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Follow Your Leaders

I leaned toward the nearly invisible layer protecting me from the free fall that waited just on the other side. Many years earlier, brave workers had secured lengths of steel rebar, concrete, and sturdy glass to construct this building in place of dilapidated tenement homes. There in our friends' high-rise apartment, we met with a half-dozen young couples for our weekly Bible study. Up in the air, our feet were on solid ground. From that vantage point, I stood at ease, looking down at the tiny people buzzing about in the city's streets. The myriad elements of the urban scene displayed themselves like a miniature model of a city.

Below us, the grid of Chicago, in 1972, stretched along the lakeshore with other high-rises in view. Just south from there, the new John Hancock skyscraper reached skyward and the even newer Sears Tower, still under construction at the time, rose up to take its place as the tallest building in the world. In that section of the city, the Chicago River cut through the geometric lines of gray streets, squares of grass, blocks of townhouses, factories, shops, and apartment buildings. Once upon

a time, the river had flowed in the opposite direction. It wasn't until civil engineers in the late 1800s reversed its natural flow, coaxing water from Lake Michigan to increase the city's water supply, that the river took its modern form.¹

From our perch, we could see the "L" train lines hovering over old alleys, taking fellow Chicagoans home from construction sites, offices, and schools. Before the modern routes had been constructed, public transportation existed as a mere scattering of rail lines working as separate entities, controlled by separate companies.² Much had changed in that city over the decades, and we were beneficiaries of it.

Fresh out of college with an economics degree, and married to the love of my life, Doris, I spent my days in the heart of Chicago doing system design and computer programming work in the management services department of the Arthur Andersen headquarters, one of the Big Five accounting firms of the era. My dad had always taught me to invest in learning and using the latest technology and innovations. It would open all kinds of doors for me, he assured. Now, heeding his advice, I was working for this prestigious company and making a life in one of the largest cities in the United States.

Born a citizen of Argentina to parents of British descent, I grew up speaking three languages and bouncing between hometowns. I spent much of my youth in Brazil, went back to do military service in Argentina, and studied at the University of North Carolina. I felt like I was from everywhere and nowhere all at the same time. But there in the grid of Chicago, I was starting to find my place.

Some of our friends were moving into houses and laying

foundations for a long future in the Windy City. Doris and I were prepared to do the same, saving up for a down payment on a condo. But there in our friends' high-rise apartment as we studied the Bible with other young businesspeople, God was giving Doris and me a bird's eye view not only of the city, but of His kingdom, too.

As we gathered in that living room above all the hustle and bustle below, He began to reveal the grandness of His kingdom's infrastructure and His long-term plan for it. Soon we sensed Him inviting us to become personally involved in the continued expansion of that beneficent kingdom here on earth. We could not remain as spectators looking on. He wanted us to go beyond reading the blueprint in the pages of the Bible to become living, breathing kingdom builders involved directly in the growth of the worldwide community of Christ. Believers can do that in Chicago, to be sure. In fact, today Doris and I call Chicago home once again, a landing pad that allows us to be close to our family. Thanks to the international airports in the area, we are "close" to the rest of the world, too. We get to watch our grandchildren grow while still encouraging the growth of the church around the globe. But back in our early adulthood, though we had been excited about putting down roots and settling into the American dream in our adopted city, we were starting to sense that God might be asking us to hold our residency in Chicago loosely, to be untethered and ready to move, not knowing that He would one day bring us back.

The night before we were to sign the papers for the condo, as we gathered in prayer with our brothers and sisters there in that skyscraper apartment, we knew God was telling us to

forfeit the opportunity we so wanted to seize. Though we were to remain in Chicago for a time, it became clear that He didn't want us to plant our roots there yet. The next day, we told our realtor that we wouldn't be moving in. And we began waiting to see how God was going to move from there.

When I joined the consultancy division of Arthur Andersen, my supervisors presented their plans to make me manager in Brazil after six years at the international office in Chicago. It was an attractive offer that would grow my career, use my skills in strategy and administration, and put me back in São Paulo, Brazil, the place where my parents and brothers still lived. It sounded like the perfect fit, so I accepted. Yet as Doris and I went to visit Brazil and prepare for the move back to our home continent, we began to see more than just a business need in that part of the world. We also sensed a spiritual need, and along with it, a call from the Lord to return to Latin America and invest our time and energy in a whole different way than the one we had expected. We knew we could serve the Lord in either capacity, whether in business or full-time ministry, and we knew there was a real need for His people to do both, but we couldn't shake the feeling that God was specifically and personally inviting Doris and me to a new task in our old familiar territory.

DRAWN TO THE LIGHT

Visiting my childhood city, I thought back on my reputation during my early years and reflected on the ways I had changed since coming to know the Lord. I hadn't always been known to say yes to the best things. As a youth, I had put my energy toward pursuits that impacted our community in a not-so-

positive way. As a ten-year-old in Brazil, I rounded up my peers in the São Paulo neighborhood where we lived and held a secret meeting one night at an empty house owned by my family. If my friends wanted to be part of the neighborhood gang, I told them, they had to do one mischievous deed each day. I held up the list by candlelight for them to study. Then, we went out to the streets.

We rang doorbells and ran away before the homeowner could get to the door. We let the air out of our neighbors' car tires. And we did some other things, too, but I'll plead the fifth on all that. It didn't take long for us to build a bad reputation in the aftermath of our escapades. Before I knew it, the law caught up with me, and one evening an officer stepped onto my porch to ring my doorbell. Unlike us hoodlums, this officer apparently didn't think it would be humorous to ring our doorbell and run. He stood stoic and unyielding when my father opened the door.

I couldn't run, not this time. So I did the only thing I could. I hid. I slid behind the front door as the officer gave my father the lowdown on all the vandalism happening in the neighborhood. "We've heard the ringleader lives at this address," the officer said. I knew he wasn't there to compliment my leadership skills. And this was no prank. This was it. I was caught.

I remember that moment in utter clarity, how I peeked through the crack and braced myself for the moment that the door would close and I'd be left to deal with my father's discipline. Let's just say that night brought about a swift and permanent end to my neighborhood troublemaking. While the punishment wasn't pleasant, I'm grateful for my father's firm

guidance and enduring concern for my lifelong well-being. This ringleader had a great leader to follow.

Although there was a change in my behavior that night, it wasn't until much later, on a trip back to Argentina in my college years, that my real transformation began. I had just finished my first two years of general courses as I worked toward my economics degree at UNC. At that time, I returned to Argentina for mandatory military service. A break from my studies didn't seem like such a bad idea. I had been lucky to be accepted into UNC in the first place and had been a mediocre student to prove it. I seemed to excel much more on the rugby field than I did in the classroom. After two years of struggling to keep a C average, I needed a change of pace. I just didn't know how much of a change I was walking, or marching, into.

When I arrived at boot camp in Argentina, I heard the shouts of officers giving commands to new recruits as they did push-ups. I gave my name to the military officer at the registration desk. "Bush," I said, watching the officer's pen attack the paper.

"Puff," he wrote.

"B-U-S-H," I corrected, with some level of confidence.

"It doesn't matter what your name is here," the officer shot back at me. And just like that, whatever confidence I had was gone. I scooted along with my head down, doing my duty, feeling my inferiority and invisibility from that moment on. But in that kind of environment, invisibility isn't always a bad thing.

They gave me a bent-up tin soup plate and gaucho pants that were several sizes too big, and each mealtime we would sit back to back on the dirty ground and eat the same bland mash. Finally, the day came when we could see visitors. My Grandma

Phyllis showed up without warning and brought me a container of roasted chicken. This was gold. I immediately crept to my tent and placed the contraband delicacy between my pillow and the straw mattress. But as soon as the visitors left, one officer called us to attention while the other inspected the tents. He pulled out that roasted chicken and promptly signed me up for two weeks of cleaning duties to pay for my offense.

Military service was starting to feel like prison. But one evening, when camp life had me hanging my head, something forced me to look up. It was my turn for watch duty. As I stood at my post somewhat dazed and daydreaming about going back to UNC, another officer, a committed Roman Catholic, approached me.

“Hey,” he said, pointing up as if he were shooting a gun into the sky. I tilted my head, half expecting to see smoke rising from his fingertip. But there was no smoke. The sky was perfectly clear. The stars burned bright.

“How do you think those stars got there?” the officer asked.

Whether I was shy or felt better remaining unnoticed, I kept quiet.

“God made those, you know,” he went on.

“Nah,” I said under my breath.

He brushed his hand over his uniform and scoffed, unimpressed by my response, unimpressed by anything about me.

“You’ve got all this education and still you don’t know who made those lights to guard the night?”

My eyes rolled a bit before looking up again. This time, though, my eyes went in and out of focus with the magnitude and depth of the dome of stars above me. The scene was now over

my head in every way. Then my mind's eye took over, thinking on the shape of the constellations. I began connecting the dots of Centaurus and Musca. Between them was Crux, the shape of the cross. It wouldn't be the last time that shape would meet my eyes.

Not long after that jarring encounter with the officer and the stars above, I was reassigned to serve in Buenos Aires. It was a welcome assignment as the Keetons, my girlfriend Doris's family, lived in the area. On Easter Sunday, my grandmother and I were invited to lunch at their place. Gran saw me getting a little boisterous and hinted that I should settle down and change my behavior on account of the special occasion and the young lady at the table. Behave. That message was coming at me from all sides.

A few days later, after traveling to visit my family in São Paulo, Brazil, Crux confronted me again. This time, it showed up in the dotted constellation design on the Brazilian flag. Next, it showed up in the cross emblazoned on the Bible my brother John carried around. He had just returned from a silent retreat at Cambridge, where he had read Erasmus's *Letters to the Pope* and Augustine's *Confessions*. He couldn't stop speaking of what he'd learned.

When Doris came to visit from Argentina, we followed my brother's trend and began to read together. First, we read some of the classic writings my brother suggested. Then we opened Scripture itself. Soon our curiosity couldn't contain itself. We found ourselves accompanying my brother to church, to a local Protestant chapel.

On our first visit, the pastor read from Revelation about a world of famine, war, and disease, and about a Savior who will someday return to set it all right. We were captivated. We had

never viewed the world through this lens, and we began to search Scripture for ourselves, exploring the redeeming work and coming return of Christ. We were compelled to keep digging deeper, planting ourselves in the rich soil of God's Word. One day, as Doris and I met with the pastor of the little chapel, he opened the Bible to another part of Revelation—the passage where Jesus pursues a people who have gone cold in their love for Him.

“I stand at the door and knock,” Jesus says, urging apathetic believers to renew their love. “If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in” (Rev. 3:20). Though originally crafted for a church in need of fresh communion with Jesus, that message spoke to me that day, to someone who was just getting to know Him. It was the hour, *my* hour, to accept Jesus' offer. He wanted me to open the door, not to crouch behind it and peer through the crack, trembling in fear of judgment. This time I stood at the threshold to welcome Jesus in, knowing only He could remake this mischief-maker, this mediocre student, this lackluster soldier. Only He could save me.

When Jesus comes in, He shakes things up. He changes His followers in heart, soul, and mind. To me, the flailing student, He gave clarity and motivation. I directed my new energy toward finishing my economics degree at UNC. At that same time, Doris felt the call to extend the invitation of Jesus to her family and friends in Argentina. Our faith would grow over the next two years in our separate lives as I finished school and Doris stayed in South America. When the time was right, we threw in our lot together in a shared life of faith as Doris flew up from warm Argentina to marry me in Chicago on the coldest day of 1971.

A PATH REVEALED

Now, ready to put down roots in Chicago, we were being presented with our first big choice as a married couple. We were going back to Latin America. That much was clear. But would I be investing myself in Arthur Andersen there as a business consultant or would I be accepting this unexpected invitation to serve the Lord in a different way, stepping out from the work I was used to? Early on in our marriage, Doris and I had dealt with minor disagreements, as all couples do. But in this area, we were totally aligned. With confidence, I resigned and closed the book on my promising career in Chicago.

This is not to say that all believers should leave the business world to take on full-time vocational ministry. I share this story with you as a description of what God did in my situation, not as a prescription for what should happen in yours. Some might be called specifically to engage in the business world. Others might clearly be called to full-time vocational ministry, like Doris and I were. Others still might be given the invitation to choose between the two—with neither path being the wrong way to go—or even to do both at the same time in something we call “business as mission.” Most often, though, following Jesus in our daily lives looks like weaving our mission in with our skilled trades, office jobs, and home life. Each of us receives our own invitations to work and serve in our unique contexts, and these various avenues for engaging our talents, skills, and passions all contribute to vibrant societies and a growing local church.

God’s invitations are particular and personal, but not always predictable. Sometimes we get a birds-eye view; other times

we can see nothing but the step in front of us. After all, we serve a God who called Abraham to go without knowing where God was leading him, a God who led His people forty years through the wilderness to a land they'd never seen. His instructions come according to His vision and His timing, and in our case, that involved a time of preparation before moving back to South America. Though I had recently finished my undergrad, we sensed God wanted me to go right back to school, to attend Dallas Theological Seminary in preparation for the work awaiting us in Latin America. I spent the next four and a half years working on my master's while simultaneously working the night shift at a local business and pastoring a small Spanish-speaking church in West Dallas. It was an exciting time of learning.

Although we knew we were heading to Latin America after I graduated, we had no idea exactly where we'd be going. We prayed and waited with expectation. With increased knowledge and daily experience of the Lord's guidance and provision, our faith was growing stronger. There was no indication regarding what specific steps we were to take beyond seminary, so we just kept praying. We prayed and we waited all the way up to graduation day.

On graduation day of all days, we opened a letter asking us to serve at a church in El Salvador. But then things got interesting. We received another invitation to serve at the church in São Paulo, the very place where our pastor friend had led us to Christ years earlier. God had presented us with yet another choice to make.

I didn't sleep much that night. I tossed and turned under

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the covers as I wrestled with God, and finally fell asleep for a short time. But when my bleary eyes awoke to His morning mercies, I had an undeniable sense that He was leading us to a place where we didn't have roots. He was leading us out of our comfort zone, away from the place we would naturally want to go. But it was more than that. I didn't have a list of reasons why, but I had a strong sense of knowing that God wasn't just leading us away from something; He was leading us *to* El Salvador. He was girding us up for adventure, strengthening our spiritual muscles by taking us to an unfamiliar place. It was a capacity we'd need for the larger work God would have in store for us further down the road.

KINGDOM BUILDERS

When we reported for duty at Iglesia Nazaret in El Salvador, we quickly realized that God wasn't just moving in us and moving us physically to a new place. He wasn't just moving in the church in El Salvador, either. We could tell right away that He was moving in the hearts of thousands of Latin Americans, even moving them physically to other places of gospel poverty. We kept hearing the loud whispers of a growing and unlikely passion: South America, where so many missionaries had been sent, was soon to become a missions-sending continent itself.

I began to sense this is why we had come. I immediately began exploring this momentum in the church. Working with a group called Partners International in Latin America, I led an inquiry to explore and discern the movement of the Holy Spirit on the continent, going to every country in Latin America to hear from the leadership of many different denominations.

Almost everywhere we visited, we found the believers of Latin America ready to go into all the earth to preach the gospel.

Soon, three thousand people convened in Brazil to launch a global missions movement from Latin America. A few years later, after staying put and enduring the horrific civil war in El Salvador, Doris and I got a new invitation. In order to enter more fully into research and inquiry, the new type of work God was preparing for me, I accepted the role of president of Partners International and prepared for a move back to the United States. Born in Argentina, raised in Brazil, and serving in El Salvador, I felt the same passion burning in me that was burning in the rest of my missions-minded brothers and sisters on the continent. In a way, I was being sent as one of the first representatives from Latin America to give voice to our vision inside the world of Christian missions strategy. So it was back to the States to work at the Partners International headquarters to increase the momentum for a new Latin American wave of missions.

The missions world as a whole could feel the rumbling, and when God shakes things up, it's tough for His people to ignore. Immediately following the Congress of Ibero American Missions, better known as COMIBAM '87, leadership from the well-known Lausanne Movement contacted me. The small gathering of Lausanne leaders, led by Dr. Thomas Wang, the International Director of Lausanne at that time, embraced the distinct call to connect influencers and ideas for global missions. They invited me to share the principles in the Latin American missions mobilization that led to COMIBAM '87, as well as what that might mean for the rest of the world as we looked to the year 2000.

After much research on the challenge before us, I presented my findings at their second global conference, Lausanne II, held in Manila, Philippines, in 1989. There we focused on the area of the world with the greatest human need and the greatest spiritual need. In my preparation, I lingered over the research of many past workers, thinkers, and writers whom God had used to pave the way in the study of missions. In the early 1900s, Samuel M. Zwemer's book *The Unoccupied Mission Fields of Africa and Asia* featured a map of the world highlighting countries without any Christian missionaries. Most of those countries were in the section of the world that was catching my eye at the time. Ralph Winter, founder of the US Center for World Mission—who was later listed as one of *Time* magazine's top twenty-five most influential evangelicals—turned the missions world upside down back in 1974 when he spoke at the first Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization. There he challenged leaders to look past the political borders of nation-states to strategize based on the great diversity of “unreached people groups” within those nations in order to reach the 2.4 billion people of the world.³ Billy Graham echoed this charge when he said, “The whole church must be mobilized to bring the whole gospel to the whole world. This is our calling. These are our orders.”⁴

In the early 1980s, David B. Barrett, then-editor of the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, focused on the area that was home to the least-evangelized people of the world and called it “World A.” George Otis, Jr., focused on an “oval power center” that overlapped many of the core countries where the Holy Spirit was drawing my attention. Finally, a staple of the early '90s Christian library, *Operation World: A Day-to-Day Guide to*

Praying for the World, featured Patrick J. Johnstone's reflections on the "Resistant Belt," an area that was opposed and intolerant to the claims of Christ, the advance of the gospel, and those proclaiming it.

As I spoke at Lausanne II, I noted that most of the unreached people groups live in a belt that extends from West Africa across Asia, between the latitudes of 10 and 40 degrees north of the equator, an area including the Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist blocks. Over the following twelve months, I carefully observed that particular part of the world, from both the outside and inside. We were a mere decade away from the year 2000, which seemed to many at that time to be a year of destiny. We sensed a *kairos*, a special moment from God, compelling us to concentrate our efforts on the most gospel-resistant region of the world, what we then called the 10/40 Box.

With all the energy of a stirring that was clearly from God, we continued to seek out ministries and organizations to join us with a vision for the year 2000. Soon, along with Lausanne's Thomas Wang and 350 leaders from the wider spectrum of the Christian world, we set up a small collaborative organization to multiply worldwide missions efforts in view of the pivotal year 2000. We called it AD2000 and set up office. In the first several months of 1989, AD2000 became the seedbed out of which a tiny shoot would spring up and grow into an unexpected tree. And like all trees, only God knew just how big it would grow.

A NEW VIEW

In July 1990, when I was presenting my findings at a Partners International annual event in beautiful Mt. Hermon, California,

Doris and I looked out the window to take in the sight of the stunning redwoods. Then we looked down at the plastic overhead projector page in our laps as we readied the materials for my presentation. Gazing back and forth between the redwoods and the see-through page in our laps, we began to think about a new way to frame that rectangle on the map, that “Resistant Belt” or “10/40 Box.” With all our prayerful research, we were starting to see that geographic area not as something confining or impossible or boxlike, even, but as something hopeful, something you could see through, reach through, and even step through. We were starting to see it as an opportunity. This realization was a moment of crystal clarity: God had been training me, preparing me, and giving me the resources needed to partner with others for a new moment in missions history.

Beginning with my early days at Arthur Andersen, I had always had an interest in system design and computer programming. In my leadership role at Partners International, I had begun to look at how to take the information gathered by various Christian ministries and missions and connect them with innovative technological tools that had just become available. One of those technological tools was a brand-new mapping software. For the first time in history, it was possible to take a graph or table, input the data source, and immediately see the impact on a map.

Nowadays, we have a vast amount of technology at our fingertips and data that can be processed and displayed in a split second. But in the missions world at the time, communication was limited to phone calls and what we now call “snail mail.” Remember when the CIA and FBI were doing their work in

complete isolation of one another with no avenues of communication between? Or when Chicago's public transport existed as a scattering of disconnected lines owned by separate companies? The missions world had a similarly ineffective structure and mentality, meaning that many important ideas or pieces of information were not getting into the hands of the people who needed them most. We were doing our best to remedy that with meetings like Lausanne and organizations like the US Center for World Mission and publications like the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, but we had yet to see it all come together.

My contribution would come through technology, a tool my father had so often encouraged me to learn how to wield. I was like a kid playing a video game, typing in commands and searching every nook and cranny for some hidden key or treasure. In that era before well-known tech experts developed visually friendly operating systems for the world to use, I saw the black screen and prompts as a code to crack. Having my longtime love for computer programming paired with exciting new technology, I pulled information on poverty and ministry from sources in every country of the world, consulting all along with researcher Bob Waymire of Ralph Winter's US Center for World Mission. Late nights in my son's room, I would sit at the computer and tinker with the data. Other times, I would visit with experts at a secular mapping firm and piece things together.

One day as I visited software programmer Pete Holzmann at Strategic Mapping International, I asked him to help me create an accurate box on the map with the calculations from the data I had gathered. He typed some things in and within a few

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moments, I saw the spiritual data and material data overlaid, statistics settling into place one on top of the other. My fellow mission strategists and I had never before seen the connection. The map finally made it clear. Where there was physical poverty, there was also poverty of the gospel. Where people were starved for food or resources, there also happened to be a spiritual famine with little or no access to the message of Jesus. Like invisible ink seen only through special glasses, the truth was coming through: a low quality of life persisted where Christ was not named. The poorest of the poor and those least reached with the gospel were, according to the statistics, the very same people. After leaning on decades, even centuries, of work done by those Great Commission pioneers who came before, I was literally knocked off my feet in that moment of sudden realization in the mapping firm. Although I was in the middle of a secular institution, I couldn't help but collapse on the floor, get on my face, and thank the Lord for bringing this to light.

CATCHING ON

A few months later in 1990, I went back to Illinois to the largest student missions conference in the world, InterVarsity's Urbana. The atmosphere felt charged, electric. I shared the platform with my friend Anita Deyneka—then a director with the Slavic Gospel Association—who talked about what God was doing with students in the former Soviet Union, which had opened its Iron Curtain to the world just a few months earlier. As I came to the podium, I spoke from Colossians 1 on the lordship of Christ and how His transforming power seemed strangely absent in this region I was now calling the 10/40 Window.

At the end of the week, a group of students prepared a set of rap lyrics to sum up the content of the conference, and the “10/40 Window” suddenly became a catch phrase. After the conference, we started hearing it more and more in faith circles. People were using it in conversations. Soon *Christianity Today* picked up on the term in an article. People began to team up in a whole new way with a hope and a vision for reaching the unreached in the 10/40 Window. That very phrase turned out to be the water God used to grow that tiny, unexpected tree that was the AD2000 movement, with little to no resources, into something strong. God was moving and allowing us to lend words to His heart and vision for the poorest of the poor. Through the teamwork of missionaries and strategists that came before me, and the vibrant movement of young people who picked up the vision of the 10/40 Window, we witnessed a monumental shift in missions history.

THE BIG PICTURE

It’s important to remember that the 10/40 Window concept didn’t come out of nowhere. Missions history certainly didn’t begin with me and my contemporaries. We would all be wise to recognize that the gospel didn’t just fall into our laps by chance. When Doris and I responded to my brother’s urging and began to first read Scripture back in our twenties, we were following a long line of people who had heard the message of Jesus from someone else who had heard the same message from someone else who had heard from someone else. God has employed a long line of pioneering leaders, well-known or unknown, to reach each of us where we are.

We go way back to a core of eleven followers and the growing church in Jerusalem sent out to be witnesses by the power of the Holy Spirit promised by Jesus when He ascended into glory. Before that, a courageous line of Old Testament history makers anticipated the first coming of Christ, keeping the faith when it had not yet become sight. God tells us in Hebrews 12:1 that a great cloud of witnesses cheers on the next era of believers from their place in glory. They've run their race; now we're running ours. As we grow tired or distracted by the concerns of everyday life, weighed down by sin or circumstance, the example and encouragement of previous generations can help us gain new resolve to cut loose from what holds us back and to put our shoes to the ground. God has worked mightily through generations past. Those stories in church history have a bearing on what He wants to do in our day.

My guess is if you're reading this book, you want to find a way to act out your faith, connect with others, and make a positive impact on a broken world. Maybe deep down you care about the needs around the globe, but you're overwhelmed and overworked by the needs in your own home. Maybe you've got First-World guilt or compassion fatigue. Maybe you're running tired in the hamster wheel of a demanding work schedule, a "just get by" family life, and the unending, never-satisfying scroll of social media. Your chest tightens at the thought of racial tension, arguments over refugee care, food scarcity, and unwanted babies. You want to do more, but you can't seem to get your bearings.

These feelings are not new or unique to you. Era after era, believers in Jesus have longed for an ideal but felt pulled to

keep doing things the way everyone else does them. In your struggle, I encourage you to follow the advice in Job 8:8, one of the very few helpful pieces of advice given to Job while processing his difficulties. “For inquire, please, of bygone ages,” Job’s friend said, “and consider what the fathers have searched out.” I encourage you to dig into the larger story of faith-sharing through the epochs and eras, and into the smaller narratives of your own personal history.

You have your own story of how a specific believer in a long line of others handed the gospel to you like a relay baton. A grandmother who prayed for you, an ancestor who endured persecution and lived to tell you their testimony, a pastor who rightly divided the Word of truth and spoke it with grace to you, a believer who left the comforts of their own home to learn your language and live out the gospel in your great-grandparents’ distant town, a friend who studied the Bible with you in your days at the university. What if any of those people had said no to God’s invitation to follow Jesus and join His mission? What would that have meant for your life? Think back on the sequence of events and the various people God has used to draw you to Himself. Then think about all the Christians before them who were faithful in handing down the gospel. Dig into church history. Start with the book of Acts and Hebrews 11, and then read about the spread of the gospel all the way to the movements in recent eras. Search out the stories of those who’ve gone before, and they’ll teach you how to step out of the hamster wheel to find a more effective way of life.

Over the forty-four years that I’ve been following the Lord, He has continually turned my head to notice the remarkable

work He's set in motion. He has introduced me to past generations who pioneered missions in a time when traveling to foreign lands might mean never seeing your family members again. He has shown me those faithful workers just ahead of me in the journey, allowing me to springboard from their ideas and help believers in Jesus know where and how to follow the call God has given them. And He has shown me a whole crowd of ordinary people who are saying yes to God, watching extraordinary stories unfold in their small circles of influence.

In the chapters to come, you'll read stories of believers who have taken time to understand God's vision for the unreached areas of the world, those who have stepped out of their *status quo* lives in whatever country they call home to say yes to something, and Someone, beyond themselves. As these adventurers have taken time to rethink their way of life, they have searched for what it means to be a good neighbor to those on their street or on the other side of the world. They've taken care of refugees, brought peace amid ethnic tension, stamped out the stigma of the orphan, and ministered to the tired working class. They've seen an opening to make an impact and they've said yes. God desires something similar for you. Second Corinthians 1:20 says, "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory." Every promise from God is an invitation to believe and act. When we take Him at His word and step forward in obedience, good things are sure to come, things that will warrant a hearty "Amen!"

Each chapter that follows will share a step in the process of transformation I call "The Yes Effect." This is a particular type

of transformation that my friends and ministry partners have seen consistently in their own lives and in the world as a result of accepting God's repeated invitations to activate their faith in new ways. True transformation is sparked when we reorient our hearts, get in sync with God's tenderness toward the oppressed, and regain compassion for the lost. We let the Lord work in us, and then we can't help but join the work He is doing in the world around us.

While the attitudes and approaches in the stories of this book are indeed inspiring, God doesn't want your life to be a replica of others' lives. Many of the examples in these stories might seem unusual, unattainable, or even unrealistic from the point of view of your everyday life. That's okay. What might seem exotic to you is simply everyday life for someone else. So don't discount who and where you are as you read on. God has a plan for every latitude and longitude on the globe. Just because your story doesn't sound exactly like the ones in this book doesn't mean God's not writing it.

The examples in this book are meant to encourage you and show you that no matter the context, when a follower of Jesus says yes to His invitation, all kinds of possibilities open up in that particular person's life in that particular corner of the world. Wherever and whoever you are, God is inviting you to expand the goodness of His kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. He is inviting you to rethink your way of life and step out into something new. He is inviting you to watch the most beautiful chain reactions of transformation unfold as a result of saying yes to Him, even in the smallest of ways. That's the Yes Effect.

As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:1 (NIV), “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” Each of us comes after a long line of committed followers of Christ who have shown us how the life of faith is done. Just as generations of city planners added their various insights and solutions to build the infrastructure of my home city, Chicago, so have generations of passionate believers in Jesus offered their gifting and heart for service, co-laboring with God to grow His kingdom. Imagine what could happen if we learn from those in the generation before us and build upon their work, if we carry on the legacy of the past instead of letting it fade into modern apathy. I invite you to read on, take a look and see what God has been doing in cities and countries across the globe. Let the stories in these pages speak hope and urgency into your soul. Listen for God’s invitation to join His transforming work in the world around you. And be ready to say yes.