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in Significance

KENT R. HUNTER

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to our faithful donors and ministry partners, whose lives for Jesus were anything but ordinary – may their legacy of generosity and significance continue to multiply and transform lives for eternity.

Wally and Dolores

Bud

Tom

Dan

Jack and Laurene

John

Ken

Lynne

Roger

John and Edna

And to all those who so faithfully support our mission

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Introduction

Will it matter that I was? Do you wonder if your life really makes a difference?

These are questions you will likely ask at some time before you die. They are questions about significance.

Perhaps you have buried a parent or grandparent. Maybe you are reflecting about their aging lives. Perhaps you have achieved some material goals. You might be a young adult—looking for adventure. Ever find yourself looking at your world, asking, “Is this all there is?”

As I sat in an interview at a church in the suburb of St. Paul, Minnesota, I looked across the table at a well-dressed, healthy, and vibrant man in his early forties. John was an orthopedic surgeon. He told me about his children and his wife. He shared his good fortune to have a great house, cars, financial resources—what many would call “the good life.” Yet, John was restless. He was looking for adventure, wondering, now that he’d achieved many of his goals, what horizons were left to explore?

In their book *Repacking Your Bags*, Richard Leider and David Shapiro listed four deadly fears. They can sap the life out of us: 1) the fear of having lived a meaningless life, 2) the fear of being alone, 3) the fear of being lost, and 4) the fear of death.¹ Surprised? The fear of death isn’t at the top of the list. What could be scarier? *The number one fear is having a meaningless life.* Do you ever experience that concern? Welcome to this adventure, *Life Beyond Ordinary: Invest Yourself in Significance*.

Perhaps you're like many others—looking to fill the significance void. It is a cavity within. It can't be *filled* with toys, fame, or fortune. It can only be *satisfied* with value that goes beyond the trappings of success. This cavity is filled by the awesome power of significance.

Significance is defined as “having or expressing meaning.” Significance stands for what is important and momentous. Here is one of the definitions of “significant”: “of or pertaining to an observed departure from a hypothesis too large to be reasonably attributed to chance.” Significance is both important and a sure thing! It reflects how you see your value. Deep down, you want to make a contribution. It's a demonstration of your worth. *You are valuable!*

In modern culture, self-worth is often defined in terms of financial success or popularity. Joe Stowell said, “We are built for significance. Our problem is not that we search for it, but that we search for it in all the wrong places.”² You may not be a wealthy professional. No matter who you are, you can suffer from the significance void. Ask yourself: “How can I matter in the marvelous scheme of my Creator's plan?”

When I was a high school student, I wanted to letter in football. I wanted one of those beautiful Northville (Michigan) High School letter jackets. Yet, by the time I earned the letter and could get the jacket, some of the pizzazz and prestige was somehow behind me. The journey seemed more important than the destination.

Dawn is a stay-at-home parent. With three children she's got her hands full. However, as the kids got into school, she found an itch that couldn't be scratched—a hunger she couldn't satisfy. Being a mom and a good wife was plenty of reason for significance. Yet, there was still a desire, a passion, growing within Dawn. She wanted to make a difference on a wider scale.

Larry is a retired factory worker. For years he dreamed of the day when he'd be able to retire and just have fun. But as the day drew closer, he realized that his soul did not really long for pleasure. Larry began to structure his life as a full-time volunteer. In the book *ReFirement*, James Gambone refers to psychiatrist Carl G. Jung. "...Jung also wrote about the role of religion, spirituality, and meaning.... 'What is my life all about?' The way we go about answering the 'meaning' question can result in a tremendous new source of personal energy and spirit."³

According to researcher George Barna, "One of the most confounding and bothersome stresses we face relates to the purpose of our lives. Less than 1 out of every 20 people can identify what they believe is God's unique vision for their life. Half of us say that we are still trying to figure out the ultimate meaning of our lives. Two-thirds say that it is to enjoy life as much as possible, yet there seems to be a subconscious sense that there has to be more to life than mere pleasure seeking."⁴

Are you on a quest for fulfillment? Then you may have wondered about what will happen 100 years from now. If you were to fast-forward a full century, what will remain of your accomplishments during the brief life you've lived? To think about it another way, rewind a century: Do you remember the name of your great-grandmother? What about her mother? What was her name? What did they do? What were their accomplishments? What did they accomplish that is still impactful today? If you're like most people, you know very little about your great-grandparents. In the landscape of history, they didn't live all that long ago!

Built within you is the quest for significance. It has eternal dimensions—beyond your death. It has a spiritual side. In *Whistle While You Work*, Leider and Shapiro write, "Each and every one of us is called...there is no calling without a Caller. Calling is an inherently spiritual concept that challenges us to

see our work in relation to our deepest beliefs.... And yet, calling is not revealed to us automatically at birth. Heeding our calling requires an effort on our part.”⁵ Your journey through this book may be your first step toward the most important discovery of your life!

There is a popular story in management circles about the man who was climbing the ladder of success. He was a good climber. Every step, every rung of the ladder, was accomplished precisely.

The man worked and toiled much of his life to make it to the top of the ladder. Then he discovered the ladder was leaning against the wrong wall. There is a difference between efficiency and effectiveness. Being efficient is doing things right. Being effective is doing the right things. My friend Rick Warren says that being efficient is like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. All the chairs are in the right place, in a straight row. But the ship is sinking!

The quest for significance is tied to effectiveness: doing the right things. The quest for eternal significance is doing the right things right, with an impact that will outlive you.

This small book deals with the secret of eternal fulfillment. It is a concept known by millions of people and practiced for centuries. However, it is undiscovered by many others—perhaps billions. The principle is simple, but profound. It is elementary, but life-changing. The secret of significance requires a leap of faith—a trust that transcends what you can accomplish on your own. It is the key that opens the door to significance beyond your life. It is this truth: *The greatest use of life is to spend it on something that will outlast it.*⁶

The book you’re reading is dangerous. If you follow the ancient principles reflected in these writings, your life could be reordered significantly. What you thought was most valuable

may turn out to mean very little. Following these principles, you can transcend the mundane. You will experience life beyond the ordinary. While some books are written with the hope that those who read it will be changed for life, this one is not designed simply to touch your life, but to make a difference for generations. It is intended to help you invest yourself in eternal significance. Read on and begin the significance journey. You may never be the same!

CHAPTER 1

Discovering the Significance Hole

*“If we did all things we are capable of doing, we
would literally astound ourselves.”*

—Thomas Edison

When I was in high school, the pressure was on. Everybody was talking about the future. But all the talk boiled down to one preferable scenario: go to college. Why? The obvious answer was to get a good job. Why? In short, to make a lot of money. Why? No one said, but the implication was that if you had a good education, you could land a good job. If you landed a good job, you would make more money. If you made a lot of money, you would be happy. The whole motivation for education, for work, and for life itself was happiness. Happiness equaled fulfillment.

The problem with that brand of thinking is that many today are discovering happiness is not what they thought it was. Steve Nelson is one of them. As a commodities trader, Steve put together multimillion dollar deals that spanned the globe. For twenty years he practically lived on airplanes. He was outside the country forty-eight out of fifty-two weeks. However, on the way toward a lifestyle of success, he found he wanted more out of life than money. He wanted to make a difference. “All I was doing with my life was making money, either for myself or for

the company.”¹ Steve decided he wanted to combine his ability to make things happen with a life focused on something more meaningful than creating wealth. He became the business manager and director of social ministries for First Lutheran Church in Longmont, Colorado. He describes his new life by saying, “I’m doing the same thing I’ve always done—looking for potential, sharing a vision of what can be done, getting people together who can do it, trying to find ways that everyone can benefit. Only none of it used to make a real difference—just money. Now it feels like everything I do makes a difference.”²

Are you looking for happiness in all the wrong places? Some search for happiness in the context of fame and recognition. But what about the movie star who commits suicide or the dissatisfied politician who has an affair?

Are you looking for happiness in all the wrong places?

Some look for happiness in fortune. Yet, there are billionaires who are miserable. I talked with a man in Georgia who, by every definition of the word, is a success. He gave a million dollars to each of his children. When we talked, I could see the pain on his face as he described how his son, age 42, couldn’t handle the money. This son, who had received what some might consider as a ticket to happiness, was serving time in jail for driving under the influence of alcohol.

Others look for fulfillment in a position. They strive to become president of the company or owner of a business. I visited a man like this recently and saw a bottle of Maalox on his desk. He had achieved the position he sought, but among the prices he’d paid, he was battling a serious ulcer. Was he fulfilled? Not at all!

Happiness is not necessarily connected with fame, fortune, or position. In fact, two of the most influential and respected

people in history were not successful themselves in these areas: Princess Diana and Mother Teresa. Princess Diana came by her fame through her marriage and Mother Teresa through service. The admiration many had for both these women was for their compassion toward the less fortunate. They became two of the most respected people in the world—not because of fame, fortune, or position—but because of their service. There are many who have experienced significance in spite of their celebrity status, not because of it.

Dave Dravecky was a pitcher for the San Diego Padres who played in the 1984 World Series. He was traded to the San Francisco Giants in 1987. In 1988, doctors discovered cancer in his pitching arm. Part of the muscle was removed, and the doctors said he would never pitch again. However, Dave beat the odds and the following August took the mound once again and earned a 4-3 victory. But five days later, Dave's arm broke while he threw a pitch in Montreal. The cancer was back, and two months later, his arm was amputated. Dave quickly discovered he needed to recalibrate who he was. In the past, his pitching arm had defined him. After his amputation, he had to look elsewhere for identity and value. In the book *The Worth of a Man*, Dave told of his search for answers. He discovered a new definition of worth not based on worldly achievements or success.³

How Are You Wired?

While humanity has advanced to biologically cloning stem cells, many have yet to find a way to fill the *significance hole*. The *significance hole* in a person's life is where true happiness, honest joy, and real fulfillment reside. It is built into the soul of every person. You are created that way, and you will remain unfulfilled until that hole in your soul finds significance. It is how you're wired.

Every human being is hungry for something. Most are not exactly sure what it is, but it's a hunger that won't go away. And it won't go away until the significance hole is filled. This might be a good time for you to take some time for inner reflection. In their book *Repacking Your Bags*, Leider and Shapiro write, "...we must learn to count on an inner sense of direction. *We must unpack and repack our bags*. Unpacking simply means taking a long, hard look at what we're carrying and why. Seeing if our possessions, responsibilities, and relationships are still helping us to move forward, or if they're dragging us down. Repacking, then, is the ongoing activity of reevaluation and reinvention. Rearranging our priorities. Reframing our vision of the good life. And recovering a new sense of being alive."⁴ When should you start this inner reflection? Right now! This little book will direct you.

Perhaps your life is busy—cluttered with thousands of details that get in the way. It's a challenge to take the time to step back and look at your life from a big picture perspective. It's hard to see the forest when your daily life has so many trees. Perhaps you have too much clutter. If you do *nothing else*, do this: Discover your destiny of significance. Watch less TV, skip a party, drop the ball on some details. You owe it to yourself: Take the time to focus on that hole in your soul.

Life—real life—and living—really living—are related to a sense of purpose and fulfillment that go beyond the tangible rewards many of us work so hard to achieve. The significance hole is filled by joy that is on a higher level. It's fulfillment that does not—and cannot—come from the typical activities of everyday life. It's on a whole higher plane. You have likely had glimpses of fulfillment for the significance hole as you traveled along life's way. Stop and think about that for a moment.

Many have yet to find
a way to fill the
significance hole.

What have you done in your life where you stand back and say, “That had *lasting* satisfaction”? As you go through life, you begin to differentiate between efforts the world tells you are fulfilling and those that are real. You get hints along the way that the big “dream of success” is really a big lie. Fulfillment is something beyond, something more extraordinary. Fulfillment leads to significance.

The big “dream of success” is really a big lie.

There is nothing wrong with success. If you’re someone who has worked hard and experienced beneficial results, there is no need for apology or guilt. Enjoy the goodness of those tangible results that make life more comfortable! However, recognize this: There is more—and you know it! Part of it has to do with your worldview. As Darrow Miller puts it, “Material wealth, ‘stuff,’ despite what our culture intimates, is actually one of the lowest forms of wealth. He who dies with the most toys does *not* win.”⁵

When you look for happiness in all the wrong places, you fail to feed your fulfillment appetite. The late Katherine Graham, former CEO of *The Washington Post*, approached the precipice of fulfillment when she said, “To love what you do and feel that it matters—how could anything be more fun?”⁶ So what do *you* want: survival, success, or significance? *Significance gives birth to life beyond ordinary.*

Your appetite for fulfillment reflects your desire to move from success to significance. It’s the longing that every person has: to move from making money to making a difference. It is that passion to transcend from a job to a mission. It’s the dream to leap from routine life to ultimate adventure. It is the human investment to go beyond producing results that won’t be identified a hundred years from now—and to live a life that makes an impact of significant dimensions. Producing results that go beyond your grave has an eternal quality.

It is exciting that eternal significance is not only possible—it is what you were created to do. It's your destiny as a human being to produce fruit beyond your lifetime. This is your Creator's design: that you will produce fruit that will not rot. It is God's plan that you experience a filling of your significance hole to overflowing. How do you get there from here? Read on!

It's the dream to
leap from routine
life to ultimate
adventure.

CHAPTER 2

In Search of Happiness

“If you’re not doing something with your life, it doesn’t matter how long it is.”

—Peace Corps commercial

Geraldine was in her early fifties when she received the shocking news that she had ovarian cancer. She only had a few months to live. For the previous twelve years, she had served tirelessly as my assistant. For her, it wasn’t a job. It was a mission. She did whatever it took to get the job done, and she did it joyfully. I watched helplessly as each day Geraldine stepped closer to eternity. In the middle of a very painful end to her earthly life, she expressed the unbelievable satisfaction of having accomplished her life’s mission. It was impossible to miss her tranquility, joy, and confirming sense of peace.

George Bernard Shaw described true joy in life: “This is the true joy in life — being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one, being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.... I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no brief candle to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I’ve got ahold

of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as bright as possible before handing it on to future generations.”¹

If you were given two months to live, what would be on your “success” list? What would be on your “regret” list? In research conducted several years ago, people were interviewed on their deathbeds. They were asked the question, “If you could live your life over again, what would you do differently?” Hardly anyone said, “I would spend more time at the office.” Most people said, “I’d spend more time with my family.” Why do you think that is? I believe that it’s partly because some of your family will outlive you. Consequently, you’d like to spend more precious moments with them. It’s called investing beyond the grave. J.H. Newman once said, “Fear not that your life will come to an end, but that it will never have a beginning.”²

If you were given two months to live, what would be on your ‘success’ list?

The search for happiness doesn’t end in a fountain of youth that prolongs life. Happiness is making a contribution that instills lasting fulfillment. It is interesting to watch parents become grandparents. There is a sense of joy and fulfillment on a whole new level, different than when they had their first child. It is not just a further extension to have a grandchild; it is a multiplication dimension. This in itself is not the ancient principle for life beyond ordinary. However, it is a glimpse, a hint.

The Divine Paradox

Another glimpse of the multiplication dimension regards giving. You can learn about it from the Bible. Jesus is quoted as saying, “There is more happiness in giving than in receiving.”³

Dr. Karl Menninger was asked, “What would you advise a person to do if he felt a nervous breakdown coming on?” His response was, “Lock up your house, go across the railway

tracks, find someone in need, and do something to help that person...generous people are rarely mentally ill people.”⁴

There is a spinoff dimension to this concept of giving to others. It has to do with service, or being a servant. Again, Jesus gives a glimpse of the happiness concept in Mark 10:43-44: “If one of you wants to be great, he must be the servant of the rest; and if one of you wants to be first, he must be the slave of all.”

Have you ever noticed that many people tend to be more pleasant around Christmas? Why is that? It is my perception that even though Christmas is a season of stress, overcrowded with parties and activities, it is the season of giving. It is a glimpse of happiness: to give rather than to receive.

When I was young, my mother would see to it that, on occasion, I would go along with her to visit my great-grandmother, who was in a nursing home. Naturally I always had something better to do (in my mind) than go to a stuffy old nursing home that seemed to me – as a child of seven – fairly boring. But as I went, gave up my time, and took on the role of a servant to my great-grandmother, I caught a glimpse of fulfillment – even at a very young age. I didn’t really understand it. Yet, I could tell – it was the right thing to do. I always felt better afterward. The reward was not tangible or measurable. But it was an experience within the hole of my soul that, somehow, was fulfilling – in ways I didn’t quite understand. Like most people in a nursing home, my grandmother was lonely. She was, of course, very glad to see us. But there was more than just the gratification of making my great-grandmother happy. There was a fulfillment because we made the sacrifice to give the time, to make the touch, and to share some love.

Some years ago I was part of a mission team that went to the Amazon region of Brazil. We flew to the capitol city of the region, Manaus. There we taught a conference and then boarded boats to travel up the Amazon River. We had medical

doctors and nurses with us as we went to a remote village. Our team included twenty-five people, and, to a person, we had the same experience. Sure, it was hot! We slept on the deck of the boat. We showered with river water. We ate black beans and rice with the Brazilians—every day, twice a day. There were millions of mosquitoes. We gave ourselves to people who had almost nothing of this world’s possessions. They could give nothing back. And—to a person—it was an exhilarating experience, almost without parallel.

The ancient truth about happiness is related to what might be called *eternal mathematics*. It defies modern math from the human perspective. It goes like this: When you hoard what you have, you end up with less of the fulfillment that counts. But when you give away, or subtract, what you have, you gain fulfillment. On that Amazon trip, though we gave completely and the Brazilians received and gave nothing in return, there’s no question we received more than we ever anticipated. Eternal mathematics are a paradox. You don’t have less because you give away. You have more. To give is to receive. I call it *supernatural mathematics*.

It’s totally opposite from human nature. But it’s a fact: Fulfillment from serving others turns out to be greater than fulfillment from all the “stuff” you have. Give yourself, find yourself. Empty yourself, fill yourself. Humble yourself and discover life sky-high with excitement and satisfaction. We were created for this!

In the magazine *My Generation*, published years ago by AARP, the editors posed an online question to their readers, “If you could retire now, what would you do?” Here’s one of the responses: “If I could afford to retire now, I’d become a full-time volunteer doing something different every day.... What a

Give yourself, find yourself.
Empty yourself, fill yourself.
Humble yourself and
discover life sky-high

luxury it would be to have fun and still give time to others.”⁵ Dan Beason claims that, in some sense, you should never retire.⁶

Special Significance

There is special significance when you give to those in need who cannot get the benefit on their own and don’t have the ability to provide anything in return. *It is generosity without payback.* On several occasions, I’ve had the opportunity to teach conferences in Nigeria, West Africa. On one of our trips, we were able to provide each of the several thousand Nigerians with one of my books that supported the teaching we provided. It was a chance to give without anything tangible in return. There was no way that the Nigerians could give us anything or do anything for us in response. That is one-way giving, sometimes called grace. This, too, is a glimpse at the ancient truth of fulfillment in a life beyond ordinary.

The world witnessed this graceful giving in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on America. People gave money, donated blood, and sent supplies to New York and Washington, D.C. —without any expectation of return. In the middle of tragedy, people gave graciously.

Experts in the field of wellness say that those who are elderly, physically suffering, or emotionally stressed receive a certain measure of therapy by having a pet. In the last several years, nursing homes and some mental institutions have allowed pets among the residents. Any health risk from germs is far outweighed by the benefits of a pet. It is interesting to visit a nursing home or extended care unit and see dogs running around! The truth is that pets are fairly helpless and dependent for food and protection. They can give very little in return except for their presence and their desire for affection. Yet, the dynamic of providing love and care, even to an animal that can give nothing in return, benefits the overall health and vitality

of the individual. When you give to people who might not be able to get help otherwise, there is a sense of satisfaction.

Bob Buford in his classic book *Half Time* speaks of this as “altruistic egoism.” Altruistic egoism means gaining satisfaction from helping others. Buford says that this phrase was coined by a microbiologist named Hans Selye, who wrote the book *The Stress of Life*. Buford notes that this altruistic egoism is “...nothing more than the biblical truth that helping others helps *you*.”⁷ While this is still not the core of that ancient truth about significance, it is a peek into that reality. As you look at the eternal dimension, you get closer to the secret of significance. In the next chapter, we look at fruit that never rots.

CHAPTER 3

Fruit That Doesn't Rot

“The measure of a life, after all, is not its duration, but its donation.”

—Corrie ten Boom

What's wrong with this picture?

Think of your life's efforts resulting in fruit. We live in northeast Indiana, and in our backyard there was a tree that very likely could have been planted by the famous Johnny Appleseed. This apple tree wasn't always its present size, and it didn't always bear fruit. It started out very young. And, if it was planted by Johnny Appleseed, it was planted as a seed that sprouted and grew for many years before it began producing.

In the same way, we enter this world and, in the beginning, don't produce much fruit. As babies, we bring joy to our parents—and challenges! But as we learn, grow, and work, we eventually produce. We contribute to the world around us. Like that apple tree in our backyard, if we're healthy and the environment is right, we produce fruit.

Think of some of the fruit that you've been able to produce in your life. Maybe you'd list a house, car, or dream vacation.

Perhaps you would also be able to list children or grandchildren.

Life is a journey. Often the goals of this journey become cyclical. You raise children, work at your job, get a raise, obtain a desired position, get that house, pay down the mortgage, get the kids through college, get the sports car (or whatever) and in the end—your end—what happens? Your heirs inherit the leftovers. You die, and those “fruits” are left. Those who inherit them consume them or sell them. When they do, they feel a little boost in their own quest for fulfillment. Wherever they are in this cycle—called the journey of life—they gather momentum from your leftovers. But the momentum that is added to their cycle repeats itself with their heirs a few decades later. Materially, their heirs—your grandchildren—indirectly inherit some of the momentum that you built into the cycle of their parents’ lives. And so it goes from generation to generation. But is that all there is?

A Higher Definition of Success

The ability to accumulate material objects and achieve certain goals is certainly one measure of success. However, there is a sense of significance that can be obtained on a higher level as well.

Søren Kierkegaard once said, “The thing is to understand myself, to see what God really wishes me to do...to find the idea for which I can live and die.”¹ The ancient truth for life beyond ordinary is found in the Bible. It is in the New Testament Gospel of John, chapter 15. It’s the secret for investing in eternal significance. That is fruit that doesn’t rot.

In this section, Jesus said something that was captivating to His followers: “I am the vine, and you are the branches.”² His followers knew a lot about vineyards and grapes. Yet, you don’t have to be a farmer to realize that it’s important for a

branch to be connected to the vine if it is to produce fruit. Basically, Jesus is saying that those who are His followers are connected to Him in a way that they receive light and power. Jesus gets closer to this subject of significance in verse 16 when He says, “I chose you and appointed you to go and bear much fruit, the kind that endures.”

Obviously, Jesus isn’t telling His followers that they will produce grapes. He’s talking about the fruit of their efforts. It may seem—at first

Imagine... the possibility of participating in an enterprise that never ends.

glance—that He’s talking about the more common fruit of our lives: our offspring, the house, material wealth, or whatever. But He adds a very interesting phrase. Did you catch it? He says, “I chose you and appointed you to go and bear much fruit, *the kind that endures*.” That is quite a statement! Anyone who has lived past the age of ten knows that most things in this world don’t “endure.” Cars rust. Houses fall apart. Even governments come and go. People die. The concept that some fruit can “endure” is radical—and extraordinary—because everything in our physical existence demonstrates the opposite.

For Jesus to say that He would choose human beings—people like you and me—and appoint them to go and bear fruit that endures is amazing! Jesus is elevating the whole concept to a different level of satisfaction. He’s talking about fruit that lasts. He’s focused on an eternal dimension. He’s directing us to the possibility of participating in an enterprise that never ends. He’s talking about producing fruit that will outlive your life—and outlast centuries. He’s focusing on fruit that lives forever. That’s a dramatic perspective in comparison to, for example, the car in my garage or that apple tree in our backyard.

Bill Hybels was the senior pastor at one of North America’s largest churches, Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois. But Bill was not always a minister. He

found a divine niche. Or to say it another way, he had an encounter with this Jesus who, in fulfillment of verse 16, showed him a direction and appointed him to “go and bear much fruit, the kind that endures.” Bill reflected, “...I can say with confidence that *the church is where the action is*. Nothing is more captivating, nothing more strategic, nothing more lasting and nothing more rewarding than investing your best in creativity, energy, hours and effort in the work of the local church.”³ Bill described his history, indicating he had been groomed to run his family’s produce business in Michigan. He said he looked forward to all the “toys and perks” that would come with it. As a young man, he loved on-the-edge adventures through sailing, powerboating, motorcycle racing, flying airplanes, parachuting out of airplanes, and traveling around the world. He said, “Wherever there was a risk to be taken or a new experience to be enjoyed, there I would be, ready and willing to give it a try.”⁴

Hybels explained that soon after making a commitment to Christ, a man he deeply respected asked him, “‘Bill, what are you doing with your life that will last for eternity?’” He responded (to himself), “*I’m busy doing all kinds of things, and a lot of them seem pretty important...but put against the backdrop of eternity they seem awfully insignificant.*” Bill reflected, “...self-revelation started me down a track that helped me reevaluate everything in which I had been investing myself. Before long, it led me to where, at age 20, I got on my knees and told God I wanted to give the rest of my life to building things that really last.”⁵ Bill wasn’t perfect—nobody is. Yet, God uses imperfect people who can experience forgiveness.

You have been created for a purpose. You, too, have your own divine niche. Ephesians 2:10 says, “God has made us what we are, and in our union with Christ Jesus”—remember the vine and the branches concept—“he has created us for a life of good deeds, which he has already prepared us to do.” If that concept is true, and I believe it is, it means you have already been

prepared by your Creator for this fruit that lasts for eternity. You just have to find the niche for which your Creator has prepared you. It doesn't necessarily mean you'll become a pastor. Your niche might be to stay right where you are—but aim your influence, time, energy, and resources toward eternal efforts. The amazing truth is this: You can invest in the eternal destiny of others. You will invest and sow seeds way beyond the grave. These seeds have eternal significance, not only for yourself, but for others.

It also means that you can multiply yourself. If you have received God's love, you can pass it on. In the paradox of divine mathematics, you can give away and not lose anything yourself. As you do, you experience the divine truth that it *is* better to give than to receive. True fulfillment comes that way. Significance occurs when you give away the truth and love that has eternal impact on others. Someone once said, "We make a living by what we get—we make a life by what we give."

In the paradox of divine mathematics, you can give away and not lose anything yourself.

One of the great ways people give is through parenting. Raising kids is a big job. As Janet and I raised Laura and Jonathan, we discovered that there is a lot about parenting that is "not in the manual." That's my way of saying we never realized the cost involved in being parents—financial, emotional, time, energy—the list goes on forever. Parents invest a lot in their kids. But what about eternal fruit? If that cyclical journey ends with your kids receiving your inheritance and nothing else, your eternal fruit ends in their death as they pass on their wealth to your grandchildren. If you are a parent, your top priority is to help your children discover Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. It is to help them learn biblical values that include producing eternal fruit in their lives. It is to help your children see that when they become parents, Job #1 for them is

to sow seeds of eternal fruit in their children. That *is* in the manual—God’s manual, the Bible.⁶

Why do so many people miss out on Jesus’ formula to experience complete joy by producing eternal fruit? One of the main reasons is the pervasive worldview in our culture: Greatness comes by competing with and overcoming others. Rising to the top inevitably results in stepping on others. Jesus’ worldview is just the opposite. Jesus told His followers the path to greatness involves becoming a servant to others. What a divine paradox! It’s so diametrically opposed to what we are repeatedly taught. Anyone who observed the life of Mother Teresa sensed how her greatness touched the hearts of people around the world. This divine dimension is particularly operative because, through servanthood, you give to those who don’t have the capacity to obtain on their own.

You may not be a Mother Teresa type. In fact, your investment in the eternal dimension may not be full-time at all. I know a successful businessman who works very hard at his job. But Jim’s work has taken on dimensions way beyond ordinary because he uses his resources, knowledge, experience, and wealth for eternal purposes. He explains, “I make a living between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Between 5 p.m. and 8 a.m., I make a life.” He is also an amazing Christ-follower between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m.!

This is the same way God provides His love to you in Jesus Christ. Christianity is not built on the premise of people reaching up to God. It’s about God reaching out to people and giving His love—which they cannot obtain on their own. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “For it is by God’s grace that you have been saved through faith. It is not the result of your own efforts, but God’s gift....” Jesus extends that grace by saying, “You did not choose Me, but I choose you...”⁷ *Your destiny is shaped by God’s action toward you, not your decision to do something for Him.* As you extend that grace to others by sharing God’s love

through service, you enter an enterprise of eternal dimensions. Therein lies the heart of fulfillment.

Ultimate Fulfillment

In the context of all this talk about vines, branches, and eternal fruit, Jesus makes this amazing point that speaks directly to *your* happiness and fulfillment. Jesus says, “I have told you this...” for a reason. He basically says to His followers that there is a distinct purpose connected with how all this works. He says, “I have told you this so that my (Jesus’) joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”⁸ Think about that! Jesus tells His followers they can produce eternal fruit. You can be part of a divine enterprise that reaches far beyond your grave – infinitely, eternally, and forever. Why? He’s given you this privilege so you can experience His joy. That is divine joy – not human happiness. He says that He has told you this so that His joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. That means your significance hole is filled to overflowing. You can receive the fulfillment you were created to experience.

If you’ve been in the rat race of success but fulfillment has eluded you, you are not alone. Years ago, researcher George Barna said, “The driving life goal for most of us is to achieve happiness. Sadly, few reach that goal.... Happiness has proven to be elusive for decades: It is our summary description of what we most desire in life, but it is so elusive that most adults cannot even provide researchers with a preconceived notion of what it is. Perhaps, as people tell us, we will know it when we achieve it.”⁹

As you read this, consider where you are in your spiritual journey. Maybe you’re a Christ-follower – and perhaps you’re not. But think about this: If Jesus is who He says He is, what does that mean? He claims to be the ruler of the universe – God’s own Son. He is God. He is divine, and He says to those who follow Him, “You are created to experience a higher level

of satisfaction. Your destiny is not just about houses, cars, positions, wealth, health, and comfort. The greatest adventure you can ever experience is joining me, the entrepreneurial King of the universe, to give everyone a chance to experience God's love, forgiveness, wholeness, fullness, and new life—divine fulfillment." Are you ready to take that trip?

In his classic book *The Prayer of Jabez*, best-selling author Bruce Wilkinson wrote, "Whatever our gifts, education, or vocation might be, our calling is to do God's work on earth. If you want, you can call it living out your faith for others. You can call it ministry. You can call it every Christian's day job."¹⁰ He goes on to say, "I couldn't recommend more highly living in this supernatural dimension! God's power under us, in us, surging through us is exactly what turns dependence into unforgettable experiences of completeness."¹¹

Jesus puts fulfillment in perspective. He understands that, in this material world, having "stuff" is nice. There's nothing wrong with enjoying comfort. There is nothing irreligious about working to achieve a better standard of living. But putting all of this into perspective, Jesus says, "...be concerned above everything else with the Kingdom of God and with what he requires of you, and he will provide you with all these other things."¹² In other words, He says to go after God's enterprise and that *all* these things you think are important will be given to you. It doesn't mean you won't have to work for them, but all "these things" are thrown in as a bonus, on top of the divine fulfillment of producing eternal fruit through serving others and sharing God's love. Your greatest adventure is life with God.

I've experienced this divine enterprise myself. What I share here is neither complaining nor boasting. It's a report on how God's enterprise works. Several years ago, I felt called by God to move from my career as a minister with all of its securities (house, health insurance, retirement, income) to work more

fully at Church Doctor Ministries. It was a calling I could not deny. From the human perspective it made no sense. I declared a self-imposed reduced salary that was one-third of what I previously earned. Further, I began raising my own support through partners who would pledge a certain amount of money per month—much like missionaries who work overseas. It was a humbling and risky adventure.

Since I no longer worked for a congregation, our family had to leave the church parsonage. We moved into a three-car garage with an upstairs. It was located on a farm we bought a few years earlier. We wondered if we'd ever be able to make the payments. Our family of four lived in that garage for eight and a half years. It was a nice garage, but it was still a garage. We frequently joked that I was probably the only person with a PhD living in a garage in the entire state—if not the country. But you know what? It was just fine. Our son and daughter each slept under an unplugged garage door opener. One wall of each of their “bedrooms” was a garage door, boarded up and insulated.

Ultimately, we were able to pay off the farm. Almost a decade later, we were able to add a house to that garage. We started planting some trees, and the local state forester suggested we enter into a program that promoted turning poor farmland into tree plantations—timber for next generations. Wow! A contribution beyond my grave! We spent the next few decades planting and pruning trees by hand. Ultimately, we planted thousands of trees. We knew we wouldn't live to see any financial gain. But—surprise—the program paid for the farm and gave us the opportunity to save money for the house. Now we live in a beautiful setting: a worn-out farm we've turned into a wildlife habitat. And we've moved from the garage to the attached house.

However, our primary commitment was putting what we believe is God's work first. And it happened just as Jesus said:

All these other things were added to us. Someday, after Janet and I are gone, our children will sell timber, and much of the proceeds will go toward missions. In the meantime, we've been a part of God's divine enterprise and continue to experience the fulfillment of adding eternal value to other people. It's a miracle!

How did we know it was God's thing for us to do? It just seemed right: unselfish, contributing to others, investing beyond the grave. Also, it was crazy. It required a step—no, a leap—of faith. There was the element of risk. We would have failed if God wasn't in it. It was way beyond ordinary—just ask some of our neighbors who thought we had mentally lost it!

Recruitment

At this point, you might be questioning my motives. You might think, "Oh, he's a recruiter for God, and God desperately needs my help to change the world." No, that's not my motive, and it's really not God's need either. It is true that Jesus said, "The harvest is large, but there are few workers to gather it in. Pray to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest."¹³ However, the truth is, God doesn't really need your help. When Jesus says in John 15:16, "I chose you and appointed you to go and bear much fruit," what He's doing is graciously inviting you to be involved *so that you can experience joy and fulfillment on the eternal level you were created to experience*. My motive for sharing this is that you might experience the incredible honor of being part of God's eternal enterprise. I want you, too, to receive the only fulfillment that can fill the hole in your soul.

Consider God's strategy, according to the Bible. First, God creates people. He loves them, and He doesn't make them like puppets. He gives them a choice. He wants people to love Him because they want to, not because they are robots. The Bible says that people reject God. They choose to be rebellious and

do things their own way. Then they are out of favor with God, and there is a broken relationship that needs to be healed.

God has this plan—a strategy—of sending a Savior to heal that broken relationship. In their rebellious state, people can't do it themselves. This Savior is His Son, Jesus. The payment that Jesus makes is His death on a cross. The victory comes because He rose from the dead and, in the process, makes the payment for their rebelliousness. The charge? Nothing—it's a free gift. This strategy is summarized succinctly in the New Testament in John 3:16: "For God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not die but have eternal life."

Before He leaves this earth and goes back to His Father in heaven, Jesus commissions His followers. He gives them a mission. Why? He could do it Himself—He's God! He could just wave His hand, say the word, and everyone would fall in line. But God's approach is consistent. He wants people to believe in Him and follow Him by their own choice, not because they are forced. And He wants followers who respond by faith.

God chooses to use people to reach people by sharing the message of John 3:16. Those who are weak—and on their own journeys—share God's love with others in the same situation. The fulfillment for those who share is enormous. You can accomplish more in one hour with God than in a lifetime without Him. God does make a difference in people's lives. When you are a messenger for God, you experience ultimate fulfillment—being in partnership with the King of the universe. You invest in the eternal destiny of others. It doesn't get more significant than that!

Jesus said, in John 15:11, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." At another

time, Jesus made a similar radical statement. He said, “I have come in order that you might have life — life in all its fullness.”¹⁴

This is powerful stuff. Think about it. No one has ever claimed to be God. On top of that, no one claiming to be God has ever asked you to join in His work. Further, no one except God has asked you to join in His work so that you might experience eternal significance.

When I was growing up, the Rolling Stones were singing, “I can’t get no satisfaction.” It was a popular song, partly because many identified with the lyrics. If fulfillment is the satisfaction that makes you complete, where do you get it? You see, the words of Jesus make the incredible claim that when you are involved in His work, you produce eternal fruit. The work itself may be temporary, but the effects last eternally. Your work changes the eternal destiny of other people—as God works through you. God’s work is a divine enterprise with eternal dimensions.

C.S. Lewis said, “If you can’t find satisfaction in this life, it’s probably because you were made for another world.” But, you see, you can taste eternal significance by getting involved in God’s work. So, when God leads you to the challenge, say yes to His call and taste the sweet fulfillment of eternal fruit. However, of course, you first need to be a branch connected to the vine.

CHAPTER 4

Connecting to the Significant

“Life is a glorious opportunity if it is used to condition us for eternity.”

—Billy Graham

When Jesus uses the vine and branches language, he’s drawing a picture so we can easily get the concept of connection. It’s all about a relationship. A branch can’t produce what it was created for—and it can’t fulfill its destiny—unless it’s connected to the vine. Jesus says, “I am the vine, and you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, and I in him, will bear much fruit; for you can do nothing without me.”¹

It is interesting that Jesus clearly says that He expects “much” fruit. There is no mediocrity about this promise! If you are connected to Jesus, your life is going to be fruitful. However, if you’re not, you are going to come and go. You’re going to live and die. One hundred years from now, no one will even know the difference. Jesus is being radically and ruthlessly honest when He declares, “...you can do nothing without me.” What does He mean by that? Oh, you can build a house. You can build a company. You can pay off the mortgage. You can run for Congress! You can make money and invest in the stock market. You can experience many accomplishments. But no matter how much you do, whatever you accomplish, will it

make a difference one hundred years from now? You can experience *success* without Jesus. You just won't touch the *significance* you were created to experience. You will die with the fulfillment hole empty in your soul, even though your bank account might be full.

I recently read an interesting perspective. The authors were asking the question, "What is your purpose?" They went on to say, "Before choosing a lifestyle rich in purpose, we must first know what we want. To put it another way, if we don't know what we want, how will we know if we've gotten it? But even before knowing *what* we want, we need to know *why* we want it. Knowing why we want something means knowing a little bit more about our purpose in life."² I couldn't disagree more with that whole paragraph. Why? Because it focuses on what *we* want. You see, that is not a biblical worldview. The biblical worldview is to focus on what God wants, not what *we* want. It's the culture of consumerism that teaches this supreme idolatry: "comfort at all costs." We constantly hear that happiness is connected with getting what *we* want.

Will it make a difference one hundred years from now?

In one of my previous books, *Discover Your Windows: Lining Up With God's Vision*, I shared research we conducted with thousands of people. We discovered that large percentages of people lived daily by what they wanted. Many of them were Christians who claimed church membership. They frequently prayed the Lord's Prayer, which has the phrase, "Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" — a prayer Jesus taught His followers to pray. Even though they prayed for God's will to be done — what He wants — their lives were often all about what they wanted.

Basically, when Jesus says in John 15:5, "I am the vine; you are the branches," He's making a declaration that you don't always know what is best for you. He is saying that when you are

connected to Him and seeking what He wants, you are open to God's direction in your life. Then you have real potential for significance in your life.

My friend Walt Kallestad says, "Don't ever say 'never.' When you do, you set yourself up to miss a major God opportunity." Think about it this way: God's gift to you is your potential. Your gift to God is what you do with your potential.

I grew up thinking that the Christian faith was all about Bible stories, commandments (rules), and going to church. I fell into what might be called "the activity trap." James Emery White in his book *You Can Experience...A Purposeful Life* makes this dramatic statement: "A...subtle temptation is to substitute *activity* for God, even along the lines of His purpose for your life, for a *relationship* with God. I've heard this syndrome likened to cut flowers. We try to maintain our life and fruitfulness, but we are cut off from our sustaining roots. We seek power without prayer, dynamism without devotion, abundance from God without abiding in Christ. And as cut flowers, no matter how we might try to maintain our appearance, no matter how much water we add, it's only a matter of time before we wither and die."³

This activity approach to Christianity was part of my earlier life. Only later did I discover that faith is a living, ongoing, everyday relationship with Jesus Christ. It is like a branch being connected to the vine. That everyday relationship is just like a relationship with another person. If you have a relationship with someone else, you talk to them regularly. When you talk to Jesus, it's called prayer. You want to learn from that other person. In the spiritual realm, that comes from reading the Bible and receiving good preaching and teaching. When you have a relationship, you want to care for another person. When you are in a relationship with God, you want to worship Him. In the spiritual realm, that comes through service to others and

obedience to God. But it's not obedience like rules. It's not out of duty. It is a response to love through a relationship.

It works just the way Jesus describes: It is a relationship connection. In my own life, there have been times when I've tried to bear fruit but have gone light on my relationship with Jesus. I didn't do it on purpose or out of rebellion. I just got lazy or too busy. I found out the hard way that Jesus is right. When it comes to real significance – producing eternal fruit – a branch doesn't produce unless it's connected to the Vine. Jesus is clear when He says in Matthew 17, “if you have faith...nothing will be impossible to you.”

The key to this relationship with Jesus is to remember that you are getting something great – something you can't obtain on your own. Being a rebellious, imperfect person, you can't reach out and impress God with anything. You can't make yourself right with God. It happens by God's gracious and kind gift of salvation, which brings forgiveness and restoration. God doesn't just say this; He does it in the person of His Son Jesus Christ. He wants to have this relationship with you. That relationship provides wholeness.

The amazing surprise is that it's not a relationship we chase to obtain. It's one that we receive. It is a gift, by God's grace.

I'm personally overwhelmed by God's love for me. He gave His Son to die for me! Not a shred of evidence supports that anything I do as a rebellious person could impress Him, and there is not a minute possibility that I deserve anything that He has done for me. That is the pure definition of grace. “Amazing Grace,” the traditional song sung by many Christians, has this sentence: “I once was lost but now I'm found.”

It works the same way when you experience eternal significance. It is a gift of God through Jesus – the Vine. Through your connection with Jesus, you transcend the

mundane and move beyond success to significance. “I once was bored, but now I’m on an adventure.” Significance is not something you pursue. It is something you receive, just like faith. Faith is a response to God’s activity. Jesus said, “I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into his house and eat with him, and he will eat with me.”⁴ The concept is entirely connected with your relationship with Jesus. The door is the door of your heart. You don’t knock at His door. He’s knocking on yours. Are you listening? Are you open? You don’t shop for significance in the eternal dimension. It comes through that relationship, and it is the privilege of being a branch connected to the Vine. It’s all about your relationship.

Foundation

This relationship fosters trust and faith. It is foundational to the experience of eternal fulfillment. In his book *How to Find Your Mission in Life*, Richard Bolles says, “Your first mission here on earth is one which you share with the rest of the human race, but it is no less your individual mission for the fact that it is shared: and that is *to seek to stand hour by hour in the conscious presence of God, the One from whom your mission is derived.*”⁵ Your response to the gift God has given you is your desire to live in that *relationship* and *partnership*. The *relationship* dimension is all about faith and salvation. The *partnership* dimension is all about tasting significance, producing eternal fruit, and experiencing a life beyond ordinary. The approach is not “ought to” but “want to.” It is similar to marriage. You love your spouse and want your spouse to love you. Yes, you ought to be faithful. That is not only a good idea, it is a commandment! The foundation is not the fear of being caught. The foundation is love—a relationship.

Faithfulness to God is also born out of a love relationship He started with you. Faithfulness leads to fruitfulness, and when it's connected to God's love, it is eternal fruitfulness. In the

Faithfulness leads
to fruitfulness.

same section where Jesus talks about the vine and the branches, He says, "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love..."⁶ Out of love, you

obey His commands because you want to remain in His love. And yet—and this is the irony – your response is not perfect, just as no relationship is perfect when it includes a human being. But here is the good news: God is perfect. God's love in Jesus is perfect. His commitment is perfect. Being a Christian isn't some effort to be perfect. That would be a fruitless journey of frustration. Being a Christian is about always striving to be in that perfect relationship, yet also living in grace and forgiveness.

The *relationship* dimension is
all about faith and salvation.
The *partnership* dimension is
all about tasting significance.

Forgiveness Connection

To connect with significance is not simply to experience fulfillment. Primarily, it's about connecting to the One who offers significance. That is why the relationship is foundational. What is important about a relationship with Jesus? Forgiveness. Why? *Forgiveness provides a platform for the possibility of fulfillment.* Eternal fruit is not possible without being in a state of forgiveness. Just like the branches connected to the vine need a good environment to produce fruit, your environment is God's grace and forgiveness. Divine significance occurs when you're plugged into that power. It happens when you're connected to the vine, who is Jesus Christ.

Over the Cliff

One of my best friends is Brad. I still remember the day I met him. I can't explain it, but I instantly sensed that this man was already experiencing life beyond ordinary. God was calling him to a significant role in ministry. I began praying for Brad. For every minute we spent together, I probably spent another five minutes praying for him. When I met him, Brad was a very energetic and accomplished advertising executive. His sense of understanding people and effective communication was extraordinary. I could tell he was restless. His journey began long before I met him. Within twenty-four hours of our first meeting, I felt God nudging me to do something very bold. I invited him to have breakfast with me. I asked him if he ever considered leaving his position at his advertising firm and serving God more directly. His jaw immediately dropped, and his eyes widened. He wondered how I could possibly know the inner struggles in his life. The truth is, I didn't know! I just sensed that God wanted me to talk with him. That breakfast was the start of a great relationship. It was also the beginning of an intense journey that would take Brad several years. I just continued praying—every day. It was a privilege, not a burden, for me. I kept sharing books and articles with Brad. I invited him to visit with the board of directors of our ministry. He was later nominated and elected to the board, which gave me an opportunity to watch him more closely in his journey.

One day, in the middle of October, I got a phone call from Brad. He explained that he had taken the entire week off—an extremely rare comment from such an energetic guy. It was a week at home in solitude, prayer, and fasting. He was reading the Bible and asking God to direct his life. He called me to say he was over the cliff—he had decided that no matter what the obstacles, he was going to use his experience, talents, and gifts to serve God. He said he had shaken hands with God on it. I really believe all the angels in heaven were having a party that day, celebrating a new recruit who was going to have the

privilege of experiencing eternal significance on a full-time basis. He became a person who experienced life beyond ordinary.

Brad's calling was significant. Yours may be as well. You may experience eternal significance using your gifts for eternal impact as a part-time volunteer. Serving God is a faith journey.

He called me to say he was over the cliff.

It is my observation that when you make a step toward producing eternal fruit, it initially raises more questions than answers. It's a step into the unknown. Otherwise, it would simply be a human decision. Ministry requires a step of faith. The Bible defines faith this way: "...faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see."⁷ Going "over the cliff," as Brad described it, is a leap of faith and trust in God when you're not sure how you're going to get there. For Brad, it meant tediously separating himself from a corporation where he was a major partner. How was it all going to work out? What would it mean for his family? There were a thousand questions to every two answers. Yet, that's the way it is with God, and that's the way it is with eternal fruit. The fruit is always found at the end of the limb. When you're involved in a faith journey, you're always out on a limb.

We have a hickory tree in our backyard. Every once in a while, I'll see a squirrel gathering hickory nuts. I watch the squirrel as he inches his way out to the end of the limb. I see the limb bend, and suddenly there's the squirrel dangling by his back feet—forty feet in the air. But the squirrel goes out on the limb

In a faith journey, you're always out on a limb.

because *that's where the hickory nuts are!* That's where the fruit is! It works the same way with the fruit of faith. That is why it's called faith. It seems like God never lets you figure it all out. You

always have to take the step of faith without seeing everything that is before you.

Sometimes the leap of faith doesn't require you to leave your career, but to change the way you approach it. Ben, Mark, Jim, Tom, and Dan are all brothers and cousins who operate a family conglomerate of businesses. And they run them well. Of course they get excited when the bottom line looks good. But the real twinkle in their eyes occurs when they serve on a ministry board, bring their business knowledge to a ministry, or fund a project. They work full time for God as much as any senior pastor, missionary, or seminary professor.

Don't make the mistake of the Gnostics in the second century. They separated the "secular" from the sacred. Follow that line of thinking and you end up thinking you are a second-class citizen if you don't have a "Rev." in front of your name. Your life at work can give you the opportunity for eternal significance as much as teaching a Bible class for Christians at church—maybe even more. Your biblical worldview is to penetrate the eternal dimension in everything you do.

Zig Ziglar had an interesting commentary on people who don't take the step of faith. He said there are people who can't leave the driveway until all the lights are green. Of course, what happens? They never leave the driveway! The point is this: If you are going to get anywhere, you can't wait until you discover all the lights are green. It never happens that way with God.

All my life I will remember with gratitude the wonderful ministry of Herb Shock. Herb was a school principal in Detroit and a member of a church I pastored. He and some of the other leaders recognized that while I had strong gifts in leadership, preaching, and teaching, it wasn't my calling to take care of all the administrative duties in the huge congregation I served. I was a pioneer trying to help the congregation move out into the

community. God was using me to be a leader that would energize people for ministry. Through that work, God transformed that declining congregation to become a growing church. However, I couldn't lead that pioneering effort and take care of all the administration.

It was Herb Shock, in his first year of retirement, who took the leap of faith to come alongside me and become a full-time volunteer who tackled the administrative duties of that large operation. Only in retrospect do I realize the tremendous gift of God Herb was to me and to that church.

Yet, if Herb had waited till everything was just right, he would never have helped out. When he started, there was no income for his position. There was no office. There was no procedure manual. However, by faith, he didn't wait until all the lights were green. He left the driveway. He stepped out in faith. He took the risk. He jumped off the cliff.

By divine design, the process of experiencing eternal fruit and living life beyond ordinary requires leaving your comfort zone. That is why I like to take people on short-term mission trips. Whether we are in the jungles of Thailand or the mountains of Kazakhstan, the bustling cities of India or the remote villages of South Africa, I love to take other Christians along. Get people away from their cell phones, time zones, and fast food and they begin to experience God's divine design at a new level. There is something God can do with you when you're outside your comfort zone that works a lot better than when life is cluttered with comforts. Ten days on the mission field can just about change your life forever! It's what I call an extreme faith journey!

For most people in this world, moving to a higher level involves limited risk and maximum calculation. When it works, we call it success. It's natural. But moving out in faith requires taking on risk. It's a faith adventure. It is life beyond ordinary.

Several years ago, I was with my friends Doug and Jim in northwest Thailand, near what was then the Burmese border. We three Americans were surrounded by the Thai people from the village where we stayed. In walked a white woman. Her

For most people in this world, moving to a higher level involves limited risk and maximum calculation.

hair looked like she hadn't combed it in months. She had on a dirty dress and wore no shoes. We discovered she was from the United States. She was visiting the village and had come across the border from Burma, now called Myanmar. Years before, this lady had read about the plight of the Karin people who lived in the mountainous region on the other side of the river Kwai. She had never traveled outside the United States, but somehow her heart was touched by the story of these people. One day she decided to make a visit there. She found whole villages of Karin who lived at subsistence levels. They were short of food and didn't have clean water. After a few weeks, this woman returned to the United States, but not to stay. She returned home to sell everything she had, raise whatever money she could, and return to spend the rest of her life in Myanmar among the Karin people. We sat at the huge wooden table in the longhouse of the village chief and listened in wonder as she shared how she had helped organize the people to bring fresh water into their village from a distant stream. She helped them reduce the number of deaths in the village. I asked her where she learned to do all these things. She said she just learned as she went along. She was sold out to those people. She was making an impact that literally changed the lives of hundreds, maybe thousands of people for generations! She was living life beyond ordinary. Did it include some risk? Did she step out in faith? You know the answer!

I met Mark when I was consulting the church he attends in West Bend, Wisconsin. He was a forty-eight--year-old engineer who worked in research and development for a well-known

manufacturing company. Mark owned twelve patents for the great engineering ideas he had developed. That was how he made a living. However, it wasn't how he made a life. His favorite time was spent working with youth in the community. His efforts included organizing concerts and operating a coffeehouse. Mark did not leave his job. People asked, "When are you going to become a minister?" He replied, "I am in ministry now!"

That supernatural element—that ability to step out in faith—comes only through the Vine connection. There is no other way. When Brad jumped off the cliff, when the American woman went to Myanmar, or when Mark started working with youth, it wasn't because they had strength by themselves. It was because they were connected to the Vine, which has supernatural power to direct our lives to do what would otherwise be impossible. Someone once told me, "Attempt something so great that it is doomed for failure if God is not in it." Doesn't that make sense?

If you claim to be on a God adventure, but you're doing something no different than anyone else could do, is there evidence that God is in it? Is it a God adventure, or are you just out for a religious walk? It is only as you step into the unknown and do what is "humanly impossible" that you enter the realm of faith. It is only as you do what you cannot afford and cannot accomplish on your own that you rely on your supernatural connection to the Vine.

You might be tempted to think that Brad, the American lady in Myanmar, and Mark are somehow extraordinary people—spiritual superstars. None of them would describe themselves that way. They would say they are relatively insignificant. My friend Mark Marxhausen spoke about the importance of dust:

About one hundred years ago a famous British naturalist, Dr. Alfred Russell Wallace, wrote a fascinating chapter in one of his books entitled "The Importance of Dust."

I don't know about you, but I have never considered dust to be important. Someone once said that dust was only 'dirt in the wrong place,' and I would agree with that. On a windy day, dust can be a considerable nuisance, getting in your eyes, nose, and mouth. If you live in desert regions, dust storms can be a serious problem. Melbourne, Australia, often has trouble with thousands of tons of dust descending on the city from hot northerly winds. I doubt a housewife has much to say in favor of dust.

But back to Dr. Wallace. To begin with, he says that the beautiful colors in the sky, the blue of summer, the tints of sunset, are all due to the presence of dust. He goes on to say that the beauty of the world is due to the ever-changing color of the sky and all that would vanish but for the dust. Dr. Wallace says that without dust the sky would appear absolutely black and the stars would be visible all day.

When you realize that these little particles of matter floating in the air are responsible for the blue sky, the flush of dawn, the crimson sunset, and the colors in the clouds, we have much to thank God for putting this "dirt in the wrong place."

That is not all that dust does for us. Dr. Wallace says that it is because of the dust we get mist and cloud and soft refreshing rain. Without it we would have perpetual sunshine that would turn our land into a sandy desert, while the hills and mountains would be devastated by raging torrents. This would render life on earth impossible. It is the dust that saves us from being burnt up by the sun or washed away by roaring floods.

When you wander through the house with the vacuum cleaner, would you have thought that dust was so important?

But dust is not the only seemingly “useless” thing that God uses. He takes men and women who seem so ordinary and untalented and makes them play a part in life. Jesus took his disciples, sinners, tax collectors, thieves—people who were often despised and trampled on like dirt—and made them into noble men and women and servants of God.

The same God who makes such good use of dust can make good use of you—if you let Him.

Life beyond ordinary doesn’t always require leaving your present job. It doesn’t always include living in the jungle the rest of your life. It doesn’t even require full-time service in ministry. It could be part-time, as a volunteer. Your call to produce divine fruit may be sharing God’s love at a local nursing home or a homeless shelter. It might be serving as a Sunday school teacher for children in your church.

Eleanor Kugler was a stay-at-home mom. Her husband worked in a factory but also farmed. Eleanor was a strong, hardworking farm girl. As their daughter got older and involved in school, Eleanor had the opportunity to produce eternal fruit. Gifted as a tremendous administrator and organizer with endless energy, Eleanor saw the need for a Sunday school superintendent at the little rural church her family attended. And what a superintendent she was! She encouraged the teachers, organized the classes, and expressed love to the children every chance she had. Eleanor produced eternal fruit. She made a difference in the lives of those children and their teachers. That difference spilled over into the families. That difference lives on in the lives of those children as they are now adults and have children of their own. That impact is felt in the community on many levels. No one but God could ever measure the ongoing multiplication of fruit that was sparked by Eleanor’s efforts as she lived beyond ordinary. It affected

generations of people she will never meet. I know; I was blessed to be Eleanor's pastor for several years.

It affected
generations of
people she will
never meet.

Unlike Eleanor, some people have a less hands-on approach of encouraging the destiny of others. While I was in seminary, I met Bob and Nonie Whittle. Bob was a successful businessman who ran a construction company. There is no doubt that God gave these people an extra portion of graciousness and generosity. They became spiritual parents for me, and I still remember them that way today. During struggles at school, they provided prayers, encouragement, and hospitality. I'm not sure if I would have made it without them. God used them, not just in my life, but in the lives of hundreds of students and thousands of poor people in the St. Louis area.

If you are connected to Jesus, you have become a partner in His divine enterprise. That enterprise is sharing His love with others. That love changes their eternal destiny. That is not success; that is significance. It's not just efficiency; it's effectiveness. That is eternal fruit. You have transcended the ordinary and are experiencing fulfillment on an eternal level. You are connected to the significant.

CHAPTER 5

The Significance Journey Part I: Getting Started

“The purpose of life is a life of purpose. The height of your accomplishments will equal the depth of your convictions.”

—Robert Byrne

Where are you on the significance journey?

If you’ve picked up this book and read this far, chances are you’re on the trip—or about to start. Think of your journey as a process, not an event. You are traveling a road that may have many steps and few stops. As you pause along the way, reflect about where you are. The steps reflected in this chapter are not experienced by everyone, nor are they always in this order. But these steps reflect the general process you might experience as you travel the significance journey. As you read about the steps, identify where you are. With each one of the steps, there are thoughts and suggestions about how to move toward your next step.

Step #1: The Fuzzy Hunger

It can hit you at any age, at any stage of life. You might be young—perhaps still in high school. Or perhaps you are in the middle of raising a family. You could be experiencing a midlife adjustment. Perhaps you have recently retired. I knew a man once who got his fuzzy hunger at age eighty-five. Chet ended up living his last years in Africa experiencing life beyond ordinary.

The fuzzy hunger stage is when you have this gnawing—a growing hunger for fulfillment. Nothing else satisfies. You might find yourself working harder doing the same tasks. Yet you can't reach a level of satisfaction. Maybe you struggle to identify what you're going through. Perhaps it is difficult to grasp. But you're definitely not in the mode of mediocrity. Life isn't going to be the same down the road—and you know it.

Ken Blanchard in his book *Mission Possible: Becoming a World-Class Organization While There's Still Time*, says, "Somehow we've all grown up expecting the ordinary. We've come to think of magnificence as being in short supply, and we treat people accordingly. Not surprisingly, they respond in kind—low expectations lead to low performance. Since expecting less becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, the way to reverse performance begins with reversing expectations."¹ Your expectations about life and about yourself are changing.

What is happening to you in this fuzzy hunger step? You may have no clue how to satisfy the hunger. But you clearly recognize the dawn of a new stage in your life. It's what happens, as my friend Barry Kolb says, "when work doesn't work anymore." Perhaps you have observed someone who seems to be on a mission in life. From a distance, vicariously, you've experienced their enthusiasm. You may not have recognized it, but they were living life beyond ordinary. You felt their uncommon passion. In your response, you may have

vacillated between admiration or – at the other extreme – have thought they were crazy. Your fuzzy hunger was partly due to your intrigue about the significance radiating from their energy.

You may have no clue how to satisfy the hunger.

It's possible you have traveled this road from the other direction. Maybe you observed someone who has tasted success. Perhaps you know someone who collected many "toys" and built a huge bank account—yet you've observed little internal fulfillment. You might know someone who has great wealth and status but seems genuinely miserable. You can learn from that direction too. It can spark that fuzzy hunger, and you may have increasingly wondered, "Is this all there is?"

To move on. To get beyond the stage of fuzzy hunger, read about fulfillment. (You're doing that already with this book in your hands.) Take some private time and evaluate your level of satisfaction. What is your sense of significance? How would you rate it? Estimate how long you might live. Just guess. Then add one hundred years. What is it that you are pursuing now that will have a significant impact then? Think about this statement from John Maxwell: "The great men of history were not great because of what they owned or what they earned, but because of what they gave their lives to accomplish."² To what accomplishment are you investing your life? Will it be measured—to any degree—as greatness?

Try writing your own obituary the way you'd like it to read. Here's what I'd like for my obituary: "Kent R. Hunter, born September 23, 1947, died yesterday. Kent was the founder of Church Doctor Ministries, an organization he founded in 1976. He spent much of his life being a servant of encouragement to pastors and churches, helping them to become more effective in fulfilling Jesus' Great Commission to make disciples. He worked tirelessly to help others experience the divine

significance of serving others, sharing God's love and allowing Him to use them to change the eternal destiny of others."

Max Lucado once said you should make all your major decisions in life in a graveyard. It puts your decisions in perspective. A pastor read what Max said and put a bench in the graveyard behind his church. He told his people to make decisions in the cemetery. The pastor reported that almost every day someone has done that. Imagine a conversation between your friends and family members the evening of the day of your funeral. What would you like them to be talking about?

Step #2: A Willingness to Step Over the Material Line to the Faith World

In this stage, you find yourself wondering more about the existence of God. You're beginning to recognize spiritual themes in the music you hear and the movies you see. You might even have new or renewed interest in reading the Bible. You may begin attending a church or small group Bible study. You are sensing a growing curiosity about those who express religious convictions. Through it all, you are experiencing some serious doubts about whether materialistic satisfaction is "all it's cracked up to be."

To move on. Get together with someone who's been a Christian for awhile. Ask that Christian to discuss this book with you. Spend some quiet time by yourself. I was moved by what my friend Ben Manthei wrote in the book he and Ruth Manthei wrote, *In His Majesty's Service*. Ben says, "The key to developing true significance is found in being obedient to God's quiet prompting in your heart! It means acting upon what God is leading you to do and using your success to make a difference in a way that will impact people's lives a thousand years from now. This brings extreme fulfillment and purpose in life! Try it.

I can guarantee you'll like it."³ Notice what Ben says about "God's quiet prompting in your heart."

In your quiet time, by yourself, focus on God and allow Him to direct your thoughts. Use a modern translation of the Bible in a format that is readable for you. Look at the Gospel of John, chapter 15. Think about what it says. If you find that premise interesting, go back and read all of the Gospel of John. You may want to read it with a Christian friend. If you don't have a Christian friend, call a church and ask if someone would do that with you. Make your Bible reading more than an academic exercise. Think about what it says. Consider it as God speaking to you—because He is. Think about the implications of the truths, principles, and values. Though it may not seem like it at first, the Bible is a blueprint reflecting God's plan for your life. It is your road map for the journey to significance.

Step #3: A Holy Restlessness

Your fuzzy hunger—connected with your willingness to step over the material line to the faith world—has now led you to a new level of contemplation. You are beginning to wonder about the meaning of life. That's good! As Bob Buford said, "You may feel, at least at first, that you are losing control of your life. To which I say: Good for you. It really is good for you to surrender control and, in the process, come more fully to your senses—those senses that enable you to be aware of life's adventures and its rewards."⁴

In your contemplation about the meaning of life, you may think about how life is short. You may wonder if there really is a God who created you. You might contemplate your purpose in this world.

Pastor Luther Dale at Incarnation Lutheran Church near Minneapolis, Minnesota, started what he calls a Third Stage Center. It's for people who are in their third stage of life—near

retirement. They gather to explore how they can use their remaining years in a more purposeful way. Perhaps there is a church or organization in your area that brings people together who are experiencing this holy restlessness. You may gain a growing sense that—if there is a divine being—perhaps He’s not disinterested or so far away. You could discover that God wants to be more involved in your life on a day-to-day basis.

You likely know some believers—followers of Christ. You realize they aren’t perfect, yet you recognize their lives are different. In your holy restlessness, you begin noticing those who give of themselves to others from a faith-based perspective. You may wonder why they serve and what motivates them.

Perhaps you have been impacted by the death of someone who went to the grave with a sense of joy and fulfillment that defies human description. You might want to begin living with renewed purpose. You may want to be remembered that way. Purpose becomes more important. Leider and Shapiro write in the book *Repacking Your Bags*, “...purpose is not a goal. A goal is something that can be reached. A purpose is never achieved. It exists before you and lives on after you’re gone. Purpose is a direction—like west. No matter how far west you go, there’s still more west to travel. And like directions, a purpose helps you choose where to go along the route. Purpose is your lodestar, your personal compass of truth. It tells you, in any given moment, whether you’re living your life ‘on purpose’ or not.”⁵

To move on. Explore your feelings with a trusted friend. Read the biographies of those who have lived lives of extraordinary fulfillment. Talk to people you know who serve in efforts that bring no immediate tangible payment or reward. Ask them why they are involved and what it does for them. Look for a church that provides opportunities to serve as part of God’s mission of love toward others.

Step #4: A Disruptive Dissatisfaction With the Ordinary

Although you will experience some “successes” in your life, they may not provide the fulfillment they once had for you. For example, perhaps you make another sale or accumulate more money, yet it just doesn’t provide the excitement you expected. You are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with what you do and who you are. Perhaps the door is closing on your present career.

That is not unlike what happened to Mo Hodge. Hodge was the senior pastor of The Bridge Community Church in Monroe, Indiana. However, he didn’t always want to be a pastor. In 1979, he had a comfortable job at General Motors. He and his wife, Nancy, had plenty of possessions. But he felt increased dissatisfaction as God began to call him to ministry. He became a youth director in one church, then worked for the parachurch organization Youth for Christ. He began to raise his own salary and expenses for ministry—a far cry from the financial package at General Motors. In 2000, God called Mo to start a church called The Bridge. The first service was in a high school gymnasium, and 317 attended.

You are becoming
increasingly dissatisfied
with what you do and
who you are.

For Mo, his journey accelerated through career dissatisfaction. It may be the same for you. Your present job may not be enough fulfillment anymore. You feel a lack of enthusiasm toward the same life you used to consider the road to success and happiness.

To move on. Recognize this is not a problem! Your dissatisfaction doesn’t mean something is *wrong* with you. It may be the beginning of something *right* with you! Consider the likelihood that God is speaking to your heart and shaping

you for a future where you will experience life beyond ordinary. Recognize that God may be closing one door to open another. Or He may modify the door. He may want you to balance your priorities with efforts of eternal significance. It is like the story that appeared years ago in *The Wall Street Journal* titled, “Can You Go Back?” It was about professional people going back to God: “In many ways, the 90s have been good for Kenny Lombino. He’s got a job with the top brokerage firm in Los Angeles, a \$600,000 bachelor pad and a blue Jaguar with vanity plates. He’s even a master sky diver.... But last year, he felt he needed something more. ‘I thought, here I am 45 years old, and my life isn’t going anyplace,’ he says. ‘I have a penthouse in Westwood, and a right kind of car, and my life is empty.’ So he did something really radical: he went back to church.”⁶

Begin investigating your options. If you are considering work that shares God’s love, there are many choices. They all have an impact on the eternal destiny of others. Go online and look at Christian ministries and spiritual resources. You will find many ideas about ways to serve. Investigate some of the healthy and growing churches in your area. See how they are creating opportunities to make an impact on the lives of others. Learn more about yourself. Ask, “What is my passion? What are my unique gifts? How am I wired? Where do I belong? What do I believe? What will I do about what I believe?”⁷ Remember: God wants to use you in the unique way you are divinely created.

Get bold. Be radical. Step up, step out. Get started. Take the leap of faith. Be like Jesus. He was no wimp. He came to conquer—not territory, but a world of people. Let God stretch you—it’s a good experience.

Let God stretch
you—it's a good
experience.

Review the previous chapter of this book and reflect on your own personal connection with Jesus. Seek out a Christian friend to help you grow in your Christian faith. Start praying to

God and ask Him to direct you. Ask some friends to begin praying for you.

Step #5: The Open Door Opportunity

What if an opportunity arises where you can get involved in a faith-based form of service? It may enter your life in an unexpected way. It could be small. It could be temporary. Or it could be radical. It really doesn't matter if it's God's opportunity for you.

In this step, you begin reflecting on this opportunity – and your excitement. When you learn about it – and think about it – your pulse quickens. If it's your passion, it is what you laugh and cry about. It may keep you awake with excitement at night.

Norm Miller was the president of Interstate Batteries in Dallas, Texas. When you walked into Norm's office, the first person you saw was his administrative assistant. But the office to the right of the assistant belonged to the chaplain. Miller's business had its own chaplain. He not only dispersed corporate charitable dollars, he also led Bible studies and counseled those in the corporation. Norm and his management team made a commitment to develop their employees professionally and spiritually. The office to the left belonged to the head of venture capital, the person who made investment decisions to make the company money. But much of the profit went toward ministries. One of Miller's passions was to interject Christian quality into Hollywood films, recognizing their influence on the values of so many.

Think about the amazing power of the series *The Chosen*. The phenomenal impact of this series, directed by Dallas Jenkins, has touched the lives of millions of people.

What is *your* passion? That passion may lead you to produce eternal fruit as an extension of your business or in an entirely new career. As you follow your passion, you will discover which direction to take.

If you are retired, you might have the opportunity to become a missionary to your own community. Or you may be called to serve God as a spiritual advocate to those in another country.

To move on. Ask yourself if you can handle a new responsibility at this time. Think about others in your family. What are the implications for them? Consider what it is you will give up to take on something new. Determine how you will remain healthy and balanced in whatever passion God has given to you. Seek counsel from a Christian friend as you look for direction. Talk to Christian leaders, such as a local pastor, for advice and guidance. Sit down and write a scenario of how your life will be different if you walk through this door of opportunity. Describe what life would look like a year or more from now. Try to get a handle on how God is moving in your life. What is God saying to you? And what are you going to do about it?

As you follow your passion, you will discover which direction to take.

Write a scenario of how your life will be different if you walk through God's door of opportunity.

CHAPTER 6

The Significance Journey Part II: Over the Cliff

“There is no security on this earth. There is only opportunity.”

—Douglas MacArthur

Step #6: The Leap of Faith

This is the scary and exciting stage. You are under the conviction that you should enter into this fruit-producing work that gives you eternal significance. Your leap may be small or large. On the small end, you may decide to help at a church’s homeless ministry or train to visit those in the hospital. A longer leap may include relocating to the mission field of Indonesia. Your leap may be to remain a successful businessperson who provides influence and resources to ministries with eternal impact. That is huge! The size of the leap doesn’t matter. If you are doing God’s work and serving others in a way that brings them closer to Him, then your work has eternal consequences. Congratulations! You are producing work that endures.

As you celebrate your relationship with Jesus Christ, you’re connected to the Vine and will produce fruit—the kind that

endures. Lives will be changed as you invest in efforts that outlast your life. At this stage, you are convinced that this longing is from God. Now, you go public. You let those around you know: You are going to redirect your life—on the level of eternal fruit. Some of those who know you will affirm your decision. Though it's exciting and scary at the same time, you feel real peace.

That's the way Bob and Tina Muzikowski must have felt. Bob was a high-income worker for Northwestern Mutual. They lived with their six children in a clean, tidy suburb of Chicago. But God touched their lives with a passion to make a difference in the inner city. When Bob heard about the drugs, gangs, and unwanted pregnancies rampant in the inner city, he was moved

Lives will be changed
as you invest in efforts
that outlast your life.

beyond sympathy to action. He decided to help at-risk kids by establishing an inner-city Little League baseball program. Then Bob and Tina moved their family

to Chicago's West Side. Over a decade later, they were still working in the inner city, raising their family. Their house has become a refuge in the neighborhood. They built a home where they could serve in ministry on the ground floor and live on the second and third floors. Their connection with the kids in the Little League provided many opportunities to make a significant difference. Bob says, "Two or three nights this week there will be four or five kids sleeping at our house, and I don't know who they are. But they have Little League uniforms on, and they knock on the door at ten o'clock and say, 'Coach, we're locked out.' I look at the Bible on my desk. What am I supposed to say, 'Go away—go somewhere else'?"

Together the Muzikowski family is changing their neighborhood. Bob Muzikowski points to his life verse in James 1:22: "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourself. Do what it says."

Many of the kids in Bob Muzikowski's Little League are different people for life because of that ministry. Their children and grandchildren will grow up with different values and faith commitments. The Muzikowskis' work will outlive their lives. They will make a difference that is not only multigenerational, but eternal. There are people not even born yet who will celebrate a different eternal destiny because the Muzikowskis have taken a leap of faith and landed in the hearts of inner-city kids.

To move on. Be sure to stop, smell the roses, and celebrate the transition you experience in your leap of faith. Make plans to adjust to your new work in a way that provides optimal commitment to whatever you are leaving. For example, if your eternal fruit leap of faith requires you to leave your present job, finish well. Take care that no harm is done to the business. Provide enough advance notice so that you leave with the highest integrity.

Carefully and sensitively share the announcement of your leap of faith with those around you—those who are closest to you. Timing and delivery are important. Assume the posture of a servant—not a conqueror. Give attention to what God is doing in your life, not what you are doing for God. Remember, your disclosure can actually plant seeds that are a model for others.

I remember when my friend Brad shared his leap of faith with Steve, a marketing executive. As Steve listened to Brad, I could see by the look on his face that Brad's decision made a tremendous impact. It was clear that Steve was not at the leap of faith stage, but it was obvious he was somewhere on the journey.

Your calling may require adjustments to your lifestyle. Plan and prepare carefully. Even if you choose to serve in a volunteer capacity on a very part-time basis, you may have to give up something else. That requires a reordering of your priorities. It may call for a reshaping of your lifestyle. Remember, for me and my family, it meant moving from the church's four-bedroom house to a three-car garage for eight and a half years. That was a fairly significant lifestyle change, but I don't regret it for a minute. Neither does anyone else in our family.

Give attention to what God is doing in your life, not what you are doing for God.

Sometimes you need a jolt to jump. The leap of faith may require the closing of one door so you can recognize that God is opening another. In his book *Wild at Heart*, John Eldredge describes how God acts: "God thwarts us to save us. We think it will destroy us, but the opposite is true—we must be saved from what really will destroy us.... We simply accept the invitation to leave all that we've relied on and venture out with God. We can choose to do it ourselves, or we can wait for God to bring it all down."¹

Don't hurry the process at this stage. Take this step—and all the steps—very deliberately and intentionally. Think it through. Pray. Talk to other seasoned travelers on the significance journey. Read some books and listen to audio resources on the subject. Think about the Vine and the branches. The branch cannot produce fruit unless it is connected to the Vine. It's also true that the fruit does not appear instantaneously or overnight. The branch has to grow, expand, and stretch. It has to be nurtured. It needs the right environment. This is necessary for fruit production. And there is one thing more: pruning.

Step #7: The Pruning

Once you make the leap of faith, there are times when you have moments of “buyer’s remorse.” This is a subtle second-guessing that makes you ask the questions, “Am I really doing the right thing? Am I crazy? Have I just blown it? Am I going to fail?” These feelings are natural.

There are times when you have moments of “buyer’s remorse.”

There will also be some people who react negatively to your situation, especially at first. I remember when Michael and Kim made their decision to join our ministry. Michael left a fairly good-paying, “secure” job as a consultant to city planners and housing developers. They had a nice, comfortable home in the suburbs. As Michael took the leap of faith, which required moving to another state, he made his announcement to his close relatives. He then added he would be raising his own financial support. To say his family’s reaction was negative would be an understatement. They were shocked and wondered if he had lost his mind. Was he going through a midlife crisis? Had he been sucked in by some cult leader? You see, his extended family had a limited worldview. They didn’t realize that hundreds of thousands of people around the world work in efforts that produce eternal fruit. And they didn’t know that most of them raise their own salaries. Michael and Kim may have had a brief experience of “buyer’s remorse.” But God may also have been doing some pruning (discipline) in their lives. At the same time, Michael and Kim’s decision provided a wonderful opportunity to speak about the very different realm of eternal significance.

Some pruning always takes place in the process. You’re humbled, sometimes temporarily setback, often momentarily discouraged. Pruning hurts. Yet, it’s an investment in productivity. When you are pruned, you produce more. It works with grapevines. It will work the same for you.

Circumstances change, and some aspects of your adventure may not materialize exactly the way you anticipated. This, too, is natural. As you get involved in work that produces enduring fruit, you may experience the pruning Jesus talks about. You realize that God's work has its problems and challenges like anything else.

I remember once when I made a presentation to a group of pastors in St. Louis. I was "feeling my oats" and speaking with confidence. But I got a little arrogant and condescending. Afterward, I took some harsh criticism. I learned to be more humble and less judgmental. Pruning always has a lesson and an opportunity to grow.

Perhaps you naively thought that if you are working for God and producing eternal fruit, everything will go smoothly. You didn't look closely at the life of Jesus or His followers, all of whom had significant challenges, experience with pain, and instances of rejection.

In this stage some hardships come, and you can experience struggles early on. This is part of what Jesus was talking about when He said that God "...prunes every branch that does not bear fruit so that it will be clean and bear more fruit."² No one really enjoys the pruning process, yet it is the way God changes your life and directs it so you can be even more productive—perhaps more productive than you ever dreamed.

Hans and Ivan Haggeman are two African American brothers whose father was a pastor in East Harlem. Hans graduated from Princeton and went on to Columbia University law school. He was an associate at two New York law firms. Ivan graduated magna cum laude from Harvard University and earned a master's degree in education, also from Harvard. Both had great careers, but God had eternal fruit in mind for them.

At their father's death, they took inventory of their lives and recognized that though they had been successful, they were not impacting others for eternal fruit. They both quit their jobs, moved back to East Harlem, and began a school for at-risk children called the Exodus House. The school operates twelve hours a day, six days a week and provides three meals a day.

Hans and Ivan are providing a change in the lives of street kids—who are introduced to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Their efforts are helping kids become branches connected to the Vine. Hans and Ivan live life beyond the ordinary. But their experience of eternal significance has not come without pruning. It required a major change in lifestyle and a significant reordering of priorities. There have been many challenges along the way. But they have persevered, and they are investing in the lives of children at a level of eternal significance.

To move on. Recognize this: Everyone who takes the significance journey experiences reality shock. Some of your friends and relatives will not react well at first to your leap of faith. Later, they may come to understand. Give them time and space. Don't write them off. With high integrity, continue to be positive. My friend Doug Kinne told me about Mary and Dana Libby. Dana served on a police force, and many of his coworkers were shocked with disbelief when Dana became a Christian and he and Mary chose to become missionaries in Cluj, Romania.

As Dana and Mary began training for their new adventure, it took awhile for some of Dana's fellow officers to understand that this was the real deal. But as the Libbys began to raise support for their mission work, they discovered that some of their support would come from non-Christian officers Dana worked with over the years. Dana wrote, "Twenty-year cops that knew me prior to accepting Christ as my Savior are some of the most interested and open people to what we are doing."

Dana's journey made an impact in Romania and in the precinct he left back home.

Understand that God's work has challenges too. Recognize that human beings are *human* beings, even when they serve as branches connected to the Vine. Your commitment to eternal fruit does not make you perfect. It makes you powerful for God's Kingdom. Read the New Testament and look at some of the difficulties those followers of Christ experienced. In 2 Corinthians 4, the Apostle Paul says, "God in his mercy has given us this work to do, and so we do not become discouraged."³ Read the account of some of the challenges Paul faced in 2 Corinthians 11:23-29. He talks about being imprisoned, whipped, near death, stoned, shipwrecked, in all kinds of danger, betrayed by false friends, subjected to work and toil, going without sleep, being hungry and thirsty, without shelter or clothing, and under political pressure.

As a follower of Christ who made an enormous impact on many people—and continues to do so through his writings in the New Testament—Paul knew about being pruned! Don't be surprised when it happens to you. When you take the leap of faith—that is, when you leave the driveway—you'll experience some pruning on your journey.

Your commitment to eternal fruit does not make you perfect. It makes you powerful for God's Kingdom.

Look at John 15:2. When Jesus says, "You will be pruned so you will produce more fruit," reflect on the hardships you might experience. Ask yourself, "What can God accomplish in and through my character as I experience this pruning? As I face these difficulties, how is it that God might be using them to grow and stretch me?" That is not to say that God is causing the difficulties, but He is allowing you to go through them, and He is there to provide strength and courage.

Early in my work, Church Doctor Ministries experienced some huge financial challenges, and we got behind the financial power curve. Like many companies caught in the financial crunch, we had to downsize. I experienced significant pruning. The ministry was pruned. God didn't cause the problem, but He allowed it. I had to ask, "What am I learning?" It was during that time our ministry "grew up." We got involved with a CPA who monitored our finances carefully. We developed a board of directors who understood the financial dynamics of the ministry. We developed monitoring and measuring steps that demanded the very highest integrity of financial accountability. We emerged financially solvent nine years later. During that time, the ministry continued to touch the lives of millions of people. It was an extremely difficult time of pruning for the staff. It was a time for trusting God.

Sometimes the ministry you join or the church where you belong must go through some pruning. At some time, you might have to go through it. It is never easy, but it's always so you come out the other end with more fruit. Sometimes the pruning takes a long time. Often it seems like a desert time.

Step #8: The Desert Time

In the Bible, the desert is a place of testing. Early in His ministry, Jesus was led into the desert, where He was challenged by the devil. In the Old Testament, the people of God left slavery in Egypt under the leadership of Moses and spent forty years wandering around in the desert.

A desert time is common for those on the significance journey. It is a time when God does some great ministry. Yet, it is not always fun. In his book *If God Has a Plan for My Life, Why Can't I Find It?* Ron Boehme makes this dramatic statement: *"Every great individual in the Bible was prepared for his life's work through some kind of testing. There are no exceptions. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Job, Esther, Deborah, Noah, and Elijah all encountered*

God's stop signs in their lives. It's the same for us. We will be prepared for our life's work by trials, delays, and purification: God's way of protecting and perfecting our destinies."⁴

Yes, it *feels* like a desert time. As you mature as a servant, you are going to experience ups and downs. You may sense a time when you enter this desert. It's an extended time of testing. This usually comes just as you are sensing some fulfillment and you begin to feel security in what you do. Perhaps it's *because* you begin to feel secure. Maybe you're relying too much on your decision to produce fruit. Perhaps you are putting too much stock in your own abilities. It could be a pride issue. It is possible you just need to learn more. For whatever reason, God may allow you to wander through the desert for a season. Sometimes it happens via a major crisis. You go through a dry time—a desert time. It is usually not just a day or two. Often it is a longer period of time. How long? That depends on what God has in mind.

In the desert time, you may seriously consider giving up. Yet, you don't. You persevere. Steve Alford is a former All-American college basketball player, Olympian, and player for the NBA. When he was a coach at the University of Iowa, he shared with me a reflection of his faith. Like everyone else, he had his share of challenges and difficulties.

Perhaps you're putting too much stock in your own abilities.

As a devout and committed Christian, he shared his life verse: "Happy is the person who remains faithful under trials, because when he succeeds in passing such a test, he will receive as his reward the life which God has promised to those that love him."⁵

If you're in the desert stage, you may have thought about giving up. You're not alone. It's not only biblical characters who face trials. If you talk to any Christian leader or look closely at their lives, you'll see there was a time when every one of them

considered throwing in the towel. It just seems like the desert time is part of God's strategic plan to strengthen our relationship with the Vine and cement our character for the work of eternal significance.

Read the Old Testament book of Exodus. See what happened to the Israelites as they went through the desert for forty years. What lessons do you think God was teaching them? Can you understand how they were learning to rely on God more than anything else? Remember: The Promised Land is *always* on the other side of the desert. And sometimes we experience several desert times. Yet, God grows us through each one—if we let Him!

You may seriously
consider giving up.
Yet, you don't.

Look at the first chapter of Joshua in the Old Testament. Joshua and the Israelites are right across the river from the Promised Land. Earlier, Moses had sent spies into the land (Numbers 13) and discovered one part of the promise God didn't tell them. There were people already living there, and some of them seemed to be like giants! They weren't about to get up and leave their farms and homes just because God promised this group of people—who wandered around the desert for forty years—that the land belonged to them. The Israelites had a fight on their hands. They were afraid.

In Joshua 1:9, God told them to be “strong and courageous.” He told them how to take the last step out of the desert—a leap of faith. He told them to boldly go in and capture the land, which He had already given to them. In other words, it was a done deal. The check was written; they just needed to cash it. But they had to have the faith that God would deliver again.

God reminded them that He was with them in every step. It's just like when Jesus told His followers to go make disciples. He

promised to be with them every step of the way – to the end of the world.

Then God told Joshua and His people that they would find strength by focusing on His truths and direction for their lives. That's the formula for strength and courage.

Remember, your desert time is when God will build character—if you let Him. He will strengthen your faith and reliance on Him. He is preparing you for more service. The longer and more severe your desert time, the more God may have in mind for you in the future.

I'll never forget when my whole life was falling apart, when my nine-year desert time was being launched. Church Doctor Ministries was in financial peril. It was an October day, and I was feeling the deepest, darkest place of the desert. I was on the phone with my friend Olan Hendrix. As I shared with him my horrible reaction to the devastation all around me, Olan had incredible words of wisdom. He said, "Kent, with all that you're going through, God must have some tremendous potential for you and your ministry in the future." There was a part of me that wanted to say, "That's easy for you to say!" But I had such high respect for Olan that I knew he was speaking into my life at just the right moment.

To move on. If you are in the desert time, pray. Let God grow you. Recognize the desert time for what it is: a time of testing. Don't pretend that it is fun—it isn't. It's OK to feel the human side of stress. Yet, look to God and don't give up. The New Testament word for a Christian "leader" is from the root word "to persevere." God knows ahead of time that you will be stretched, troubled, and challenged. The key is to persevere. That is what Christian leadership is all about.

God is looking for followers who produce eternal fruit. When you are under the challenge of the desert time, being connected

to the Vine is important. Hang on to Jesus with all your might. Through His strength you will persevere.

Be a Christian who is a winner and not a whiner. You will stretch to the challenge, not shrink from it. You can be strong and courageous – with God's help. And when you come out the

Don't pretend that
it is fun—it isn't.

other side of the desert, you and your ministry will be prepared to produce even more eternal fruit. You will find yourself on the threshold of fulfillment.

CHAPTER 7

The Significance Journey **Part III: Landing at a New Level**

“I firmly believe that any man’s finest hour—his greatest fulfillment to all he holds dear—is that moment when he has worked his heart out in a good cause and lies exhausted on the field of battle—victorious.”

—Vince Lombardi

Step #9: The Threshold of Fulfillment

If you are in this stage, you have come out of the desert. You are crossing the line. You have learned, like Joshua, that God is with you. He’s already won the victory, and if you stay in His Word and do it His way, you will experience significance at a whole new level. You have emerged as a seasoned warrior.

Years ago, there was a great film called *The Mission*. Robert DeNiro played a mercenary and slave trader in 18th century Argentina. There was a great struggle between the Roman Catholic church, Portugal, and Spain for dominance of the territory. In an act of passion and jealousy over a beautiful woman, DeNiro killed his brother. Suddenly he was crushed by what his life had become, and he sought

You have emerged as
a seasoned warrior.

solitude in a Jesuit monastery. He withdrew and began starving himself to death.

A Jesuit missionary, played by Jeremy Irons, visited DeNiro—who thought his terrible sin was beyond redemption. The priest showed how he could have forgiveness and know God's mercy. He showed him how his life could have significance by serving the very tribe from which he used to steal slaves.

DeNiro's character began to change and, ultimately, he became a Jesuit priest. He found fulfillment as he entered a life beyond ordinary. The slave trader became a Jesuit priest, serving the very tribe he used to plunder. He discovered eternal fruit and the fulfillment of significance.¹

Like the missionary played by DeNiro, you may be in the stage where you find yourself on a threshold of fulfillment. You still have challenges—everyone does. But you have some history behind you. The desert is behind you. You've learned to rise above the challenges.

You have learned the incredible lessons found in Romans 5:3-4. A different missionary, the Apostle Paul, wrote these words: "We also boast of our troubles, because we know that trouble produces endurance, endurance brings God's approval, and His approval creates hope." These verses have tremendous implications. You can boast of your troubles. That means that you are not ashamed of your troubles, and you don't try to hide them. You can, with great stability and security, be very transparent about some of your challenges because you have discovered that trouble produces endurance.

When you go through difficulties, you learn. God gives you the strength to endure. And, once you have made it through some difficulties, you recognize that God has given you an endurance that will sustain you. So, when you are faced with challenges, you put them in divine perspective: God will get

you through this just as before. Your troubles produce endurance. Your endurance, in turn, brings God's approval. Why? Because, as you look to God for strength and courage, your faith and trust in Him are affirmed.

When you look to God in your troubles, you are celebrating the reality that you are a branch connected to the Vine. You are not a liberated branch doing your own thing. You are fused to Jesus Christ because you know you need His strength to endure. That pleases God. It honors God. Endurance reflects the power of God. It demonstrates your faith in Him to those around you, those who watched you go through your troubles. So, your endurance brings God's approval. And His approval creates hope. Of course it would!

You are not
ashamed of
your troubles,
and you don't
try to hide them.

As God helps you through challenges and you rely on Him, you have hope for the future. Why? Because you have made it through difficulty before. Over the years, some of my greatest experiences have been talking with seasoned Christians who are much older and experienced. To listen to the "war stories" of their troubles and difficulties and to hear them express how God has helped provides tremendous encouragement. Of course it creates hope. If God did it for them, He can do it for me. If He's done it for me before, He'll do it again. And He'll do it for you. That's why you can be forthright about your troubles. You know that trouble produces endurance and endurance brings God's approval, and His approval creates hope. When you emerge from the desert time, you are on the threshold of fulfillment. You have experienced victory in a personal way. This is not just theory!

Another dimension of the threshold of fulfillment is that you begin to experience the miracle of multiplication. As you invest in the lives of others, on the level of eternal fruit, their lives are changed. They become different people. They begin to operate

on a whole new level. They experience the connection with Jesus the Vine. Their changed lives impact other people. This is the miracle of exponential fulfillment.

Our consultants have spent several years helping churches. Our support team analyzes a congregation before the visit to the church. We discover strengths and

You begin to
experience the miracle
of multiplication.

challenges. Surveys and questionnaires identify opportunities for ministry. We take that information on-site, interview numerous members, look at the facilities, and study the surrounding area. Then we make specific, tangible recommendations of what that congregation can do to remove roadblocks and restore vitality. We recommend changes that help the church become more productive. The real “payoff” for us is not when we give the report with the recommendations—although that is very exciting for the church. It comes during the next few months as we stay in touch with the church and follow up. When we observe the church dramatically changing, we see eternal fruit produced through our ministry. The church begins to produce spiritual fruit in the lives of many others. That is exponential fulfillment, a characteristic of significance: God’s people experience multiplication. Congregations not only produce eternal fruit like a parent, but also multiplied like a grandparent.

The fruit of this process reflects the blessing of God as our Church Doctors help Christians—and their churches—to become more effective to reach their communities for Jesus Christ.

To move on. If you are in this stage of the threshold of fulfillment, take inventory on a regular basis. Stop and reflect. How has God used you to make an eternal impact? Put your troubles into perspective. Look at Romans 5:3-5 and see how trouble produces endurance, which reflects God’s approval,

which creates hope for you *and* your church. Open yourself to God's strength and encouragement as you grow to become Christian warriors—rising above troubles. Celebrate the persevering power that God instills in you as one connected to the Vine—sold out for the cause of eternal fruit and experiencing significance in a life beyond ordinary.

Accept your troubles as a part of life. Bruce Wilkinson related to this in his book about the prayer of Jabez: "Jabez's last request is a brilliant but little-understood strategy for sustaining your spiritual life. After all, as your life transcends the ordinary and starts to encroach on new territory for God, guess whose turf you're invading?"²

Pray that God would keep you from crumbling under the challenges you face. Pray that God would keep you from evil. Recognize that as you produce eternal fruit, you become a strategic part of God's great plan for all people.

Understand that there is an enemy against God's purposes. Satan does not want people to experience divine fulfillment. Satan is a clever enemy. He will go after you because you are strategically productive. You are a conduit for God to change the eternal destiny of those around you. Satan is going to tempt you. You will have struggles. You will be challenged. Pray for God to deliver you from that evil.

You are a conduit for God to change the eternal destiny of those around you.

Live by hope. Make sure your hope is not based on your own intelligence or effort, but on God. Remember, your only hope to produce eternal fruit is when you are connected to the eternal Vine.

Celebrate victories. Worship and praise God for the way He is using you. Thank God for choosing you to go and produce much fruit, the kind that endures. Show your appreciation for

the honor of serving Him. Think about how your life is different when you live beyond ordinary. Reach deep inside your soul and notice that your “significance hole” is filled to overflowing. There is a divine satisfaction about being in partnership with the Ruler of the universe!

Notice that your
“significance hole” is
filled to overflowing.

Years ago I attended a conference sponsored by Willow Creek Community Church. The pastor of that church, Bill Hybels, asked us to close the conference by joining hands. As he prayed, he asked God to remind us of the incredible privilege of serving in partnership with Him. Several times Bill said, “We *get* to do this.” We *get* to do this – we *get* to be a part of what God is doing to change the eternal destiny of others. When you live by that joy and excitement, you are on the threshold of fulfillment. It’s the greatest place to be in life. It is life far beyond ordinary.

Step #10: The Reflective Dimension of Significance

You live a lifestyle in which you have transcended the ordinary. It is not a position of pride or arrogance. Rather, it demonstrates a sense of deep humility and awe of the wonderful privilege God has given to you. You have deep appreciation for the ancient truth that God has revealed to you. You bask in the wonderful revelation that your life has meaning, even beyond your life. You produce eternal fruit in a posture of servanthood toward others. You realize you have come a long way from where you used to be.

Greg Savitt was a CPA with the largest accounting firm in the United States. His life was all about money. He was an Orthodox Jew. Yet, by God’s amazing intervention, Greg left it all when he converted to Christianity. Then this accountant became a street evangelist for Jews for Jesus. He carried the message to other Jews. He shared about how they can become

“completed Jews” by meeting Jesus the Messiah. Greg’s life transcended the ordinary. The reflective dimension of significance is when you reach the point, like Greg did, that on your worst day, you couldn’t go back and work for the ultimate purpose of a paycheck.

On your worst day, you couldn’t go back and work for the ultimate purpose of a paycheck.

You still have struggles and challenges. Everyone does. You always will. But by God’s power, you rise above those daily difficulties. They are now put into perspective because you are on a divine mission that impacts lives forever. As you become more strategic, you are well aware that you are involved in supernatural activities. You are conscious of the supernatural enemy who opposes what you are doing. You recognize that, on your own strength, you cannot fight this enemy. But you are also confident that by the power of Christ, that enemy has been defeated once and for all. Your connection with the Vine brings you triumph over Satan no matter how he attacks.

You live in a new dimension. Your existence is not just a life, a career, or a job. You are on a mission. God is your senior partner in a divine, supernatural enterprise that engages in the highest priorities of life, death, and eternity. You live at the level of significance for which you were created. You understand what Jesus meant when He said, “...my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”³ You experience life beyond ordinary. You are complete. You have discovered the divine design for your destiny.

To move on. Rejoice in the privilege of your calling. You are no longer involved in a “job.” You have entered a mission. It’s why you were born. It is why you get up in the morning.

Gather those believers around you who share the mission. Make sure you interact with them regularly. That is God's way of speaking encouragement into your life.

You have discovered
the divine design for
your destiny.

Make sure you have prayer partners. I gathered over thirty prayer partners who have committed to pray for me. Every once in a while, we correspond and connect. One of my favorite prayer partners was Ken Jacques, who is now with the Lord. His faithfulness and support for my calling was strong and unwavering—for longer than I can remember. Ken and his wife, Marcy, were what Jesus called "...salt of the Earth."⁴ Through their prayers and encouragement, they *flavored* the work God called me to do. They were salt in my life. They enhanced my journey of significance. I was privileged to be a small part of their eternal fruit, multiplied in my life through their prayer investment. It is great to have prayer partners!

Celebrate regularly the joy of making an eternal difference in the lives of others. When I pray with our staff, I make it a point to give thanks to God for the privilege of serving Him. Quite frankly, some days it doesn't feel like it's a great privilege. Sometimes the struggles are overwhelming. But I believe that is when we should pray even more and give thanks for the privilege of ministry. As we pray, we are reminded that, with God's help, it is indeed a privilege.

My friend Doug Kinne told me about the yak lady of Tibet. Her name was Margaret. Margaret's husband died in his late sixties. Margaret was just a few years younger and determined that she was not going to withdraw from life into a cocoon. She wasn't sure what she would do. When her church offered a short-term mission trip to Tibet, she decided: "It might do me some good." During her brief two weeks in Tibet, Margaret learned that the economy there is closely tied to owning one or more yaks. They are used for food and clothing and are often the centerpiece of a barter economy. She also learned that, in Tibetan culture, the

wealthy people inflate the price of yaks to keep others poor. She recognized that if poor people could purchase a yak at an honest price, their standard of living, the health of their children, and their whole future would be brighter. Margaret returned home determined to learn about animal husbandry. She then moved to Tibet and began what might be her life's greatest adventure. She began to breed yaks and provide them at cost to the poor. She made a significant impact on the economy of Tibet. She became known as the "yak lady" of Tibet!

Your calling may not be so dramatically distant. It may be to speak into the lives of children by teaching a Sunday school class. I still remember one of my Sunday school teachers when I was a little boy. Her name was Mrs. Janetski. I can remember that the year she taught me in Sunday school, she began to show signs of graying hair. I'm quite sure my behavior might have aided that process! I have no idea how God was working in her life or why she was teaching Sunday school. But I know that through the Bible stories she shared, she introduced me to Jesus. Her efforts were not the entire plan of God to bring me into full-time ministry, but they were significant. I would not minimize her ministry to me at all. And now, several decades later, I get to do this.

For several years, I had a program that was heard Monday through Friday on almost 300 Christian radio stations (and the Internet) throughout the world. I get to write books like this and speak to thousands of people at conferences. I get to help hundreds of churches. So, what was the extent of Mrs. Janetski's ministry through Sunday school? I don't even know about the other kids in whose lives she invested. I just know about my own. Who knows what has happened through all the children she taught over the years? Never underestimate what God can do through you.

Every time you worship, celebrate the joy you have through the honor and privilege of making an eternal difference in the lives of others. Celebrate the exponential fulfillment that is part of multiplying God's love—releasing others to touch many people who touch other people—who touch others. Whatever you know, whatever you *think* you know about the fruit of your efforts, it is probably more. Much more.

Ben Manthei and Ruth Manthei have written this in their book *In His Majesty's Service*:

I used to think: *It must have been exciting to be a disciple at the time of Christ when the early church was turning their world upside-down.* But then my mind drifted back to a recent conference where a statistician asked, "Of all the people who have ever lived on the face of the earth, how many of them do you think are living today?" Someone said, "Maybe ten percent?" His answer had shocked me. "In the year 2002, over half of the people...that have ever lived in the history of the world...were **alive!**" I found that amazing! When we influence our world today, we have the potential of impacting the lives of well over half the people who have ever walked the planet. What an exciting time to be alive!⁵

I wonder what that number of people is today. Whatever it is, we are clear: There is a great mission field! Is God calling on you?

Consider your partnership with those throughout all of history who have transcended to life beyond ordinary. You are part of an army that spans centuries—people who have lived a life full of significance, those who are part of an army that produces eternal fruit. The Bible says, "You, too, are built upon the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, the cornerstone being Christ Jesus himself. He is the one who holds the whole building together and makes it grow into a sacred temple dedicated to the Lord. In union with him you too are being built together with all the others into a place where God lives through his Spirit."⁶

It is amazing how many people are part of the task force for eternal fruit. I think most people would be totally surprised by the enormous number of those who, down through the ages, have lived a life beyond ordinary. It would be amazing to know how many today are part of that eternal significance.

In my work, I have been privileged to meet all types of Christians in countries and cultures around the world. Whether I am working with Indians in the southeastern part of the subcontinent of India, Japanese Christians in Tokyo, or Zulus in South Africa, it amazes me how we immediately sense

Consider your partnership with those throughout all of history who have transcended to life beyond ordinary.

camaraderie based upon our common faith. I have been privileged to visit or train pastors in seventy-eight countries. Yet, here is what I know: We are a physically disconnected army that is spiritually united by the

Vine. Celebrate that you are a part of the most powerful and revolutionary movement the world has—or ever will—know!

Some days you may feel all alone. You are not! You are never by yourself. Jesus is always by your side. And there are literally millions of Christ-followers who are on the same team. They also face struggles and challenges. But they, too, are those who live at a whole new level in a life beyond ordinary.

We are a physically disconnected army that is spiritually united by the Vine.

CHAPTER 8

Your Moment in Time

“There comes a special moment in everyone’s life, a moment for which that person was born. That special opportunity, when he seizes it, will fulfill his mission—a mission for which he is uniquely qualified. In that moment, he finds greatness. It is his finest hour.”

—Winston Churchill

My wife, Janet, and I are greatly blessed with two Christian children, their spiritually strong spouses, and four grandchildren who are also enthusiastic believers. Our son, Jon, who is now a gifted pastor, was a challenging child. When he was young, he had a propensity for procrastination. “Have you fed the dog yet?” “Not yet.” “Have you finished your homework?” “Not yet.” “Have you thought about cutting the grass?” “Not yet.” Don’t get me wrong—he was a great kid who did numerous things really well. But he did tend to put things off.

Perhaps you are similar: a great person who does many things well. Yet, your clock is ticking. More important than feeding the dog, doing homework, or cutting grass, the opportunities to invest in the lives of others diminish with each moment, every day. There are people all around you who could receive the

love of God through your eternal fruit. There are those who, at this point, have no grasp of their spiritual destiny. Yet, touched by the love of God through you, their lives could change forever. Yes, eternally!

Opportunities to invest in the lives of others diminish with each moment.

For those in your social network, their clock is ticking as well. How close is your neighbor from entering eternity without God? That could be measured in numerous ways. When she is traveling down the highway at fifty miles an hour and passes a car going the other way at fifty miles an hour—how close is she from eternity? About five feet! Life is fragile, and life is relatively short. We were all reminded of that on the tragic date of September 11, 2001, when terrorist attacks took the lives of thousands of people in the destruction of the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and United Airlines Flight 93. We remember that every September 11. It is also a reminder that our windows of opportunity are limited.

The Bible says you should “number your days.” That means you should beware: Whatever time you have been given, it’s running out. Oliver Wendell Holmes said, “Most people go to their graves with their music still inside them.”¹ Many people live their entire work lives and go to their graves without finding out what they wanted to be when they “grew up.” When is your time? Without question, now!

My friend Doug Kinne, to whom this book is dedicated, was a brilliant obstetrician who delivered hundreds of babies in Petoskey, Michigan. Doug and his wife, Jan, spent several years after Doug’s graduation from medical school paying off bills. While Doug was in med school, their children were born. That, too, required a significant financial investment. Just about the time the children got through college, Doug finally had the opportunity, as a medical doctor, to make financial headway.

But it was precisely at that time God began to speak to his heart. He felt called to a full-time ministry beyond his service through his local church. Jan was also being called. They experienced some short-term mission trips. They discovered that they each possessed a heart for a world much bigger than Petoskey, Michigan, or the United States and much longer than a short-term mission trip.

Doug had a decision to make. He thought about it and talked to his pastor, Bill Mindel. Being a very smart man, Doug realized that if he worked for ten more years, he and Jan would have finances put away for the rest of their lives. He would be in his late fifties. He could have plenty of time to serve God. But Doug was a man of high integrity, so he put God first. He trusted Jesus' words, "...be concerned above everything else with the Kingdom of God and with what he requires of you, and he will provide you with all these other things."² So, he did the supernatural thing. Recognizing that the clock is always ticking, he and Jan plunged into missions.

They began approaching other Christians and, with the help of their church, raised their own support as missionaries. That was quite a change from a lucrative medical practice! They began work with Youth With A Mission, or YWAM, a worldwide ministry with the purpose of "knowing God and making Him known." Doug became the dean of the College of Counseling and Healthcare at University of the Nations in Kona, Hawaii. This is the training arm of Youth With A Mission (YWAM). He and Jan, a trained nurse, devoted their lives to training workers from numerous countries around the world to meet medical needs and share Christ. In the ninth year, Doug was diagnosed with a brain tumor.

Within a year after his diagnosis, I was attending his funeral. It was one of the most moving events I have ever experienced. Doug's pastor shared that if Doug had waited for financial security rather than letting God provide, he would never had

that great missionary adventure of life beyond ordinary. Only God knows how many people have—and will continue to be—touched throughout the world because of the training Doug and Jan provided. They were unwilling to say, “not yet.”³

Benjamin Disraeli said, “The secret of success in life is for a man to be ready for his time when it comes.”⁴ Timing is important. Doug and Jan Kinne sensed that in spite of the world’s pressures to obtain financial security, they were called to act for a much greater purpose. It has been said many times: “Make sure the thing you’re living for is worth dying for.”

Mixed Motives?

I must admit, when I started my journey into ministry I had very mixed motives. I was a Christian, but somewhat spiritually immature. I can’t say that I had a strong connection to the Vine or a super relationship with Jesus. But I saw the value of eternal significance, and it really excited me. How could I invest my life in anything less? Being the adventuresome and aggressive type, I thought, “Why should I do this part-time or volunteer?” While it is certainly not that way for everyone, for me, it was all or nothing. I flung myself into training for full-time ministry and ordination as a pastor. But to be honest, I had mixed motives. Sure, I wanted to serve God and wanted my life to count for something. I really believed in what I was doing. But, frankly, I liked the idea of watching my pastor get up and speak, knowing that everybody listened and paid attention (or so I thought!). I saw the authority and the enthusiasm of my pastor. I know now that my pastor, Vic Halboth, wasn’t doing it for the spotlight. His years of servanthood declared, with high integrity, his commitment to his calling. But from my vantage point, I thought it was a great way to be “up front.”

I could be a little ashamed to share this in writing, except that I understand God uses many people who have mixed motives. There is a great story in the Gospel of John, chapter 4, about a woman who met Jesus at a well. Her life was not in very good

I saw the value of eternal significance, and it really excited me.

condition, but she left Jesus a totally different person. Her priorities changed. Honestly, she did not go to that well to meet Jesus. Even when He started talking with her, she tried an “end-around” to skirt her messed up life. She threw up smoke screens to get Jesus off the subject of her immoral lifestyle—and her eternal destiny. Her original motives were simple: She was at the well to get water. You know what? Jesus accepted that. But He wasn’t satisfied with it. He accepted her in the place where she was, but then He led her further. He told her about how she could receive life-giving water.⁵

If you wait until all your motives are pure, biblical, and theological, you’ll probably never leave your spiritual driveway. Never will all your lights be green. So, don’t worry about mixed motives. God is not asking you to be perfect. It’s not an issue of ability, but availability. He is asking you to be available to experience the eternal significance of divine fruit. That restlessness you feel is the desire to move beyond ordinary. And God can use that restlessness. Let it happen!

Remember the Nike motto? “Just do it!” Rusty Rustenbach says, “You and I live in an age when only a rare minority of individuals desire to spend their lives in pursuit of objectives that are bigger than they are. In our age, for most people, when they die it will be as though they never lived.”⁶ Don’t let yourself be numbered in that mass of people who died without ever living, especially at the level of eternal significance. As you get involved, your motives will adjust. As God continues to grow and use you, you will learn to care about the eternal destiny of others with a clearer focus. The strength of your

eternal fruit doesn't rest on your motives anyway. It doesn't rest on you. It is the power of God at work. Even the Bible says that "...we who have this spiritual treasure in common clay pots, in order to show that the supreme power belongs to God, not to us."⁷

I love the way my friend Brad Hoefs describes it: "We are just a bunch of clay pots... very fragile and easily broken. In fact, we're not only clay pots, some of us, sometimes, are cracked pots!" We are supposed to take Jesus, the light of the world, and shine that light to the world. How can God do that with a bunch of cracked pots? He shines through the cracks!

Don't let yourself be numbered in that mass of people who died without ever living.

Producing eternal fruit isn't about pointing people to ourselves. The fruit points others to the Vine—Jesus Christ. Abraham Lincoln thought about how he would be remembered. He said, "Die when I may, I want it said of me by those who knew me best, that I always plucked a thistle and planted a flower where I thought a flower would grow."⁸

Claims Beyond the Ordinary

Jesus made claims that were far beyond the ordinary. Stephen Levine said, "Buddha left a road map, Jesus left a road map, Krishna left a road map, Rand McNally left a road map. But you still have to travel the road yourself."⁹ I wholeheartedly disagree with that comment. Jesus didn't leave a road map. **He is the road map!** Among all the leaders in history, Jesus is the only one who said, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me.*"¹⁰

You don't have to travel the road yourself. The key is to be a branch connected to the Vine. Jesus is the one who provides the life. He said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever

believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.”¹¹ Jesus is the source of eternal life beyond the grave. He is the power of the vine for the branches. He is the source of eternal fruit.

Pointing people to a relationship with Jesus is what eternal fruit is all about. Success is for a lifetime, but significance goes beyond. Eternal significance lasts forever. Ultimately, the desire to share that eternal life with others is the proper motive. It is ultimate love for others. Jesus talked about this love when He taught about the vine and branches. He said, “My commandment is this: love one another, just as I love you. The greatest love a person can have for his friends is to give his life for them.”¹²

That is what Jesus did. He gave His life so we could have forgiveness and new life. He gives us the privilege of using our lives so others can receive His love as well. As you engage in works of service and meet the needs of people, you are involved in efforts beyond the ordinary. These works of servanthood provide a platform for relationships. Those relationships provide an environment to introduce others to Jesus Christ in a relevant way. **That is what life beyond ordinary is all about.** You have to decide. What are you going to do with your life?

Success is for a lifetime, but significance goes beyond.

Jim Elliot was a missionary to South America. Before he was killed for his faith, he wrote: “God, I pray, light these idle sticks of my life and may I burn up for you. Consume my life, my God, for it is yours. I seek not a long life but a full one like Yours, Lord Jesus.”¹³

There is a story about a man who went into a store to buy a compass. The clerk said, “What kind of compass do you want?” The man replied, “What do you mean?” The clerk said, “There

are two kinds of compasses, and they are very different. One goes around in circles. The other points the way." Don't let your life be one that goes in circles until it finally ends. Let Jesus be your compass. He is the One who is the truth; the One who is the life; the One who is the way. He is the One who gives the free gift of salvation that changes the eternal destiny of others.

Fulfillment

The Guinness World Book of Records describes a man who grinds up metal and glass and eats it. He has several world records for what he has eaten. He has eaten six bicycles, four chandeliers, and, believe it or not, one Cessna airplane (over a period of time). Imagine when this man dies and faces his Creator and the Lord asks, "Well, what did you do with your life?" What's he going to say, "I ate an airplane"? J.H. Newman once said, "Fear not that your life will come to an end, but that it will never have a beginning."¹⁴

That hole in your soul is God's way of prompting you toward a life that produces eternal fruit. *Success* is a reward you gain for being very good at what you do. *Significance* is using your

Significance is using your success to make a difference for eternity.

success to make a difference for eternity. "True significance is not what you do for God, but your ability to allow God to accomplish His goals through you."¹⁵

If God calls you to leave your job, go. However, God may call you to produce eternal fruit right where you are – right where you have always been. You can produce eternal fruit through your business. J.D. Collins is like many Christian businessmen and businesswomen I have met who continue to run a company to earn money to fund God's work. J.D. is the president of a cement factory. He told me, "My goal is to make as much money as I can so I can give it away to ministries working to

share Christ with others. The more I make, the better—for Christian ministries.”

What is great about the privilege of producing eternal fruit? You are in partnership with the King of the universe. One of the greatest honors a nation can bestow is to give someone the privilege of being an ambassador to another country. That ambassador status is what God offers to you. The Bible says that we are ambassadors for the King of the universe, representing Him in this world: “Here we are, then, speaking for Christ, as though God himself were making his appeal through us.”¹⁶

You did not choose to be an ambassador. God chose you. Your longing for significance is tangible evidence that God has chosen you. It’s a privilege of service that has its reward: “...that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete” (John 15:11). In the end, it is to have the words of Jesus eternally ringing in your ears, “Well done, you good and faithful servant!”¹⁷

I think my friend Jim Manthei is best at putting this into perspective: “Why stoop to be a king when you can be a missionary?” Once you have tasted life beyond the ordinary, you will never go back. How could you? It’s like the man who was a missionary to Indonesia. He had some engineering in his background, and an oil company offered him a tremendous salary to work for them. He declined the position. So they doubled the salary. He declined again. They raised it more. He declined. So the oil company said, “Just name your salary.” The missionary replied, “Oh, the salary, it’s big enough. It’s the job that’s too small.”

You can live your life any way you want, but you only get to spend it once.

You can spend your life any way you want, but you only get to spend it once. Once you touch life beyond the grave and invest in eternal significance, you have

experienced how God uses you to change the eternal destiny of others. You have tasted life beyond ordinary.

About the Author



Dr. Kent Hunter is the founder of Church Doctor Ministries, now led by Dr. Tracee J. Swank. Church Doctor Ministries is a team of church consultants who help Christians and churches more productively impact their world.

Kent is the author of thirty-six books that help Christians and churches impact their world for Jesus Christ.

He lives on a tree farm in northeastern Indiana with his wife, Janet.

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Endnotes

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