

The Sacred Chase

MOVING FROM PROXIMITY TO
INTIMACY WITH GOD

Heath Adamson



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To Ali.

I adore you and cherish our life together.
We are leaving a legacy for generations to come.

To Leighton and Dallan.

No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has
conceived what God has prepared for you.

To Bill, Beni, Kris, Kathy, Eric, and Candace.
From afar and up close, your pursuit of God's face has
compelled the Adamson family to hunger for more.
Your spiritual ceiling is becoming the floor for many.

To the team at Baker Books and also Creative Trust.
Thank you for the privilege of partnering with you.
I am grateful.

Most of all, to Jesus.
You capture our heart with a glance.

You have said, "Seek my face."
My heart says to you,
"Your face, LORD, do I seek."
Psalm 27:8

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Introduction

My childhood had its share of challenges. To balance them out, my time was filled with skateboarding, long bike rides, hours of basketball in the summer, sunburns, and playing video games with my friends. We didn't have earbuds, motorized scooters, or the internet. I grew up in a day when, if school might be canceled due to bad weather, there were no text messages or social media posts. We had to get up early, sit in front of the TV, and wait for the scrolling announcements at the bottom to see if our school was in session. There were no instantaneous directions because we didn't have maps on our cell phones. There were no cell phones. Parents drove down the highway without slowing down, with large paper maps in front of their faces to figure out where to go, while their young child held the steering wheel. Getting lost on trips was normal, just like riding up to the gas station to use the phone book was.

Every day we always found plenty to do to capture our imagination and expend our energy. But then the inevitable would occur. When young boys run out of sports to play, pizzas to eat, and dreams to chase, somehow and somehow they find

another adventure to go on. But there are some adventures that just aren't wise.

One day, as such a moment struck, I grabbed my fishing rod and headed to my friend's house. The fishing line needed to be strong as well as hard to see. For this reason, we rethreaded my rod with some line from his dad's tackle box. We happened to have a brand-new, crisp, fake twenty-dollar bill, and we used his mom's translucent tape to attach the currency to the end of the fishing line, tied a sinker a few feet away from the money, and walked down the alley to take the back roads to a small field filled with lush bushes and tall trees on one of the busiest streets in the neighborhood, next to the stoplight. The wind was nonexistent, which was perfect for our plan. We settled into the bushes and waited for about ten minutes to ensure no one had seen us walking down the street with the fishing rod.

We waited for the perfect moment, then I threw the fishing line out, and it landed exactly where we wanted it to. The fake twenty-dollar bill was lying right on top of the sidewalk, a few inches from the curb, and the fishing line was invisible. It looked like a twenty-dollar bill was lying on the sidewalk just begging for someone to pick it up. The bushes and trees were the perfect camouflage for us. We were able to observe everything that happened.

We watched, time after time, as people put their cars in park, turned on their hazard lights, got out, and walked over to the money. The unassuming victims of our boyhood menace knelt down, reached out—and we watched their faces as the fake money scooted away across the ground, thanks to our fishing contraption.

Then came one businessman in shiny shoes and dress slacks that he pulled up a bit as he knelt down, and that's when I slowly

began to reel in the line. *The wind must have blown it*, I'm sure he thought. So he followed the money as it crept along the concrete. I started to reel the line faster as the man chased the money.

People were staring at him from their cars, and we laughed our heads off. Leaving an automobile with the engine still running at a stoplight is just foolish. Chasing fake money oddly crawling along the sidewalk is even more so. Our laughter quickly went beyond quiet snorts and chuckles, though we tried desperately to remain covert. It was just too funny!

What was equally as funny is that neither one of us stopped to realize that as I reeled in the line with the man chasing the money, I was also leading him right to us.

Before we knew it, we were face-to-face with a man whose forehead was covered with beads of sweat, whose dress shirt was soaked with perspiration, and whose face was twisted into a scowl.

As a young boy, I don't recall ever seeing an adult that angry before.

The man screamed at us and said words I'd had my mouth washed out with soap for—plus I learned a few new words that day. I grabbed my pole and my friend, and we ran away as hard and fast as we could through that field. The man never caught us and, once we arrived back at my friend's house safe and sound, we laughed that he'd never caught the twenty-dollar bill either.

The fake bill, that is.

That was the last time we played what we called "the money game." That was probably the last time that businessman dared to get out of his car to attempt to chase down a twenty in broad daylight too.

In Pursuit

We can laugh at this story, but the truth is we have all chased after something that had no real value at all, just like that fake twenty-dollar bill. We can be successful at what, in the end, doesn't even matter. We have also all pursued things that seemed good and valuable only to end up disappointed, rejected, or discouraged. Sometimes a college application is submitted but the resulting letter of denial disappoints us. We can apply for the job only to see it go to another candidate. A relationship we invested in can end not in greater connection but in heartbreak and betrayal. On the other hand, sometimes our pursuits in life do lead to accomplishing a few goals. Maybe our hard work pays off and we make some new friends, accumulate some achievements, or attain a promotion or two.

I am a firm believer in pursuing dreams and taking risks. There is certainly something special that takes place on the journey, whether the outcome is achieved or not. I am also a firm believer that there are no guarantees that every pursuit will end up the way we hope it will.

There is one pursuit we can go on, however, where our expectations and hopes are not only realized—they are exceeded. What pursuit is this? It is our pursuit of a deeper, sacred, more intimate connection with Jesus. This pursuit is not one of striving or begging; rather, it is one of inheriting and embracing. We chase the reality of God from a heart that is fully and finally at rest in Jesus. This deeper spiritual connection occurs by being authentic, intentional, and vulnerable with God.

There is a mind-blowing, never-ending connection with God available to everyone right now. I am not necessarily talking about meeting God so you can go to heaven after you die. That

is of primary importance, don't get me wrong, for eternity is long, and your eternal salvation cost God all: his Son.

What I am referring to is the audacious pursuit of God and God's reckless love for you—what I call the sacred chase. Perhaps you can think of salvation in Christ like a door. Once you walk through that door, you will discover how unsearchable the love and promises of God are for you. For the difficulties ahead and for those moments of celebration, yes, but even more so for your every day. All of heaven desires to see your life soaked with the reality of God's presence. Pursuing this is worth all of your efforts. When deep connection and friendship with God is someone's desire, I have never seen that someone walk away disappointed.

Heaven Is Tangible Now

Although our lives should change when we meet Jesus, salvation is more than the transition from being a bad person to becoming a good person. When we receive the amazing gift of salvation, God performs the most remarkable miracle in our lives. Through salvation in Jesus, we literally go from being spiritually dead and eternally separated from God to being spiritually born into God's family.

Coming to faith in Christ, however, does not take away all of our problems. The baby's diaper still needs changing and children still get sick in the middle of the night. Water heaters still go out and an unexpected bill arrives in the mail—again. Flights may be delayed or canceled. Relationships don't always go as planned and, although the love of God is breathtaking, your mortgage company still requires you to pay on time.

When we are introduced to the goodness of God and all of his life-changing promises for us in Scripture, there can come

a time when we see the object of our pursuit but it seems just beyond our grasp, just like that twenty-dollar bill. And in our striving and pursuing, we can become discouraged. We can even quit. We think holding in our hands the tangible expression of heaven on earth can happen for everyone—except us.

What we really need to take hold of is this: whenever we pursue a greater connection with God and endeavor to see the promises of Scripture become our very own, we always inherit the promise. How can I say that? That promise is not just an answered prayer or changed circumstance. Yes, God cares and is faithful. We should expect our prayers to be answered, and, if they are not, rather than excusing it away we press on and contend for the miracle. But the ultimate purpose of prayer is not just to get an answer.

The purpose of prayer and fulfillment of every promise, first and foremost, starts with God. God is our reward. God is at the beginning, the end, and the journey in between.

Have you ever devoted your heart and soul to connect with God and felt like that connection was just out of reach? Or do you feel like God is hiding in the bushes as he dangles promises of hope, peace, a fresh start, strength for what lies ahead, healing in your relationships, miraculous divine turnarounds to situations, or direction for your future that he pulls further and further away from you?

Many if not all of us experience a tension between what we know to be true about God and our situation. This is not an excuse to become discouraged or to change our definition of God to fit our experience. This is a divine invitation.

Religious routine can easily replace the intimacy you used to have with God before life became busy and unpredictable. I can

assure you the breakdown is not on God's end and the solution you need is within your reach. You can, and I believe you will, scoop up in your hand what your soul longs for.

Have you ever had a memory of something you did that made you feel ashamed and unworthy, or like God was mad at you? If so, you don't fully understand how God feels about you. Have you ever made commitments to read your Bible and pray, only to see your spiritual hunger fade? Yes, God is worth more of your heart, but rather than being disappointed with you, God is delighted in you for trying to connect with your Creator.

Do you want God to be more real in your life but are not quite sure where to begin or how to continue?

Does your past torment you? Does your future worry you? Is your present reality distracting you?

Has your lifestyle made it convenient to have a Christian-branded version of "you" but an empty, hollow soul?

Do you simply want to get closer to God? The reality of a spiritual life in full bloom, here and now, can begin. The choice is yours. God can't wait for you to start!

Now is the time, not to strive but to rest and to begin the most sacred of all pursuits and the most rewarding of all chases you can fathom.

There is so much more to your relationship with Jesus than you are experiencing.

God Chases Us First

You and I are as close to God as we want to be. We have all, like Moses, been invited to the top of the mountain to hear God's voice and walk down the jagged path of Horeb with tablets hand-inscribed by the very finger of God. Like Abraham,

our days can be instantaneously interrupted by the One who invites us to journey into the unknown, looking for a city whose builder and maker is God, while remaining at peace, for what we do not see is much more real than anything we do see.

God beckons us all to step out on the water like Peter and watch heaven itself literally transform the physical world and make impossibilities like walking on water possible. When wisdom is needed for something we have never experienced, like Noah, God can provide the next steps for us to make informed decisions to bring our family through difficulty. When the shadow of the giant eclipses our face, and no one else around us knows how to break through that obstacle, like David, God knows where to find the smooth stones needed to take down our Goliath.

As a stay-at-home parent, you may feel insignificant and off of heaven's radar as you fold another load of laundry, clean up after another child, pay another bill, and talk to yourself since you're the only adult around. God is chasing you.

As a student, you may arrive home from school discouraged from the popularity game or hear the echo of the bully's words spoken about you. God spoke different words over you today you may be unaware of.

Perhaps as a single parent you struggle with the guilt of working multiple jobs to pay bills but not investing enough time with your children. God has a solution, and it is found in his presence.

Maybe you can no longer pretend, and your past is finally catching up to you. You may attend church regularly and feel like you're the only one struggling. You sit there, in quiet desperation, under the shadow of the steeple. God isn't angry with you. God loves you and invites you to the reality of heaven in your moment right now. Things can change.

You don't need to settle for anything less than what God promised.

Your finances may be tight, or you may have more than enough money to purchase a better brand of temporal, carnal misery. Your relationships may be shallow or nonexistent, or you may find yourself surrounded by healthy family and community.

Whether things are going great or you feel like you're stuck in a cycle of things constantly falling apart, *right now* is your moment to shout a resounding yes and begin the chase—the sacred chase—that always results in winning the prize. And what is that prize? The reality of Jesus in your life today.

This sacred chase is not about performing for God's approval; rather, it is about positioning your heart and responding to a divine glance. And one glance is all it takes.

CHAPTER ONE

Beyond Belief

Miraculously, not one person on her beach died that day. It was the day after Christmas, 2004. Around the world, families reminisced about their Christmas holiday in various ways. Parents recovered from the mental hangover of putting together the toys for their toddlers, which comprised thousands of tiny pieces and a small wrench spared by the manufacturer. (I am still convinced there is a conspiracy out there somewhere as drones hover outside of our windows and watch us struggle to put these toys together.) Ironically, by lunchtime the expensive toys requiring hours of assemblage are forgotten, and their cardboard boxes become the magical castle where the princesses dwell or the deep, dark, adventurous cavern where the superheroes spelunk.

Some spouses spent the holiday without the love of their life for the first time, because death comes to us all. Proud grandparents traveled back home after watching their grandchildren open presents and sitting around the table with their family. People all over the world ate fruitcake and wondered what in

the world goes into it. Some students headed to the mall to return those denim jeans that were just a little too tight, probably a result of too many Christmas cookies. College students slept in. Some waitresses worked all day and would celebrate with their families later. Christmas music echoed in homes. For some, refrigerators were filled with leftovers from the holiday feast. Others couldn't afford the turkey or ham. New gloves adorned the cute little hands of the kids who were sledding, or new swimming trunks or swimming suits went on those who were surfing in the ocean.

Tilly's Beach

On that December 26, Tilly Smith and her family relaxed on the beach.¹ Their first family vacation had taken them to Thailand. Shortly after 8:30 a.m., ten-year-old Tilly, her parents, Colin and Penny, and her seven-year-old sister, Holly, went for a walk along Mai Khao beach, in front of their Phuket hotel. Disaster was the furthest thing from their minds. They enjoyed the warm breeze in their faces and felt the sand squish in between their toes. Fresh sea shells and creatures littered the beach.

A mere two weeks prior to their holiday, Tilly had learned about tsunamis in her geography class. As is the case with many ten-year-olds, Tilly did not find geography tantalizing, but the video her teacher showed had caught her attention. So, as Tilly and her family walked the beach, and she noticed the waves coming in but not going out, she dared to pay attention to something most people would have dismissed. Tilly had a different perspective that would soon change everything. The right information, applied at the right time, not only made a difference—it made *the* difference.

Tilly alerted her parents that they were surrounded by signs that something unusual, unexpected, and cataclysmic would occur. At first they were dismissive, but Tilly's passion and persistence paid off. She began shouting, "There is going to be a tsunami!" Now, what would you do if you were on vacation with your family and your ten-year-old daughter started screaming on the beach that a tsunami was about to strike? Imagine the embarrassment. Imagine what people thought. Breakfast on the beach interrupted by an irate ten-year-old is hardly vacation in my book. Tilly shouted louder and louder, and her panic frightened her younger sister, who began to sob hysterically.

Can you hear it? I imagine the volume increasing with her parents saying something like, "Tilly, are you all right? How can I help? Tilly, calm down! It will be okay. What's the matter with you? You're scaring your sister! Get yourself under control, now!" Tilly's dad took Holly back to the hotel to calm her down. Tilly and her mom walked on, but Tilly kept shouting. She looked around and saw the people in the ocean, on the sand, and just knew in her heart that everyone was in danger. Tilly then ran back to the hotel to find her dad conversing with a security guard.

"I know this sounds completely mad, but my daughter says there's going to be a tsunami," he said.

The security guard listened not to a PhD candidate, brain surgeon, or NASA scientist but to a passionate plea coming from a ten-year-old British schoolgirl. The guard listened to the most important voice—though it was disguised as a seemingly insignificant one—then shouted for people to get off the beach. Those in the pool began to run. Those in the ocean came to shore immediately and went to higher ground. People scattered all over the place as pandemonium set in.

It all happened so fast.

By this time, Tilly's mom was also running back to the hotel. She was one of the last people off of the beach. People screamed and children cried. Everyone was running. The hotel lobby, on a higher floor, became a gathering place. Then the reason for the pandemonium became evident. A tsunami, triggered by an earthquake at the floor of the Indian Ocean, struck.

This tsunami devastated nations. It killed an estimated 230,000 people.

Not one person from Tilly's beach died that we know of.

Tilly's dad, in shock after learning of the horrific devastation and suffering, said to Tilly, "What if we hadn't listened to you?"

What Tilly's father said is a logical thought, and one I would have as well. What if no one had listened to Tilly? I will take it a step further. What if Tilly hadn't listened to Tilly?

Believing Truth

When truth is no longer deafened by the voice of apathy, the results of our obedience, like Tilly's, are immeasurable.

What you believe and who you believe are crucial. In the end, this will determine the quality of your earthly life along with your eternal resting place (Hosea 4:6). There is a truth and, contrary to cultural opinion, truth is not relative. Truth is a Person whose name is Jesus. Whatever doesn't line up with the life and message of Jesus is inferior. Appearing to be authentic, it can simply be candy-coated poison. Just another fake twenty-dollar bill that takes our pursuit away from what is most valuable.

You can't always believe everything you think or feel. The heart is deceitful (Jer. 17:9). When you believe a lie, you empower it to produce results in your life. This is why Scripture says in Proverbs 23:7, "For as he thinks within himself, so is he" (TPT). The Hebrew word translated "think" means to "calculate, estimate, put a valuation on." It is safe to say that what we calculate to the thousandth decimal in our thinking, which takes place often subconsciously, literally shapes how we perceive the world. There are more electrical impulses traveling from your brain to your eyes than vice versa. This means your brain tells your eyes what to see.

When you believe the truth, it opens a door for freedom to reign (John 8:32). Believing the truth, however, is not enough to experience the freedom God created you to experience. James 2:19 says, "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!" The Passion Translation puts James 2:19–20 this way:

You can believe all you want that there is one true God, that's wonderful! But even the demons know this and tremble with fear before him, yet they're unchanged—they remain demons. O feeble sons of Adam, do you need further evidence that faith divorced from good works is phony?

What is the big idea? Tilly took what she believed and did something with it. It took courage for her to live out what she knew to be true, though she might be misunderstood or criticized, as everyone else around her did not see what she saw. She was vulnerable, allowing her beliefs to move her outside of her comfort zone to a place of decisive action regardless of how inconvenient it was. She stood alone.

When Believing the Truth Isn't Enough

Believing in the truth isn't enough. Had Tilly believed a tsunami was about to strike and remained silent, the miracle of Mai Khao beach would instead have been a tragedy. Although what you believe is of life-or-death importance, what you do with that belief is equally if not even more significant. If we say we believe but it does not transform our motives, deeds, and priorities, we are simply chasing a twenty-dollar bill that we will never be able to spend down the sidewalk.

People often ask, "Do you believe in God?" It is an important question and one that can unlock our purpose. The intent of this book is not to convince you to believe in God; instead, I want to convince you that *God believes in you* and *there is a relationship with God that is beyond belief*. If you dare to believe God's invitation to "have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10) and allow that belief to move you to a place apart from all excuses, all mistakes, all areas of shame, and all of the reasons you think you have to justify why your audacious pursuit of God's goodness in your life won't work, you will never regret it.

Never.

In John 10:10, the Greek word translated "life" can mean "the state of one who is possessed of vitality."² Can you imagine your life literally being possessed by vitality? In the same verse, "abundantly" means "continuous and excessive."³ The word picture of this sort of life would be a cup so full that it is overflowing and, though it drips all over the counter and onto the floor, the source just keeps pouring and pouring and pouring. You may think it is waste; God says it's life.

If I told you I was giving you twenty-five million dollars, after your bewilderment went away and you realized it was actually

true, immediately your dreams of how to spend the money would begin. Houses, cars, vacations, shopping, charities, school bills, and the like would be glad recipients of your new-found wealth. You may not receive twenty-five million dollars, at least not from me, but you have an inheritance worth much more than this. It is found in a relationship with the God who knows it all, sees it all, and still absolutely loves you. Your soul will thank you one day if you go looking for your inheritance in Christ. It isn't far away, nor is it buried deep beneath the ocean's surface. Your spiritual inheritance is found by gazing into the eyes of God, knowing true love, and embracing the authenticity found only in that space. God is your inheritance, and the abundant life with him should never stop flowing. Sometimes, unfortunately, it does, when our perception overshadows how good God really is. What we perceive can be self-fulfilling, and it isn't God's fault. Without a true glimpse of Jesus, we can tolerate the inferior and counterfeit in our lives.

The Power of Hope

In the 1950s, a professor at Johns Hopkins named Curt Richter conducted an experiment with rats (both domesticated and wild) that were placed in jars filled halfway with water. The domesticated rats were placed inside one by one, and the amount of time they swam around was measured. The first rat swam incessantly and then dove to the bottom of the jar, where it placed its nose up against the glass and continued swimming. After about two minutes, that rat died. Nine other domesticated rats did something quite different: they swam for days before giving up.

The wild rats, recently trapped, aggressive, and known to be good swimmers, surprised Dr. Richter. All thirty-four of them

quit within a few minutes of being placed in the jars. He then tweaked the experiment. In the first experiment, the rats did not experience fight or flight; rather, he said, they experienced hopelessness. In the second experiment he sought to create a scenario that wasn't hopeless. Watching closely, he picked up the rats just before they stopped swimming, held them briefly, and then placed them back in the jar. And that brief moment of time the rats were removed from their striving in the water made a difference.

The rats that experienced a break from their struggle swam longer and lasted longer than those that were never held. Dr. Richter believed the rats kept swimming when they had a reason to. A *Psychology Today* blog post puts it this way: "There are obviously many differences between humans and rats. But one similarity stands out: We all need a reason to keep swimming."⁴

When we go on the journey with God and live our life with Jesus, life can feel like a struggle at times. We may not even feel like we are making much progress in our God-connection. The abundant life God promised seems too good to be true—at least for us. But what I am learning is that we don't have to wait for God to reach down and give us a reprieve from our swim. The rest we need is within us, for that is where our great God lives. But for many of us it just doesn't feel that way all the time, does it? Is there anything God can do about the gap you experience between the divine promise and your current reality? You may think, *I sure hope so*. But remember, God already took the necessary steps for you to inherit every promise provided to you and all generations to come. The next step, which is possible and doable, is up to you.

Like Tilly's, your situation is perfectly designed for truth and belief to meet wholehearted devotion.

The Bible is full of examples where individuals, refusing to be distracted from their purpose in knowing God in a deeper way, laid aside baggage from their past, excuses from their present, the illusion of success, and anxieties about their future to go on the sacred chase. In Matthew 20, the blind beggars cried out desperately to Jesus of Nazareth, who was walking by on the Jericho road. They were told to calm down and be quiet, yet they shouted even louder. Jesus stopped and looked at the blind men, not the first time they cried out but the second time. This tells me that sometimes our condition will capture the heart of God while at other times our spiritual passion will. I wonder what would have happened if they'd stopped crying out when the crowd told them to be quiet? Have you ever cried out to God before and decided not to cry out a second time?

Job, a righteous man whose family and wealth were tragically taken from him, had every reason to be cynical toward God. Job chose to walk humbly and remain devoted to God. Rather than accusing God, Job was led by his pursuit to say, "Though he slay me, I will hope in him" (Job 13:15). What is Job communicating? We can infer he meant his passion for God would never be subject to his earthly circumstances.

Queen Esther devoted herself for months, in preparation, to stand before her earthly king and defend the marginalized. Elijah outran chariots. Paul endured prison. David stood firm in the face of intimidation. The man they called Legion, whom we will learn later had a multitude of excuses, chose to let his love for God slay every one of them. Abraham, "in hope . . . believed against hope" (Rom. 4:18). Hope is a powerful force, and when we allow ourselves to hope for the reality of heaven to emerge in our lives on the earth here and now, we will never be disappointed (Isa. 49:23).

In our age, style is often exalted over substance. Spiritual apathy can easily take on the appearance of what we call “balance.” What we see, and the way things appear, can lure us into an illusion. God is not impressed with performance. God looks at the heart (1 Sam. 16:7) and searches far and wide for someone who will wholeheartedly commit themselves to the sacred chase (2 Chron. 16:9). This reaches further than coming to God with our problems in prayer. If the problems in our life went away, would we still have a prayer life?

Seeking God with our whole heart is revealed when we want divine connection more than anything else. Can we come to God in prayer and trust our good Father cares, answers, and meets our needs? Of course. Philippians 4:19 reveals that God supplies our needs. It is possible, however, to get so caught up with a lot of other things that we miss the most important thing. Matthew 6:33 says, “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” You can seek things and forfeit the kingdom. When you seek the kingdom, everything else comes with it. I pray my, and your, dominant fixation in life is simply to catch a fresh glimpse of who God is again. Day after day.

Our examples of Job, Esther, David, and the rest reveal a common thread: they all bent their hearts in God’s direction. They chose inheritance over convenience. What do I mean? One of the most remarkable promises God makes to us is found in Ephesians 3:20: “[God] is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us.” In this verse we see that not only is God able, God is willing. This reveals a significant truth for you and me: all of this mind-blowing, dream-shattering goodness of God displayed in our lives is somehow, some way, related to the condition of our souls.

The word “power” in Ephesians 3:20 can be literally translated “dynamite.”⁵ The phrase translated “according to” is the Greek word *energeó*, meaning “to work or accomplish.”⁶ This is where our word *energy* comes from, which can literally mean “an electrical current energizing a wire.” It’s almost as if all of God’s goodness and your spiritual inheritance are packaged in a stick of dynamite, and you have the ability to light the fuse. This affects your marriage, children, friendships, family lineage, finances, emotional and physical health, destiny, purpose, and entire life. With no spark, the dormant power is useless. The words “according to” reveal that much of the quality of our spiritual lives is not up to God; it’s up to us.

One Door Takes Us There

A detailed study of the New Testament reveals dozens of reasons why God sent his Son to earth. I am thankful for one of the most well-known, widely recognized reasons: salvation. When God became tangibly real to me at seventeen, and I discovered how deep and rich the grace of God is, it seemed far too good to be true. I was and am eternally grateful for salvation. The lifestyle I was rescued from is proof that God restores. Jesus is more real now than ever. Although my salvation through Jesus Christ still takes my breath away, it wasn’t until I had walked through that door that I began to realize how wide and deep and high God’s love is. I then began to notice the other reasons Jesus came. One of them is to consistently grow us in our understanding of God’s love.

The apostle Paul expressed it this way in Ephesians 3:17–19: “That you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth

and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” Love is a Person (1 John 4:8). Without Christ, we cannot know God.

Through Christ and our salvation in him, the most unbelievable privilege and reality in the universe become ours. We can know God intimately and personally. I am thankful for eternal life (John 3:16), but I am equally thankful for the ability to know God in this life too. Paul invites the Ephesians, and through these Scriptures the Holy Spirit invites us too, to “know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge” (Eph. 3:19). How can you know something that surpasses being known?

You have just officially learned about the sacred chase.

In this verse, we have a divine invitation to let loose our deep, pent-up hunger for God and point every area of our lives in God’s direction. God put eternity in our hearts (Eccles. 3:11) and also invites us to search for the unsearchable (Prov. 25:2). We have a deep longing to see the Unseen One, though we may not always feel that way. It is almost as if God says, *Hey, there is no way you will ever know, understand, or even begin to figure out how crazy I am about you. But go ahead and try! I will enjoy every second of it. I have been waiting for this moment since long before you were born.*

Yet somewhere along the line, thousands of voices begin talking us out of our divine design to start and finish our sacred chase. We can fill our lives with pleasure, accolades, and getting “more,” only to realize in the end we confused our goals with God’s purpose.

Our busy lives keep us going, just enough, to avoid the necessary stillness needed to hear the divine whisper. Are we afraid of what God may show us in the silence? Henri Nouwen thought

so when he said, “There was a time when silence was normal and a lot of racket disturbed us. But today, noise is the normal fare, and silence has become the real disturbance.”⁷

We compromise and call it tolerance. We slowly let the very things that used to destroy us creep back in and call it authenticity. We don’t want to be “religious and legalistic” and can therefore justify the dimly burning spiritual flame in our heart. We can neglect ancient, timeworn spiritual disciplines that are sure to bring spiritual health because we become addicted to the next new thing. We can ignore reading and studying Scripture because we listen to a sermon every now and then. We tolerate the very things that destroy lives and call it entertainment.

Now, there is nothing wrong with having goals, purchasing a house, going back to school, or watching a movie. I am not talking about selling it all, moving to a monastery, living off of rainwater and berries, or saying adios to technology. It is God who gives us the knowledge, wisdom, and understanding to create the computer chip, build the skyscraper, or pilot a plane to take families to their favorite vacation destination. And that’s exactly my point. It is God.

We can become like the older brother in the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15 and take advantage of God’s goodness by becoming content with the father’s blessings without desiring to spend time with the father in his house. In this way, unfortunately, we treat God like a mere prostitute, where intimacy is exchanged for mere want. The younger brother was seduced by opportunities that ended up becoming distractions from what eternally mattered. Only after the younger brother became impoverished did he realize true, unending wealth was found in simply being present with the father.

The only rational commitment you and I can make to Jesus, given he laid down his life for us, is complete and total surrender to live a life of love and devotion to God (Luke 9:23).

One Step

Do you need to grow in your connection with God? If you say yes, then this book can help you immensely on that journey. You can fuel your passion for God and know unknowable love. If you respond, “No thanks, I am just fine where I am,” then I pray you continue reading, for maybe there is much more available and accessible to you as a follower of Christ than you first believed or were taught. Regardless, the difference between “God is nowhere” and “God is now here” is something small, insignificant, and achievable by everyone. The difference is one simple step.

Once you begin the sacred chase, your challenges in life become smaller as your perspective of God’s love and goodness become clearer. The sacred chase for the heart of God will help you become the spouse and parent you were created to be. It will bring freedom from your past to your mind once and for all. It will grant you the wisdom to know which decision is best. It will equip you to distinguish between confrontation and conflict and learn how to establish boundaries in relationships when necessary. It will benefit your business and bless your life. None of these things are the ultimate prize, however; God is. If knowing God was the only reward for a life of commitment to Jesus, then that reward is worth it.

In the midst of opportunities that seduce us, excuses that paralyze us, and experiences that often confuse us, we have a longing deep within our soul for more of God. There is a primal hunger for God that this world can never fully and finally

satisfy, yet our faulty understanding of God and the distractions of this life often sabotage us from starting.

Two verses in Hebrews 12 seem to capture it all:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. (vv. 1–2)

Hebrews 11 is full of the stories of ordinary people like us whose sacred chase often included unusual circumstances and unlikely destinations. Through challenges like the inability to conceive children, dysfunctional families, insurmountable trials, physical pain, and spiritual ups and downs, they continued to run their race to win their prize.

After being inspired and encouraged when we read Hebrews 11, we find chapter 12 drives a stake in the ground. The writer provides an illustration we can all relate to, if not personally then certainly through what we have watched on TV. The word translated “race” in Hebrews 12 is also used in ancient Greek literature to describe athletic games, even the original Olympic games from which the modern Olympics are patterned. That word is *agon*, from which we also derive our word *agony*, and it refers to the strenuous training and competition the athletes endured in the games. It is also used in ancient literature to describe a struggle in the human soul.⁸

Scripture is painting this picture of you and me in a large arena, surrounded by some who want us to win and others who

want us to lose. It is up to us to compete to win. To do so, we must make sure we aren't weighed down with anything, and we put away or literally "renounce" all types of sin. The word translated here as "sin" can mean "a brand of sin that is self-originated."⁹ The struggle in our soul can be won when we let go and throw away anything that distracts us from our prize. We are then instructed to let our gaze fall on Jesus who is our author (literally "pioneer") and finisher.

You can run your spiritual race with all of your heart, but if you are running in the wrong direction, you still won't finish.

By now, you may be thinking that the sacred chase refers to doing more Christian things like reading your Bible, praying, going to church or life group, or giving financially. These can be healthy things, but as we will see, they are symptoms of a race well run, not necessarily proof of it. Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Jesus, basically did all of these things. He was not a hypocrite. Judas was an unbeliever. Judas didn't lose his relationship with God at the end of his life. It appears from the Gospels he never had one. In Greek literature, when the writer describes an event and a list of names appears, the order of those names is significant. Typically, the first name is considered the most prominent or relevant to the reader. Judas's name appears about twenty times, and usually it's in a narrative where other disciples are also mentioned. He is always mentioned last. It is almost as if one of the most well-known of all Jesus's followers is unfortunately, due to the condition of his heart, a dark horse.

To run well and finish strong, you must first take an honest assessment of where you are in your connection to God and

how you got there, and make a commitment that you are going to accept once and for all that God is worthy of your pursuit.

We can spend a lifetime finding blame for the reasons we live beneath God's best, or we can look to Jesus and let God show us where to really begin. John 3:34 tells us God "gives the Spirit without measure." Who sets the limits? The devil doesn't. Our culture doesn't. Our past doesn't. Our race, gender, or social status doesn't have to.

The limits are up to you and me, within the condition of our soul, for there is a spiritual inheritance in Jesus that can be claimed only one person at a time. This is the moment for each of us to take what we believe, like Tilly did, and apply it to our situation. If what we believe is correct but is overshadowed by apathy, our spiritual adversary doesn't need to speak to us or tempt us anymore. But if we take what we know to be true about God's goodness and allow our spiritual passion to overtake our other priorities, the words of Job will become ours: "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you" (Job 42:5).