

## **Flight Plans, False Goals, and a Life Uncommon**

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In 1938, an Irish-American pilot named Douglas Corrigan flew his jalopy single-engine plane across the Atlantic Ocean by mistake. Or so the story goes. According to his report to authorities at the airport where he landed, he had made a navigational error because of fog and an inability to see his instruments in the dark. He had filed a flight plan that plotted his course from New York to California, but despite being an experienced pilot, he "mistakenly" flew by the wrong end of the compass needle and didn't realize it until it was too late to do anything but land where he was - Ireland. When questioned by officials at the airport near Dublin, Corrigan stuck to his story that the whole thing was just a big blunder. Though Corrigan lost his license to fly, he became a national folk hero upon returning to the United States. For Americans, whose spirits had been deflated by the Great Depression, Corrigan's stunt was comic relief.

Although Corrigan never quite admitted it, his "mistake" was likely a ruse to circumvent the Federal Bureau of Aviation, who had repeatedly rejected his request to make the trans-Atlantic flight to his parents' homeland. The nickname "Wrong-Way Corrigan," stuck, and a year later, he starred in a biopic (*The Flying Irishman*) about his life. We may never know what his intentions were, but his story rang in the ears of the American people, who were desperate for a little laugh and maybe even for a little taste of courage.

Whether we declare them or not, our goals set our course, act as our compass. It behooves us, then, to be sure we choose the right ones. Our culture bombards us with the message that what we see is all there is. The enticing wisdom of this world dictates a certain set of goals: maximize your pleasure and minimize your pain, make a name for yourself, gain money, gain status, gain power. But wisdom from above tells us that we are immortal creatures and that our brief stay on this planet is nothing compared with the eternal existence that awaits us.

The Bible tells us that knowing God is the greatest possible pursuit, that he holds in his right hand all we could ever want (Psalm 16:11). Jesus urged us, in Matthew 6, to seek his kingdom first and trust that the things we need will be supplied by this same God, who knows everything we need, even when we haven't asked for it yet.

But having to live in this fallen world, we easily forget and lose our focus. We get caught in the tension between the goals this world would have us set and the goals we would set if we really believed that what the Bible says is true. This is warfare between an earthly, demonic wisdom and a heavenly, divine wisdom (James 3:13-17), and we're all required to make a choice: on which side of the field are we going to play?

While we're deciding, let's look at some of the goals we humans typically seek and try to figure out what's behind them.

***False Goal #1: Pleasure***

Somebody's knockin' should I let him in,  
Lord it's the devil would you look at him  
I've heard about him but I never dreamed,  
he'd have blue eyes and blue jeans<sup>1</sup>

Ahhh, self-indulgence. Whether it's too much wine, too much ice cream, 28 pairs of Italian leather shoes or a too many hits on a website we know we shouldn't visit, when we pursue pleasure as an end in itself, we use the right things in wrong ways and can end up in real bondage. Country singer and songwriter Terri Gibbs broke the bank with her hit single, "Somebody's Knockin'," which promptly became a nationwide favorite. It spoke to a common temptation for every human being who heard it – *sin looks "real good."*

Erwin Lutzer agreed. He said, "Sin never comes to us properly labeled; it always appears wrapped in a different package and presented as something other than what it is."<sup>2</sup> Short-term sensual pleasure can bring long-term pain. Eating and drinking for the wrong reasons can lead to addictions. These top the list but are only a few of the distortions Satan would like to use to trap us. He would like us to think that the choices are either the pursuit of pleasure or asceticism (extreme self-denial). But this is all wrong. God isn't trying to keep us from enjoying life. In fact, he wants us to have life in abundance. But real abundance never comes by way of self-indulgence. It comes as a byproduct of seeking the one who holds all of our pleasures in his own right hand - forever.

The wise writer of Proverbs tells us that, "He who loves pleasure will become poor" (21:17). Years later, the apostle Paul passed this same wisdom on to Timothy, saying he counted lovers of pleasure among the people he should avoid (2 Tim. 3:4). And Jesus, The Walking Wisdom of the Ages, said the pursuit of pleasure can choke out the word of God like thorns choke out good seeds (Luke 8:14). Don't we usually find all this to be true in our own lives when we seek pleasures instead of seeking God? This pursuit will always, eventually, disappoint. God has made us for himself, and the deepest pleasure we will ever know comes from knowing him.

Surely, as Christians, we should be able to see this. So what's wrong with us?

*Why do people who are otherwise so decent, smart, and well-intended – yes, even some committed Christians – behave in ways that are stupid, selfish, and self-destructive? And sometimes evil? Why don't we live up to what we know is right?*

*The answer, quite frankly, is that we are driven not by reason, but by our desires. We do not behave according to what our mind tells us; we obey our passions that cry out for gratification. To quote the words of Woody Allen (who fell in love with his own stepdaughter), 'The heart wants what it wants.'*<sup>3</sup>

The fact is that the path of pleasure is not a very difficult one to take. We start down it willfully. Why not? It is pleasure. But then, as James says, "each one is tempted when, by his own evil

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<sup>1</sup> Gibbs, Terri. MCA Records, 1980.

<sup>2</sup> Erwin Lutzer, *Why Good People Do Bad Things*, (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 2001) 32.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 27

desire, he is dragged away and enticed” (James 1:14). We start walking leisurely down an enjoyable path, when, out of nowhere, the snakes named Want and Lust twist around our ankles and squeeze until we’re dead. The original problem is, according to James, that we’re the ones who named them. Usually the path to pleasure is only easy to follow in the outbound direction.

### ***False Goal #2: Approval***

Paul asked a question we should all consider asking ourselves: “Am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still striving to please men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ” (Galatians 1:10). That’s strong language. If I strive to please people, am I no longer Christ’s servant?

Let’s look to Pontius Pilate for our answer. The governor of Judea at the time of Jesus’ death, Pilate was a politician, but, apparently, not a very good one. Assigned the task of ruling over a conquered people who hadn’t quite admitted they’d been conquered, Pilate found himself in a very difficult situation which he did not handle well. It appears he was alternately cruel and compromising. History says Pilate hated the Jews and had a reputation for being brutal, even murderous. His harsh rule had been reported to the emperor, and he would have been under investigation at the time of the trial of Jesus. Perhaps because of this, on various occasions, Pilate would threaten the Jews and make great shows of power to accomplish his purposes; but when the Jews, seemingly unintimidated by these demonstrations, refused to relent, Pilate would concede.

His actions and the well-known question he asked of Jesus, “What is truth?” help to form a picture of a confused man who made his decisions without consulting any reliable standard. During Jesus’ two trials before him, his chief concern as governor should have been dispensing justice. However, it is more likely that his real interest lay in trying to placate an angry mob while his job as their ruler was on the line. To complicate matters, as he is sitting in his judgment seat, his wife sends him a message: “Have nothing to do with that righteous man.” *Now what does he do?* Pilate symbolically washes his hands, says, “I am innocent of this man’s blood,” and sends Jesus to the cross.

Some claim that Pilate later became a Christian, even a martyr. History says he was banished by the emperor Caligula, suffered some kind of breakdown and committed suicide. Tragically, Pilate came face-to-face with the Son of God; but he was so concerned with the power of the emperor and the power of the mob that he failed to realize that the most powerful figure in history was seated right in front of him, yielding to his control. Striving to please people took him miles away from a possible relationship with the suffering servant whose help he desperately needed.

Missed opportunities and terrible decisions are only some of the consequences we suffer when people’s opinions become more important to us than God’s. Whether it is recognition that we want or, like Pilate, we’re just frantically scrambling to avoid consequences, when we try to please men, we will ultimately fail. It is God’s approval we should seek. The *incidental* outcome of seeking God’s approval may be that men esteem us; but it is the goal that matters. We cannot simultaneously seek to be impressive to men and pleasing to Christ.

### ***False Goal #3: Fame***

*Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.*

(Gen. 11:4)

Sounds good; doesn't it? Take a look at Flemish painter Pieter Bruegel's two fantastic paintings of the Tower of Babel to get an idea of what this ziggurat must have looked like. These were powerful men building an amazing monument. It took strong leadership to bring people together for a project of this magnitude, and it took a lot of people working to build one of these things. Who knows how far they got.

**Comment [U1]:** Ken, would be great if we could include these prints. ???

But where was God in the plans of the men who came together at Shinar to make a name for themselves? He was totally missing from their equation. And verse 8 of the same chapter tells us how well their plan worked out for them: [T]he Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city." The very thing they were working to prevent happened to them in an instant when God came down.

No one wants to leave this earth without making a mark. We all want to accomplish something that will matter. And if we are servants of God, it's right to hope we will accomplish something that will last forever. We ought all to fear dying until we have done something that will always live. But it is *how* we go about accomplishing this that matters. In a total inversion of the world's recipe for success, the Bible tells us we ought to humble ourselves, become servants, and trust that God will be the one to exalt us (James 4:10). He wants to accomplish great things through us; but he knows that, when we try to do it on our own, we become proud, and in so doing set ourselves up for failure.

How difficult is this other way? How hard must it have been for the 12 men sitting with Jesus when he told them that "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all" (Mark 9:35). Each one of us has, indeed, been crafted by God to accomplish something that will last forever, but the number-one way we are to do this is by investing sacrificially in other people in the name of Jesus Christ, by being his servants.

Jesus knows what works. This becomes more apparent the longer you take him at his word. And he says that if we want to become great, we must become servants. Think about it. If you set your course for fame, it is up to people to determine if you succeed or fail, and people are fickle. Even if you do well, you may not gain their respect. Or you may gain it and lose it as they applaud you one day and turn their back on you the next. Popularity is fleeting, a fading good which cannot sustain itself.

How popular was Noah? While he was out there building a ship for a reason apparently no one could understand, how likely is it that people esteemed him? None came with him, except his own family. But to this day, we remember his name, because Noah was a servant of God.

In contrast, look at the popularity of the Pharisees. Until Jesus arrived on the scene, they had it all. They had special seats and demanded special treatment from the lay people. They had the things that fame can give; but they had nothing of substance. Jesus repeatedly pointed this out. They made a name for themselves, but the lasting reputation they earned was one of disgrace.

Now look at the ridiculed little band of servants from Acts 2, who obeyed Jesus when he told them to go to Jerusalem and wait. They didn't even know what it was they were waiting for, but they were faithfully praying together at the time of Pentecost, when it came. The same power that was able to destroy the work of the men building the tower at Shinar came upon a group of uneducated men who could suddenly speak the language of every pilgrim in Jerusalem. When you read the words of Peter that follow this amazing event, it becomes clear. God was doing for them what the tower people in Genesis 11 wanted to do for themselves.

*Every time I have sought my own gain instead of what is best for the kingdom of God, I have failed. When my hope has been built on my own dreams, I have been paid back in full from their futility.*

*God has consistently brought down my pride despite the cleverness of my hands (Isaiah 25:11). When one challenges God with a desire for a great-name, God may just take the dare. In any event, the arrogant will be bested in the battle.<sup>4</sup>*

God wants our egos to be destroyed so that we can hope in *Him*. Any towers on our drawing board without God's supervision and direction are pipe dreams and just dare Him to undo them all.<sup>5</sup>

#### ***False Goal #4: Wealth***

*"There is nothing on which[the world] is so hard as poverty; and there is nothing it professes to condemn with such severity as the pursuit of wealth!"*  
*-Ebenezzer Scrooge<sup>6</sup>*

Like Dickens' English miser Scrooge, we Americans love money. We always want more of it than we have, and we are willing to do some pretty drastic things to get it. According to authors James Peterson and Peter Kim, 25 percent of Americans would be willing to abandon all of their friends and their church for \$10 million. For the same amount, 23 percent would be willing to become prostitutes for a week, 16 percent would leave their spouses and seven percent would kill a stranger.<sup>7</sup>

Maybe we're not that bad, but it is tempting to displace our faith with Scrooge's golden idol. The world raises wealth as a standard of success, security, and identity, and we buy into it with everything we've got. We believe it when we're told that money is sexy and powerful; it can also make us happy and keep us safe. As this material value system continues to permeate our culture, this standard becomes a central, driving force in the lives of most people, even those who embrace Christian ideologies. We've gotten so far down this road that we can barely see, anymore, that there's any problem in heading this direction.

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<sup>4</sup> Anne-Geri Gray, "To Dare God." In *Christian Woman Magazine* (July/August 2000), 24-25.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Dickens, "The Christmas Carol." In *Christmas Books* Oxford University Press: Geneva, 1941.

<sup>7</sup> James Peterson and Peter Kim, *The Day America Told the Truth* (New York: Plume, 1992) 65-66.

Our society may be the worst in its focus on riches, but it certainly is not unique among nations, neither in this age nor in the past. The hunger for wealth is a powerful tool of the enemy; it always has been. The apostle Paul said:

*People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. (1 Timothy 6:9-10)*

The greatest danger related to the love of money is that it pulls us away from faith. C. S. Lewis said, "Prosperity knits a man to the World. He feels that he is 'finding his place in it,' while really it is finding its place in him. His increasing reputation, his widening circle of acquaintances, his sense of importance, the growing pressure of absorbing and agreeable work, build up in him a sense of being really at home on earth."

If we attain prosperity, the things we are able to purchase may put us at risk of forgetting God. But even if we fail to attain it, we can face the same kinds of problems when we assume that it is a large bank account that will care for us instead of the One who has promised that he loves us and is always willing to provide for our needs, if we would only seek him first.

This doesn't mean that we stop working. Labor is the biblical method for producing prosperity. But again, our focus is what is important. Who or what are we pursuing first? Are we after wealth, or are we after seeing to it that a godly character is built in us? It's not a choice between wealth and integrity. There are wealthy men with great integrity. However, there are also many people who sacrifice their integrity to gain wealth, and we must refuse to become like them.

The outcome of our pursuits belongs to God, regardless of what we choose to pursue. If we work with excellence and diligence and let him determine the outcome - that is faith. He may bring a great deal of abundance to one person's life and give to another very little. But again, the issue is not the fortune you amass, but the character you build.

It may be difficult for some of us who are very good at business to accept that God may at times ask us to risk the loss of the cutting edge in business when faced with a choice to sacrifice our integrity. We may be offered shortcuts which could produce more profit in less time but that aren't altogether ethical. But doing all of our work as if it were for Christ will cause us to work with greater excellence in the long-run. We'll avoid the short-cuts. We'll seek out contrast in the gray areas that are causing temptation. We'll boldly refuse to sacrifice our integrity and character to gain wealth and status, because wealth and status are not the ends we're pursuing. Wealth and status as ends in themselves will, without a doubt, never be enough to satisfy.

Look at the man who made it, who had arrived at wealth and the "good life" in Luke 12:15. One good crop, and he found himself so far ahead of the game that he could retire. He said:

*This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.' But God says, "'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then*

*who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.*

It is the old children's Sunday school song about the foolish man building his house upon the sand, ". . . and the rains came tumbling down." Unfortunately, I think I know this man. He is the man who left mission work for oil money and lost his family in the bargain; he is the woman who left her husband for a rich man and forfeited her relationship with God and family; he is the young sales clerk who stored away the petty cash for his own benefit.

The Psalmist said, "Though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them" (Psalm 61:10). We should be happy to set our hearts on relationships, that do not cease, over the golden idol that has a temporal life. May we, like Mr. Scrooge, not find that we've wasted years on the love of money, but throw it generously in the right places instead. *God* is all about generosity, and we, created in his image should reflect that.

#### ***False Goal #5: Power***

*"Are you seeking great things for yourself? Do not seek them."  
(Jeremiah 45:5 NASB).*

That's a verse we don't often hear quoted. Why? Probably because it is a little too clear. God is the giver of all good things, and if we are going to attain great things, He is the one who is going to make it happen. Period. Sometimes he will grant that great things happen; other times, he may show his "severe mercy" in taking our "great things" away. But our dependence is to be on him, not our own power. If our goal is to increase our own personal power, then our goal is in conflict with God's.

*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit,  
but in humility consider others better than yourselves.  
Each of you should look not only to your own interests,  
but also to the interests of others.  
Philippians 2:4-5*

The Bible is full of specific instruction to walk humbly, humble yourself, practice your humility, pour yourself out, serve others, put others before yourself. The world is going to tell you that's a waste of time, and it will be yours to decide which you will choose.

7The thing is, God has actually created in us a *desire* to prosper; but an eternal perspective leads us to give to God the power to exalt us (in *his* time) and to give *our* hearts and our energy to things God values. In so doing, we avoid worthless things which will let us down in the end.

So then, what causes us to set our sites on power and status? Look at 1 Peter 5:6-8:

*Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*

We devour, hence we become devoured. Interestingly, when Jesus asks us to abandon our own climb to the top and let God be the one to exalt us, he reminds us that, when we do, we can cast our anxiety on him. It may be that we're grasping for power and status because we're afraid. But Jesus says he can handle that. We can let go of this worry, actually cast it off, and throw it away. He can take our unease, our fear – and, better than that, *he wants to do it*. Jesus isn't afraid to handle everything you fear, even if there's a prowling lion after you. Far be it from me to say, "No thanks, Jesus. I've never tamed lions before or anything, but (arrogant cough) I'll take care of 'im," as we strut to our certain destruction.

The quest for power over people and circumstances is something that people are often driven to pursue. People have killed over the centuries to gain power. They've done horrible things in order to gain something that feels a lot bigger than it actually is. But Jesus, the most powerful person the world had ever known, was the most humble person who walked this planet. He knew that humility is its own kind of power, a mighty form the world cannot understand.

### ***Setting Your Flight Plan***

Small aircraft pilots and charter pilots submit their flight plans to the Flight Service Station (FSS) that services their departure airport. The FSS enters the flight plan information into their system. The FSS is responsible for processing flight plans, which include the aircraft description and tail numbers, departure and destination airports, route of flight, estimated time of departure (ETD), estimated time of arrival (ETA) and number of people on board. The FSS keeps track of the airplane's ETA, with the pilot radioing in to report his or her position. If the pilot does not close the flight plan or communicate changes, a search and rescue procedure will be initiated, assuming the aircraft to be "lost."

Now, here's the interesting thing about all of this. If we do the math, we'll see that these aforementioned false goals lead to another kind of "lost." If we submit a flight plan to wisdom, reality, and spiritual fulfillment, but instead fly a course to pleasure, recognition, popularity, wealth, and power, what do we get? A fat lot of nothing. A futile pursuit. A life off course and out of control. "Ireland," if you will. We start off heading to the sunny Cal of a life in Christ and end up in the Dublin of doubt.

Speaking about doubt, Mel Gibson told Diane Sawyer in an interview that the idea for his movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, came to him during a personal struggle with self-destruction and despair.

*"Let's face it, I've been to the pinnacle of what secular utopia has to offer. It's just this kind of 'everything.' I've got money, fame, this, that and the other, you know, and it's all been like, whoosh here, here you go, like that. And it's like, okay. And when I was younger, I got my proboscis out and I dipped it into the font and sucked it up, alright. It didn't matter, there wasn't enough, it wasn't good enough. It's not good enough. It leaves you empty. The more you eat the emptier you get."*<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Transcript: *The Passion*, February 22, 2004 - Reporter: Diane Sawyer - Producer: ABC - Primetime

Mel Gibson's words only echo God's. A close look at the world around us, coupled with an intense look at Scripture, will tell us that these things lead to emptiness, and then to delusion, and finally to foolishness. No temporal thing can satisfy the human heart. Pursuit of earthly goals leaves you craving something more, because they're not enough in themselves. Pursue them, and you'll find you've given yourself to a lie. You've played out a false script, and you've bought into a wrong identity. You've inadvertently chosen delusion and foolishness. Scripture tells us that it's foolishness to put our own pursuits above God's plans for us, but we just keep on doing it. We are not autonomous, and we are fools when we believe that we are. On the other hand, an eternal value system is founded in and remains in *reality*, provides *fulfillment* and leads to *wisdom*. Let's build a flight plan around those variables and see where we land.

### ***Departure Point: Reality***

Many of us have hoped in things that have also died. It is a harsh reality of life, death. It comes sneaking up on us with absolutely no warning and can change our reality. What we thought was tangible and constant turns into a memory, leaving us grasping for a constant thought of that person, so as to make him real and living again. With every loss comes another slap in the face from that old foe mortality.

From the dawn of time, it has been human nature to want to hold onto life. The serpent in the Garden of Eden tempted Eve with the lie that life could be controlled, and she took the bait. "If you eat it *now* you will become wise and never die!" This arrogant choice, as you may know, only brought her pain and a deeper understanding of death. Her unhealthy curiosity became her sad reality, and she came to understand what it meant to "pass away."

I John 2:17 tells us how to invest our life in what will *not* pass. John reminds us that many things in this world will pass away and not carry over to the world to come. But the one who does the will of God abides forever. *Our* reality is preparatory to the invisible kingdom which is to come and lasts forever. This world is, very simply, a womb which is preparing us for that new life. Understanding the temporal nature of the world will help us live in the reality of it.

*"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." 1 Peter 1:3*

This is a living hope, a hope that will not die. First of all, this hope is imperishable. Secondly, it's undefiled; it can't be corrupted. Third, it will not fade away. And, fourth, it's reserved in heaven for you. You have a reserved seat. What a wonderful contrast! *That's* realty. *That's* the thing which will endure forever. Therefore, a man is wise who gives his life in exchange for what God says is permanent and valuable. A man is foolish who gives his life in exchange for things God says are despicable and worthless.

### ***Cruising Altitude: Fulfillment***

What are the things that people long for, really? When they go after people's approval, what do they really want? When they go after power, what do they really crave? Think about the people you know who are trying to control, trying to gain power. What drives them to it? What do you think they hope to get? Whether people will admit it or not, all fulfillments in life are summed up

with nine surprising words: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. The fruit of the Spirit. It's all there.

Look at the list. Even if you just take the first three, that would be enough for most people. Those three things describe most, if not all, of what most desire. Fulfillment is found in love, and in joy, and in peace. Many people who seek wealth and power suppose that when they get them they'll be satisfied, but neither wealth or power really even promise to ever bear us this fruit. And when we look deep down, we find that we desire these real things much more, anyway. We think we want those other things, but what we really crave is to be loved, to be content, and to live in peace with our reality.

***Special Equipment: Wisdom***

*A fool finds pleasure in evil conduct,  
but a man of understanding delights in wisdom.  
Proverb 10:23*

Wisdom always relates to skill in scripture, and the highest wisdom is skill in the art of living, the ability to maintain every facet of our lives under the dominion of God. The greatest skill that anyone can achieve is the skill of living a godly life. The book of Proverbs, part of what is called "the wisdom literature," discusses all your relationships, how you deal with wealth, the ways in which you speak. Wisdom can inform every component of your life.

But you're not going to get wisdom from a university. Generally speaking, you won't get wisdom from entertainment; and you won't get it from most of the media. Though universities and the entertainment industry are cultural powerhouses, though they can guide you into cultural literacy, they cannot provide you with wisdom. An eternal perspective is the only foundation on which your moral/ethical standards can be based.

Our sin nature drives us to want to have our cake and eat it too. We want the temporal and the eternal at the same time. What we fail to realize, though, is that if we pursue the eternal, the temporal falls into place. While we aren't promised that everything will go our way when we operate from an eternal perspective, we can still taste of the fruit, that joy and fulfillment while walking in reality. They may not come in the packaging the world promises, but they do come, often in greater measure. If you go for the world first and heaven last, you'll end up missing out on both. But those who go for heaven first discover there *are* joys in the world, and that is wisdom. Having wealth, power, etc. is no longer the issue. For some, power and wealth may be serendipity, but they are not the goal. Walking in wisdom does not have a thing to do with circumstances, but with the understanding of our assurance: we are loved by a real, living God; we have hope and a purpose and a destiny. These things, even one at a time are worth more than all of the ends of the false goals put together.

***Destination: A Life Uncommon***

I've heard your anguish  
I've heard your hearts cry out  
We are tired, we are weary, but we aren't worn out  
set down your chains, until only faith remains

Lend your voices only to sounds of freedom  
No longer lend your strength to that which you wish to be free from  
Fill your lives with love and bravery  
And you shall lead a life uncommon<sup>9</sup>

There were many small miracles at the wedding of Cana besides the turning of water to wine. There was the miracle of aging the wine (“But you have kept the good wine until now?”) There was the miracle of abundance (“There were six stone water pots.”). Jesus didn’t wait and bring out the nasty stuff when their palates were undiscerning, but he filled them with the best vintage ever tasted and heaped the blessing upon them. But above all, there is the miracle of his great love for us, an uncommon love that led him to do something exceptional and beautiful.

The story of the wedding of Cana illustrates the destination to which we are flying – to a life uncommon. The world always pours out its best wine first. It knows nothing of saving the best for last. It makes promises, and then it breaks them when people’s discernment has been dulled. We get duped. We think these things (power, pleasure, wealth, etc.) are what we want, but it later turns out they’re not all they’re cracked up to be. But, God shows himself in the Cana wedding story. He is all about excellence and anything less wouldn’t be a reflection of his glory. Corresponding to that, there is a best reserved for later; that glory of God that we get glimpses of in this life, little sips of what will be poured out in great measure in the life that awaits us.

Often I contend with Thoreau, who said our lives get, “frittered away by detail.” Maybe if we (as he suggested) let our affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand<sup>10</sup>, we would find that we’ve conserved the things that truly matter. This faces us toward a major challenge and some exigent questions: What will I choose to pursue? Is there something for which I am willing to give my life? To where am I setting my course?

Here’s a diagnostic test. If you could be granted one thing, what would it be? Ask and answer it quickly. What comes to mind first? The focus of your heart is far more important than the thing you are trying to achieve.

Everything is spiritual if the focus of your heart is correct. But the skill of living well, the living aware of God’s presence at all times take practice. We must cultivate it as a skill, set our watches to beep and remind us to pray, carry cards with scripture on them, memorize verses regularly, or whatever method works, but we must incorporate these things into our lives. We are commanded to teach the Scriptures to our children, to talk of the Word of God in our homes, to keep it on our lips and in our hearts. The Word of the Lord is to be the last thing we think upon before sleeping and the first thing on our lips as we wake.<sup>11</sup> These commands are a reminder to keep him ever in the forefront. We will be surprised to find that, when we do, the temporal ordinary takes on a splendor it never had before.

Every day, you will be seduced, pulled by these things of the world system. But if you pick the Word of God and make it your authority, you will act in a way the world knows nothing about.

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<sup>9</sup> Jewel Kilcher, “A Life Uncommon,” from *Spirit*, Atlantic Record Company, 1998

<sup>10</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, Ch. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Deuteronomy 6:6-9

*I used to think, loving life so greatly, that to die would be like leaving a party before the end. Now I know that the party is really happening somewhere else, that the light and the music, escaping in snatches to make the pulse beat and the tempo quicken comes from a long way away. And I know, too, that when I get there the music will never end.*<sup>12</sup>

This chapter is not about dying and neither is this poem. But it *is* about the party we are headed to, about the laughter and music we hear from afar. Don't you hear it? We talked about the pain of the reality of a temporal life, but we spoke the joy of it as well. Have you ever lost someone dear to you and then woken up in the middle of the night and heard the ringing sound of her voice? It can be disheartening, but maybe, just maybe, it can be encouraging too. Imagine it is a voice, beckoning you to get your gear in order, your flight plans together, and your compass working so that you can stay the course to the true destination and join the party waiting for you in the heavenly realm.

Many false goals and temptations will come knocking at our door and they'll be even more attractive than blue eyes and blue jeans. But a long bath in the pools of an eternal value system which understands reality, provides fulfillment and leads to godly wisdom, will give us the strength to slam the door on the snakes of Lust and Want, to reject Pilate's water basin of public approval, to stop building towers with our own blueprints, and to lead, God help us all, a life uncommon.

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<sup>12</sup> *Reflection* by Evangeline Peterson.