# Now Where Did I Put Him?

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One of the phrases I've probably said more than any other in my life is:

**"Now where did I put that?"**

I have what I like to call the gift of preoccupation.

I can put my keys somewhere perfectly logical, and five minutes later, that location has apparently been erased from human history.

My glasses. My phone. A book I was just reading. A piece of paper I absolutely could not lose.

The things I need most somehow end up in the most peculiar and apparently unforgettable places, and so I wander through the house asking:

**"Where did I put that?"**

This morning I was reading the second chapter of Luke when I came across a phrase that stopped me.

Mary and Joseph had been in Jerusalem for the Passover. When the celebration was over, they started home. They assumed Jesus was somewhere in the traveling company.

After all, He was twelve years old. Surely He was with relatives, friends, the other families making their journey back to Nazareth.

But after traveling for a day, they realized something:

**Jesus wasn't there.**

So they turned around. Yeah, they took a U-turn. They searched

for Him high and low, and Luke says:

**“After three days they found him in the temple.”**

After three days.

I read that this morning and thought, *I’ve heard that before.*

Three days.

I think you might know where I’m going with this.

Years later, another Mary would be looking for Jesus, and this time she knew exactly where He was supposed to be.

In a tomb.

Except He wasn’t there.

And that got me thinking.

## Jesus Has Never Agreed to Stay Where We Put Him

Maybe one of the recurring lessons of the Gospels is this:

**Jesus has never agreed to stay where we put Him.**

Mary and Joseph assumed He was in the caravan, but He was in the temple.

And throughout His ministry, people were constantly trying to decide where Jesus belonged.

But He kept showing up somewhere else.

We put Him on the shore—

and He’s strolling across the water.

We put Him with adults—

and He’s blessing children.

We put Him with the Jews—

and He’s with a Samaritan woman.

We put Him with respectable people—

and He’s eating with sinners.

We put Him in the synagogue—

and He’s healing somebody, and He’s not supposed to be doing that.

He’s supposed to be *here*.

But He’s not.

He’s *there.*

We put Him at the head of the table, and—

wait a minute, where’d He go?

Oh.

He’s washing feet.

We put Him with the crowds, and—

wait, we lost Him again.

He’s slipping away.

He’s supposed to be in bed. For goodness’ sake, it’s four in the morning.

But He’s already got an appointment with His Father in a solitary place.

We think He should be on a stallion—

and He’s riding a donkey.

We put Him on a cross when we thought last week He’d be on a throne.

And finally, we put Him in a tomb.

We roll a stone across the entrance.

We seal it.

We guard it.

There.

Surely Jesus will stay there.

Or so they thought.

And three days later—

**He’s gone.**

Maybe the problem isn’t that we keep losing Jesus.

Maybe the problem is that we keep assuming He should stay where we put Him.

# God Tore the Curtain

Perhaps the clearest illustration of this uncontainable God happened on Good Friday when the veil split from top to bottom.

It was like God was saying:

**“There. I fixed that for you.”**

God tore the curtain—

and we keep trying to sew new ones.

Curtains of race.

Class.

Denomination.

Politics.

Tradition.

Curtains that separate people who look like us from people who don’t.

People who vote like us from people who don’t.

People who worship like us from people who don’t.

People whose stories make sense to us from people whose stories make us a little uncomfortable.

We keep building dividing walls—

and Jesus keeps walking through them.

He walked through Samaria.

He touched lepers.

He welcomed children.

He spoke with women whom respectable men avoided.

He ate with people religious leaders considered unclean.

He put people at the same table who probably would never have chosen to sit together.

Think about it.

Matthew was a tax collector for Rome, and Simon had been a zealot.

**That ain’t right.**

One worked for the system.

The other wanted to overthrow it.

And Jesus said to both of them:

**“Follow Me.”**

That’s what Jesus does.

He crosses boundaries.

He tears curtains.

He walks through walls.

## Where Will Jesus Lead Me?

And now comes the part that makes all of this more than a little interesting as we observe Jesus.

**Christ lives in us.**

We are His body.

We are His witnesses.

We’re His ambassadors.

Which means that following Jesus will eventually require us to follow Him across some boundary we would never cross.

Maybe toward someone we were taught to avoid.

Maybe into a conversation we don’t completely understand.

Maybe toward someone whose politics makes us uncomfortable.

Maybe toward someone from another denomination.

Another race.

Another social class.

Another generation.

Another story.

Because the question isn’t simply:

**Where can I find Jesus?**

The better question may be:

**Where will Jesus lead me?**

And I have a suspicion that sometimes He will lead us somewhere we never expected to go—

to love somebody we never expected to love—

to cross a boundary or a barrier we never thought we would cross.

And maybe that’s why my favorite Easter phrase is:

**“He’s not there.”**

Again, Jesus was exactly where He was supposed to be.

Maybe that’s still true.

If we’re looking for Him, we may find Him in the sanctuary.

But we also might find Him on the roadside.

At a dinner table.

In a hospital room.

Across uncomfortable divides.

Among the forgotten.

With the lonely.

Beside the person everybody else has passed by.

Jesus has never been very interested in staying where we put Him.

So discipleship means refusing to stay where people put us either.

**The veil has been torn.**
**The tomb is empty.**
**Jesus is on the move.**

And if we follow His lead, may we find ourselves carrying His grace into some very unexpected places.

So the next time I find myself wandering through the house asking,

**“Now where did I put that?”**

maybe I’ll remember this:

Jesus was never mine to put anywhere.

**He is Lord.**
**He leads.**
**And my job is simply to follow.**

Now I’m back to looking for my keys.

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*Take heart. Notice the scattered moments. Share the grace.*

**Listen to “Now Where Did I Put Him?”**

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# Angel View

“So, what’s shaken’ down there?” Gabe asked Raphael, a seasoned guardian of an American church.

“Looks like they’ve gathered to worship,” Raphael said as he squinted down at the entrance.

“What’s that lady carrying in? Looks like some kind of package,” Gabe asked

“Probably a casserole,” came the matter-of-fact response.

“A casserole?”

“Must be having a special ‘something-or-other’ after worship.”

Gabe tilted his head, confused. “So, this is what they call worship?” Gabe had been assigned to the churches in Asia, where they worship secretively. So, it was a little startling to see that big cross and that sign out there in front of God and everybody.

“No pastors getting whisked away to sketchy tribunals? No believers getting disappeared?” He paused, taking in the half-empty parking lot. “So, you mean to tell me they’re free to worship? No restrictions? Crowd seems a little on the lighter side.”

“Well, they have more options over here. They can stream, listen to other pastors, or get the highlights on TikTok. Plus, YouTube is full of pastors that are, according to them, more viral. I think they’re just used to worship. They’re comfortable with it all, and they just want to come whenever it fits into their plan.”

“Really?”

“I’m not kidding. I’ve been watching over this church for

years. Lots of churches in North America are like this. It’s more of a social thing.”

Their conversation was interrupted by raised voices from the church steps. “Hey, look over there! That guy looks pretty upset.”

Raphael sighed. “I expected this. It’s been boiling for quite some time now.”

“What’s been boiling?”

“This feud. It started on X. Those two guys have been egging each other on for weeks. They’re all in a fuss over the church finances.”

Gabe’s eyes widened. “That church has money?”

“Of course. This is America, the richest nation in the world. The church even pays its leaders.”

“Wow!”

But it’s deeper than that. This church is filled with people who are all focused on all the MAGA controversies, still arguing about Covid, where it came from, lots of other stuff too, Epstein files, whatever…”

As they watched the congregation settle into their cushioned chairs, Gabe grew restless. “I can’t wait to see what worship is like. When does it start?”

“It already has.”

Gabe observed the scene below with growing bewilderment. “That’s worship? Everyone’s watching. Nobody’s doing anything!”

“They’re tired. They’re a very busy group: travel ball, fellowships, their jobs, their hobbies and Netflix rolled out three new limited series. It’s a lot,” Raphael explained with

practiced patience.

“Are they just going to sit there?”

“No, they’ll stand a time or two. With those padded chairs, I can’t say I’d blame them for sitting.”

The singing began, and Gabe listened intently. “Who’s the guy with the mic?”

“That’s the band leader. He leads them in a kind of group karaoke. They follow along on the screens.”

Gabe squinted down at the stage. “Nice wings on his tattoo, though. Quite impressive artwork.”

The service continued, and when someone came to the microphone, Gabe leaned forward expectantly. “Finally, they’re praying!”

“Enjoy it while it lasts, they don’t really pray much. Hardly ever in private… Prayer closets are rare and prayer meetings are filled with lots of medical jargon. This is the extent of being ‘prayed up’ for most of them”

As the service wound down, Gabe looked at the empty tank behind the stage. “I guess that’s the baptistry.”

“Right. It broke a couple of years ago. Something with the plumbing went haywire but they don’t really miss it anyway.”

Raphael studied his companion’s troubled face and asked, “What do you think happened to them?”

“Kind of a Laodicea situation?” Gabe observed.”

“Right. No passion. No change. Just check the box and get back home before the game.”

“If only they could have seen what we saw in the first few centuries of the church.”

“Or even the Christians across the ocean who face persecution right now .”

As the service concluded and people began filtering out, chatting casually about weekend plans and rating the sermon, Raphael yawned and said, “Gabe, I miss the days when things were cookin’ in America and I’m not talking casseroles.”

“Sorry, bud. You’ve got a tough assignment,” Gabe said empathetically. “Well, I’d better head to our division staff meeting. We just got prayed into some new assignments from believers in Nepal, Bangkok, Tehran, and Bogota.”

“You always get to go to where the action is. I’m stuck with Americans impressing each other on Instagram.”

“Hang in there, Raphy. Things could turn on a dime here. All it takes is a remnant.” Gabe said as he patted Raphael on the back.

“I hope so. It’s been a while,” Raphael said to himself gravely as he watched Gabe disappeared into the evening sky.

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# What If We Actually Believed?

There’s a thought experiment that haunts me: What would happen if we took the Bible seriously? Not just as a collection of inspiring stories or moral guidelines, but as the actual Word of God that should fundamentally reshape how we live, love, and engage with the world around us.

The primary foundation of any authentic faith movement should be “Believing the Bible as the Word of God.” But here’s the radical part—what if we actually lived like we believed it?

## Love Without Borders

When Jesus said “love your enemies,” He wasn’t speaking metaphorically or offering a gentle suggestion for our consideration. He was laying down a revolutionary principle that should make the church the most confounding institution on earth. Imagine if we actually loved everybody—even our enemies—to such an extent that our enemies would look at the church and say, “Wow, those crazy people love me!”

This isn’t the sanitized, comfortable love we often practice within our church walls. This is the kind of love that crosses political lines, racial boundaries, and ideological divides. It’s the love that makes people scratch their heads and wonder what on earth has gotten into us.

## A Consistent Respect for Life

If we truly held a radical respect for life, our witness would become beautifully consistent. We’d fight as vehemently against the death penalty as we do against abortion. We’d recognize that being pro-life means protecting life at every stage, in every circumstance, without the convenient exceptions that align with our political preferences.

This consistent ethic of life would make us uncomfortable allies to many and perfect allies to none—which is exactly where the church should be when it’s truly following Christ rather than partisan politics.

## Listening Like Jesus

Too often, we have become known more for winning debates than for loving people. But what if we listened to people the way Jesus listened to them? Instead of feeling compelled to win arguments and exclude those with opposing viewpoints, what if we created spaces where people felt heard, valued, and

welcomed?

Jesus had this remarkable ability to make people feel seen and understood, even when He disagreed with their choices. He listened first, loved always, and let transformation happen naturally through relationship rather than through rhetorical conquest.

## Seeing Christ in the Poor



The Bible is crystal clear about how we should treat poor people—as human representations of Christ Himself. Yet somehow we've managed to create elaborate theological justifications for why this doesn't apply to our economic policies or personal generosity.

What if we actually believed that when we encounter someone in need, we're encountering Jesus? How would that change our budget priorities, our voting patterns, our daily interactions with those society has pushed to the margins?

## Going Instead of Staying

We've become remarkably comfortable with staying put, building bigger buildings, and creating more programs for ourselves. But Jesus called His followers to "go." We should be more compelled to move toward the world's pain than to retreat into our sanctuaries.

This doesn't mean everyone needs to become a missionary, but it does mean the church should be fundamentally oriented outward rather than inward. We should be known more for what we're bringing to the world than for what we're protecting ourselves from.

## Cleansing the Temple

Jesus didn't just teach about spiritual purity—He grabbed a whip and drove the money changers out of the temple. Maybe it's time for some serious temple self-cleansing programs to purge the church of widespread commercialism and politics.

What would it look like if our denominational leaders were seen more often with mops and wrenches than with microphones and marketing materials? What if they were known for their service rather than their strategies, their humility rather than their platforms?

## New Heroes

Our heroes should once again be found in mud huts and rice fields half a world away instead of in corner offices and television studios. The people we celebrate should be those who are sacrificially loving the world rather than those who are successfully managing religious enterprises.

This isn't to diminish the importance of leadership and organization, but rather to remember what we're organizing

toward and who we're leading people to become.

## A Little Holy Rebellion

And here's where things get fun: for every preacher who tries to turn the church into a political organization, they should be fair game for wedgies. (Okay, maybe that's taking it too far, but you get the point.)

The church loses its prophetic voice when it becomes an extension of any political party. We're called to be a peculiar people, not a predictable voting bloc.

## The Challenge

This vision might sound impossible, naive, or even dangerous to some. Good. The gospel has always been a little dangerous to the status quo. It's always challenged comfortable arrangements and safe assumptions.

The question isn't whether this kind of radical faith is practical or politically expedient. The question is whether it's biblical. And if it is—if this is what it actually means to believe the Bible as the Word of God—then maybe it's time to stop making excuses and start making changes.

What would your church look like if it actually believed? What would your life look like? What would the world think of a church that loved this radically, served this consistently, and believed this authentically?

Maybe it's time to find out.

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# Israel, Gideon and a Bug's Life

Remember the movie "A Bug's Life"? If you have kids, you've probably watched it countless times—children love repeating their favorite films over and over. In that animated classic, a colony of ants lives in constant terror of the grasshoppers who swoop in like a plague, devouring everything in sight. The ants cower and hide, always wondering when the next attack will come, living their lives in fear of when the enemy will return.

This vivid picture perfectly captures the situation we find in Judges 6, where the Israelites faced their own version of grasshoppers—the Midianites. Just like those animated ants, God's people were hiding in caves and strongholds, paralyzed by fear, never knowing when their enemies would strike next.

Fear has a way of making us feel small. Whether it's that uncomfortable meeting with the boss or facing circumstances that seem insurmountable, we all know what it's like to feel overwhelmed and inadequate. Yet within each of us—regardless of our perceived weaknesses—lies a warrior that God sees and wants to use.

The story of Gideon in Judges 6-7 reveals a profound truth: God doesn't see us the way we see ourselves. He sees the warrior within, even when we're cowering in fear, much like those frightened ants who would eventually discover their own courage.

## When Fear Takes Hold

The Israelites found themselves in a desperate cycle that feels all too familiar. They had rebelled against God, leading to isolation, then bondage under their enemies, the

Midianites. Like locusts, these enemies would swoop in and destroy everything the Israelites had worked for, leaving them hiding in caves and strongholds.

This cycle—rebellion, isolation, bondage—mirrors patterns we see in our own lives. When we distance ourselves from God, we often find ourselves isolated from others as well. That isolation creates a void we try to fill with other things: alcohol, drugs, pornography, or countless other substitutes for the soul connection that only Jesus can provide.

But there's hope in this cycle. When we reach the end of ourselves, when we cry out to the Lord in our helplessness, He is faithful to respond with deliverance.

## The Unlikely Warrior

Enter Gideon—hardly the picture of a mighty warrior. We find him threshing wheat in a winepress, hiding from the very enemies God would soon call him to defeat. Yet when the angel of the Lord appeared to him, the greeting was startling: "The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor."

This reminds me of a personal experience that perfectly captures how God sees us differently than we see ourselves. During seminary, I worked as a jailer—a job I was completely unsuited for. I wasn't tough, didn't have the "spiritual gift" of being a jailer, and dreaded the day I had to get certified on the rifle range.

I'd never really shot a rifle before, except for hunting squirrels with my grandfather in Louisiana. Standing on that windy day in Fort Worth, Texas, watching these burly, experienced marksmen struggle to hit even one or two clay targets, I felt like Don Knotts—shaking with fear and nerves. I needed to hit seven out of twelve to get certified, but I just prayed to hit one so I wouldn't be completely humiliated.

They called me “preacher boy” and saved me for last. As I stood there, rifle trembling in my hands, I whispered one more prayer: “Lord, just let me hit one.” The first clay target flew out, and somehow—boom—I hit it. Then the second. By the end, I was the only one to get certified that day, hitting eight out of twelve while seasoned marksmen looked on in amazement.

In that moment, I understood Gideon. I was the unlikely candidate, shaking in fear, yet God saw something in me that I couldn’t see in myself. Just as the angel called Gideon “mighty man of valor” while he cowered in a winepress, God sees the warrior in us even when we feel most inadequate.

Gideon’s response reveals his mindset: doubt, questions, and complaints about God’s apparent absence. “If the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us?” he asked. Sound familiar? We often get stuck asking “why” when God wants to move us to “what”—what He’s calling us to do next.

Despite Gideon’s protests about being from the weakest clan and the least in his family, God’s response was simple and powerful: “Surely I will be with you.” This phrase—”I will be with you”—might be the most powerful promise we can cling to. As the psalmist wrote, “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me.”

## God’s Unconventional Strategy

When Gideon finally assembled an army, he gathered 32,000 men. But God said it was too many. After allowing the fearful to leave, 22,000 departed. Then, through an unusual test involving how the men drank water, God whittled the army down to just 300 men—less than 1% of the original force.

Why would God do this? Because when we rely on our own strength and resources, we get the glory. But when God uses

the small, the broken, and the unlikely, everyone knows it had to be divine intervention.

God equipped these 300 men not with swords and shields, but with trumpets, empty jars, and torches. Hardly conventional weapons of war, yet they contained profound spiritual symbolism that would later be echoed by the apostle Paul.

# Three Symbols of Spiritual Warfare

**The Trumpet** represents proclamation. Every time we speak the name of Jesus, we're wielding the most powerful trumpet imaginable. Our testimony, our witness, our proclamation of Christ's lordship—these are weapons that confuse and defeat the enemy.

**The Jar** symbolizes brokenness. Just as the men had to break their jars to reveal the light within, God must break us to use us effectively. Like bread broken to feed thousands, our brokenness becomes the means through which God's power flows.

**The Torch** represents God's glory. Hidden within the clay jars until the moment of revelation, the light points to the glory of God shining through fragile human vessels.

Centuries later, Paul would write in 2 Corinthians 4:5-7 about how we carry this treasure in jars of clay, making it clear that the power comes from God, not ourselves. Gideon lived this truth before Paul wrote it.

# The Power of Unified Minority

Here's a crucial principle: a unified minority always confuses the enemy. Satan thrives on division, schisms, and clicks within the church. But when a small group of people agrees together in the Lord, amazing things happen.

Those 300 men, following Gideon's lead, surrounded the enemy

camp. At the signal, they blew their trumpets, broke their jars, and revealed their torches, shouting “The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!” The resulting confusion caused the Midianite army to turn on itself.

## Your Warrior Calling

What does this mean for us today? First, recognize that God sees the warrior in you, regardless of how inadequate you feel. You might be hiding in your own version of a winepress, but God is calling you a “mighty man [or woman] of valor.”

Second, remember that Jesus is with you. This simple truth can transform any situation. You may have lost your job, but Jesus is with you. You may be facing illness, but Jesus is with you. You don’t need anything else beyond this assurance.

Third, be willing to let God break you. Our brokenness isn’t something to hide from—it’s the very thing God uses to shine His light through us to a dark world.

Finally, don’t be overwhelmed by the size of the opposition. God doesn’t need an army of thousands when He has a few faithful people willing to follow His unconventional methods.

The same God who gave Gideon victory with 300 men and clay pots is ready to work through you today. The question isn’t whether you’re qualified—it’s whether you’re willing to let the warrior within step forward in faith, knowing that Jesus is with you.

Your winepress moment might just be the beginning of your greatest victory.

# Aligning Your Ministry and Work to the Overall Vision of the Church

Victor was a retired CEO of a hospital supply company in our town, and when he agreed to be a deacon, I was absolutely thrilled. He'd bring so much insight, wisdom, and acumen to our team. He attended our first meeting as we discussed and prayed about the work of our leadership team. From the outset, there was an issue. A huge one. He wanted to singlehandedly change the vision and values of the church. For the next year, it was a push-and-pull affair rife with counterarguments and proposals that seemed to come out of nowhere. Perhaps he missed the thrill of boardroom takeovers or the ability to singlehandedly change things.

We had recently worked across our entire church organization to prayerfully create a mission statement and a long-range plan that stretched our people's view of the church. Adding Victor's force of personality and motives almost cost us three longtime leaders to resign simultaneously. Victor, as gifted as he was, just couldn't align to the plan, and he left everyone frustrated, including himself.

You can't minimize the importance of alignment when it comes to vision and effectiveness in a church leadership team. Misalignment will sabotage the tread life of any team.

Here is an easy way to remember, measure, and evaluate your alignment as leaders. I'd call it the **P.L.A.N.**

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## Purpose

Purpose reflects the important question: **“WHY.”** Everything in your church needs to run through this filter. If you have a program or a practice which has no purpose, you are wasting everyone’s time. There are many things that knock churches off their purpose. Sometimes it’s a shadow mission of a member or a leader. A leader can press others to do something or decide on an initiative because there is something else going on. It could be a personal desire, a resentment, or an unshared agenda.

In other words, a leader may say, “We need to do this program” because of a need they have, or to make themselves look good, or to right a wrong from five years ago. Every leader, whether they are a pastor, staff member, deacon, or volunteer team leader, needs to ask this soul-searching question: **“Why?”** When you lose your “why,” you lose your way.

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## Leadership

John Maxwell nailed it when he said, **“Everything rises and falls on leadership.”** For a vision to be realized, every leader needs to think of themselves as a champion of that vision. Our goal as leaders shouldn’t simply be to make more followers but rather to develop new leaders. Being a leader doesn’t mean that you’re going to make all the decisions. Leadership means that you will champion the overall vision of the church through your initiative and enthusiasm. That’s what makes a great leader.

Some leaders believe that their role is simply to filter or inspect the actions of the pastor or other leaders. Although we do need to assess where we are, it’s easy for us to get into an analytic mindset that sabotages the overall vision and

purpose of the church. Anyone can stand back and offer opinions, but blessed is the pastor who has leaders that get in the game.

One of the greatest leaders I've ever worked with had a simple phrase. Every time there was a consensus for our church to move in a certain direction, he'd simply say, **"Let's go."** If he texted it, there would be three or four exclamation marks after the sentence. There was no "How will this affect me?" or "Why was I left out of the decision?" His job was simply to encourage and cheer on the entire team.

If he ever had a concern or disagreement, he would always come to me first before bringing it to the entire group. But usually, when it seemed right to the entire leadership team, he was my "Let's Go" man. He was never the chairman, but he was always a leader.

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## Attunement

Dr. Dan Siegel defines attunement this way:
**"When we attune with others, we allow our own internal state to shift, to come to resonate with the inner world of another. This resonance is at the heart of the important sense of 'feeling felt' that emerges in close relationships."**

If you are aligned to the overall mission of the church, you'll want to be attuned to your team. Leaders who are attuned can read the cues of their team members. They pause to think about the "why" questions but not just the "why" question. Attuned leaders are not only group-aware but are also self-aware. In other words, they don't dominate the discussion but know how to listen, empathize, and ask important questions.

The opposite of attunement might be best described by what the

Gottman Institute calls **the four horsemen of the relationship apocalypse**: criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling. If you've been a member of any church or organization for any amount of time, you've probably experienced these four horsemen.

If you align your ministry and work to the vision of your church, make sure you stay away from these four horsemen. (They are headless!)

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## Nuance

Along with purpose, leadership, and attunement, an aligned leader also understands the power of nuance. They understand that no person or vision is crafted by cookie cutters or led by robots. A successful plan in one church or with one team doesn't guarantee the same amount of success in another environment.

Many pastors and leaders know their Bibles—that is paramount. But secondarily, we need to understand our community and adapt our vision to provide strong biblical solutions in the context of our surrounding environment. We must learn to nuance our vision so that our church understands the objectives and ministries.

**Shepherds don't drive their sheep; they lead them.** That's what we should do. And we should do it with a winsome heart and nuance. It will allow you to customize, improvise, and strategize effectively.

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If a church's alignment is off, the tread-life will be short. To be in proper alignment, we must know our **PURPOSE**, practice healthy **LEADERSHIP**, **ATTUNE** our minds, and adapt with **NUANCE.**

# Approachable

*We can approach Him.* To do so is to be rescued from the typical  and baptized into the extraordinary. We can come boldly because He replaced the burden of our shame with the throne of grace. May we not miss the bliss of God's pleasure and purpose in our calling. We can run to him for mercy in our time of need. Unlike some who treat God as an angry tyrant, we know the truth. He is Abba, our loving Father. He is both perfect and good. Again, *we can approach Him.*

Perhaps the greatest mystery is when we realize that God wants us, as profoundly flawed as we are, to approach Him. The greatest adventure known to man is revealed when we say, "I want to know Him." Our hearts yearn for His advent, and we are captivated by his holy purpose in our lives. Every step we take toward the sunset of our days will bring us closer to him. *"Come close to God and He will come close to you."* Again, *approachable*.

And what devastates every smallish notion of God is this: The God who created everything-the One who crowned Kilimanjaro with snow and taught each cardinal to fly, is *approachable.*

This is the mystery of our Great Divine Savior.

We can approach him in our grief, joy, shame, destitution, poverty, ecstasy, loneliness, or thanksgiving. We were created to approach, to enter into the gravitational pull of the glory surrounding His presence. But we must come to him as little… always little. When we come little, His glory is seen as great and exalted.

Beware: Approaching Him is not safe. We approach through sandpaper corridors that rub out all the things that we once

held dearly. But the closer we get, the more we realize the shaping brings transcendence and purpose which is what our hearts yearn to find.

Some hide out in the far reaches of the garden like Adam, grasping for fig leaves and folly. The *fallen world instinct* betrays us. We labor in our workshops, sweating away, trying to construct our own significance. It's a fool's occupation.

Do not hide.

Approach.

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# This is the Hard Part

We have more ways to hear God's Word than any generation before us. Me? I have three Bible apps, several audio bibles, and e-bibles on my phone. That phone also sends me a chime and a verse every morning at 6:00. I have a great church family with access to daily resources, great Sunday worship and a Sunday School class.

Hearing the word?
No problem.

I can nail that every day and twice on Sunday. But then James reminds me, "But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." I shudder a bit when I read James 1:22. Being a veracious hearer of the word but not a doer of the word is utter craziness, but I'm so good at the "hearing of the word" part! It's my jam. But doing the word trips me up every day. Now that I'm in my 60's, you'd think I would have arrived. I haven't. The difficulty is in the doing.

## What is Easy?

It’s so much easier to label than to love.
It’s so much easier to be entertained than to be involved.
It’s so much easier to hoard than give.
It’s so much easier to fear than to have faith.

It’s so much easier to win the internet with half truths, mocking memes, and snarky comments than it is to step into the middle of another real person’s trauma and offer grace through our acts of Christian charity and mercy. We often build walls to keep us away from the people He called us to love and reach.

## What is Difficult?

Our words are deadly serious: *“But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”* (Jesus Christ, Matthew 12:36)

This is a difficult saying that I have to remember every. single. day.

Because we don’t have much time, it’s important that we become acutely aware of our spiritual illnesses and give them up quickly. We should be throwing off the chains of dead religion with hilarity and abandon so that we can enter into the narrow, eye-of-the-needle Gospel.

## What is Impossible?

Like the flabbergasted disciples said after another of Jesus’ revolutionary challenges, “Then how can
anyone be saved?” I completely relate to their astonishment. But how amazing would it be if we all were a different kind of

crazy! For instance, when Jesus said, “love your enemies,” what if we actually loved everybody—even our enemies, to the extent that our enemies would actually look at us and say, “Wow, those crazy people love me!” What if we listened to people like Jesus listened to them instead of feeling like we had to win debates and put people in our own neat little categories? Our magnificent obsession would be to see how much time, money and encouragement we could give away. We would be more compelled to “go” than we’d be to “stay.” We’d seek to serve more than to be entertained. Our heroes wouldn’t be found in the Marvel universe, but missionaries in mud huts and rice fields half a world away. We’d have the audacity to believe that all things are possible. And when we have that kind of faith, they absolutely are.

## What about you?

Do you long to see your ideological villains embarrassed and humiliated? Do you enjoy the rhetorical violence of politics? Do you love it when you get the applause or become the preferred? Do you relish the time you spend on the pews of your amen corners? Are you constantly designing your argument or apologetic strategy before listening, *really listening* to people?

If you read the Word and stop there, you are safe, at least for a few years. If you obey the Word, you are a revolutionary. Every revolution begins in the soul. Revolutions are dangerous, unpopular, and messy but in 10,000 years from now, you will have no regrets.

# The Mystery of Making Stuff Up

Most creatives can’t explain how they do what they do. Formulas escape them. The mysterious process occurs somewhere between the prefrontal and motor association cortex.

Apart from the mechanics of syntax, color, structure, template, perspective, and story arc, creators are at the mercy of something no one but God understands. Like little children at supper, they say grace over it but can take no great credit for its existence. It’s something that causes emotional tremors from time to time. It causes lack of sleep, lack of time, brief moments of tunneling when all relationships temporarily vanish, frustration on the behalf of spouses, and the inability to focus on other people and things during moments of artistic production.

Most artists have low self-esteem even though some may appear egocentric. Their low self image is rooted in emptying one’s self to make room for things that come through them, but not from them. The best creative work is found in hiddenness. This hiddenness allows the reader, audience, viewer or listener to feel as if they, themselves are in the experience created by the artist. It’s why lovers love love songs. And mourners need poetry. They walk into the art and adopt it into their own personal narrative. In this way the artist becomes a concierge of the human experience. Great art always gets personal.

There are moments of unrestrained yeses. Everything is yes in the creative process, before the murdering of darlings- those little things in the work that mean much to the writer and little to the reader. The writer must scatter themselves to the four winds of the delete key. They are at the mercy of the muse because they don’t know how the muse works. I use the term “muse” but I’d rather not. It’s the spiritual cosmos that

is unseen and neutral until the forces of divine consequence appear. Artists do it but don't understand it any more than most people understand the inside of an MP3 and how it produces sound from digits.

But when it happens they are as close to God as Genesis 1:1. "Created" is a verb coined by God Himself. There is nothing new under the sun, but the artist will fight tooth and nail to disprove it.

All good gifts come from God but not everything artists write or say is God breathed. Not in the least. But there are those times when the Spirit moves, the clouds part, and glory speaks. The artist stands trembling with a little flicker called an idea. The artist enters the process like an East Tennessee snake handler in a church with signs following. It's risky but it's when the artist feels most alive. Ideas are best seen in caves of solitude and often express themselves in seismic yearning. Painters paint, musicians compose and writers write because they can't help themselves any more than one can stop a sneeze, and often just as messy.

Some artists give meaning to mythos and mysteries but find it hard to iron shirts or complete an online form. They dance between the county lines of catastrophe and bliss, often in both at the same time- a fact proven possible in quantum physics.

*How does normal life work? Why is everything so desperately broken? Why do I feel so alone?* These are questions that creatives struggle with but never conquer. (And woe to the artist that thinks she's figured everything out.) The name "artist," like the name Israel, means STRUGGLE. Struggling is a virtue, not a vice. It stands poised for the angelic fracas until the blessing is spoken.

The mortality rate for creatives is much lower than the general population. Their brain's tread-life is much shorter.

They are stripping gears to dig deeper. And for that we should all be thankful. We need them down there in the threshing floor.

So the nervous, emotional artist continues to do what he can't put his finger on, for an audience he doesn't know and a debt that he didn't owe when he started. He or she lives in a state of panic or grace, totally dependent on God or some infinitely lesser being to survive.

Not all crazy people are artists, but most artists are crazy people and we need them. Bruce Cockburn puts it so simply, "Pay attention to the poet. You need him and you know it." We need them in our homes, churches, universities, seminaries, and kindergartens. But don't hand them the keys. They'll lose them.

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# Random Notes on the Bible

Recently, we've seen God's word questioned, defiled, glorified, and deified. It's all caused me to really think through what the Word of God means to me. God's word is peace to me, but God's word also disturbs the peace in my life. That's right, it disturbs the peace. It causes me to see the storms. It's constantly stirring me as batter in bowl- It thickens me.

It tells the whole story.  There are lots of things that I would have censored out, but God chose to tell the truth.  To record anger so great that it wishes for the death of infants. It shows heroes with flaws. You won't find a Clark Kent type in this book other than Christ- who was the Word. Men and women fail and then succeed. Or they succeed and then fail. It's always a combination of both except for Enoch and he got

a hall pass before the bell rang.

The Christians I'm around today are on a quest of defending the Word of God against heretics. Nothing new to the church… But as Spurgeon once said, "The Word of God is like a lion. You don't have to defend it; you just have to let it out of the cage." (How I wished I would have thought of that metaphor! Please forgive the writer envy, Sweet Jesus.)

Theologians wield the Word of God as a theological litmus test to keep out people they don't like. We find our favorite parts, parts that fit our general worldview and we make people sign off on it. Others choose to make the Bible a graven image, worshiping it more than God himself. Putting God, the 20lb version on the communion table- never read *but ain't it big.*

As I read the Acts of the Apostles- the major formula of the Holy Spirit is this: The Holy Spirit doesn't have any formulas. Meanwhile the Acts of the American Church is that we are glitzed out, overfed and underachieving. We are focused on the power of the company (church inc.) rather than the Company of His Power.

To tell you the truth the thing I love about God's word is this: It's a director's cut of the Good News. No deleted scenes. No formulaic ending, no apologies, and no edits. It's the light unto my path. It's a scary book when you get right down to it because it calls for radical love- it propels us to snatch people out of the leper colony and the Bethesda's pool of self-help and holistic healing. It leaves the servant work to me. It warns me to avoid debt and riches- both have the potential to damn me. And it dares me to believe in something from nothing, life from death, and beginning from ending.

**You can't deconstruct the Bible, yea and verily, it is deconstructing you.**

The Bible is Anti-Religion. It doesn't show God as a "tip toe

through the tulips” Creator. He’s a roaring Lion and He dares you to battle- note that His battle is always His. He is not looking for our help. He is inviting us to adventure- so great and unpredictable that even as we gasp our final breath, we look forward to the next page-turning chapter of the swashbuckling thriller. It is not stayed; it is not a book of administration and order. It’s a living, progressive organism of divine transformation. And again, I say—**It’s against religion.** (And most will never get their brain around that truth. I pray I will.) The Bible is about dead men walking. It’s about surrendering- holding our hands to Heaven and watching our God, like an angry parent witnessing a bully torment his little girl- knock the snot out him and dare him to pull that stunt again. Therefore, one must examine himself to be sure he is not a bully.

Some Christians use the Bible as lawyers use precedent the argue their case citing certain past cases in God’s Word as their loophole and syllogism. Usually, their case has more to do with their personal power than it has to do with the Great Commission or the Greatest Commandment. Some of these people would rather see a neighborhood go to hell than have the wrong type of person (sex, race, political faction) preach in the neighborhood. And because of this they become the practicing liberals in the Body. I’m convinced that the Bible needs more lovers than apologists, more incarnations than discernment rangers.

I must spend more time reading the Word of God than the time I spend listening to people talk about the Word of God. I must spend more time letting the Word teach me through the Holy Spirit. It’s trusting God’s promise that the Word will accomplish what it set out to do. And yes, indeed, certainly, and verily I must DO the Word of God every day.

I look forward to spending more time in God’s Word- when I do, it’s never wasted time.

# Aging 30 Years in Half a Second

Recently, I did the annual New Year's cleaning. I love getting rid of stuff. Like most, it happens on a warm Saturday afternoon after the garage sale. We sold 174 items and ended up with around 35 dollars. I was amazed that so many of people don't want what *we* don't want. By the end of the day, I was paying people to take what's left over. *"I'll pay you 50 dollars to take the sofa that's parked in the garage. Please? I know it's mauve. But mauve is back! I'll even throw in the inflatable Santa Claus!"*

After a Saturday of lifting a refrigerator, an entertainment center, my son's barbells and various other items, I woke up the next morning and grabbed a shirt out of the closet and the next thing I knew a shock of electricity shot through my back. I aged 30 years in half a second, as I tried to get up. I looked at myself in the mirror. It was a pathetic sight. I was stooped down and to the right at a 60-degree angle. I had the posture of the Elephant Man. What happened? The day before, I was robust, vigorous and almost impressed with the deftness of my herculean prowess and the next, I'm bent over like an extra on the set of the Golden Girls after attempting the feat of lifting a shirt from the closet. I went to church like that because I didn't have time to draft a small group leader replacement. Our group was very understanding and prayed for my restoration, but evidently these demons require much prayer and fasting.

Monday, I found a chiropractor who could squeeze me into the schedule. I am not a frequenter of chiropractors, but I've

been before. I've learned through the years that there are different schools of thought when it comes to chiropractors. (Or as my grandmother called them: "the choir-practors.") Some of them have a little tool that pokes you in the spine after they hook you up to a something akin to an octopus with electrical suction cups. I've been to others that wanted to sign me up for a lifetime supply of supplements containing things like lamb's hair extract, acacia seeds and aromatic wild caught salmon oil. For me, I don't think you've actually been to a chiropractor until he puts you on a plank of wood and you hear bones popping as he plunges his knee in your thoracic vertebrae.  That's when I know I got my money's worth.



It's been a few days and I'm walking normally now. I've learned a lot since then. I've learned that it's the little things that often trigger the hidden pain of over-exertion. I think that's true in marriage. It's often not the actual disagreements we have that bend Darlene and me out of shape. It's sometimes the guy tailgating me on the way home that incites my contrarian mindset. And sometimes the best thing I can do to keep my marriage and my back healthy is a little daily stretching.  It's not a macho as weightlifting but it's

just as important.