

Chapter 1: *The Puzzle*

Inside, we know we were made alive for more than just survival. We all long to know why we exist? What we were created for?

But our humanity comes with limitations. For instance, we don't possess foreknowledge. And since we can't see the future it is often hard to see the portrait God is forming out of our lives. At times, we can struggle to make sense of things, to discover our purpose.

"God has made everything fit beautifully in its appropriate time, but he has also placed ignorance in the human heart so that people cannot discover what God has ordained, from the beginning to the end of their lives." Ecclesiastes 3:11

The good news is, that while we can't know the future, we can know and trust the one who does. As we seek to discover our purpose in the face of unknowns we must remember...

- **God sees all.** The puzzle maker starts with a portrait. He sees the end.
 - *How does God's omniscience impact your mind?*
- **God's timing is perfect.** If a piece doesn't fit, it's in the wrong place.
 - *How does believing "God has made everything fit beautifully in its appropriate time" effect your heart?*
- **God's plan prevails.** There are no extra pieces. He is working all things out.
 - *What does God's sovereignty do for your soul when life feels like an overwhelming puzzle?*

Our God is, well God. So, remember, no matter what life throws your way, He knows and He knows best. And even when you feel your heart broken to pieces and lying on the floor there is purpose in the puzzle.

Chapter 2: *The Talk*

Having future aspirations gives us something to work toward. Being hopeful, forward looking, is a good thing. But when our vision for our future trumps Gods plan for our lives we are in for a struggle, one we actually should not want to win.

*"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end **is the way of death.**" Proverbs 14:12 ESV*

Because God loves us and wants to do good through us, He does what it takes to open our eyes to a better way, to His purpose for our lives. Sometimes the struggle can be very confusing. But He is always working for our good.

As you navigate the path toward His purpose for your life I want to offer three helpful truths...

- **His plan leads to life.** He formed life. He is the way the truth and the life. Our life is in His Hands.
 - *Am I surrendered to God's will for my life?*
- **He is shaping us.** The master craftsman is always perfectly molding the clay.
 - *How can I readily learn from the potters work on me?*
- **He is speaking.** He speaks through His Word. He communicates through His World. His still small voice prompts our souls.
 - *How do I tune into God as He talks?*

Remember, true life comes on the backside of death. Surrender is our best friend. We can't be released to walk in His divine purpose until we loosen our grip on our plan. Tune your ear to The Way. To all who will hear He is still talking.

Chapter 3: *The Rehab*

Confidence exists in abundance when our sails are filled with the air of favor. Progress feels unhindered. Working with the wind makes for smooth sailing. But like a ship encountering raging seas our lives can feel run aground when we hit painful challenges that seem to hinder our course.

Unexpected trial; loss, injury, death, or chronic pain can wreak havoc on the soul.

But nothing is wasted with God. He is our healer, but He's also a refining fire. Even the greatest pain is worked to fulfil great purpose in the hands of our Savior. In this we find meaning, even joy, in suffering.

*"Dear brothers and sisters, **when troubles** of any kind **come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy.** For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So, let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing."*
James 1:2-4

When we face difficult waters, seasons of refinement, we must tether our lives to three foundations for hope...

- **Christ is The Rock.** He's firm, unmoving. He's strong, unwavering.
 - *Am I trusting in Christ above all?*
- **God will prevail.** He wins. The end is written. The struggle can't steal us from Him.
 - *Do I believe He is greater than the trial?*
- **He is always working.** He is active. He is intentional.
 - *What is He teaching me through the rehab?*

Never forget, in good times and bad, His love is unwavering and His plans are good. Trust Him. Some of His greatest work takes place in the rehab.

Chapter 4: *The Shift*

It would indeed be nice if we came into the world with perfect perspective. No realignment needed. In autopilot fashion we get started on point and throughout the ride, we stay on the right track.

Reality is much different. We live in a fallen world and apart from God we're drawn towards that which dishonors Him and is harmful to humanity. Every person is in desperate need of an eternal reset.

Even after we enter into relationship with God, through Christ, we are continually in need of recalibration.

"So, all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord-who is the Spirit-makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." 2 Corinthians 3:18

It is imperative our compass is set toward truth. It is essential we make ongoing course corrections, continually realigning to God's way.

When we bump up against things that dislodge us or just do not align with God's way we must...

- **Move toward truth.** Truth doesn't change locations. We must head its way.
 - *Are cultural norms or God's Word directing my life?*
- **Listen through experience.** Experience is a great teacher. Learn as you live.
 - *What is He saying to me though my current circumstances?*
- **Constantly recalibrate.** Daily adjustments are better than delayed adjustments, leading to massive shifts.
 - *Where am I slightly off?*

Staying in a rut can end you in a ditch. Once our course is set on Him we must take the time to continually realign. Remain sensitive to His guidance and rooted in His Word. When you see your off, make the shift.

Chapter 5: *The Stabbing*

God made us to live in relationship. Even the most introverted people still need community to truly thrive. We, like our triune God, are communal beings.

Great friends, healthy relationships, can actually be the difference between success and failure. After all its not "what you know" but "who you know."

*"There are 'friends' who destroy each other, but **a real friend sticks closer** than a brother." -Proverbs 18:24*

The problem is people are complicated. Different backgrounds, cultural norms, beliefs and personal standards make it challenging to effectively relate. On top of that, even the best of us are not perfect, while others, can be downright evil.

So how do we foster relational health without getting crushed by broken people?

Three tips can help you gain the relational value we all need...

- **Build on common ground.** Know your values. Find people who share them.
 - *Am I developing community built upon shared values?*
- **Sow in diverse soil.** Find good people who believe but don't look like you. Invest time with them.
 - *Am I building meaningful relationship with people who don't look like me?*
- **Stand in every season.** Choose to be a loyal friend. Find people who will be there for you.
 - *Am I building all weather relationships?*

Meaningful relationships are worth building, maintaining, and fighting for. Beliefs are reinforced and rich perspective provided. In good seasons the joy is shared. But even in the worst times true friends help you survive the stabbing.

Chapter 6: *The Kid*

There is something special about waking up to a well laid agenda leading to the advancement of a righteous path. It feels great to be confidently walking on a good road.

Even then we must be careful. Intentional pursuit can give way to “defaulting to familiar” and ultimately become an excuse to ignore promptings from God’s Spirit.

Sometimes our nature to control dies hard. We can find ourselves drifting into the driver’s seat all over again. Taking the wheel from the best captain is problematic. After all, some of God’s greatest revelations come through the moments and the people who weren’t on our calendar.

“Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.”- Proverbs 19:21 NLT

The trick is to steadfastly walk the road He lays while following him down the side trails as He calls.

Three helps, can help, anyone who wishes, discern if an invitation is a godly detour or a distraction...

- **Walk God’s Talk.** God’s Spirit does not invite us to violate God’s truth.
 - *Does the invitation call for me to compromise truth?*
- **Step Toward Others.** Jesus way typically leads to the service of others.
 - *Will the detour bring good to others?*
- **Move with Peace.** His Spirit in us often confirms His invitation with peace.
 - *Does God’s peace rest on the side trail?*

Sometimes the greatest revelation comes after we follow God into places we would normally not go. Sometimes the greatest relationships form when we submit to Him like a child who trusts the Father to direct the kid.

Chapter 7: *The Danger*

Most people want to enter the grave having experienced a long and fruitful life avoiding as much trauma as possible. We're naturally danger adverse.

Even in the church we rally around sentiments like "the center of God's will is the safest place to be."

But what about those trapped in spiritual and physical danger who need someone to come to their aide? What about all the scriptures calling us to sacrificially move towards the hurting?

What about Christ's words...

*"...If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, **take up your cross**, and follow me." Mathew 16:24b*

As we balance our instincts to preserve our lives with Jesus's call to take up our cross three reminders serve us well...

- **We all die.** It's inevitable. In Christ we need not fear it. The best is ahead.
 - *Am I trying to prevent something I should stand ready for?*
- **Jesus gave His life.** He laid his down for us. He modeled selfless living.
 - *Have I fully accepted the grace and example left by the Savior?*
- **He calls us to follow.** To walk His path. To reflect His character. To pursue what He said is important.
 - *Am I following the one who lived to rescue those in danger?*

While we're not called to be reckless we are invited to lay our lives down for the lost, the poor, the hurting. Never forget, our Savior is seeking to reach our world through those willing to enter the danger.

Chapter 8: *The White Man*

The old adage is true. "Birds of a feather flock together." We naturally gravitate toward people like us. When it comes to finding community centered around shared beliefs there is value to this reality.

But if we were not careful we can close ourselves off to people of different cultures, backgrounds, and races missing out on the fullness of the Kingdom.

This is a big mistake. God's vision for His Kingdom is a multi-ethnic one...

*"After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from **every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne** and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands." Revelations 7:9*

What an image.

Why not pursue this multi-ethnic outcome in a multi-ethnic posture?

To foster cross-cultural relationship three practices are key...

- **Listen first.** Lean into the perspective of believers outside your culture.
 - *Am I more interested in sharing what I know or learning what I don't?*
- **Explore second.** Try their food. Play their games. Sit at unfamiliar tables.
 - *Am I willing to try new things and have different experiences?*
- **Love always.** Demonstrate God's care for all people all the time.
 - *Am I prepared to show Christ's love no matter what I find?*

Just like the story of the good Samaritan God often uses people who do not look like us to rescue us in times of need. We are invited to serve and be served, to dwell in harmony with all God's people. May we walk hand in hand with the black, brown, red and white man.

Chapter 9: *The Disciple*

By grace we are saved. By design we are sent. How amazing it is that the rescued are called to join the rescuer on mission. What an invitation. What an opportunity.

But before one is ready to go they need to grow and God's plan for growth is discipleship.

*"...Now **teach these truths** to other trustworthy people who will be able to **pass them on** to others." 2 Timothy 2:2b*

But In a "just do you" culture there are numerous challenges.

The first is finding people willing to invest themselves in reaching the lost and developing new believers. For those willing, "making a disciple" can seem a daunting task. Like something only pastors can do.

But we are all called. In Christ we can all advance the disciple making mission. Sometimes clear steps can help us get going.

Here are 3 in the disciple's journey...

- **Begin with Evangelism.** Actively share it. Continually sow it. Look for opportunity to proclaim it.
 - *Who am I sharing the gospel of Christ with?*
- **Move to Edification.** Build others up. Show them how to grow.
 - *How am I building the faith of young believers?*
- **Aim to Equip.** Train others to reach others.
 - *How am I preparing followers to become leaders?*

The legacy of a leader is carried in the follower. When we die the greatest treasure, we leave behind lies in the people we have impacted for Christ. Advance the gospel. Make and be the disciple.

Chapter 10: *The Fight*

Having clarity around our purpose and vision for our future is exhilarating. Nothing like waking up in the morning feeling confident in your calling.

However, we may think the battle to get there was the whole of the war, after all, we have vision now, we won! Game over. Right?

Nothing could be further from the truth.

The greatest trials come after purpose has found its soulmate. The evil one is bent on knocking those dedicated to Christ off their mission filled path.

"Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him." James 1:12 ESV

So how do we stay steadfast under trial?

Let me offer three habits embraced by those who stay committed through the fight...

- **Recall Your Why.** Look back to the beginning. Rediscover the reason behind the race.
 - *What was the motivation behind the pursuit?*
- **Recalibrate Your Heart.** Repent when you drift. Reorder your steps.
 - *What in me needs to change?*
- **Dust Off Your Feet.** Wipe yourself off. Leave the stone throwers behind.
 - *How will I consciously rid my mind of counterproductive slights?*

Challenges will come. Bully's abound. Tough days will darken our view. But the purpose we fought to find is worth pursuing with all our heart. In the end, things worth doing are worth the fight.

Chapter 11: *The Field of Play*

There is something special about hitting your groove. When you are confident in your environment doing life can feel like a warm knife on butter. Work flows. Things come easy.

But what do you do when called to serve in a context nothing like your own? How do you respond to the unfamiliar and the discomfort it can bring?

Many try to colonize the foreign places they enter. In an effort to recreate the rhythm found in the comfort of home they remain culturally irrelevant and ineffective and at times plain old offensive.

Paul was different. He said,

*"Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible... **I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.** I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings."* I Corinthians 9:19 & 22b-23
NIV

So how do we effectively take the gospel into very different environments?

- **Learn There Love.** Find out what makes them tick. Take interest in their interests.
 - *What do people here rally around?*
- **Find Common Ground.** Capitalize on shared interests. Build on things natural to them.
 - *Where do my interests or abilities intersect with theirs?*
- **Love There Thing.** Incarnate. Become one with your new environment. Make their passions yours.
 - *How do I learn to care for the things they love?*

We are so much more effective in environments not like ours when we become more like them. We must never compromise truth. But for the sake of the gospel, we must always set aside preference. Find common ground and join their field of play.

Chapter 12: *The End*

What a joy to see the handiwork of God all around us. To experience his life in our souls. To feel the gospels power transforming hearts and minds. How great it is to see our God and King building His kingdom through His people. And yet, all we've seen, pales in comparison to what could be.

*"Now all glory to **God**, who **is able**, through his mighty power at work within us, **to accomplish infinitely more** than we might ask or think." Ephesians 3:20 NLT*

If we are not careful our admiration for the good old days can turn into complacency concerning future opportunity. We can function as if we have seen it all, received it all, and know it all.

We can settle for a tame faith. We can end up wasting our time trying to control what we have and build boxes to contain the God who knows no bounds. All the while, all around us, there is work to be done, mountains to be moved.

In a skeptical age, audacious faith is in short supply. And faith is critical. It fuels your pursuit of purpose. It keeps you engaged in mission. It ensures you make the difference. You don't pursue unless you believe.

A powerless mental assent will not move a mountain. But great faith can cast it to the sea.

So, let me offer three reminders to foster your faith in coming seasons...

- **He is greater.** No one bigger. Nothing higher. No one like our God.
 - *Am I trusting as if He spoke the galaxies into existence?*
- **He is near.** Emanuel, God with us. Holy Spirit, God in us.
 - *Am I relating as if He actually dwells inside of me?*
- **He is worthy.** Holy. Perfect. Pure. Savior. Redeemer. Jesus.
 - *Am I remembering the infinite value of The Living God?*

There is nothing like experiencing God's love in you and feeling His power flowing through you. And while constant gratitude for all he has done is absolutely key, we must never grow cold. We must allow the coals of expectancy to warm our faith believing the impossible into reality as our miracle working God works to the end.