

SAMPLE

I

How to Love Him

WANT

with Your Whole Heart

GOD

and Revive Your Soul

Lisa Whittle

I
WANT
GOD

*How to Love Him with Your Whole
Heart and Revive Your Soul*

Lisa Whittle



W PUBLISHING GROUP

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I Want God

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Published in Nashville, Tennessee, by W Publishing, an imprint of Thomas Nelson.

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ISBN 978-1-4003-3446-9 (audiobook)

ISBN 978-1-4003-3445-2 (eBook)

ISBN 978-1-4003-3444-5 (TP)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2023938173

Printed in the United States of America

\$PrintCode

*To Momma
Who has always wanted God most.*

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When you get desperate for God or feel desperate in general, read this . . .

What you are about to read is personal and raw, and houses content that will far outlast me.

It is a message for the saint and the sinner—one and the same. It contains a life-altering word for us all. These are big claims, I know. I stand by them.

In my nine-book career I have never had an experience writing a book like this. I know the difference, because I've written books before and since. It's been ten years since its first release. The effects of writing it still linger.

Perhaps it is because when I wrote it, I was particularly desperate: desperate to quit, desperate for more, desperate for God, desperately sick of me. I call it the heart cry of the “sick of me” life, in fact. Throughout it, you'll hear the groanings.

One thing I know: when you are desperate, something *will* change.

An interesting fact is that hardship isn't the only aspect of life that causes us to be desperate and, therefore, causes problems. So does selfishness. Boredom. Becoming sick of the sound of your own broken promises to yourself . . . and to God. Lack of breakthrough. And, ironically, a life of ease.

People claim hardship forces change. It certainly can, but it doesn't have to. Sometimes we stay numb, bound, isolated, or dry even while

our world implodes around us. I've found that a greater catalyst is often something else, the real driver of good growth to do things we never thought we'd do, to become a completely different person, unrecognizable often to even ourselves.

Desire.

That's what this book is about.

The hunger and desperation that drive desire, leading to true and radical life change.

Let's be honest: a lot of us have not been driven to change by our hard and complicated lives. When life is hard, it is an instinct to get lost in the tall-tree forest of the daily—to hide behind carpool lines, the corporate ladder, social media, grocery store visits, texts, and dirty laundry. We settle into predictability, like standing oaks that don't change. The days we live look exactly like they did many days before.

I wanted more than that ten years ago. I want more than that today.

I am an everyday woman, but I want the radical movement of God. I want revival inside of me. I need it.

Recently, the world watched while Asbury University in Wilmore, Kentucky, got a taste of that revival a lot of us have only just heard about in church history books. You might have seen it in the news: What started as a regular chapel service on February 8, 2023, ended with students and faculty lingering with no agenda but to pray, recite Scripture, praise, and repent. It brought tens of thousands of people to witness the spontaneous move of God and lasted for at least two weeks.¹ I watched people hungry to get into a room where God was clearly doing something exciting they didn't want to miss.

Ironically, ten years ago, when I was in the place of hungering for more myself, desperate for God to breathe life into my spiritually dead bones (and without an active Asbury situation happening), I went looking for proof of God's radical movement. I dove into the archives of history and began to study revivals and revivalists.

This moment is where the origin of this book finds me.

In my studies I am particularly fixated on the early 1900s. I'm intrigued by what I'm finding out, as it appears that God was clearly moving in this time in a radical way. In 1905 the same Asbury many of us are just now hearing about experienced its first revival. There were others, but I zero in on the Welsh revival of 1904–1905. I'm intrigued by it partly because the movement's beginning is credited to a young woman, Florrie Evans, and partly because it is a piece of history I do not know. I read for what seems like hours, my mouth wide the whole time over what I learn. Over one hundred thousand people saved. Bars and brothels shut down, people worshipping God for hours and days, sports stadiums empty because the players and fans were present, instead, in church.

As I read about the Welsh revival, my questions are these: How does God create such a movement? What makes for such extraordinary movements of God? Can it happen again? In the ordinary people I read about, I find answers: the everyday invitation for God to come in and bring the radical, the surrender, the willingness to want Him most in life—things we can all do.

And then I remember what living in a place of escape among the tall trees of life has helped me learn: the only way I know to get better is to pursue a greater desire for God.

So I came out of hiding and wrote this book.

Since you have picked up this book, I imagine one of four things to be true of you. You are in a place of *lack*—the starving, desperate place where you need God to consume you more than what is currently consuming your life; you are in a place of *plenty*, but it is not satisfying and you still want more; you are *spiritually dead* and have no clue how to change it; or you are *searching* for what you think may be the missing piece of your life. It doesn't matter which is true for you.

Your soul needs revival.

Join the crowd.

There are a lot of us Christians out there today. We are short and tall and blond and dark-skinned and happy and sad and good and sometimes mean as a snake. We park our cars in parking spaces, buy milk at the store and convenience-store Cokes, plant flowers in our yards and lay some of them on loved ones' gravestones. We work at jobs, stand in unemployment lines, sit in dentists' waiting rooms, ride roller coasters with arms in the air, and on different days worship God in big church rooms and small family rooms with arms lifted there too. We are living, yes. But many of us aren't living very well when it comes to our relationship with God.

For some of us He's there but not really; He makes the short list but is not number one. We visit Him on Sundays, preach Him on social media, bake cookies to take to neighbors "in His name" but never find the right moment to talk to them about Who and what and why. For others of us, life is good and we are busy. Or life is hard and we are wounded by the saviors we trusted to do the job but didn't.

At some point we ran into the forest of the daily routine and got lost. We have hidden in the tall trees long enough. We need to come out so we can get better.

But this book is not a book about need.

This is a book about *want*.

There is a reason it is called *I Want God*.

Because, you see, you and I both know in that deep-down place . . . we are selfish. And even things we know we *need* we do not always get because we do not really *want* them.

We *need* to be healthier, but we do not *want* to exercise.

We *need* to be wiser with our money, but we do not *want* to stop spending.

We *need* to have better communication with our family, but we do not *want* to take the time to sit down and talk.

We *need* more of God, but we do not really *want* Him.

Until the want matches the need, nothing will ever change. Needing without wanting is just a really good idea that never sees light.

We can talk about social justice issues, promote spiritual causes and service, but until we want God the very most, our ministries will merely be good efforts. I have known many people who didn't want God but racked up countless mission hours doing things that were very good. I've also known people who love God but never do much to serve Him. Yet I have never known a true, passionate God-wanter whose relationship did not overflow into great kingdom usefulness. Just try to get a Jesus freak to sit on their hands and do nothing. It will never work.

That is why wanting God is so important: when we want Him and experience a soul revival, there is no limit to what we will do for Him. We will find ourselves in the world of *I never thought I'd do this, but I couldn't do anything else even if I tried*. When we taste of the good thing, it will ruin our palates; we will never again be satisfied with the mediocre. We will come out from hiding behind the predictability of tree trunks and realize that as safe as the tall-tree forest at one time seemed, its staleness makes us go mad. Wanting God is not a risk. Living without wanting Him is.

*Needing without wanting
is just a really good idea
that never sees light.*

But do not think for one minute that we aren't going to walk this out together. The world doesn't need any more experts, and an expert does not write this book. The world needs passionate and focused people who are willing to be honest about their struggles and share what they learn on their quest to be better. It is from this place that I write this book. In community we will seek out this revival.

Yet it will start in *each* of our souls.

And what does that really mean—that in our souls we have revival?

It means that because of Jesus we are not too far gone. There are things we want more than God that keep us from wanting Him most. Those things consume us. We need to identify them, pray, and get rid of them. Those life-changing steps aren't easy, but they're not impossible. They will restore us to God, and He will do a miraculous work within.

And at the end of it all? It is my prayer that we will not only be filled with joy and hope and purpose in a way we have never before realized, but we will be consumed with an endless and ravenous passion for God, able to say, as did King David while living in a dark, dingy cave, "I pray to you, O LORD. I say, 'You are my place of refuge. You are all I really want in life'" (Psalm 142:5).

Oh, God . . . *may it be so.*

A Note from Lisa

While the foundation of this message can be used any time of year, as I reviewed these words with fresh eyes, I intentionally thought about *I Want God* in the context of Lent. The season of Lent is the forty days before Easter—from Ash Wednesday to Resurrection Sunday. During this time Christians are encouraged to go deeper with God and prepare their hearts through prayer and fasting. Participating in these practices during Lent can make Christ's sacrifice and return to glory even more meaningful.

Lent can be a powerful time of personal reflection and self-depletion to gain more of God. Revival is always about a fresh wind, fresh fire from the Holy Spirit. There is a natural tie here. I realize my suggestion to use this book with a Lenten focus isn't traditional. But a message of wanting God is most appropriate in a season of intentional pursuit of Christ. No one wants you to have the most life more than your Creator. For those reasons, I trust this book will be an important resource for you in this particular season.

If you are looking for more ways to lean into the Lenten message, I have crafted a 40-day *I Want God* Challenge that would be perfect for this season (or for any other time of the year). You will find forty questions to take your own inventory, followed by forty daily "fasts"—each a short statement designed to help you hand more over to God . . . and, in the process, gain more *of* Him.

40 Questions to Take Your Own Inventory

1. I think about how I will be affected before I do what God asks me to do. True / False
2. I base at least 50 percent of my decisions on how comfortable something is. True / False
3. I have neglected to do something for God because it felt too costly. True / False
4. I quit using my gift when it stretched me further than I wanted. True / False
5. I have a tendency to serve my immediate needs rather than willingly be uncomfortable while I wait. True / False
6. I have used people or things as Band-Aids for a period of time in my life. True / False
7. Sometimes I feel like I will always be who I am now and won't ever change. True / False
8. I have sometimes felt guilty or sad because I haven't done the things for God I felt led to do. True / False
9. God is not as vibrant in my life as He could be because I'm too settled in. True / False
10. I want revival and freedom from being comfort-driven. True / False
11. It's very important to me that things make sense. True / False
12. I have a tendency to live in the great in-between—wanting God but also wanting life as I know it. True / False

13. I base at least 50 percent of the way I respond to something God asks me on calculated risk. True / False
14. I get frustrated with God when I can't figure Him out or He doesn't make sense. True / False
15. My intellect keeps me from a childlike faith in God. True / False
16. Control holds a significant position in my life. True / False
17. I am more eager to do something for God if it seems to be a good idea. True / False
18. I am convinced I can properly prepare myself for a God-sized undertaking. True / False
19. I fear being ridiculed, misunderstood, or judged for doing something God wants me to do that seems radical. True / False
20. I want revival and freedom from being logic-driven. True / False
21. I think about how people will accept me before I do something God prompts me to do. True / False
22. I base at least 50 percent of my decisions off of other people's input and influence. True / False
23. I have neglected to do things for God because other people didn't endorse it. True / False
24. I quit using my gift when people critiqued it or I felt like it wasn't well received. True / False
25. I have something God has put on my heart to do, but my fear of what other people will think is currently holding me back. True / False
26. There have been times I have not been completely vocal or passionate about my love and loyalty to God because it wasn't popular to do so at the time. True / False
27. When people praise me, I don't feel as much of a need to turn to God to be my strength and comforter. True / False

28. I feel like I can't stop wanting to please people, even though I know my life is not to be about popularity. True / False
29. I tell God He is enough, but I still try to get people to like me. True / False
30. I want revival and freedom from the chains of the opinion of others. True / False
31. If I'm honest, I want what God can do for me more than just wanting Him. True / False
32. I base at least 50 percent of my decisions on how much I will be blessed. True / False
33. I have done things for God so He would do something for me in return. True / False
34. I have neglected to do things for God when I didn't know the payoff. True / False
35. I get mad or lose faith when God doesn't bless me like I think He should. True / False
36. Things in my life don't change because I have been stuck in the same position. True / False
37. I often resent other people who appear to have more blessings than me. True / False
38. I make assumptions about how God should come through for me. True / False
39. God is not as vibrant in my life as He could be because I'm too focused on what He will do for me. True / False
40. I want revival and freedom from being blessing-driven. True / False

40 Daily Fasts

1. I will prayerfully resist from casting any *judgment* today.
2. Today I will seek to not settle for *comfort* by doing something that stretches me.
3. I will fast from *isolation* today and reach out to a friend.
4. I choose to fast from *control* and will surrender my day to God.
5. Today I will set aside *denial* and embrace what is real.
6. I will take a break from *people-pleasing* today by telling someone no.
7. Today I will fast from *avoidance* and tackle a challenge head-on.
8. I will say no to *fear* today and ask God for boldness.
9. I choose to fast from being *stuck* and *stagnant* today.
10. Today I will lay down *depletion* and be filled afresh.
11. I will fast from *striving* today and rest in God's enough-ness.
12. I choose to surrender *shame* today in favor of grace.
13. Today I will give up *certainty* and accept the unknowable.
14. I will fast from a *be better* strategy today and rest in a confidence in faith.
15. I choose to set aside the *pursuit of wealth* today and instead be overwhelmed by gratitude for God's blessing.
16. Today I release my grasp on *logic* and embrace mystery.
17. I will step out of *heaviness* today and abide in lightness.
18. I choose to fast from *turmoil* today, knowing God is a God of peace.

19. Today I will say no to *ashes* and yes to beauty.
20. I will resist the lure of *complacency* today.
21. Today I choose to take a break from *drama*.
22. I choose to fast from fear-based *inaction* today as I choose trust.
23. I will turn from *ingratitude* today and offer thanks.
24. Today I will prioritize a hunger for God over *physical hunger*.
25. I choose to fast from *short-term desires* today, asking God for a desire for spiritually more.
26. Today I will take a break from *scrolling* on my phone.
27. I will fast from *harboring anger* in my heart today.
28. I choose to lay aside *overworking* today.
29. Today I say no to *social media envy*.
30. I will seek to avoid unnecessary *noise* today as I choose spiritual solitude.
31. Today I choose to fast from dry, loveless *rule-keeping*.
32. I lay down *self-worth* and abide in my worthiness in God today.
33. I choose to fast from *image building* today, remembering that I was made in the image of God.
34. Today I set aside *worry* in favor of peace and calm.
35. I will surrender an obsession with *safety* and *security* today.
36. Today I say no to *distance from God* and embrace intimacy with Him.
37. I choose to fast from the *need for attention* from others today.
38. Today I fast from fixating on *physical appearance* in myself and others.
39. I will resist *perfectionism* today and trust that God loves me perfectly.
40. I choose to set aside *pride* today and pursue humility.

Part One

God
Knows

Chapter One

I Want God More

God is feeding me, and what I'm praying for is an appetite.

FLANNERY O'CONNOR

I sit, wringing sweaty six-year-old hands in the back seat of Momma's massive '70s boat-on-wheels, trying to muster the courage to tell her I've met God.

She is the least judgmental person I know and the one who loves Him most. But I remember our recent talk in the yellow kitchen about not asking Him into my heart because it is the good-girl thing to do but waiting until I really want Him, and I fear she may think I'm not ready.

We are in the parking lot of Judon's Hotdogs and we have just been to night church. My mind is still dancing over what has taken place that evening inside the stained glass–windowed walls—the glorious but curious display of Jesus. Church people I know in ninja-looking head sashes, hairy men's feet stuffed in Walmart sandals meant to look Roman. Grown adults and young children with pumped fists shaking, saying words they don't mean, like “Crucify Him,” portraying the *back-then* crowd.

Someone calls this curious display of Jesus a passion play, and I overhear it. I am intrigued; it is the first passion play I have ever seen.

By the time the play ends and my daddy's best preacher voice booms through the worship room to invite those who don't know Christ to accept Him, my heart is a whirlpool, and I am twirling inside.

It is the impatient sound of my brother's voice claiming starvation

that cuts through these thoughts. I stop spinning long enough to travel back to the back seat.

“I am *so* hungry,” he laments in my ear. I bob to the surface to inhale real life in the scent of a foot-long hot dog. I don’t want it, and that surprises me. Judon’s hot dogs are among my favorite things in the world.

But I’m too busy thinking about Walmart sandals meant to look Roman, the eyes of a guy playing Jesus, and my best friend, Kathy.

Kathy is playful and funny, and I feel playful and funny when I am with her. Her daddy is a deacon, which makes us a perfect pair. Thinking about her sweeps me away to the things that just took place, and suddenly I have rewound so far that the night’s events are starting over.

We enter the worship room and take our seats in the front row, eager for the Jesus show. The lights dim and the show begins and I think Kathy is watching, but I’m not sure. I hope she is, because I’ll need to talk to her later about what my eyes are recording. I’m glued to the display of scenes Daddy and Momma have read to me out of that enormous white family Bible—scenes that didn’t wear reality until now . . . and I am all in, start to finish.

It is after the Jesus-man has ascended in a white robe in a billowing cloud of smoke to loud claps and cheers that my daddy speaks in his preacher voice and I hear Kathy. Daddy has taken the stage to tell people they, too, can know this Jesus, and to repeat his words with their lips and heart. With his every word Kathy is repeating them—soft enough for only me to hear, but to me they sound megaphoned.

Dear Jesus . . . I know I am a sinner . . . please come into my life and save me . . .

It’s a weird voice she’s using, and I don’t like it. It sounds silly and singsongy and not at all like it’s coming from her. A giggle escapes and I know for sure it is something she is saying to be funny and not something that is real.

My six-year-old heart, which knows nothing of the Pharisee, feels grieved and righteous. How can Kathy pretend to mean such important words when God can hear them? I am embarrassed for both of us and worried my father will hear her and give us *the look*—the one I’ve seen him give teenagers in the church sometimes when they are being loud.

But more than anything, I’m wondering why I feel something so strong it is squeezing the breath from me, something of crosses and angry crowds and Jesus and small, young me. I have heard about this Savior many times already, but I’ve never really *seen* Him . . . and I am aware for the first time that my universe is about more than playing with stray kittens in my tree-house fort outside my country home.

I want God. For the first time. And it consumes every six-year-old square inch of me.

I want to know Him and touch Him and never hurt His heart.

I want to love Him and feel His love back.

I want to talk to Him, like they say I can, with the simple words I know.

I want to be funny about other things, but never about Him on a cross.

I want to tell God I want Him and I want to mean it.

And so, with loud voice in heart, I repeat the words my preacher daddy is saying where only God can hear them. I have shuttered my eyelids closed so I won’t see Kathy or anyone else; I want no distractions. I am more serious about Jesus than my years say I should be, more serious than I’ve ever been about anything else. I feel like a sprinter running toward something grand, and it makes me feel brave and full and honest.

I want God, and I want Him to know it.

With little-girl courage and tiny, sweaty palms, I repeat these things and the whole story to my momma from the back seat of her boat-on-wheels in the parking lot of Judon’s Hotdogs.

And while the hot dogs get cold and my voice tells the way I met Jesus, my momma cries like all mommas who want their kids to know the Great One do.

FORGETTING

For me, as for you, it is important to remember my first encounter with Jesus. Because as calendar days fly away and life becomes noisy, those of us who know God often forget how badly we once wanted Him.

Maybe then the irony is true: we who have much are often the most in need because we have forgotten how it feels to be desperate.

And let's be honest. It almost seems unfair of God to stick us in a world where we are likely to fail to live the 1 Corinthians 7:31 life—the *those who use the things of the world should not become attached to them* life. That's a near impossibility and seems to just get harder with every new gadget, every activity, every house built in the suburbs, every child born into a world that tells them they are entitled. We

struggle with having so much we want and, at the same time, still wanting God.

So it is of no surprise that we *are* surprised when we remember Him and the want stirs. We walk by the mirror one day and catch a glimpse of fixed hair and lipsticked lips and ties with perfect knots nestled in crisp, collared shirts, and what

we see looks crude and incomplete. And we wonder why we have never noticed before how perfection can be so flawed and how comfort can feel so uncomfortable, and we mourn the life we have right in front of us. And something inside us longs to take the back of our hand and smear off the lipstick, pull off the tie, rattle the everyday stale life cage

*We who have much
are often the most
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we've found ourselves in, run into the street, find the pulse again—the pulse that has us beating to the wild of God.

But instead life ticks, and numbly, we move to it. The stirring gets pushed into an emotional trash compactor that keeps packing it down, deeper, to make room for more stuff—schedules, carpools, calculated risk. Before we leave the image in the mirror, we make quick promises about how one day we will change and become *all in for You, God*, only we don't use those words because those words require us to take action. We say instead, *Tomorrow I'll be better*, with the reservation of a half heart that is torn between the now life and the one that started when we first drank truth.

We walk away, and we forget.

We forget what it feels like to come with open hands and heart. How we were once awed by the story of *in the beginning, water into wine, love held by nails, the veil torn, resurrected life*. We forget the power and the commitment, the beauty and the magnitude, the promises, the relationship, the raw passion for the cause and the reason, and the immaculate, saving grace.

We forget God.

And sometimes, when the missionary comes to church with pictures, when the neighbor adopts and we touch the baby skin of a child born of a different mother, we catch that small glimpse of Him, again, and remember how we've forgotten. And our throats swell and limbs tingle as they begin to regain their feeling, stirred by the greatness we recall. And more than anything else we want to *want*, but the want seems unfamiliar and scary and speaks harshly to the spiritual rigor mortis that has set in from years of forgetting. So, instead, we just *do*.

We write out a *be better plan*.

We read a *be better book*.

We struggle with having so much we want and, at the same time, still wanting God.

We follow someone's *be better strategy*.

We pursue *being better* in ways we know and can control.

But what we don't remember is that the people who go hard for God are not the ones who try the hardest. They are the ones who want Him more than anything else.

MORE

We learn a lot by asking the right questions.

My friend Monty does this—asks good questions, learns a lot. It is in a car that I first encounter his game of inquisition, on a winding road between trees and more trees, tires humming me to sleep. He suggests a game of questions and I dive blindly in, grateful for the break in monotony.

The questions come in a variety pack, from *If you could have any other first name, what would it be?* to *If you could do anything and it weren't a sin, what would you do?* My husband, driving, answers them, too, much to my intrigue. *He would want his name to be Austin?* Interesting what even ten years of marriage do not let you know.

I am learning things about me, too, how little I know of the things I don't need to consider in my daily life. *Where would I want to be stranded if my plane crashed and I survived?* (Silly, the pragmatist says in me, because I wouldn't.) *What would I want to eat if I could only eat one thing for the rest of my life?* (Not one thing in those terms sounds good enough, by the way.) Monty is asking the right questions—the ones that have me interested and stirred and, most of all, *thinking*.

It reminds me of something similar from my sessions on the white couch of a therapist in my twenties. My father, who pastored a megachurch, had just lost his position over a scandal that sent me reeling and left me needing to talk. Even with all his degreed smarts, the counselor I thought a genius needed only to ask me the right questions

to lead me down a path to my own soul discovery. It was all in the *good questions* he asked.

And God—He thought the whole thing up. It was His idea to teach loud lessons wrapped in subtle questions, for I can only suspect that He knew that, in asking them, we would be convicted, stirred, dialed into truth. He did this a lot—asked questions to take us to our core. One such example that I love is chronicled in the book of John.

A wild, redolent guy who ate bugs and dressed ridiculously was out and about, telling people that “the one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world” (John 1:9). They called him John the Baptist, which makes me smile, wondering what kind of church, Baptist or otherwise, would actually open its doors to let him in. There is no other way to put it: the guy was weird. But he was the perfect nonstereotypical messenger of Jesus, for God rarely uses the one we’d expect.

I picture him with curly brown kudzu knuckles on wide fingers, and mad-looking moles on his skin. My mind draws him as a smelly, anti-Hollywood version of Gaston, the burly bad guy in that Disney movie, sans the singing. But of this I’m sure: he is a bass, and a loud one.

As Jesus walked by, John looked at him and declared, “Look! There is the Lamb of God!” (John 1:36)

John spoke, with full lungs and heart, pointing to the Way. And those within earshot, even his own followers, responded.

When John’s two disciples heard this, they followed Jesus. (v. 37)

I am moved by things in this story in this order: the breathless introduction of John’s awaited Savior; the disciples’ immediate

decision to follow Him; and the obedience of John to faithfully preach truth and yet, without hesitation, turn over the spotlight to the One who was greater.

The immediate reaction and obedience part moves me because I, myself, ask God to prove Himself a lot. And don't we all? Don't we ask Him to *show us, please, just one more time, that You are real and You hear us and know of our need and can and will be enough*, especially in the hard times that require hard-core faith? We are the walkers on the road to Emmaus who have seen the nail-pierced hands and feet and "still . . . [stand] there in disbelief" (Luke 24:41). Aren't we quick to jump toward Jesus but slow to walk the journey out with Him? The longer I have lived, the more I have seen how we are more alike than we think, so I suspect I am not the only one.

He knows this about us, and much more. He knows it is in the heart of people to step quickly without understanding what stepping out really means. He wants us to dive inside to the deepest part where we know why we will follow Him and how we are willing to commit our lives to match our easy words. And He knows that it is in the right question that a soul twists and grapples and, in one way or another, responds to the lesson tucked inside.

And so, like Monty on the road trip and the therapist with the white couch did, following His lead, Jesus asks His new followers the right question.

Jesus looked around and saw them following. "What do you want?" he asked them. (John 1:38)

On a spiritual day, I know the answer: "You, Lord! I want You!" is to be the cry pushed off the tongue of one of His, even a newbie. But the men in the Bible story do not answer, maybe because they do not really know.

I pause now, chewing on this: An omniscient God would not ask a

question He could not answer, for there is nothing He does not know. If He asks a question, it's only to open a narrower mind to a bigger view—His—that He will reveal in the right time.

And now the question turns to you. *What do you want?* It's a question loaded with rich truth about who He is and what following Him is not and knowing the difference. It's a question to make us think and not just respond with a knee jerk, as we are so quick to do. It is not the want stirred by causes we hear of and needs we see and church people back from a mission trip who have photos to prove that real people are starving that suddenly turns us into rescuers and pseudosaviors. It is the permanent kind, the unwavering kind of want . . . the kind of want that changes our life and helps us offer change to others.

When He asks, "What do you want?" Jesus is asking us,

What do you really want for your life, because you have to know this going in. You can't just follow Me without understanding what following Me means, and at some point you have to stop being constantly stirred but never compelled enough to take action.

Do you want the now life? Or do you want Me more than anything else? Having Me will be the greatest fulfillment of your life, but fulfilling doesn't always mean pain-free. Do you want to be the normal, everyday person who is flawed and doesn't have life all together but watches Me do amazing things through your life?

Be warned: if you want Me most, your life might be shipwrecked. But in the midst of the storm, you'll feel My breath on your skin. You'll drink from a bitter cup of physical loss, but you'll also drink in My blood. Do you want the privilege of walking beside Me, skin-to-skin close, but walking away from position and comfort and wealth and all the things that are supposed to make you happy? Are you ready for the Jesus life? There's joy here, but not always happiness—not in the temporary sense, at least.

God help us, this is tough, but we cannot continue to be stirred for the moment lest we continue to dip only our toe into the pool of faith, teasing ourselves, teasing God—not being serious about wanting Him.

Earthly people that we are, we have it wrong. Because “more” is not about excess or greater possession, despite all the messages we are sent. Those who have more in the physical sense can testify to the futility of it all—how we can have so much, yet none of it is enough.

Are you ready for the Jesus life? There's joy here, but not always happiness—not in the temporary sense, at least.

King Solomon talks about this in Ecclesiastes 2—how the world’s “more” looks good on the outside but winds up being an empty wrapper. The “more” God gives is really about loss and less and the willingness to do without and, yes, the *joy* in that. It’s about discipline and dedication and focus and surrender. That’s messy and that’s gritty and we don’t always like it, but it’s the gospel truth.

And what makes all of this hard stuff worth it? Only, always Him. God knows, we won’t always be living the soothing words of the Psalms. We’ll be living the agonized words of Nehemiah, Jeremiah, and Lamentations that are miraculously still able to say with a loud voice, “I want God.”

And praise be to Him that just about the time we feel helpless, drowning, incapable of making such a proclamation of wanting Him, He blows in with a hopeful, resuscitating wind and—mouth on mouth—*revives us*. This is the glory of traveling with the Life—how He breathes vitality in dead spaces and offers His marvelous, illuminating light in places that are dark. And when we’re in those dark places, we want God in big heaps and not small portions, because pain doesn’t ever truly get better without Him. The more we have of Him, the more we survive and even thrive; the more beauty we extract

from life. As my friend Teri once said, “The abundance of our life here on earth is about how much we interact with the Keeper of Eternity.” Yes, Teri. *Yes.*

Rest assured, God does not choose to withhold Himself from us in a cat-and-mouse game. When the Father does not show Himself the way we ask, it is not because it is in His heart not to; it is because only He knows the time when our hearts are truly ready to *see*.

To have Him, we must want Him—more than the friends, the family, the wealth, the applause, the acceptance, the comfort. There can be nothing—even our own life—that we want more. We can’t want our life and want God at the same time.

To have Him as He promises—in the full (John 10:10)—we must want Him in the same way. Full on, all the way, with all our heart. This doesn’t mean sounding spiritual or quoting from the Bible. It means the surrender of everything, even the secret things we keep close and hidden. Since He is the keeper of our hearts, He knows when it is truly all His. He’s heard us make halfway commitments before. He’s heard us say “I need to” until we’re blue in the face. And He knows that when trouble comes, our intentions will not be enough to keep us upright. It will take a fully committed heart to keep us grounded and on the path.

We cannot want God with conditions. When we say words like *anything for You, God*, but we mean *anything but this, God*, His heart is grieved. He denies this conditional allegiance of holding on to both when He designed us to be capable of going all in. And yet, gracious God that He is, He always lets us make the choice, though He won’t always withhold consequence. But even in the tough love, He counsels us to choose the better way. “Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who care nothing for their life in this world will keep it for eternity” (John 12:25).

Yes, wanting God more requires something of us.

But thanks be to God, it is not the end of the story.

Because wanting God fulfills, completes . . .

Revives.

And that is the other part to the *What do you want?* question.

And oh . . . it's good.

Because when God brings revival, He brings Himself.

TRAVELS (OF THE FEW)

Some of us—a very few—will get the Jesus we say we want in this way. We who will embody the humility of John and become only the watermark in our own lives—present, but fading into the background of Him. When we ask God to come to the foreground of our lives, to move us in a vibrant way of revival, we must be willing to be moved.

When the supernatural blows on us, it blows our status quo away. His Spirit dances in a freestyle way that knows nothing of a safe, typical, or manageable rhythm. And then we who want God more than anything else will be swept up in a tornado of transformation.

I admit that when I was younger, I let my tongue run loose with words to God—words like *I want You* and *I need You* and *Please bring change, no matter what it takes*. But one day in my early twenties, on the floor of an out-of-town hotel room, I prayed such words on bended knees beside my sweet mother, concerned over some of the behavior I was witnessing in my father, asking God to intervene in His life. It was then I discovered that He took these prayers quite literally. I saw my *whatever it takes* prayer answered in the form of loss and pain and years of struggle, as my family was wrecked by my father's often reckless decisions. And though I have since prayed those words again, I have never prayed them as easily.

I want to make this easy on us because that feels so much better, but the truth is, when we pray for our own soul's revival, we pray for

upheaval. We are frail and scare easily, and God is gracious to not reveal all His plans or define up front exactly what *upheaval* means. In our finiteness we would quake at the scale of it.

When we want God more than anything, we forgo our control of what life looks like. We must be ready for popularity lost. Comfort interrupted. Reason tossed away. Control gone. Self disregarded. Sin exposed.

We have to welcome mountains to move. Not the mountains in glossy scenery books but the rugged, formidable kind that leave us reliant on a compass. The mountains so high we lose our breath. The mountains that bring out our primal instinct and expose our fingernails packed with dirt as we have tried to clutch them on our ascent into His world of *more*. Wanting God births such untamed things.

And I suspect that this, my friend, scary as it sounds, may also get your blood pumping. We were born to live on the edge, and when someone reminds us it is possible, our heart responds.

And still we're scared. I marvel at mountains moving, yet the idea of taking up my cross daily (Luke 9:23) feels too heavy. I know it will require sweat and guts and may leave splinters. My heart screams, *Please just let me be!* and *Let me have God too*. I want Him safely served to me on the silver platter and unleashed to move radically in me at the same time. It is the rub of all humankind.

Where there is change, there will first be a denial of something that hasn't worked and a newfound focus and effort on something that *will*. And where there is such effort, there will only be a few.

This thought doesn't come from me, for I would hope for a broader opening, a wider road, guaranteeing a shot to more travelers. But I read Isaiah 35, which tells of the travels of the few willing, gutsy ones. They follow God and will one day enjoy peace and goodness in places that were dark. Though this passage is about the time when the earth as we know it will be no more, it makes me think about the road

we can still walk to being spiritually revived, transformed, likened to God today.

A great road will go through that once deserted land. It will be named the Highway of Holiness. . . . It will be only for those who walk in God's ways. . . . Only the redeemed will walk on it. (Isaiah 35:8–9)

I can try to make God smaller, but it will not change His greatness. I can paint the road to my soul's revival smoother, but it will not change the fact that it will likely have potholes and rocks. Wanting God is wanting more than what I can know, see, feel, or understand. It is being willing to travel the present-day Highway of Holiness, which is sure to be narrow and winding and complicated and long and messy.

Most of us bail when the revival fires nip closer to our heels and the prayers for *whatever it takes* are taken seriously. We have given only half our hearts, gone partway in, and we are scared. But those who choose it will see the impossible become what only God makes possible. As in Isaiah 35:1–7,

Deserts will grow flowers.
 Bad knees will become well.
 Blind eyes will see.
 Broken bodies will leap like deer.
 Water will spring up in dry places.

These are promises for our future and spiritual promises for today. They are promises for everyday people who want God more than anything else and are willing to let Him bust up their ordinary lives for glimpses of the radical.

Travels of the few.
 People like Florrie Evans.

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