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OUT OF THE HOLDING PATTERN

“THOSE WHO LEAD MANY TO RIGHTEOUSNESS
(WILL SHINE) LIKE THE STARS FOR EVER AND EVER.”

DANIEL 12:3

I thought I had seen the scenery below me before. The pilot soon confirmed my suspicion: our flight had been placed in a holding pattern. That meant we were no longer making any forward progress; we were just continuing to circle the ground we had covered before.

You can get tired of being in a holding pattern really fast. Especially if it's your *life* that seems to be in a holding pattern. Like a circling aircraft, your life does not seem to be standing still. There is plenty of activity around you. It's just that you aren't really going anywhere. Spiritually, the ground looks all too familiar. And your soul wants more. That's because you were designed for more—much more.

King Solomon revealed that “more” in his personal “diary,” the book of Ecclesiastes. In a penetrating insight, Solomon noted that God “has also set eternity in the hearts of men” (Ecclesiastes 3:11). You and I have eternity in our hearts. There is a dimension of you that cannot be fulfilled by anything that will end. You have an appetite from God for that which you can never lose, that which will last forever. Anything else is just too small.

So a life that is filled mostly with earth-stuff and earth-pursuits is going to be ultimately unsatisfying. Your “small world” restlessness may be your heart's warning sign that you have an “eternity deficit,” a deficit God is ready and waiting to satisfy. He is waiting to give you a passion you can pursue on earth that will fill you with the excitement of eternity. It is, in fact, the passion which Jesus pursued all the way to the cross.

The Restless Ones

God has made you restless for more because He wants to *eternalize your life*—to make it count for that which will last forever. And you will never be satisfied with less. So much won't last forever. Your job accomplishments, your home, your bank account, your sports, your “stuff”—none of it will last forever. Our days just fill up with a lot that is un-eternal and, therefore, unfulfilling. And even our discretionary time tends to fill up with trivial pursuits—a numbing bombardment of small talk, the mental “junk food” of TV, innumerable hours of sporting events, entertainment, or being lost in cyberspace.

But amidst all the demands and distractions of the un-eternal, there is this quiet but relentless voice crying out, “Give me more; give me something that matters . . . something that will matter *forever*.”

And the number of the “restless ones” seems to be growing steadily. Everywhere I go, I meet men and women and young people who answer an eager “yes!” when I ask this question, “Do you ever feel a stirring inside that is saying something like this: *I want to make a greater difference with the rest of my life than I have made until now*?”

That passion to make a greater difference with the rest of your life comes from the One who gave you your life . . . who gave His life for you! And only He can satisfy that desire to make a difference. And He will—if you will follow Him into the very eternal pursuit He has made you restless for.

Called to Something Bigger

Some people have a very long memory. Then Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin sure did in 1991 during the first Gulf War. I heard a report of a press conference he held during the time that Iraq was firing Scud missiles into Israel. Most of us who followed the news at that time will never forget the eerie sights of Israeli civilians donning their gas masks at the first sound of a missile alarm.

The (first) George Bush was the president of the United States, and he had asked Israel not to escalate the situation by retaliating against Iraq. At the press conference, a reporter asked Prime Minister Rabin how he felt about the president's request. He paused for a moment, and then with a twinkle in his eye responded, “The last time the Jews listened to a talking bush, we wandered in the wilderness for forty years!”

Actually, the last time there was a talking bush (the one time there was a talking bush), the Jews were soon after liberated from four centuries of Egyptian slavery



during the exodus. The story of Moses's encounter with the Most High at a burning bush is one of the most dramatic moments in biblical history—and a powerful example of how God takes a person from a “small, small world” to a life bigger than he ever dreamed. It is, in many ways, an encounter that God has reenacted with countless believers throughout history. It is an encounter He may have been preparing you for with your hungry heart. If you are restless to make a greater difference with the rest of your life, then the story of Moses at the burning bush may satisfy your hunger and light your way.

The Bible raises the curtain on this life-changing day by telling us that “Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law . . . and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up” (Exodus 3:1-2).

With his never-a-vacation responsibilities for the family flock and his family's needs, Moses probably had a full life—but probably not a fulfilling one. He lived in a small, small world. It was safe . . . it was comfortable . . . but it was small. And this day was supposed to be just another day of “more of the same.”

Until God showed up and summoned him by name. “When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, ‘Moses! Moses!’ And Moses said, ‘Here I am’” (verse 4). Moses had no way of knowing that God was about to blow the lid off his life!

God is still in the life-enlargement business. He comes to people who may, like Moses, have a life full of responsibilities—and a life that is pretty much set on cruise control. Most of us have our career niches, our beliefs are settled, our relationships are staked out; we even have that spot in church where we always sit.

But it's not enough. You have too much “eternity in your heart.” The status quo is not satisfying your need for lasting significance. You need something bigger to capture your heart and give greater meaning to the years you have left.

So God comes to you and, somewhere deep in your heart, He summons you by name. You know He wants you—not just someone, but you—for a larger destiny. Like Moses, the Lord God is inviting you to join Him in a powerful mission. He is about to eternalize your life as never before. And you are about to find what your heart has been hungering for.

The Making of a Hero

We expect the president of the United States to introduce us to some heroes every year as he delivers his annual State of the Union address to the combined houses of Congress. You can count on it. Several times during his speech, the president will allude to some everyday hero who embodies a point he is making. He drives the point home by having that hero seated in the balcony of the House chamber where he or she is introduced for what is usually a standing ovation.

Behind the scenes, reporters ask presidential aides who the “Skutniks” will be this year. It is a reference to the first such everyday hero, Lenny Skutnik, who was introduced by an American president. Ronald Reagan was president and Lenny Skutnik was just one of thousands of federal workers in Washington, D.C.—until the day Air Florida’s flight 90 crashed into the Potomac River.

It was a cold January evening in 1982 when the plane, taking off with passengers headed for sunny Fort Lauderdale, Florida, developed ice on its wings and in its engine—enough to bring the plane down as it tried to clear Washington’s 14th Street Bridge. Suddenly, the jet struck the bridge and then fell into the frigid waters of the Potomac. Some passengers managed to get out before the plane sank, and they cried for help as they tried to stay afloat in the icy river.

Lenny Skutnik had just left work, and he was walking nearby. He saw the plane go down, heard the cries of the passengers in the water, and jumped into the river to try to help. Fighting the current and the cold, he managed to save the life of a woman who otherwise would have almost surely died in the Potomac that night. A couple of weeks later, everyday-guy Lenny Skutnik was introduced as a real American hero on national television by the president of the United States.

Called to Be a Rescuer

In a few moments of courage and self-sacrifice, Lenny Skutnik became something that suddenly gave his life dramatically greater significance. He became a rescuer.

That is what God summoned Moses to be. It is what He is summoning you to be.

The day God announced Moses would be a hero—a rescuer—He said, “I have indeed seen the misery of My people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out . . . and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them!” (Exodus 3:7–8). God, the great Rescuer, the ultimate Deliverer, used Moses to rescue His people. God hears the cries of enslaved and hurting people. That is why He sent



Moses to the Jews. It is why He sent His “one and only Son” (John 3:16) to a world He so loves, to sin-slaves like us who were “without hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12).

I can imagine Moses’s reaction as he heard that God was going to “come down to rescue” His suffering people: “Yes! That’s awesome! These people aren’t going to make it without a rescuer. I’m so glad You’re going to change things, Lord!” And then came those shocking words that would change Moses’s life forever: “So now, go. *I am sending you*” (Exodus 3:10, italics added). Suddenly, Moses’s excited “Hooray!” turned to a stunned “Uh-oh.”

God was planning an incredible rescue mission, and He was summoning Moses to join Him in it. The Lord was asking Moses to do what an everyday guy named Lenny did by the Potomac River the day of that awful crash—to hear the cries of dying people, abandon personal safety, and rescue people who would die if he stayed where he was.

Can you see the sobering picture of the crossroads at which you are standing? The Lord has heard the cries of people around you who are trying to make life work without a Savior. He has seen their lostness. He has felt their pain and the pain of their families. He knows their incurable loneliness, their quiet desperation, the awful eternity awaiting them—and He has come down to rescue them. But God will rescue the people in your personal world through a personal representative—through His “Moses.” That is you, and that is me. We are the rescuers God sends into a hurting, desperate world.

All the stirring in your soul for something bigger, something more, may have been to prepare you for the summons of God to join Him in His rescue mission for the spiritually dying people around you. He is summoning you to be His rescuer!

Understandably, your reaction might be similar to Moses’s reaction on the day he was summoned to significance. “Moses said to God, ‘Who am I, that I should go?’” (Exodus 3:11). Fear . . . insecurity . . . inadequacy—a sense that you’re not the person for a mission this big. Feel familiar?

But the Lord blew away all Moses’s excuses and objections when He responded, “Who gave man his mouth? . . . Is it not I, the LORD? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say” (Exodus 4:11–12). Or, to summarize the conversation:

Moses: Who am I, Lord?

God: That’s not the question. Who am I, Moses?



This summons from God to join Him in His eternal rescue mission is not about who you are; it's about who *God* is and that He promises you as He promised Moses, "I will be with you" (Exodus 3:12). By yourself, you *are* inadequate to help someone get to heaven, to help someone you care about put his or her hand into the hand of Jesus. It is *God's power* that gives otherwise inadequate people supernatural resources to accomplish great things for Him.

The Lord of the universe stands ready to direct your life and give it significance, a sense of fulfillment beyond anything you have ever experienced. Your heart has got *eternity* in it . . . and you will not be fulfilled until you know your life matters. Remember, *there is no greater difference a person can make than to help someone else be in heaven for all eternity.*

The Lord summons you and me to step up and be His rescuers for people He died for. Those people in harm's way don't understand that yet; they need you to tell them and show them. In the pages ahead, the how of being a spiritual rescuer will become clear and doable. But first comes the who. It is you. It is I. It is everyone who has been delivered by a loving God.

God's plaintive question has not changed since the days of the prophet Isaiah: "Who will go?" (Isaiah 6:8).

Deep down in your restless heart, can you hear Him summoning you by name? He has heard the cries of the dying people near you. Listen to His call:

"So now, go . . . I am sending you."



GOING DEEPER...

- ☞ Draw, and then explain, a representative picture entitled “My Restlessness.”

- ☞ If all of life can be basically boiled down to two lists: “The Things That Really Matter” and “The Things That Really Don’t Matter,” what are some things you used to have on one list and now have moved to the other?

- ☞ Some of the most fulfilling times in my life have been when . . .

- ☞ Those times tell us that what we’re restless for probably includes . . .

- ☞ In Exodus 3, God said He had seen and heard the hurt and lostness of the lives of His people. When it comes to the lost people in my personal world, He must see and hear . . .

- ☞ If the Lord is saying to me, “I am coming down to rescue them, and I am sending you,” what I want to say to Him is . . .