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EPILOGUE

1

LIVING ONE DAY AT A TIME

What's that mean?" the young man asked, as he removed a Mont Blanc pen from his shirt pocket and a wallet-sized, calfskin notebook from his coat. He held his pen poised above the notebook.

"Wait," the older man replied. "Don't write anything down yet. Let's just talk."

The young man placed his expensive writing instrument on the conference table. Then he was shocked—even disappointed—as he watched his mentor-to-be pick up a red-tipped felt marker and write on the acrylic board, "Principle 1: Live one day at a time."

"This is confusing," the young man responded. "Live one day at a time? I've attended seminars, read books, and listened to radio and television sermons. Some of them have talked about the sweet by-and-by. Many of them have discussed planning for the future, prioritizing, goal-setting. Now you're telling me to live life one day at a time."

Inwardly the young man was saying, *This guy's so simplistic! How can such a dumb slogan be of any help? Oh, well. I'll hear him out—at least this time.*

"There was a time," the older man continued, "when I was as concerned as you are about living as productively and effectively as possible. I wanted to achieve a lot, especially in my Christian life. In fact, I remember hearing preachers in the church where I grew up challenge us to 'burn out' rather than 'rust out' for God. You know what? I almost did just that—burn out."

Nodding briskly, the young man interrupted. "That's how I feel right now—sort of burned out. I've been working so hard at trying to become a first-class person and trying to succeed at my job at the same time. I've even told my wife about feeling burned out. She's been quite concerned about me, even with what's been going on in her own life. She's told me she feels that a lot of the time when I'm with her I'm not really there. I'm either worrying about things back at the office, or I'm thinking about something else."

The older man smiled as though remembering something. Then he returned to his chair and sat down. "I can relate to that. I used to be the same way—until I met a man named Gil Phillips. If you're in the investment business, you may have heard of him. The Phillips Companies. Phillips Construction, Phillips Properties?"

"Hey, I have!" the young man exclaimed. "He's one of my boss's top clients. I met him in the office a few weeks ago. So how did *you* meet him?"

"Well, I was involved in a struggling enterprise. A mutual friend introduced us. We became very close friends. Began getting together for lunch on a fairly regular basis. He told me the story about Phillips Enterprises. Ever heard it?"

*"Wherever you are, be all there.
Live to the hilt each day what
you believe to be the will of God."*

"No I haven't—but Gil Phillips is a man whose reputation I'm quite familiar with. Everybody who knows him calls him a success."

"Let me tell you what I learned from him." Leaning back in his chair, he pulled the cord to open his drapes, then looked out the window of his office. Reflected sunshine sparkled from the windshields of moving vehicles. An older couple walked past on the sidewalk beneath, the man pushing a small shopping cart. Muted laughter could be

heard, the sounds of children playing in the nearby school yard.

Crossing his legs, the older man continued. "Gil Phillips inherited a small chain of grocery stores from his dad—a hard-working, self-made man who died of a heart attack at an early age. They also owned a struggling insurance agency, a cleaners, and a 'five and dime.' But his dad was focused—boy was he focused! Gil, on the other hand, was sort of interested in all kinds of different activities. The family business, plus about fifteen other things. Gil's dad, to hear him tell it, didn't think he'd ever amount to much of anything. But his dad gave him a motto—something he'd read in a book somewhere that really changed his life—and Gil's."

Leaning forward the young man asked, "How could a motto change a person's life?"

"Good question, but this one did."

"What was it?"

The older man looked at the ceiling and began to recite. "Wherever you are, be all there. Live to the hilt each day what you believe to be the will of God."

"That's catchy. 'Wherever you are, be all there.' It says exactly what I haven't been much of lately. I've been worrying about my future at work—what I'm going to do to keep my career track moving ahead. I've even been concerned about what to incorporate into my religious life to improve it. I'll admit, I hadn't been giving much thought to being a successful husband—I thought I was doing a pretty good job at that. But I must not have been doing as well as I thought—" The young man's voice trailed off.

The older man stretched and leaned back in his chair. "What you told me about your marriage—I know it must be painful for you. But I think I learned from Gil Phillips what he learned from his dad—or from whoever came up with it originally—to live life a day at a time, one situation at a time—even one minute at a time.

"That's been a hard lesson for me to learn. I keep finding myself worrying about the future. What if this happens?"

What if that occurred? What if I don't succeed? Or, if I wasn't worried about the future, I'd be going over and over the mistakes of the past. Why didn't I do so-and-so? How could I have forgotten? Living one day at a time, one minute at a time—it's been hard for me to learn. But I *have* learned it—and it works."

"So now you've got this business of living one minute at a time down pretty well, huh? That must be why you're the One Minute Christian."

The older man held up his hand in protest. "Well, I'm not sure I have this lesson down pat yet. And I really wouldn't call myself the One Minute Christian."

Grinning, the young man replied, "I think that's what I'd like to call you—the One Minute Christian."

"Well, that's OK, I guess—as long as you get my point. Especially after what's happened in your life, I think it's going to be crucial for you to learn to start living one day at a time, even one situation at a time. Gil Phillips learned that's how he had to start operating in his life.

"It all started for Gil when disaster struck one day. A flood wiped out the most successful of their stores—and they were extremely underinsured. Gil told me how vividly he remembered driving through the recently flooded streets of the neighborhood. While they looked at the wreckage, his dad came up with an idea. 'All these people are going to need to rebuild. We've been trying to manage several different kinds of businesses, none of them very successfully.'

"So Gil and his dad started a construction company. They helped the people whose homes had been flooded to rebuild. They hired men who were out of work—and there were plenty of people out of work back then—and the rest is history. Eventually they became large enough to get into investments, real estate—those kinds of activities. But they never stopped construction—and they never stopped concentrating on the main thing. Gil said they made 'Wherever you are, be all there' their official motto. And he passed that motto on to me.

“At the time, my life was like the idealistic Western hero who jumped on his horse and tried to ride off in all directions at once. Gil Phillips challenged me to start living one day—one situation—at a time. In fact, he told me that’s how Jesus operated in *His* life.

“What do you mean?” the young man asked.

“Ever hear of the Sermon on the Mount?”

“Sure, but I don’t remember much about it.”

“That’s where Jesus first announced His offer of the kingdom of heaven. It’s the point at which He told the religious leaders of His day that they weren’t good enough for the kingdom. And He explained to His followers how to live as part of His kingdom.”

“Sounds like something *we* could use,” the young man replied.

“Exactly. So let’s take a look it.”

Pulling a Bible from the bookshelf to his right, he flipped through several pages, found what he was looking for, then handed the book to the young man. Putting his finger in the upper left-hand corner of the page, he said, “Read this.”

The young man began to read: “‘So don’t be anxious about tomorrow. God will take care of your tomorrow too. Live one day at a time.’ Hey, there’s that ‘one day at a time’ motto. But what does He mean by telling us not to be anxious about tomorrow? It sounds like He’s saying not even to worry about what’s going to happen tomorrow.”

“That’s exactly what He’s getting at. Now He’s not telling us never to plan for the future. He’s just warning us against becoming unduly distracted, concerned, or worried. In fact, the word He used—the word that means *be anxious*—that’s a term that actually means to be divided or distracted in your mind.”

“Divided or distracted”? I’m not sure I understand. Do you mean we’re not supposed to let what *might* happen tomorrow distract us from what is happening today?”

The older man smiled. “You’re on the right track. What

Jesus is saying is, Don't become distracted from the major purpose of life by trying to make a living or meeting your financial obligations. People in Jesus' day were probably as concerned about material things as we are today."

As the young man thought about his own pocket full of credit cards—platinum and gold—plus his recession-shrunken portfolio and the mounting stack of bills on his desk at home, he shook his head. "I doubt it."

"Look at this verse," responded his mentor. "'So don't worry at all about having enough food and clothing. Why be like the heathen?' That means we shouldn't make the necessities of life what we worry about, what we pour our lives into. That should not be our top priority."

Remembering what he had been told in the classroom as he pursued his MBA, the young man said, "Are you telling me that being a Christian is supposed to be more important than my job? More important than making a living? That sounds a bit radical."

I should've figured this guy would try to separate me from my money. Now he's probably going to tell me that Jesus wants me to get rid of everything I have and take a vow of poverty, like a monk. With a sarcastic note in his voice he asked, "What exactly are you trying to tell me—get rid of my possessions?"

The older man responded gently, "I don't want to tell you anything. Why don't you take a look at what *Jesus* says?" Putting his finger on the page in front of the young man, he said, "Read this."

The young man almost couldn't believe what he was seeing. Quietly he read the words "'But your heavenly Father already knows perfectly well that you need them, and he will give them to you if you give him first place in your life and live as he wants you to.' So He's not telling me I have to get rid of my car, my house—even my credit cards?"

"Not hardly. I think the major issue is not what we have or don't have—it's our attitude about it. It's what we consider to be really important."

Reaching into his pocket, he took out a worn 3x5 card, held it up to the light as he examined it, then passed it to the young man.

“It’s the same thing you just read—just in a different version of the Bible. I wanted you to see this because there are two words Jesus mentions that explain what it means to give Him first place in your life and live as He wants you to live.

The young man took the card. Silently his lips formed the words. “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (NKJV). The young man couldn’t help noticing that the words *kingdom* and *righteousness* had been heavily underlined with a felt tip marker.

“God’s kingdom and righteousness—I’m not sure that computes for me.” The young man smiled, somewhat sheepishly. “I guess I’m more into democracies than kingdoms.”

The older man smiled in response. “I think I understand what you mean. When Jesus spoke of His kingdom, part of what He meant was that He has a right to be in charge, like a king. In other words, He has the right to be the final authority in our lives. After all, kings have the final say in their kingdoms.”

He pointed to the book in front of the young man. “It’s exactly what you just read. ‘And he will give them to you if you give him first place in your life.’”

“And ‘His righteousness’ is living as He wants you to?” the young man asked.

“Precisely. *Righteousness* is just a word that refers to a right standard of living—doing what’s right, as opposed to what’s wrong.”

“Sounds pretty simple.”

“It is. Unfortunately, we haven’t always sought His righteousness, or lived as He wants us to—at least I haven’t.”

“No,” the young man responded, “I’m not perfect either. In fact, I’ve never met anyone who was. Maybe it’s time I tried this business of living one day at a time.”

Leaning back in his seat, the young man looked intently at the man who had now become his mentor. He noticed the man's ruddy complexion, his face lined with wrinkles.

"As you said, Jesus told us to live one day at a time. You told me you learned about it from Gil Phillips who evidently practiced it. Anybody else make it work?"

"Sure. Hal Harris, for one."

The young man's mouth dropped open in surprise. "Hal Harris Seminars? *That* Hal Harris? Why he's one of the all-time heroes of the business world. One of America's top motivational speakers. The guy's a legend in corporate America. Why, the *Wall Street Journal* even profiled him. I've never attended one of his seminars, but I'm planning to one of these days."

The older man leaned back in his chair. "A couple years ago, I had the opportunity to attend one. Now, when they conduct these seminars—they last several days, you know—Hal and the members of his staff cover everything you could possibly want to know about management, motivating people, selling, you name it.

"But what I remember most was the last evening. Hal was winding up the final session, building to a climax. Then he dropped this bombshell on us. Said something like this, 'After this session, the seminar will be over. You're free to go. But if any of you would like to stay behind and learn what really makes me tick, find out my personal philosophy of life, I'd be glad for you to do so. Now it's gonna be late—we'll finish here about 10:00 P.M., and I'll start the optional session at about 11:00. It'll take me thirty or forty minutes. You certainly aren't obligated to stay—my feelings won't be hurt. But you're welcome to stay if you want to. Just don't feel any pressure to do so.'"

"So let me guess," the young man responded. "Nobody stayed but you and one other person."

"That's what I expected. But, actually, almost half the people who were attending the seminar crowded into that little room—it was one of the side rooms where they held some of the breakout sessions.

“What amazed me is that Hal basically attributed all his success to one factor in his life—Jesus Christ. Said that he decided years ago to give Jesus Christ first place in his life, and he’s never regretted it. He says that every day before he does anything else he talks to the Lord in a private kind of devotional time. Then, during the remainder of the day, he frequently consults with the Lord.”

“That’s hokey,” the young man interrupted. “How can he consult with the Lord? Does he carry some kind of a pocket phone with a direct line to heaven or something?”

“No. I remember he talked about Moses—you know, the guy who parted the waters of the Red Sea? He said he had made Moses one of his role models, could really identify with a man who turned down the opportunity to be the CEO of the mightiest nation on earth at that time—Egypt. Said Moses chose to identify with God’s people instead.”

“How could some obscure guy from centuries ago who lived in the Middle East be the driving force behind one of the top business leaders in America today? It just doesn’t make sense.”

“One of the lessons I’ve learned from years of being a Christian is that God is with me every minute of every day—not just today. That’s why I can live one day at a time.”

“Well, it made sense to me,” the older man responded. “The main reason is a statement about Moses from another part of the Bible—I have it right here.” Picking up another 3x5 card—which showed evidence of being handled numerous times—the older man handed it to his young friend.

“This quote comes from a place in the Bible called ‘the faith chapter,’ where it talks about a number of people who learned to live by faith—by depending on God. Moses was one of them.”

The young man bent over the card and looked at it closely. "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible" (NKJV).

Looking up at his mentor, the young man inquired, "What's this all about? I still don't get it."

"Just think about it for a minute. Who would be invisible to Moses?"

"God, I guess."

"Exactly."

"But does that mean Moses actually saw Him? You know, I used to wonder a lot about what God actually looks like. Sort of thought of him as an old man with a long beard, or maybe somebody wearing a robe the way our minister used to when I was growing up."

The older man replied thoughtfully, "There were times when Moses was given a glimpse of God's glory. But this isn't talking about some spectacular experience like that. I believe what's being said is that Moses endured all the daily difficulties of life because he lived as though God were walking through them right beside him. He persisted in life, a day at a time, considering God to be right with him. Here, let me show you what it says in this Bible."

He flipped some pages and handed the Bible to the young man with his finger on the verse. It read, "Moses kept right on going; it seemed as though he could see God right there with him."

With a sweeping gesture, the old man asked, "Who are the occupants of this room?"

Without hesitation the young man replied, "Why, you and I, of course." Pausing a moment he added, "And God?"

"How do you know?" the older man asked with just a trace of a smile on his face.

The young man stretched his arms above his head for a minute and looked out the window. Then he refocused his attention on his companion. "I think I see what you're getting at. But I'm still not sure it makes sense. Moses couldn't

see God on a day-in, day-out basis, but God was real to him. Is that your point?"

"Exactly. And according to Hal Harris, Moses was the role model for his own daily walk with God."

The young man's retort was quick. "And is that how it is in your life?"

"That's how it came to be. Now, I don't get up in the morning and see God the way I see my wife across from me at the breakfast table. I don't pass him at the corner on the way to the office or run into him in the coffee shop where I eat lunch. But he's right with me every step of the way. One of the lessons I've learned from years of being a Christian is that God is with me every minute of every day—not just today. That's why I can live one day at a time."

"We're back to a One Minute Christianity?" the young man replied sarcastically. "I still have trouble swallowing that—even if somebody as successful as Hal Harris is selling it. But I'll try to keep an open mind."

"It might be better to call it 'minute-to-minute Christianity'—or 'experience-to-experience.' You've been through some pretty tough experiences lately, haven't you? Ever felt like giving up?"

"Every day," the young man acknowledged without hesitation.

His mentor picked up the copy of the Bible, turned some pages, and pointed. "Look what the apostle Paul wrote. He was a man who learned that this business worked. He was in the middle of one of the most trying experiences anyone ever went through. In fact, after what you found out about your wife, you probably felt about like Paul did. Paul's problem wasn't marriage—although there's a good chance he had been married and his marriage had broken up when he stopped being a Pharisee and became a Christian. No, that wasn't Paul's problem.

"You see, Paul had been persecuted intensely because of his faith in Jesus Christ. Right here it says he was surrounded by trouble—but he didn't give up. He was discour-

aged, but not in despair. He felt like he was being pursued, but he knew God hadn't abandoned him. Life had thrown him down, tripped him up—but he wasn't destroyed."

After staring at the page before him intently for a moment, the young man replied, "Seems like I remember hearing in church about Paul's being in a shipwreck once and being beaten. Did I hear right? And did he actually have to escape from some city by being let down in a basket from the wall?"

"He went through all that—and quite a bit more. But he never gave up." Pointing to the page before him, he began to read. "That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our inner strength in the Lord is growing every day."

Placing a hand on the young man's shoulder, he looked at him intently and asked, "Did you notice those last three words—'growing every day'?"

"One day at a time, eh?" the young man observed wryly.

"Exactly. That's Paul's way of putting it. One day at a time. On the outside, life was falling apart. Circumstances looked grim, he didn't feel so hot physically, and it seems he had been abandoned by most of his friends. But he never gave up. And the reason he didn't is simple. He had learned the secret of living one day at a time."

With a somewhat puzzled look on his face, the young man replied, "I'm still not sure how this all relates to me. I mean, some parts of my life are going really well—like my work. Others, my marriage for instance, aren't very good at all."

"That's why I'd encourage you and your wife to begin seeing a marriage counselor—I know a good one whose office is not too far from you. I recommend him highly. I'll get his phone number for you from my secretary before you leave. What I want to do is help you pick up some practical things that can make a difference in the parts of your life that are going well—not to mention those that aren't."

Walking across the office to his markerboard, the older man wrote the numbers one, two, and three in a vertical

line. “Here are a few implications of this principle, some ways it touches your life and mine.

Beside the first number he wrote the word “Trust.”

“First, I trust God for each day’s needs—that day. Did you grow up in a church where they said The Lord’s Prayer every Sunday?”

With a satisfied smile, the young man replied, “Yes, I did. It was part of the ritual. Never did figure out what it was all about. But we said it every week, whether we needed to or not.”

“Well,” the older man continued, “one line in the prayer says, ‘Give us our food day by day,’ or, as the liturgy has it, ‘Give us this day our daily bread.’ So Jesus is actually telling us to rely on Him for—and even pray about—our basic, daily needs. Can you think of anything you need today?”

The young man paused in thought. “I need to know what to do about my marriage. I guess I really want it to work. I think I’m probably more upset with myself than I am with my wife. But I’m pretty angry at her too.”

*“A lot of us tend to pick up
our concept of what God is like
from our human fathers.”*

“I’m sure there are a lot of feelings to work out between the two of you, a lot of things that need to happen to rebuild trust. Maybe what you really need is wisdom. There’s a place in the Bible where James the brother of Jesus says that, if anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives freely, no strings attached, and it will be given to him. So you need wisdom, and you probably need strength to handle this crisis. Ask God for that as well.”

“Sounds like I have a lot to pray about. Do you really think God has time to listen to me whine about all my problems?”

His private answer to that question was, *There's no way God's going to have time to fool around with this kind of penny-ante stuff. There are more than five billion people on this planet. Even Dad didn't have time to listen to my problems.*

The young man was jolted back to the present when a fragment of what the older man was saying pierced his reverie. “. . . You've picked up a lot of what you think about God from your earthly father. Was your dad the sort of person who didn't have a lot of time to waste listening to your problems?”

“How—how did you guess?” the young man replied, feeling strangely naked before an apparent mind reader.

“Seems like a lot of us were raised in homes where one or both of our parents didn't have time for us. My dad used to tell me, ‘Son, you need to become a self-made man. You need to get to the place where you don't have to ask anybody for anything.’”

The young man nodded vigorously. “That's the way my dad was. Said his dad had taught him to be that way too.”

“There's the problem. A lot of us tend to pick up our concept of what God is like from our human fathers. That would be fine—except few dads measure up to the kind of loving involvement God has. You see, I've learned from years as a Christian that God is a perfect Father. He never turns me away when I come to Him with a need. He doesn't love me based on how well I perform. And if He didn't intend for me to come to Him about my daily needs, He wouldn't have told me so. Now, the look on your face tells me that this is still sort of hard for you to take—but give it a try.”

Turning back to the markerboard, he wrote “Present” beside the second number.

“Here's a second implication of this principle of living one day at a time. I need to quit living in the past—or for that matter in the future. I may remember the past—in fact, I will, since our past experiences have been recorded indelibly in the brain. I may anticipate the future, even pray about

events to come. But the major focus of my life is today, with its problems, its hassles. For example, what would you consider to be your biggest problem right now?"

"My marriage, without question," the young man replied.

"I agree. That's probably where you need to concentrate right now. But you can't rebuild everything immediately. It's a one-day-at-a-time proposition.

Beside the third number on the board he wrote the words "Don't Quit."

"And that brings me to a third application of this principle. No matter how bad any one day seems, don't give up. Like Jesus said, 'God will take care of your tomorrow too. Live one day at a time.' At times the apostle Paul actually feared for his life, but he didn't quit. After all, even the worst of days only last twenty-four hours."

The young man grimaced as he thought, *Boy, I've just been through a couple of the worst I've ever had.* Out loud he said, "Yeah, I can relate. I feel like a line someone used in a story at a management seminar I attended. 'Cheer up, things could be worse. So I cheered up, and sure enough—they got worse.'"

"It's certainly hard to consider some things to be any good," the older man replied. "At least they're like what I heard an old preacher say years ago. They 'come to pass and not to stay.'"

The older man glanced at his watch. The young man noticed it was a Timex rather than a Rolex. "We're out of time for today. But I want you to see one more thing about this business of living a day at a time. It takes balance."

"Balance?"

"Right. Balance between facing each day's circumstances and problems and living in light of what is eternal. That's what this statement by Paul is about. Let me read it.

These troubles and sufferings of ours are, after all, quite small and won't last very long. Yet this short time of distress will result in God's richest blessing upon us forever and

ever! So we do not look at what we can see right now, the troubles all around us; but we look forward to the joys in heaven which we have not yet seen. The troubles will soon be over, but the joys to come will last forever.

The older man closed his copy of Scripture and balanced it on his right index finger. "Most of us have a lot of trouble with balance. We either get so wrapped up in the problems of today we lose sight of what is eternal, or we're like some Christians I've known who were so heavenly minded they were of no earthly good—everything that matters is in the 'sweet by-and-by.'

"I think we have to face what comes at us day by day—but we face it by looking through it and beyond it to the fact that this life is just preparation for the next. I suspect *you've* been concentrating on the present—especially your work—and neglecting the priority of what's eternal. But we'll talk more about that in the days ahead. Then I think you'll see what I'm getting at."

I'm not so sure, the young man thought. *This guy has some good things to say, but I don't want to go head over heels about this stuff. After all, he's been around a lot longer than I have, but his net worth is probably nowhere near what mine is already.*

"So I guess I'm signed on for a crash course with the One Minute Christian," he said aloud to his older companion.

"I guess you could put it that way. What time can you come next week?"