was for me to accept me, just as God accepts me. For me to see myself through His eyes, rather than through this nonsensical, distorted, false view that the world reflects back at me.

To be happy and contented with who God made you to be totally transforms your life; it sets you free.

Listen to me please. You are fearfully and wonderfully made. You are God's unique creation and He loves you so much, that He's prepared to have His Son die to save you so that you can spend eternity with Him.

Wrap your heart around that, and you are on the road to a stunning life, let me tell you.

A Prayer for “Me”

Father God, it's really hard to let go of what the world says about me, because in so many areas of my life I feel like I'm not good enough; not good-looking enough; not successful enough. And I've been living with that for most of my life.

This is a really, really difficult thing for me to let go of. But let go of it I must. Because this is the truth that I confess before You today:

I am Your workmanship; fearfully and wonderfully made. Who I am is Your sovereign choice and who I am not, is also Your sovereign choice. And this choice is a gift that today I accept willingly from You.

Thank You Lord God for making me ... me, and not someone else. Thank You for my abilities and my limitations. Thank You for how I look, and how I speak, and how I move.

And thank You Lord that I am not perfect. Thank You that I have faults and flaws in my makeup that I can only

overcome through Jesus. Thank You for the forgiveness I have in Him. Thank You for the fact that by believing in Jesus, and what He did for me, I stand before You clean, pure, holy and righteous just like Jesus.

Thank You that each time I make a mistake, I am forgiven, because of Jesus.

And thank You that I have the Holy Spirit dwelling within me, with all the wisdom and power I need to live the stunning life You have prepared for me to live.

All of this ... through Jesus! Amen!

CHAPTER SIX

start living your gig

Have you ever tried to hammer a square peg into a round hole? If you have, you'll know that it simply doesn't work. Generally the hole survives okay, but the peg gets mangled in the process. So why is it, pray tell, that so many people in this world try to live life as a square peg in a round hole? Could someone please answer that for me?

CHAPTER SIX

start living your gig

When I was young (finishing high school and making my career choices) I came very, very close to making a couple of major mistakes! I was blessed to be academically inclined, so I basically had my choice of whatever university course my heart desired.

There were three on my shortlist. Medicine, Law or an Information Technology (IT) degree. Back in those days medicine was by far the favoured career. It was seen as the pinnacle of achievement and certainly my father wanted me to study medicine.

Law was right up there as well. Both of those professions appeared to pretty much guarantee a big income.

This whole IT thing on the other hand, was something new. The question was, which one to choose? As things turned out, I'd been accepted to train as an Army Officer, which included undertaking a four-year IT degree. To be honest with you, it was the excitement of a military career which, as a young man, swung me in that direction.

As I look back on that choice now – I thank God that I didn't choose medicine or law. I can't stand the sight of blood, which is not exactly the sort of prerequisite you want to have for a career as a doctor. And the law, as I discovered later, is all about detail. Masses and masses and masses of detail, and whilst I can handle detail from time to time, it's just not my first love. I would have ended up drowning in it.

I think back to that pivotal career decision that I made way back when I was seventeen and a half years old – with not a lot of life experience to draw on exactly – and I shudder at how easily I could have chosen something that I wasn't suited to.

I literally would have found myself living my life as a square peg in a round hole – and that, I imagine, would be an incredibly uncomfortable position in

which to find myself. There's a basic rule or life principle if you will, that goes something like this:

Square pegs belong in square holes, and round pegs, well ... they belong in round holes.

You don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure that one out do you now? And yet, as I said, so many people are living life as a square peg in a round hole.

A large survey conducted in the US not so long ago revealed that only 19% of workers were satisfied with their jobs. Which means that 81% weren't satisfied with their jobs. Of those, 16% were "somewhat dissatisfied", and the rest were "dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied". That's pretty much Pareto's 80/20 law alive and well. It's not a very happy statistic is it?

SQUARE PEGS BELONG
IN SQUARE HOLES, AND
ROUND PEGS, WELL ...
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ROUND HOLES.

Another global survey found that over half – 56% of people – wanted to find a new job.

Now, there can be many reasons for those terrible statistics. Pay and conditions, or poor management are

just two. But if I were a betting man – which I am not – I would put money on the table that one of the major reasons is that people are doing jobs that they're just not suited to.

You yourself know that there are some things in life that give you great satisfaction, and other things that leave you completely drained. Now that I'm getting older, I watch people who are grandparents. We have one couple who lives a few doors away on the same floor in our apartment block, and they look after a different set of their grandchildren almost every day of the week, while the parents work. They absolutely love it!

And yet other grandparents can't stand the thought of having to look after grandchildren every day, because it's just not what they enjoy doing. They brought up their own children, and now they want a break from all that. We're all different.

And so wherever there is a mismatch between the requirements of the role and the natural motivations, talents and abilities of the individual – there you have a square peg, in a round hole. And it's generally not the hole that feels the pressure. The role is what the role is. The requirements of the position don't change.

It's the individual that has to squeeze themselves into a role that they're just not suited to, who suffers.

When I was at Bible college many years ago, the Principal of the College, Dr Barry Chant, made us memorise one particular Bible verse. In fact, he used to joke – although I'm not sure it was so much a joke!! – that unless we were able to recite this one verse, we wouldn't be able to graduate from the college.

At the time, I thought it was rather an odd choice of Bible verses. Why this one from among the 31,102 verses in the Bible? Well, here it is:

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do the good works which God prepared beforehand for us to walk into. (Ephesians 2:10)

The older and hopefully wiser I've become since those days, the more I've discovered the wisdom of Barry's insistence that we memorise this particular verse. Because what it says, is that God made us; He

GOD MADE US; HE
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JESUS AND HE MADE US
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handcrafted us; we are *His* workmanship created in Christ Jesus and He made us – you and me – with a specific purpose in mind.

He in fact made us *in order to do the good works that He prepared beforehand for us to do*, – literally *to walk into*. So picture your life, this journey over hill and dale. Just as you turn round the next corner, or come over the next rise, waiting there for you is one of those *good works* that God created you to do; one of the ones that He prepared before time even began, for you to walk into, participate in and make happen.

Now, do you imagine for one moment that God made a mistake? That He made you to do things that you weren't good at doing or things that were impossible for you to do? No way!! God knew exactly what He was doing when He made you. You are handcrafted by Him, which is why you're a perfect fit to do what He prepared for you to do.

So why is it that so many people go and live a life that they were never made to live?

Well sometimes it's stubbornness, other times it's ignorance. Or perhaps you've allowed circumstances to sweep you along in life, without ever taking a stand

and saying to yourself: *Hang on a minute, what I really want to do is ... this! My real dream in life is to go and be this and do that.*

The most common question I am asked when I talk on this – which I do rather a lot these days, because, like Barry Chant, I’ve come to believe that being the me I was meant to be is absolutely critical in life – the most common question I’m asked is this: *How do I know what it is that God made me to do?*

Not an unfair question. Well, the answer is dead simple.

Each one of us has something that gets us enthused in life, something that we’re passionate about, something that we’re really good at – probably better at, than just about anyone else we know. For me, it’s producing radio and television programs, writing books and communicating the Gospel wherever and whenever I can.

I just love telling stories. I get up mostly at three or four o’clock in the morning to write and prepare them. In fact my final edit of this very chapter started around 3:15 am one morning. Why? Not because I have to, but because I love to!

I love telling stories. I love seeing people's lives transformed through those stories.

What are you passionate about? What do you absolutely love doing? What is it that you're better at, than almost any person you know? Maybe you love working with your hands, or looking after children, or organising lots of detailed things, or ... whatever it is, there's your pointer to what God made you to do.

If you don't yet understand God's plan for your life, then look to the passions that He's put in your heart.

IF YOU DON'T YET
UNDERSTAND GOD'S
PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE,
THEN LOOK TO THE
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No. It's not always going to be easy, or convenient, or fun, or comfortable. Nothing worthwhile ever is. But there, right there, is the thing that God made you to do. Start walking in that direction, and all of a sudden a whole bunch of new opportunities will open up.

I didn't know when I set out on this journey where it would head. I had no idea that I'd be in the media. Really. None whatsoever. I couldn't have dreamed how

God would make things happen. All I did was set out on the road, knowing that in my heart, I had to tell people about Jesus. God took care of the rest.

Remember the story of Abraham's faith that we looked at in Chapter 1:

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. (Hebrews 11:8) (emphasis mine)

He didn't have a clue where he was going. All he knew was the call that God had placed on his heart – crazy and irrational as it must have seemed to his friends and family at the time. And he set out on the journey and God blessed that.

That passion you feel in your heart; that gift that you have; that thing that you really enjoy doing more than anything else – that's the pointer to God's call on your life. Start walking in that direction and opportunities will start to appear.

And those opportunities, as things turn out, are the good works that God prepared beforehand for you to do. Get it?

A Prayer for Your Calling in Life

Lord God, it's an amazing revelation from Your Word that You made me to do these good works that You prepared beforehand for me to walk into. WOW! I'm blown away that You would make me to be a perfect fit with what You've called me to do.

Now Lord, You know that I enjoy [whatever it is that you really enjoy]. I just love doing that. But right now Lord, the way just doesn't seem to be open for me to do that.

I don't know what it's going to look like Lord, but I'm going to start stepping out in that direction and I know I'm going to make some mistakes. But I also know that those good works are there, ready and waiting. I know that You're going to steer me in the right direction when I head a bit off the track.

And I know that no matter how hard it will seem some days Lord, You will be right there with me. I love You and I trust You.

Guide me, dear Lord, to walk in the ways, in the steps, and into the good works that You already have prepared for me.

I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER SEVEN

prayer is everything

Have you ever felt as though you've lost your way? Somehow life's heading in a direction that doesn't make sense; it's not what you expected; the daily grind is grinding away at you. And so you start asking yourself: Why am I doing what I'm doing? What's this all about? Is this all there is?

CHAPTER SEVEN

prayer is everything

If you believe in Jesus, then you know that God is this all-powerful, all-loving God who can completely transform your life. If you don't, then humour me for a bit. Let's assume that Jesus is who He said He is, that God is this all-powerful, all-loving God who Jesus came to tell us about.

Then what follows from that is this: *if God is all-loving and all-powerful, He surely wants to make a powerful difference in our lives. And not only does He want to, but He can.*

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Yet the lives of so many Christians simply don't bear that out. There are so many people who love Jesus and want to follow Him with all that they are, for whom God doesn't seem to be making any difference at all, let alone a powerful difference.

Why is that exactly??!

In the first few months after giving my life to Christ at age thirty-six – I made a discovery! This wasn't something that I uncovered after years of study, but as a simple man with just a plain grasp of the obvious and a heart that was open to receive. It's something that rocked me to my core.

The discovery was this – *that prayer that yields powerful results is normal in God's sight*. It sounds so simple and yet, the more I dwelt on that simple truth from God, the more it rocked me and disturbed me.

Why? Because my prayer wasn't yielding powerful results. I'd been through a cycle of delighting in prayer and then dreading it. In the first few months of giving my life over to Christ, my prayer life was awesome. I couldn't wait to spend time with God.

It was such a devastating time in my personal life – so much had fallen apart – that my times in prayer with God were the highlight, in fact the only light, of my life. But as can happen in any relationship, when the day-to-day, post-courtship, post-honeymoon reality sets in, my communication with God had sunk to lows that I'd never expected. I avoided Him. I prayed out of no more than a sense of duty. I would have been embarrassed in those days to tell anyone about my “prayer life” (if you could even have called it that). I was in every sense of the word – *a pauper in prayer* – absolutely bankrupt, or so it seemed to me.

My prayer life was not what God set out in His Word as being the normal reality of the Christian life. If anything, it was the exact opposite. I felt so weak. So inadequate. So sinful. So condemned. And over and over again I read about the powerful things that happened to people as they prayed.

The word “pray” (together with its derivatives - prayed, prayer, prays, etc.) appears around 350 times throughout the Bible.

The very first appearance is in Genesis Chapter 20 which simply says this:

...he will **pray** for you and you shall live.
(Genesis 20:7)

So what happens? What is the result of this prayer?

*Then Abraham **prayed** to God; and God healed Abimelech, and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children. For the LORD had closed fast all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.*
(Genesis 20:17, 18)

What a powerful outcome for the first recorded prayer in the Bible! The second story about prayer just a few chapters later (Genesis 24:12-21), has a similarly powerful outcome. And the third story about prayer in the Bible? Let's take a look at it:

*Isaac **prayed** to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived.* (Genesis 25:21)

Now, call me crazy, call me whatever you like – but to me, there's a definite pattern emerging here; a pattern that repeats itself over and over and over again right throughout the Bible. It is quite simply this - ***prayer that yields powerful results is normal in God's sight.***

In fact, prayer that yields powerful results is the only sort of prayer that the Bible teaches us about. Sure, there are a couple of examples of ineffective prayer, but God hardly endorses those. In fact quite the opposite.

And the whole of what God has to say about prayer – from beginning to end – culminates in these words from Jesus' own lips:

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.
(John 15:7)

Let me tell you something. I am not a natural prayerer. I want to race off and do things, not sit around and talk to God. But what I've discovered over these last twenty or so years walking with Jesus, is this: *the more I pray and the less I try to do things in my own strength, the more powerful things I see happening in my life.* It's that simple.

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In fact, so passionate have I become about this –

that I wrote a book called “*Unlocking the Power of Prayer*”. Now God is not some lap dog of ours who performs tricks on command. God is not a sugar daddy who, upon request, will give us every comfort and desire that we ask for. *God make me rich* is not a prayer that gets answered all that very often.

The key to what Jesus said, is our relationship with Him. Listen to it again:

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

In other words, if we’re close to Jesus, we’ll know what to ask and how to ask. If His words abide in us, we’ll be asking things in accordance with His will. And at that point, let me tell you, the power of God starts to manifest itself in your life.

The sort of power that helps you love the unlovable, touch the untouchable and forgive the unforgivable. The sort of power that gives you patience when you don’t have any. The sort of power that helps you to hold your tongue, when all you want to do is to rip somebody’s head off. The sort of power to walk the difficult road with Jesus, carrying your

own cross, sacrificing your own life. The sort of power you need to change the things you can't change, and to suffer through the things you're called to suffer through.

That's the sort of power that changes our lives. That's the sort of power that transforms us, and restores us back into the original image of God in which we were created.

Prayer changes everything. Prayer changes the most important possession that you have – your very life. Prayer changes your heart. When you do what Jesus said – *pray for your enemy* –

(Matthew 5:44) He doesn't just change your enemy, He changes you. When you pray for God's protection at a time of danger (Psalm 91:1-16), when you pray for God's provision at a time of deprivation (Matthew 6:25-34) God changes you as well as your circumstances. That time in prayer, builds your faith, it softens your heart, it changes your perspective.

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God uses our faithful, daily prayer time to transform us from the inside out. He yearns for us to spend that quiet time with Him:

But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.
(Matthew 6:6)

He longs to bless us as we pray:

So I say to you, ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.
(Luke 11:9-13)

He's waiting to fill us with His peace through our prayer time with Him:

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

(Philippians 4:6, 7)

And He's waiting to bless your socks off through your prayer:

Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, "Oh that you would bless me and enlarge my border, and that your hand might be with me, and that you would keep me from hurt and harm!" And God granted what he asked. (1 Chronicles 4:10)

Prayer isn't some duty that we have to drag ourselves to. It turns out that the more you pray, the more you want to pray, because you experience the joy of fellowshiping with God. The more you experience the peace that comes from resting in Him and waiting expectantly on Him, the more you will see things happening in your life and around you and through you, that you never thought possible.

Listen to me, please.

Prayer ... changes ... everything.

The sooner you realise that, the sooner you start believing that, the sooner you start living that, then the sooner you'll find yourself on that road to a stunning life.

The Prayer Prayer

Father God, I've experienced exactly what Berni's been talking about here. I know what it's like to have those great times of prayer and yet I know how easy it is to drift away from the habit of prayer. From that wonderful habit of just finding a few quiet minutes to be alone with you.

Lord I confess that there has been many a time when I've allowed the distractions of this world to come between You and me – to my detriment.

I know that when I've done that, I've ignored You – You my Creator, You my Father, You my Saviour, You my Lord.

Please forgive me. Please lead me into a place where that quiet time of prayer – just You and me alone –

becomes the most important, the most anticipated part of my day.

Lord I love You. And my heart is to spend more time alone with You. Because I know that You want to speak to me and hold me and transform me.

Help me to do that. In Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER EIGHT

forgive and forget

There is not a single person on this planet who hasn't been hurt by another person, other than perhaps someone who's been a hermit all their lives. But for the rest of us, it is an absolute, slam-dunk certainty, that we are going to be hurt by other people. You can't avoid that. But what you can do, is stop it from ruining your life.

CHAPTER EIGHT

forgive and forget

So – when was the last time someone hurt you? Come on, think back. For the majority of us, we probably don't have to think back very far – just the last twenty-four hours for most people.

A harsh word here. Being left out when some friends went out for dinner. Being ignored by someone as they walk past you. Being passed over for a promotion. Being misunderstood when all you tried to do was the right thing.

It doesn't take all that much, does it, to get hurt. That doesn't mean that we're all overly sensitive – some people are of course. But those little things, they can really cut deeply, can't they?

And they're just the small things!

Then there are the big things like the unfaithfulness of a spouse, physical and emotional abuse, theft, violence. There are plenty of people I know who listen to my radio programs around the world, who have been through some of those. In fact there are more people who listen to those programs, living in poverty, (without basic housing, clean water, sanitation and safety), than there are people living in the comfortable affluence of the west.

Perhaps you've been through some major trauma in your life – most likely you have – where people have hurt you deeply. I remember a dear friend of mine, a pastor who'd been serving his church for almost 35 years, had a couple of elders turn on him and his long suffering wife, after he retired. He was totally devastated.

THE ANSWER FOR
MOST OF US IS THAT
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ACTS OF ALL.

Okay! So, back to you;
back to the people who
have hurt you in your life.
Can I ask you, how easy
do you find it to forgive
them? Is it something that
comes naturally, or do you

struggle to forgive? The answer for most of us is that forgiveness is one of the most unnatural acts of all.

Because when someone wrongs you, that innate sense of justice that you have built into you – having been created in the image of God who is, after all, the God of justice – demands that it be put right. Right?

When you are wronged, things should be made right. When someone causes you to suffer loss, then justice demands that they compensate you for that loss. That's why people sue one another. When someone steals, or commits an act of violence – justice demands that the courts punish them for their actions.

But forgiveness is the exact opposite of the punishment that flows from justice. Forgiveness is you giving up your right to hurt me, when I've first hurt you. Forgiveness is you giving up the recompense that justice

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demands that you should have. And for God, forgiveness is rather a big deal.

Jesus once said this:

Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.
(Mark 11:25)

So – us forgiving others, is a precursor to God forgiving us. Have you wondered, how is it that this God of justice, is so focussed on forgiveness? How is it that justice and forgiveness can live side by side in the one Person? Isn't there a conflict between the two?

Sure there is. Justice and forgiveness are fundamentally opposed to one another when it comes to their outcome. Imagine if you will, the murderer who is found guilty by a court and it comes to the time when the sentence is to be handed down. Imagine if the judge said "Look young man, I know that you're guilty of this terrible crime, but I have decided today to forgive you. You are free to go."

It's inconceivable isn't it? We as a community would be completely outraged if something like that

transpired in a court of the land, because we demand that justice should be done. That the person who committed the crime should be punished for their crime.

But God's call on our lives, is for us to forgive others:

be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you
(Ephesians 4:32)

The problem with unforgiveness, other than the fact that it offends God, is that it continues to hurt us. Let's say that someone hurts you and you decide not to forgive them. What happens then, is that you keep living through that hurt over and over again. You keep planning on how you can get revenge.

When we fail to forgive, the hurt keeps on hurting. It's like giving that person who hurt us, rent free space in our hearts, so they can keep causing us pain. And

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when you look at it that way, it simply doesn't make sense. Sure, our sense of justice says we should hang on to it until justice is done; until the person is punished or until we're compensated or both.

But common sense, says, *let it go*. Forgive them, without any expectation that the person will apologise, or mend their ways, or ask you for your forgiveness, or recompense you for your loss. Because when you let it go, you're free from the hurt. When you forgive and choose to forget, the pain starts to go away – slowly but surely.

You've seen this and you've probably even done this – when you fail to forgive someone and you just keep on throwing it back in their face. Is that good for you? Is that good for them? Is that good for your relationship with that person or with God?

Marlene Dietrich once said this:

Once a woman has forgiven her man, she should not reheat his sins for breakfast.

Not bad – and how true. (It also applies the other way around of course.)

And listen up, this conflict between justice and forgiveness is nothing new. God is the God of justice – absolute justice. Nothing sways Him – He is completely impartial. And yet He is also the God of love – in fact the Bible tells us that God is love (1 John 4:8, 16).

So what then, does this God of absolute justice and complete love do with the likes of you and me – when the outcomes of justice and love are completely different? After all, we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). We've all turned our backs on Him in thought, word and deed at some point in our lives and probably the last time it happened was not all that long ago.

What we really deserve is His wrath and His punishment – that would be a just outcome. And yet if at the same time He loves us, so completely, then how does He satisfy both His absolute sense of justice as well as of love when it comes to you and me?

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the

world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (John 3:16, 17)

FORGIVENESS IS THE
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US SOMETHING, BUT IT'S
ALWAYS, ALWAYS WORTH
IT IN THE END.

Forgiveness is the
supreme act of love. It
always, always costs us
something, but it's always,
always worth it in the end.
Because it sets us free
from the hurt; free to get
on with our lives.

People often ask me – *But Berni, how can I forgive someone who has hurt me so much? How do I actually do that? It's not easy!*

Absolutely it's not easy. I never said that it was. The small things, the harsh words in a family, those things are sometimes easy to forgive if we're close to Jesus. The closer we get to Him, the more we wrap our hearts around the sacrifice He made for us so that we could be forgiven, the easier it becomes to forgive the little things quickly – you can learn to do that pretty easily, on the fly, actually.

But those big things, the people who've really hurt us, those big hurts from the past, how do we forgive

those? How can we be set free of the deep hurt that comes from betrayal and abuse and violence – those things that leave such deep scars? How can we stop the hurts of yesterday from ruining our today and robbing us of our tomorrows?

Well, I only know one way. It's what Jesus taught us to do, and as counterintuitive as it feels at the time, it's the only thing that I have found that works:

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. (Matthew 5:43-44)

When you pray for your enemies, God changes your heart. His Spirit and His Word end up working in you to soften you, to make you more like Him and to set you free from the anguish that you feel. The stuff Jesus teaches us to do – as much as it often flies in the face of conventional wisdom – really works.

And that's the road to a stunning life, living our lives based on His wisdom, not the world's wisdom. You just can't live that stunning life God has planned for you, when you have the bitterness of unforgiveness reigning in your heart.

Your Forgiveness List

Now at this point, **I want to encourage you not to skip by to the next Chapter but to pause, and picture the faces of the people who have most hurt you in your life.** I know that this is going to be difficult, and probably rather painful.

You'll know immediately who they are. You can picture their faces right now, can't you?

Now, before God, ask yourself – have I truly forgiven them? Have I given up my desire to see them punished and me compensated for what they did to me?

Well – have you? Only you can answer that, and then, perhaps, only after some deep soul searching and prayer. Because sometimes we kid ourselves that we're over it.

Yeah, sure, I've forgiven them!

That's easy to say, but it's much harder to do.

How do you know if you've forgiven someone who's hurt you deeply? Well, actually, it's not all that hard. When you think about them, do you continue to think

about how you could hurt them back, or what they owe you in recompense for what they did to you?

If you're still thinking about the outcomes of justice, and your right to see them punished and you compensated, then you haven't forgiven them yet, plain and simple.

So, here's what I'm suggesting that you should do. Put together a list of less than half a dozen people, who have hurt you and who perhaps you've been struggling to forgive. And bring one or two of them before the Lord each and every day over the next month in prayer.

Ask the Lord to bless them. Pray that the Lord will heal their relationships, and give them wisdom and pour His love and His mercy out over them.

And I know that if you commit to doing that, over the next month and indeed well into the future, the Lord will bring such an incredible peace to your life and a healing and sense of forgiveness, that you never thought was possible.

Don't expect it to be easy. It isn't. And don't expect it to be instant. It's not that either.

But as you obey Jesus and pray for those who have persecuted and hurt you, the peace of God that passes all understanding will guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus.

Guaranteed. It's just how God works.

CHAPTER NINE

take God at His Word

Can I ask you a question? Do you believe that God means what He says? Yes or no? Because if you do, then it turns out He has some pretty outrageous things to say to you. Things that are actually, quite difficult to believe.

CHAPTER NINE

take God at His Word

I'd like to share a story with you today. It's something that really opened my eyes to the power of God's Word and how easy it is for us to dismiss that power; the very same power that God means to give to you and me.

There I was, I'd just become a member of a new church and after a few months, my wife Jacqui and I joined one of the small groups in the church. It was a bunch of people around our age who, each week on a Wednesday evening, would meet together. So, we'd head over to the leader's place – about eight or ten of us in all – and we'd have a time of fellowship, a time

studying God's Word, and a time talking about what we'd learned.

Great! It was a good way to get connected with people, and learn a bit more about what God had to say to us.

It's week two or perhaps three of attending the small group and we're studying Philippians Chapter 4. In particular this verse:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:4-7)

So one of our group read the passage out loud and then a discussion ensued about worry. After all, we all have some things in our lives that we could worry over, and what God is saying here, through the Apostle Paul, is that we should never worry about anything. Or so it seemed to me.

The discussion went back and forth, to and fro. People shared some of the worries in their lives. All understandable. All pretty reasonable. There were different views about what the passage was saying to us that day ... and then, in summing up the discussion as we came to the end of it, the home group leader said something like this:

Well, that was a good discussion – thanks everyone for sharing. But I guess we all have worries in our lives and we just need to learn to live with them.

He was about to move on – and at this point, I couldn't help myself. I'm not one who can let something like that go. So ... out of my mouth came a rather loud, a rather emphatic and insistent: "NO!! NO!!!"

Well at that point, I'm pretty sure that Jacqui was hoping that the floor would open up and swallow us up. There was dead silence in this couple's living room where we sat in a circle facing one another ... and everyone as I recall was staring at me, waiting, I guess, for an explanation for my outburst.

So this is what I said:

No! That's not the point at all!!

What this passage says to us is simply this: we're not meant to worry about anything! No-thing!! And in fact, if we take the time that we would have spent worrying and instead we spend it praying, with thankfulness in our hearts instead of grumbling and complaining – then what God is promising us here (if we actually do that) is that the worry in our hearts that gets us down so much will be replaced with a peace that is completely beyond our understanding, as God guards our hearts and minds in Christ. Do you believe that's true for you or not? Do you believe that that is going to work if you do it or not?

I went on to explain that the thing that made this passage even more poignant and powerful, is the fact that while he was writing it, the Apostle Paul was sitting on death row, not knowing whether he would live or die, chained to a Roman guard.

Put it in that context, and God is really speaking to us, is He not? He is speaking about the power of prayer and the impact that He can have in our lives, amidst the most terrifying of circumstances, if only we would swap our time of worry, for time in prayer.

Well, that threw the cat amongst the pigeons, I can tell you. There was quite some discomfort in the room. I wasn't being rude or belligerent about it, but those questions are questions that these people found terribly confronting. And so they should – because they are confronting.

The question is really: *Do you take God at His Word or not?*

Here were these Bible-believing, Jesus-loving, faithful, kind, gentle Christian folk ... reading God's Word as best they could, trying to discern what God was saying to them on that day, and yet they couldn't accept this powerful promise and truth into their hearts.

They weren't prepared to take God at His Word. They weren't even prepared to give it a go, expecting it to work. Perhaps that's a little harsh. Perhaps it was more that no one had ever taught them to take God at His Word. Perhaps no

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one had ever taught them even to expect God to make a powerful difference in their lives.

And sadly this is not a unique situation. The Kingdom of God is full of people who don't take God at His Word, because they're not expecting God to do mighty things in their lives.

WHAT I AM TALKING ABOUT IS TAKING THE POWERFUL, OFTEN COUNTER-INTUITIVE THINGS THAT GOD SAYS TO US IN HIS WORD AND BELIEVING THEM WITH OUR LIVES. AND BY THAT I MEAN, ACTING ON THEM. STEPPING OUT, PREPARED TO FALL FLAT ON OUR FACE IF GOD ISN'T TRUE TO HIS WORD, BUT STEPPING OUT ANYWAY, EXPECTING HIM TO HONOUR WHAT HE SAYS.

Now of course, it's easy to take a Scripture out of context and make a doctrine out of it. That's why there are so many people preaching the God-will-make-you-rich-and-comfortable Gospel. That's not, I hope you realise, what I am talking about, because it's a distortion of the truth.

But what I am talking about is taking the powerful, often counter-intuitive things that God says to us in His Word and believing them with

our lives. And by that I mean, acting on them. Stepping out, prepared to fall flat on our face if God isn't true to His Word, but stepping out anyway, expecting Him to honour what He says.

In real, practical areas of need and of living out your faith. Have you ever worried about your finances? Listen to what Jesus said on that front:

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ... For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matthew 6:25-33)

Living out your faith means stepping out on the basis that God means what He says, that He'll do what He says, and that He'll show up when He says. Living out your faith means being prepared to abandon the so-called wisdom of this world, and trust instead in God's wisdom and God's truth and God's promises even when, in fact let me say especially when

– there is no concrete evidence to support making that decision ... other than the Word of God itself.

So many Christians want to live a safe and cautious life. But that's never the life that Jesus called us to live. He called us to live a dangerous life; a risky life; a life where we take Him at His Word as being the God who is faithful beyond measure and beyond anything that we can possibly comprehend.

I've met so many Christians over the years who have said the same thing to me: *Berni you preached about the power of God and the faithfulness of God and the amazing things that God does. But ... well ... I've never experienced those things in my life.*

Well of course you won't if you're sitting back in your comfort zone waiting for God to bless you. Jesus called us to take up our cross and follow Him on that difficult, dangerous, lonely road. That means stepping out in faith. That means being prepared not to have enough money to support yourself to do what He's called you to do, unless God is faithful and true to His Word.

That means being vulnerable to the outrageous behaviour of the people whom God has called you to help. That means heading out on that journey like Abraham, knowing nothing of where you're headed and knowing that you will be completely lost unless God guides you in the right direction.

The only time we really experience the faithfulness of God in a powerful way, is when we're between a rock and a hard place, and instead of playing things safe, we decide to take God at his Word. We decide to step out and experience for His incredible faithfulness.

THE ONLY TIME WE REALLY EXPERIENCE THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD IN A POWERFUL WAY, IS WHEN WE'RE BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE, AND INSTEAD OF PLAYING THINGS SAFE, WE DECIDE TO TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD.

Let me come back to where I started on this. God is the God of the most amazing love. And God is the God of the most amazing power. And like any loving father, He wants to use all that He has to make a powerful difference in our lives.

But the difference between what He has for you, and what the world has for you, is that He knows how

He made you, what your strengths and weaknesses are and what's best for you. He knows that it's only in a relationship with Him, only in His loving embrace, that you can find yourself and all that He has for you. He knows what He made you to do – what you're capable of and what you're not capable of – even better than you do. Much, much better than you do.

So following Jesus, taking Him at His Word when you're out there doing His business is sometimes, in fact often times, going to involve trials, temptations and wilderness experiences. In fact, it's often going to mean great temptations, great trials and very long wilderness experiences. But when you and I trust ourselves into His loving hands, then it's in that place that we experience His great faithfulness.

It was when Jeremiah was going through a terrible trial, when all around him was destroyed, when all hope in God seemed to have been lost after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Babylonians, that he wrote these words:

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The Lord is my

portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in him”.
(Lamentations 3:22-24)

It’s only when we’re out there, taking God at His Word, believing that God is who He says He is and that He will do what He says He will do in His Word, that we can discover first-hand the truth of those Words.

So – when you read your Bible, as you’re travelling through your wildernesses, here’s the question: *Will you take God at His Word ... or not?*

A Prayer of Faithfulness

Lord God, thank You that You are faithful when I am not. Thank You that You are faithful in a way that no man or woman on this earth can ever be.

The problem I have is that learning to take You at Your Word, learning to trust You with all that is dear to me, with my finances and my health and my career and my family and indeed my very life – well, that’s just not all that easy. I’m sure You know.

And yet Lord God, You are faithful beyond measure; beyond comprehension. It’s just not possible for You to go

back on Your Word, because there is no shadow of turning with thee.

So forgive me Lord for my lack of faith in You at times, and help me to have the courage to step out – despite my fears – to do Your bidding and to follow Your calling.

My heart, my passion is to bring glory to Your name. And Lord, if I, like John the Baptist, must decrease in order that You may increase, then so be it.

Thank You Lord, for calling me to serve You. Thank You that it's not going to be easy. And thank You for leading me in the right direction and being there whenever I need You.

Give me courage, give me faith, give me a willing heart to serve You and sacrifice whatever it takes, and give me the wisdom, the love and the joy to bring glory to You.

In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

CHAPTER TEN

don't expect the world

What exactly are you expecting out of life? What are your hopes and dreams? And when you get to the end of your life, will you have realised them ... or not?

CHAPTER TEN

don't expect the world

I don't know about you, but I'm one of these people who loves to live life to the full. I want each and every day to be something special – and most mornings when I wake up, I have this tingling sense of the opportunity that today will certainly bring.

That's not true every morning of course. Some mornings I'm tired, especially when I've been travelling, and speaking late in the evening and then I have to turn up the next morning and do it all again. Or when my body is fatigued through jetlag. Sure – some mornings it's hard to face the next day.

But by and large, to me, each new day is a new opportunity. And that's exactly what the Bible teaches us:

This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. (Psalm 118:24)

That doesn't mean that everything is always going swimmingly well in our lives. It just means that whatever our circumstances, there's something to look forward to because today – this very day – *is the day that the Lord has made* and He has a plan for your life today.

I can say that, in fact, I know that, because again, that's what the Bible tells us and the Bible is, after all – God's very Word, His living Word to you and to me. And as we saw in the last Chapter, if you want to live a stunning life then you need to take God at His Word. The Bible is God speaking directly and unequivocally to you and me today.

And this is what God says about your day today:

In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed. How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!

How vast is the sum of them. (Psalm 139:16, 17)

So, the Lord your God knows what your today holds. And He knows what each one of your tomorrows holds as well, because He planned each one of them an eternity ago. And it's a good plan. A plan made by this God who loves you beyond measure.

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. (Jeremiah 29:11, 12)

But the problem is that all too often God's plans and our expectations don't match up. And it's in that place that you and I are in for a bumpy ride.

So if I might ask you – what are your expectations of today and tomorrow?

What are you hoping that they hold? What do you want them to bring to your life?

BUT THE PROBLEM IS THAT ALL TOO OFTEN GOD'S PLANS AND OUR EXPECTATIONS DON'T MATCH UP. AND IT'S IN THAT PLACE THAT YOU AND I ARE IN FOR A BUMPY RIDE.

Well, often our expectations revolve around what we think is going to be good for us. In fact “often” is something of an understatement. We always expect things to be fantastic ... for *me*, right?

Our expectations generally revolve around success. Success in relationships, success at work, success in our finances and in our health and in pretty much every other sphere of our lives. *We want to be healthy, wealthy and wise.* We'd like everybody to love us and always agree with us. We'd like lots of money in the bank so that we don't have any financial pressures. We want our marriages and families to be perfect. And, oh, by the way, a nice, sunny, warm day would be just perfect to top it all off Lord. Yes, that's what I'd like today to be. Also tomorrow, and the next day and pretty much the rest of my life.

And Lord I'd like to live to a ripe old age too, if you don't mind. Forever would be good! Nice and comfortable and safe and happy and content without any stresses or strains or arguments or ill health to ruin my day. You got that?

That's pretty much it isn't it? That's what we, by and large, expect out of life.

In fact our hopes and expectations revolve around the things of this world. Quite literally, we're expecting the world of God. But have a listen to what Jesus says about you and me, in His final prayer in the Garden of

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Gethsemane, just before He goes off and gets Himself crucified for ... you and for me:

And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one ... I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. (John 17:11, 15-17)

So according to Jesus, we don't belong to the world and the world doesn't belong to us. His prayer to His Father for you and me is that God would protect us

and keep us safe in the truth. Protect us from what? Protect us from the world, because when we believe in Jesus, believe you me, the world isn't going to like that. It'll try to seduce us, discredit us, and stomp on us – very ably aided and abetted by Satan and his army of demons.

Is that what you're expecting, today, tomorrow, the next day and for the rest of your life? Because that's exactly what Jesus promises us will happen:

I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world. (John 16:33)

What we should be expecting, what we should be hoping for is that the Father will answer Jesus' prayer for us in our lives. What we should be hoping for is that the victory that Jesus won for us on that Cross and through the empty Tomb, will bring great courage into our hearts so that we can live each day in victory for Him, rather than for ourselves. And what we should be hoping for and looking forward to and expecting, is the prize that comes at the end of all of this:

For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me; and I do not know which I prefer. I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you.

(Philippians 1:22, 23)

Are you hoping for the world, or are you hoping in Christ? Are you expecting the world of God – and all the baubles and trinkets that it offers but will one day perish – or are you hoping in the certainty of life everlasting with Jesus? Forever and ever and ever Amen?

God's plans are God's plans. He's not going to change them for you and me.

ARE YOU HOPING FOR THE WORLD, OR ARE YOU HOPING IN CHRIST? ARE YOU EXPECTING THE WORLD OF GOD - AND ALL THE BAUBLES AND TRINKETS THAT IT OFFERS BUT WILL ONE DAY PERISH - OR ARE YOU HOPING IN THE CERTAINTY OF LIFE EVERLASTING WITH JESUS? FOREVER AND EVER AND EVER AMEN?

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.
(Isaiah 55:8, 9)

My hunch is that litigating our thoughts against His, our plans against His, our ways against His is not going to get us anything much more than a bloodied nose as we beat our heads against a brick wall.

God is God and He calls the shots. It doesn't matter how much we want *this*, if He wants *that*, because *that* will always trump *this*. Don't like it? Bad luck. Get used to it because that's the way it is.

So we can either hope for the things of this world and struggle for the rest of our lives against God's will, or we can come to our senses and set all our hope in Him and live out His plans.

The question is – which one will it be? Hmm?

What is it that makes us expect life to give us this fairy-floss dream that we know is completely and utterly unrealistic, and then we get all disappointed

when it doesn't work out that way (which it never ever was going to, to start with right)?

God's promise is not that He's going to take the pain and the suffering away. In fact, when you listen to Jesus, it's quite the opposite.

I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world! (John 16:33)

His promise is that in the midst of the pain and the suffering and the loss and

the tears, we will know His unspeakable joy; His peace which passes all understanding; the certain, rock-solid hope of an eternity with Him.

His promise is that with our eyes firmly set on the Author and Perfector of our faith, we will be transformed from glory to glory into His image – the

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power of sin being washed away and the freedom that only comes in Christ, will be an abundant reality in our lives.

Is that a stunning life or what?

But we can't grab a hold of that stunning life, we can't live out that stunning life when we're always chasing after the trinkets that the world dangles under our noses.

Perception is reality, and for many a Christ-follower, their wrong expectations rob them of the absolutely stunning life that God wants them to live. "Stunning" on the one hand and "sacrifice" and "suffering" on the other, don't seem to go together, do they?

They seem to be diametrically opposed, until you gaze upon the Cross of Christ – the most stunning life and sacrifice of all time. That's the life that He has for you. A stunning life!

So ... will you take up your Cross and follow Him? Will you?

A Final Prayer

Father God, the truth of Your Word is just amazing. You have this way of turning things upside down. So often, I'm lulled into this false sense of security as I seek after the comforts and the pleasures of this world, only to discover how empty and hollow they are without You.

So often, I wonder why Your plans don't fit in with my plans, as I look for comfort and convenience.

And then dear Lord, You bring me back to the Cross of Christ to remind me what it's all about. And in my heart of hearts I hear Your voice, calling me to take up my cross and follow You.

And in my heart of hearts I know that this is the only place where I will find the contentment and the joy that my heart yearns for.

So today, Lord, I want to tell You again how much I love You. Today Lord I turn my life away from my sin and back to You. And I take up my cross to follow You.

Lead me on Lord. Take me where you will. Use me however You will, so that glory will be ascribed to Your name, through my life.

*I know I can't do it on my own. So Holy Spirit, I give
You full sway in my heart to make me holy, as the Lord my
God is Holy. Do this for me I pray. In Jesus' name. Amen*

ON A PERSONAL NOTE...

Just before we part ways, there's something I would like you to know. The things that I have written in this small book, don't come from the theory lessons that my lecturers at Bible college gave me.

To be sure, those great men and women of God helped lay the foundations of my faith. But the thoughts and insights that I have shared with you come from a transformed life.

I first encountered Jesus on the 8th floor balcony of a hotel room, on the morning that I almost took my own life. Life doesn't get any lower than that.

That was in February of 1995. A good many years ago now. At that moment, when I was torn between ending it, and coming back inside and praying, I could never have imagined how great the love of God really is; how incredibly faithful and patient He is; and the plan – the utterly amazing plan – that He had for my life.

A plan that He'd dreamed up before any of my days as yet existed.

I'm sharing this reality with you for a number of reasons.

Firstly, I don't want you for a single second, to imagine that because I'm the guy writing this book, that somehow I have a free pass to an easy life. That's simply not the case. The Lord took me from rock bottom to a place where I simply can't keep still and not tell people about Jesus.

Secondly, I want you to know that wherever you're at – no matter how low things may be at the moment, no matter how long your challenges and difficulties

have been going on – God is not done with you yet. In fact God isn't done with you in this life, until you exit this life. He has plans for you that would astound you if you knew them all.

Of course, the plan He has for your life is entirely different to the one He has for mine. Because you're a wonderfully unique individual, handcrafted by God, to do the good works that He prepared beforehand for *you* to do.

And finally, I share the reality of my life with you, simply to give all glory to God. None of what I am today, or what I'm called to do, has happened because of me. I wasn't dragged back in off that 8th floor balcony because I was such a great guy.

I wasn't, and although the Lord has done a mighty work in me, I'm still not such a great guy. What I am is a sinner, saved by grace, and transformed through the power, the mercy and the Spirit of God.

In Christ, all things are possible. If God loves you enough to send His Son to die for you, then believe

you me when I tell you – He has a stunning life
planned for you.

May you be blessed as you receive His Word.

Your brother in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Berni". The letter "B" is large and loops around the start of the name. The "i" has a small dot above it. There is a short horizontal line under the "i".

Berni Dymet

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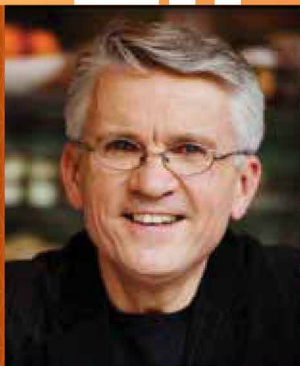
God loves you in a way that words simply can't describe. His love is the tender-hearted love of a Father. His love is the sort of love that travels with you and aches with you through every hurt, disappointment and tragedy. His love is the sort of love that celebrates with you through every joy, victory and achievement.

A God who loves you like that, surely is a God who wants you to live a stunning life, wouldn't you agree?

Not always a comfortable life; or a convenient life; or a "successful" life. No - He loves you much more than that.

That's why He wants you to live a stunning life! And how to live that life, is what this book is all about.

YOUR ROAD TO A STUNNING LIFE



Berni Dymet is passionate about seeing peoples lives transformed as he shares the Word of God right into the realities of everyday life. Your life. As the ceo + Bible teacher of the global media ministry Christianityworks, the radio and television programs that he produces are heard and seen by tens of millions of people each week, in over 160 countries around the world.

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