

Chapter 6

Your Partner in Crime {Spouse}

The most sublime act is to set another before you. — William Blake

Here's a tale of two couples: both couples are Christians, both go to church, both profess relationship with Christ and pursue God, both have been married for a while, and both have children.

Couple #1 is a *good couple*. They live a good life, have jobs they somewhat enjoy, and contribute to their church and to society. They are pretty good with their finances, they attend family gatherings, they honor their marriage vows, they rarely fight, and people find them pleasant to be around. They are a *good couple*. But their goodness comes from a kind of passivity—they don't like conflict. They don't start difficult conversations, and they don't seek out opportunities to serve.

Couple #2 is an *incredible couple*. They are different individuals in lots of ways. They are good at different things, and they carry different personality traits and strengths. But when it comes to their desire for God and their zest for life, they are cut from the same cloth. These folks, upon their uniting, seemed to make each other *better*. Stronger. More Christ-like. Their vitality towards God and one another only seems to increase year after year. It's a fascinating and beautiful thing to watch. They have hard talks with each other from time to time, and remain accountable to their community. They look for ways to bless their community with their gifts. They are excellent partners in crime.

Over the years I have gotten to meet, watch, and sometimes marry couples. And I meet a lot of *good couples*. I really do. But every once in a great while – I meet an incredible couple. And when I do I take note: these are the types of people who change the world.

Dating really isn't dating at all. It's finding, choosing, and setting off on a journey with someone who will lead to a good life...or an incredible one. This chapter not about encouraging you to get married. It's about encouraging you to set sights high, and never look down again. For you, for your life, this will be *one* decision that will have dramatic impacts. Choose wisely, and your life with your mate will honor God, and show the world a love that's real, sacrificial and focused.

Choose poorly, and the effects could be painful. 51% of Americans go through divorce, according to our most current government statistics. (Notably, the highest divorce rate comes from the state of Nevada. I guess what happens in Vegas truly *does* stay in Vegas.).¹¹ Even more common, choose poorly and you could have a marriage that simply exists and fades into mediocrity over time. And, in some cases, a marriage can be a volatile source of perpetual pain. Sadly, these marriages exist. Even more sadly, people seem to careen into marriage not understanding that this could be their reality... if they aren't careful.

The goal is that in patience and prayer, focused living and a hunger for all things Godly, eventually, you will find a partner who matches you in wit, vitality, love of God and drive. Welcome to the Dating Game. But this is no game, is it? This is your life.

The Great Dilemma

Out of all the things that I have the privilege of preaching on with post-grads, this has to be the most popular. Don't act so surprised.

¹¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/mardiv.htm>

There are always the folks who act like they don't care, or like they are "above" caring about finding a spouse – some may be. But in general, this topic is weighty on the mind of the post-grad.

On Facebook the other day, my feed was filled with these articles posted by my twenty-somethings friends: *3 Things I Wish I Knew Before I Got Married*, *10 Things That Make A Man Datable*, *How To Go On An Actual Date*, *It Matters Whom You Marry*, *How Much Theology Should Couples Agree On Before They Get Married?*, *He's Not Your Prince Charming*, and the list goes on. Twenty-somethings are *very* focused in finding a mate in this season of life.

The dilemma is that everyone wants to find someone they love; but sometimes, this can make folks a bit shortsighted. Instead of visualizing what it would be like to be married to that person at age 40 with teenage kids, a mortgage, and some dreams on the line, I see people settle for daydreams of what a date with that person might be like. They settle for the hopes of a kiss. They settle for the first person who says they care for them. They settle for "good."

It is the rare, incredible people who evaluate whether this person would make more of them, more of their dreams, ambitions, goals, and sanctity. Is this person on board to follow God wherever He leads? Does this person value family the same way? Are they kind to people? Do they make more of the people around them? Instead of thinking about character and the future, we sometimes only look at whether they fit in our lives well right there and right then.

When we want a relationship *now* more than we want a relationship forever, we put ourselves in a dilemma that will be your dilemma in your twenties—and possibly beyond. And, let me tell you. The dilemma is real.

Your Forever Partner In Crime.

What I am proposing in this chapter is not necessarily a typical approach to Christian marriage. But I can think of no more important decision, besides deciding to follow God, which has a more radical impact on the trajectory of your life. Plus, I'm a little bit biased. I met my forever man when I was in my twenties. To save time, I will just say that it was a quick love – both my husband Jon and I fell and fell fast and hard for the other. We walked through a lot of prayer and change and getting to know the other, and three years later we married.

Jon is my rock. On top of a full-time job and starting his own company, he helps me run the young adults ministry at our church. It's a ton of effort on top of it all, but he's all in just as much as I am. That was important to me because my tenacity needed a guy who would be willing to sprint alongside. He's endlessly supportive, engaging, and optimistic – which I rely on often.

He is always excited about my dreams, about where God is taking me, and prayerful about where God is taking *us*. When we make a move in ministry, we make it together. When we decide to give financially, or take a risk for God, we do it as a team. I am 100% positive that I would not be as effective in ministry if it were not for my husband. I joke that he pastors me so that I can pastor – but the reality is – he's just that. My perfect partner in crime.

Alternatively, I would like to think I'm his perfect partner in crime. We spend hours talking about and dreaming about his start-up. We decide on business names together. I root him on as he pursues his dreams. I endlessly believe in him. I forever applaud him. I ruthlessly support him. See, we're a team. And thus far, we've had a lot of adventure. We're not planning on this train of hope, laughter and godliness slowing down anytime soon. There's a *lot* we want to do with Jesus.

Our relationship has only made us better. We met and a portion of my life began. It made me more holy. More sanctified. More aware of God's love. More driven. More alive. Partners in crime should be that way.

This is important. You don't just want *someone*. Someone may not like your dreams. Someone may not pursue God the way you do. They may be half-hearted in areas you wish they were full-hearted. They may not be a forever partner. They may just be a "good enough for now" kind of someone. The challenge is for you to choose wisely before you even choose this guy or gal. Choose to set your sights high. Choose someone whose character you admire. Choose someone who will value you and your God-given future. Then, when you meet them, the choice will be easy because you've envisioned it for years.

Signing Up for Crucifixion

This season for you isn't just about choosing the right guy or finding the right woman. The biggest hurdle for the twenty-something will be coming to the conclusion that the only way to a glorious marriage is through death. From the Old Testament through the New, anytime there was a covenant, God would inevitably shed blood to complete the pact. With Abraham an animal was spilt in two. With Noah, God wiped out the face of the earth. With us, Jesus laid His body in front of a bunch of angry Romans and Jews, and then bled – all to complete a covenant. In our lifetime, beyond our covenant with Christ, marriage will be the most life-altering covenant in which we engage.

I will officiate the marriages of a bunch of new couples this summer. The bride will walk down the aisle after having spent hours, even *days*, getting her hair, makeup, dress, and accessories right. The husband-to-be will don a tie, and will be overwhelmed by the sight of his new wife when she rounds the corner. People will stand. And then I will open my mouth, and begin the ceremony. And I am tempted to say: "Dearly beloved... are you

ready? To get *crucified*?" And then the father of the bride looks at me weird and I most likely get fired from my job as officiant.

No one wants to hear that. No one wants to hear that to have it all, you have to lose it all. To join this covenant, you have to let go. To become one, you have to crucify the two. No one wants to hear that you have to *die*. But that's the reality.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul was well aware of our tendency to hoard ourselves for ourselves. And so, he emphatically encourages us to "give ourselves up" (Ephesians 5:1, 5:25) to lay ourselves down for the sake of the other. So the question for twenty-somethings is: do you get that? Do you get that to be married means to die to yourself?

So what does this look like? I will give you a couple examples from real people I have seen. It looks like the woman who, for her entire life was incredibly driven, high achieving and accomplished. At a crucial juncture, though, she sets aside an opportunity to advance her career so that she and her husband can focus on a few dreams he is hoping to accomplish. It looks like a man who, for the last decade has been dreaming of owning his own rebuilt 1985 Harley Davidson, but upon getting enough in savings has a heart change. Suddenly he desires to put it into a garden his wife had always wanted. They talk about it, and she is honored, feeling overwhelmingly loved that he would give up one of his longings for one of hers. It looks like the woman who loves beaches and vacations full of resting and reading, but whom takes an adventurous trip to Costa Rica with her husband. She knows it will be, for him, the trip of a lifetime. So she packs her bags, buys a couple Costa Rica travel guides, and grabs his hand as they walk on the plane. It looks like holding doors, and holding out our hearts. It looks like preferring the person before and instead of ourselves. It looks like not always being in control and not always being right. It looks like being the first in the argument to lay down your rights and say "I'm sorry" and the last to say "I deserve". It's a beautiful

thing. And it is the beginning of new life in our marriages every time we choose it.

Happily Ever Afters: I'm a Believer ... And You Should Be Too

There's a vibe going around Christian circles, among preachers and teachers and theologians and within Christian media and books that fairytales don't actually exist. Some well-known and well-respected preachers and authors will tell you that marriage is no fairytale. It's hard work and not always fun.

And, I get it. Maybe we talk this way because we don't want folks to have the illusion that everything will be epically perfect. For example, she'll never gain weight and always look stunning upon him coming home from work, he'll never get a food gut and will eternally cook her pancakes on Saturdays. They'll never have money problems, or fight about how to load a dishwasher, or have a blow up on the way to church. Upon saying "I do," the white horse rides off into the sunset – blissful, euphoric, with nothing to fear and all problems behind them. This is the picture we want to avoid. And I get it. We're afraid of the connotations of a fairytale this way. And so we avoid them altogether, and pretend that that's never what our hearts wanted in the first place.

But then that's not true, either, is it? Everybody wants a fairytale. (Fellas, don't lie. I've seen you reading the teen novels too. And don't even get me started on romance in the comic book movies. You love it. You want it. You've seen *The Notebook* more than once.)

The thing is, I truly believe God's design for marriage is something of a fairytale. Not the Disney kind that is in Technicolor and comes with songs and all-too-easy ways out of trouble. But, a romance of beauty. Sustenance. Sacrifice. Triumph. Ruthless devotion. Romance that is born out of self-sacrifice (see signing up for crucifixion above), laying down your life, laying down your rights, and preferring the other above oneself – these are the makings of

an incredible marriage. And, contrary to popular cultural belief, the more you sacrifice, the more romantic your relationship becomes. The more you hand over your rights to God for the sake of your relationship, the further into fairytale-land you go.

I have met tons of couples who live habitually in the realm of love, romance, and sacrifice. They are borderline annoying in their happiness. And in seasons where happiness is lacking there is always joy. I love them because I know they've discovered what many couples haven't: How to die for another.

Our friends Trisha and Ronald are couple in their fifties who serve together at our church. Trisha has a chronic illness, and recently they just went through a rough time when Ronald lost his job. But their love of each other and life remains steady. Their devotion for one another over into all their relationships. The twenty-somethings at our church *adore* these two. I think it's because they have so much love to give. And they have so much love to give because they give so much of each other to themselves in their marriage. They've discovered that service leads to deeper joy.

Or, take our friends Brittney and Stephen. Both of them came from pasts with intense sexual history. Both had marred beginnings with their walks with God. And both made it through seasons of trials to one of holiness and honor. When they met, their lives were enriched beyond what they could have ever expected: he constantly would lay down his rights for her, she continually remained focused and devoted to him. When they tell their story of how they met, they both cry. Brittney, for her part, always dreamed of being a mom. A few months ago, she became pregnant. We all celebrated. Three weeks after announcing it to friends and family, Brittney went in for an ultrasound to find the baby had no heartbeat. To say they were crushed was an understatement. But I watched, and so did the rest of the world, as their love grew and matured, and they gave God glory and thanksgiving throughout the entire healing process. They were

each other's rocks. They never stopped loving, even when it would have been so easy to go down the road of fear and blame.

There are tons of stories like this. There are also many stories that are anything but fairytales. On the other side of the tracks – we have buddies and acquaintances who live outside of the fairytale world. Many of these couples fell in love just like everyone else, but their relationship ended somewhere within the first kiss and the first knock-down-blow-out-fight. For these couples, marriage is less about sacrifice, and more about having their world (and the spouses in it) “work” for them. They look to each other to get their needs met, seeking to control the other for their own ends. They often fight when the other isn't fulfilling some obligation or some desire, and feel frustrated or defeated when their marriage isn't what they expected. These couples expect fulfillment from each other rather than from God, and their inevitable disappointment drives a wedge in between them.

See, fairytales exist. But their perfection lies in the couple's ability to navigate life together selflessly. Not in the perfection of their circumstances. Still, it's my belief that *any* relationship can cross over into fairytale-land if, like all of our most cherished and real heroes and heroines, you are willing to *lose yourself* for the sake of the other. If you are willing to lay yourself down, chances are you'll be one of the incredible ones

The Waiting Game

Some of you will find your spouse and get married in your twenties. My prayer is that you are already practicing losing yourself for the sake of others: serving, caring and loving just because. For others of you, your twenties may be less of a dating game, and more of a waiting game. To you I say: spend this season of singleness pursuing *all* that God has for you.

Paul writes to us that it's “better” to be by ourselves in Scripture. Most single folks don't like Paul at this point, but what he says is still divine. It applies, even if you don't like it. Paul says this because there is only *one time* in your life where you are both old

enough to understand the brevity of your walk with God and gifted with *loads* of free time to do something about it. When you're single, you can be single-minded. Single-hearted. And that heart can be completely devoted to Christ and to His name. Twenty-somethings who *really* get this don't do much waiting. They are too busy living out their days for the dreams God has placed on their hearts. Their minds are too focused. Their hearts are too full. And, coincidentally, the folks who don't "wait" but instead live fully after God are normally the folks who end up with fairytales. You may want more than anything to be married and soon, but that may not be the way your life goes. Lean into God during this time, and know that His plan for who you become isn't contingent on anyone else.

May you live today for everything God has for you. May you learn to choose wisely. And above all – may you learn to lay yourself down. And may you have, in perfect timing, the fairytale God plans for you.

Chapter 7

From Glory to Glory

We're born to shimmer, born to shine - born to radiate. – Shawn Mullins

When Moses went up mount Sinai to meet with God, scripture tells us that he would meet God “face to face.” Face to face with the God of the universe. It was an intimate and undoubtedly incredible meeting. Moses would then mosey (see what I did there? Moses... mosey...) down the mountain, and his face would radiate. He would literally *shine*. The Hebrew word used to describe his face was the same word they would use to describe a glorious sunrise. Moses shone like God’s glory.

But, it wasn’t permanent. Moses would cover his face with a veil when he came down from the mountain partly so that he wouldn’t freak out his fellow Hebrews with his shiny-ness. And, over time the shine would fade – it wouldn’t last. And as the glory faded from his face, he covered it with a piece of cloth. Before Jesus and before the Holy Spirit, we only got glimpses of God’s glory.

Fast forward a couple thousand years. Paul is writing to Corinth – a city in transition. A church that was leaving behind the old, and pursuing the new, however crippled their limp towards God was – they were in *motion*. Much like, say, a twenty-something in their process of becoming.

“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are **being transformed into the same image from glory to glory**, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.” - *2 Corinthians 3:18* (emphasis added)

Paul is comparing Christians to Moses. We all are being transformed into the image of God; so much so that our faces will radiate like Moses. Only when it's our turn, we won't need a veil. According to Paul, this is a glory that *never fades*. According to Scripture, those of us who follow Christ will *naturally* move from glory to glory. We were meant to move forward in glorious fashion.

It can be assumed that God's whole intention for you is that you graduate to the next glory. He's equipping you to shine.

Moving to the Next Glory

I grew up playing original Nintendo. Ninety percent of you reading this will have no idea what that means, but let me tell you – it means AWESOME. Though XBOX and Playstation may attempt, there will *never* be a game as stupendous as *Duck Hunt*. With *Duck Hunt*, *Mario Brothers* and so on, it's easy to figure out how to go to the next level. You get up *real* close to the screen and shoot those dumb ducks, avoid the laughing hound, and you move on to the next level. You kill Bowser; you level up. You rescue the princess; you level up. You kick the turtle 20 times into the wall, and you can skip three levels. (Wouldn't it be amazing to find hidden shortcuts in real life?)

When it comes to the voyage of the twenty-something, though, moving to the next level is more complex. How do you grow spiritually? How do you gain character? How do you achieve your dreams? You might say, "Wait, what? We can't kick a turtle into a wall and get a promotion? There are no short cuts to spiritual transformation?" Unfortunately, no. So, *how do you* move forward to your next glory?

Dreams

I have yet to meet a twenty-something without a dream. The problem, more than likely, is these dreams are taking *longer* than we expected. And, pursuing them is way harder than we imagined.

But that's the thing with glory-filled lives. They require a stick-to-itiveness that if you can harness in your twenties, you will harness the rest of your life.

Off the top of my head, I can think of a dozen extremely talented, visionary, skilled, and worthy twenty-somethings with big dreams. But it doesn't stop there. It can't stop there, at the dreaming phase. You have to move into the field after that. Even if it is a field you would prefer to avoid.

Moving to the next glory means setting our sights on the goal, all while being accepting and content with the *process*. Lots of people dream. Not everyone perseveres until that dream is under their feet. While I can think of many folks who have dreamed, I can also think of a many twenty-somethings who have phoned in their dreams for a nice paycheck or a comfy position or fear of failure. If waiting is difficult for us, persevering is more so.

Humble Beginnings

My favorite business stories are people who began with nothing and moved on to achieve *something*. People who stood the test, persevered, and won. People who started small – really small. Like, pinball machine small.

Warren Buffett began his business ventures when he was 16. He bought a pinball machine with savings he placed in a local barbershop. The barbershop received small kickbacks for having the machine on site, and Buffett took the rest as profit. The machine took coins at the time, and Buffett saved every single penny. A few months later he had saved enough to buy another pinball machine. He put it in another local shop. He did this again and again until he had a thriving business several machines all taking in an income.

But, it wasn't just young business prowess that makes his story great. Buffett would later take a public speaking course. The goal?

To gain enough confidence in his ability in front of peers to teach a collegiate class at night while he was a stock broker during the day. After that, he sought to put himself under the leadership of CEOs and investors he admired. He saved money, invested in side businesses when he could, and spent lots of time learning. Finally, in his late twenties, he opened up his own investment partnership.

To me, what makes Buffett's story so alluring is how he was always learning, always taking advantage, and always looking for opportunity, even though no one would probably think a pinball machine was a "great" beginning.

Today, Warren Buffett is considered to be the best investor in history, and one of the richest men in the world. While his vision surely looked like a pipe dream to others, Buffett did what many of us forget to do. He did well with the small things he had. He persevered well. He made the most of the season that was given him.

"Do not rue the day of small beginnings" the book of Zechariah says, "for the Lord rejoices to see the work *begin*."¹²

Begin. Don't despise beginnings. Most beginnings are very, very small. They aren't much to look at. The circumstances are often humble.

My Small Beginning

Before I launched into a career in ministry, and getting to teach and write like I had always dreamed, I was humbled. At age 19, I walked into a worship service, and walked out forever changed. In a couple of hours, God revealed to me that I was His, and that I would share His word. I walked out on cloud 9. God wanted to use *me*. I had vision. I had a goal.

¹² Zechariah 4:10

But then I graduated college. And I didn't know where to "begin." I didn't know how to share God's word. I was waiting for it to fall into my lap. It didn't. So, I got a job waiting tables – for three years. I refilled waters and ice teas and rang in orders for specific steak temperatures. I counted my tips, and made small talk with folks. I felt like my life was in neutral, to be honest. And, I treated it that way. I was waiting on the moment I would work for a ministry. The moment I would get a microphone in my hand and get to share the gospel.

I was waiting to begin. I wanted to get *there*. I wanted to move into my call. I wanted the next season. I didn't want to wait tables. I really didn't. And, so I treated the season poorly. Little did I understand that I was in God's classroom. And I needed to learn a few things.

In the parable of the talents, God only gives the three men a starting place. God always gives us "here" to work towards our "there". For years I was a server, and quite honestly did not know what to do with my "here". God was giving me a platform to do ministry, and I did fairly close to nothing about it. Like the last man in the parable of the talents, and like a lot of us, I wanted something different. I wanted a different scenario. But God gave me that restaurant. He gave me a talent, and waited to see what I would do with it.

See, in God's classroom, he only gives you "here." Now. This. That starter job. That dateless Friday night. That small apartment. That small-time company. That aggravating boss. That loopy co-worker.

That's your here. And for promotion – here is a great place to start. What God was hoping was that I would pastor right where I was at in that restaurant – with those customers and those co-workers. He was hoping I would use that platform for ministry. He was hoping I would dig into my here and make much of it. At some

point, I began ministering to my co-workers. I'd talk about Jesus. I'd talk about church sometimes. When a co-worker confided in me about a break-up, I asked if he prayed. "Funny you should ask," he said. "I've been thinking about praying. And maybe going to church."

Later, a friend and co-worker and I were working the week before Easter. We both were scheduled to work Easter, and we had a bunch of brunch reservations. At some point in the convo, my friend asked me plainly and innocently what Easter was about. "I know it's not the Easter bunny and baby chicks," he laughed. For the next twenty minutes, I got to talk to my buddy about how Easter was the day that Jesus rose from the grave. It was the day that God proved that death doesn't win, and darkness in our lives doesn't get the last say. Love does. Life does. Jesus does. I got to explain to him that death doesn't win – ever!

A few months after that another coworker approached me and challenged my belief in God. "I personally don't believe in God," he said. Without thinking, I laughed. Not mockingly at him, I just found it funny because I didn't believe him. I could see in his eyes he doubted his own beliefs, or non-beliefs.

"You mean to tell me you've *never* had *anything* supernatural happen in your life?" I asked. "Not once?" I wasn't trying to be a jerk; I honestly just wanted to know.

"Well. I guess so," the hardness in his eyes softened. "I have." After a few moments, he went on to confide that he wanted to believe in God, but struggled with the suffering he'd experienced in his life. He wondered how a God that loved him wouldn't stop such pain. We talked throughout the rest of our shift about God, his religious past, and a father who claimed to be a pastor, but presented himself to be a tyrant. At the end of the night, I prayed for him.

My “here” was exactly where God wanted me to start. Not in a church. Not in a ministry. In a kitchen. At a restaurant. That’s where he was hoping I would begin. And that’s where I finally did begin.

The Best Question on the Test

One question that is *always* good to ask – no matter where you are is “God, what am I supposed to be learning here?” If the post grad years are God’s classroom, then this is the best question on the test, “God, what in the *world* do you want me to be learning here?”

Circumstances for the post grad are not happenstance. They are ordained and fixed. You’ve been set up. (It’s a good setup, I promise). More than likely, this situation and season you find yourself in is rigged for you to learn something or gain character in some way. And God invites you into the process of becoming who you are becoming. When you ask, “What, Lord?” God can let you in on what He’s doing and what He is hoping you learn.

I started asking, “What do you want me today, Lord?” His answers were always there – sometimes surprising, but most the time not. Most of the time, He simply asked me to be faithful. To be trusting. To be kind. To love the people He had given me. To trust His character and His plan for me. To rest in Him. To submit to my authority. To not become entitled.

The God Who Graduates

Three years, and a few months after I began waiting tables, I got a phone call from the lead pastor at my church. “Jess,” he asked after the initial greetings, “how’d you like to work at Red Rocks?” I inhaled and sat stupidly for a moment. Work in ministry? Work for a church? A really *incredible* church? I was shocked. I didn’t have to beg, manipulate, control, or force God’s hand. Here was a chance to move into ministry – to move to the next glory.

In 1 Peter, Paul states plainly the way to the next glory: "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time."¹³

God's process for each of us is the same. He gives us something small. We work hard, stay humble, and in due time (which always means *His* time) He promotes. Notice that this text says humble *yourself*. This is something we do – actively. We view ourselves soberly and stay small in the hand of God. Then, for the person who is humble, moving to the next glory is inevitable... in due time.

God loves taking small people from small beginnings and moving them into bigger things. The Bible is full of people like that. These people, these stories, are the best because they are the most glory-filled. His glory is on display through a person's life. This meant I cleaned coffee grounds out of machines and waited on people first. It meant I washed baptism towels long before I ever set foot on a stage. I helped people at church get signed up for volunteering long before I preached into a microphone. My co-workers in ministry are the same.

One of my closest friends began as a janitor at our church. He cleaned toilets and vacuumed the auditorium and was a professional mover for months before he eventually took over a gigantic youth ministry. My favorite leaders in ministry were youth pastors before they led mega-churches. They were backup singers before they were worship leaders. They were baristas and bank tellers before they got to work in the fields they loved.

Those who were humble were promoted. So stay humble, stay hungry. God has much he's hoping we'll accomplish.

¹³ 1 Peter 5:6

A Kingdom Whose Glory Never Fades

Humility is an ambiguous word. In our culture, it is certainly not an often-celebrated virtue. And yet, it's only through humility that we are able to graduate in His Kingdom. Humility isn't thinking less of yourself or some wayward sense of insecurity that we tote around all our lives. Humility is having a proper sense of who is grand, who is worthy, and who is king. And, whose kingdom we find ourselves in.

This is about His kingdom, not ours.

Our lives are completely and totally about an unfading Kingdom – His Kingdom. What is difficult is that in our world we are told daily that this life is about building our own kingdoms and making something of *ourselves*.

In Matthew, Jesus understands that the human heart is bent towards building things for themselves, and so he addresses it: *"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ...Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."* – Matthew 6:25-33

Humanly we are anxious about our lives. We are anxious about making money, finding the right career, finding the right spouse, getting a nicer car. Jesus, in all His celestial wisdom is calling us out: Don't *worry about your kingdom*. It's not about your kingdom anyway. For most folks, a life spent building their own kingdom will always be the never-attainable answer. They will toil. Be

frustrated. Work hard. But always have a nagging that there's more. And that more can't be found in a bigger home.

Jesus puts it this way: if you want to graduate to the next level – seek my kingdom. It's truly that simple. We will only find peace in life if we can realize this truth early on: Our kingdoms aren't worth a lifetime of work and devotion. But His is. What's more, the best lives, the most glory-filled lives, are those that seek his kingdom first. Everything else is added to them. And comes as a bonus.

God's goals and dreams are comprised of seeing His children experience His grace. His kingdom is about seeing the lost be found. It's about prodigals coming home. It's about serving the least of these. It's about His ambitions of seeing the world know Him and His salvation. Our lives are best spent seeing that God's dreams come to fruition.

The most glorious of lives are those that live for God's ambitions. I suppose it should be no surprise that our glory isn't half as beautiful as His, and that living out our days building His kingdom is more exciting, fulfilling, and incredible than anything we would ever build for ourselves.

If we seek His kingdom, ours will be added to. If we take care of His ambitions, He will take care of ours.

Stay small. Stay humble. Work what God has given you. Seek Him first. This is the way to graduate in God's economy.

In Between

The only other piece is simply to have faith in between glories. For the twenty-something, there will be many, many glories to be had in the next decade. But there will also be many, many years spent in the in-between. In between dependence and independence, in between single and married, in between spiritual haze and spiritual vitality, and in between starter jobs and dream careers. As a

twenty-something, though, you should be encouraged. Being in between means that you are leaving a former glory behind, and a new, greater glory is around the corner. And, like Paul told the Corinthians, the next glory in Christ is inevitable. God always keeps His word.

Faith is the belief in things unseen. It's the resilient hope in the things not acquired or tangible. And it's my belief that faith is the key for navigating your post grad years. If you are worried about your dream, have faith. God wouldn't have given you the dream if He wasn't bent on fulfilling it. If you are overwhelmed by circumstances, have faith. God is absolutely aware of your scenario and how that will shape you into the leader you need to be. If you are worried that the next glory will never come, have faith. It will. Your choice to believe that will be the key to enjoying these years.

And so, welcome Post Grad. This season is the most beautiful and intense one you may ever face. But God is wholly devoted to you. He is absolutely on your side. He is with you in your first job, and watching you honor others in your life. He is aiding in your transformation. He is by your side as you date that wonderful man or woman. He is speaking to you as you choose your friends. He is with you as you commute to work; He is working all things for your good throughout your day. So stay focused, and never lose faith. There is a graduation and a glory directly ahead of you. Working in tandem, God will mold us into exactly the man or woman we need to be to accomplish good things for His kingdom. From glory to glory.

About the Author

Jessie Davis was born and raised in the Rocky Mountains, and found Jesus at eighteen years old. After attending Colorado Christian University, she began working at the young, vibrant and progressive Red Rocks Church (www.redrockschurch.com). She now has the privilege of leading the Young Adults ministry of Red Rocks alongside some of her closest and most talented friends. She currently lives in Denver with her drummer husband Jon, and her beautiful baby girl Brooklyn.