

“Kari is a powerful example that God will do amazing things in our lives—if we let him. God calls each of us to a bigger, greater life than we ever imagined, but only when we allow our stories to be part of God’s great redemption story. Read this book and discover how God transformed the lives of one woman and her family when they sought to follow him.”

RICHARD STEARNS, president of World Vision US and author of
The Hole in Our Gospel

“The temptation to divide life into the sacred and the mundane attacks most women every day of our lives. *Sacred Mundane* points out the heresy of this duality and provides hope that all of life can be valued as sacred. Kari is a mom in the trenches who wonderfully weaves strong theology with daily, down-to-earth application in an engaging and enjoyable way.”

CHAUNDEL HOLLADAY, coauthor of *Love-Powered Parenting*

“Kari Patterson has a way with words, and oh how we need them! More than ever, voices all around tell us we need to dream big dreams and pursue big pursuits, but in *Sacred Mundane* Kari so beautifully reminds us that each of our days, if given their due, are quiet opportunities for a faith-filled life.”

CHRISTINE HOOVER, author of *From Good to Grace*

“You had me with the title. *Sacred Mundane* stitches together vulnerable, nitty-gritty stories of life, offering practical lessons that inspire readers to seek after God’s will—on their knees. Kari Patterson is as genuine and warm as every word in this delightful book, and she invites readers to share her journey to treasure every moment as monumental.”

CORNELIA SEIGNEUR, Oregonian journalist and author of *WriterMom Tales*

“*Sacred Mundane* delivers a message that brings relief to women’s souls—we are favored, loved, and chosen by the God of the universe. And as recipients of such favor, we have the awesome chance to draw closer to him each and every moment of our days. Kari’s words, full of grace, humor, and practical application, invite us to transform the lens through which we see the world, through which we see God—through which we see everything.”

JAMIE MARTIN, author of *Steady Days* and editor of the popular blogs
Simple Homeschool and *Steady Mom*

“Kari Patterson has written a book that all moms need to read. *Sacred Mundane* taps into our struggles and our pains, while offering us hope and strength to face each day with God’s perspective. Our daily routine, with its mundane tasks and mindless repetition, is ultimately an offering of worship to God. What a great truth from a great God! Thanks, Kari, for enlightening all of us who struggle with the occasional drudgery of life and motherhood.”

ANN BYLE, author of *The Making of a Christian Bestseller* and coauthor of *Devotions for the Soul Surfer*

“*Sacred Mundane* brings much-needed truth, hope, and inspiration for the weary woman’s soul. For all of us entrenched in the mundane details of life, *Sacred Mundane* reads like a warm embrace, encouraging women to live whole lives of freedom, purpose, and joy. A must-read!”

ANGELA DAVIS, founder of the popular blog *Frugal Living NW*

“We want God to change us. Heal us. But like Naaman, we foolishly object to the *way* God wants to make us clean. This husband? These kids? This noisy, messy, sticky life? In *Sacred Mundane*, Kari Patterson—in her winsome, inspiring way—causes the muddy waters of daily life to actually seem inviting! For as we dip ourselves repeatedly into the things we wish we could change or escape or skip, these are the waters that God uses to make us clean and whole.”

SHANNON POPKIN, author of *Control Girl*

Sacred
MUNDANE

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How to Find Freedom, Purpose, and Joy

KARI PATTERSON

Sacred Mundane: How to Find Freedom, Purpose, and Joy

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To my loves: Jeff, Dutch, and Heidi. You are my joy.

And to the countless everyday heroes who are faithfully, quietly, selflessly serving Jesus in the midst of the mundane. You are wiping counters, noses, bottoms. You are working dead-end jobs to provide for your family. You are making hard choices that no one sees or celebrates. You are silently saving souls through your tireless intercession. You hear no applause, receive little thanks, and too often go unnoticed. You are the heroes of heaven, of whom this world is not worthy. Thank you, faithful sisters and brothers.

This book belongs to you.



A close-up, monochromatic photograph of a wooden chair back. The chair's curved top rail and several vertical slats are visible, set against a background of a wall with severely peeling and cracked white paint. The lighting is soft, highlighting the textures of the wood and the decay of the wall.

There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: "Mine!"

—Abraham Kuyper

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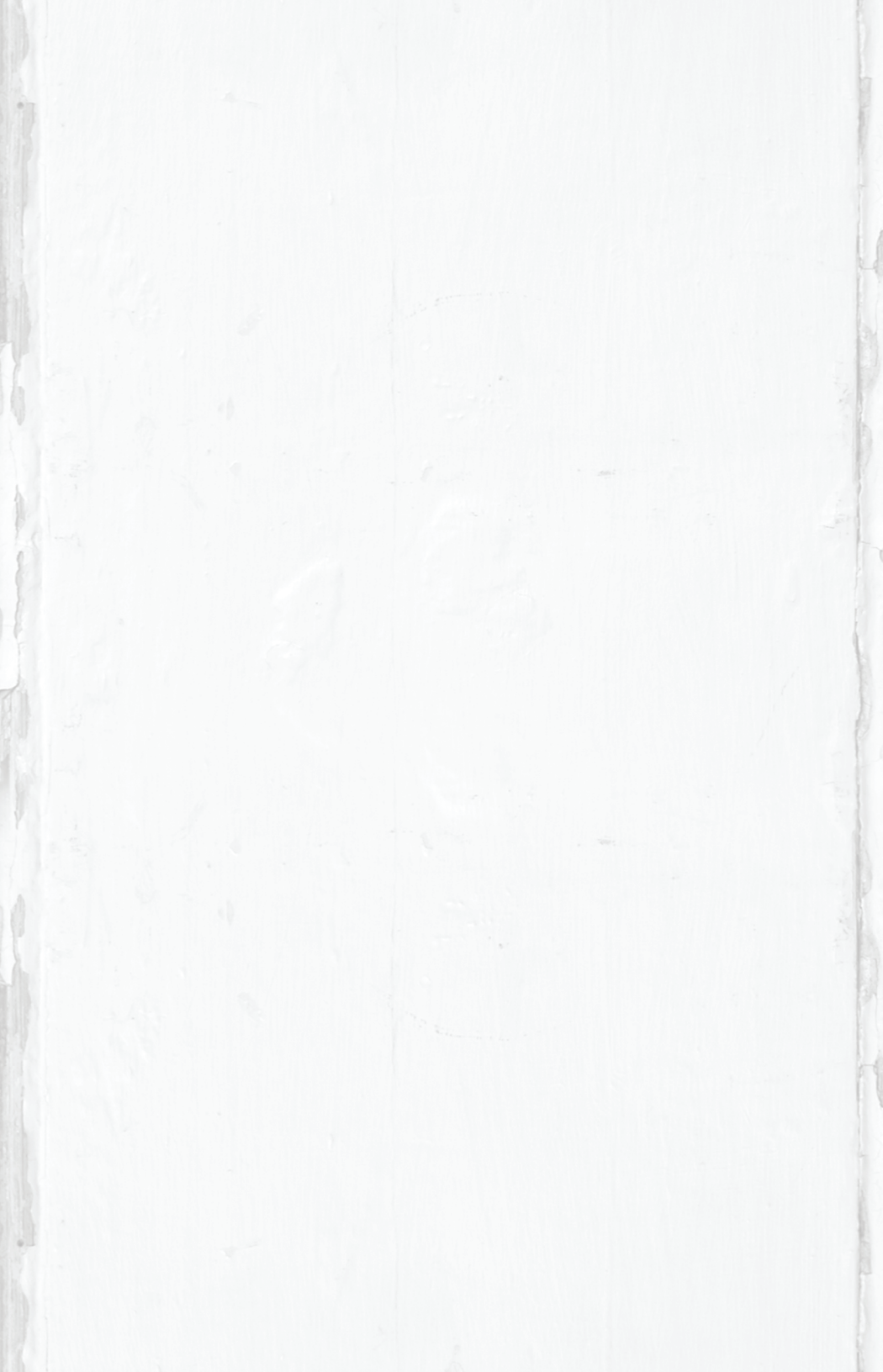
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Introduction

The Sentence of Your Life



He was a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper.

—2 Kings 5:1

GRAB A PENCIL. REALLY, go ahead. I know we've just met (hello!), but before we go much further I invite you to reflect on your life for just a moment. What you write will help us navigate the rest of our journey together, so please don't skip this part. Don't worry if it's not perfect; I said pencil on purpose. You can always erase and start over. Grace! But we have to start somewhere; let's try here.

If your life were a sentence, how would it read?

That is, if you simmered down your entire life into one short statement, just two clauses with a conjunction in the middle, what would it be?

While your wheels are beginning to turn, consider the short Scripture verse at the top of the page. This sentence describes Naaman, an oft-overlooked Old Testament character whose process of transformation will guide our own. There's a good chance your sentence will read a lot like his. You are a mighty man or woman of valor, you are a beloved child of God, *but . . .*

The whole verse reads, "Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master and in high favor, because by him the LORD had given victory to Syria. He was a mighty man of valor, *but he was a leper*" (2 Kings 5:1, emphasis mine).

Naaman had so much going for him. He was incredibly successful. He'd been used by God in a significant way. He was wealthy. Naaman's name comes from the Hebrew verb *naem*, meaning "to be pleasant, delightful, beautiful," which means he was probably handsome. He was "in high favor" with others, meaning he was popular and respected. He was in command, a powerful leader. But all of this was spoiled by the *but* in the sentence of his life. *But . . .* he was a leper, and leprosy cares nothing for Klout scores—it kills indiscriminately. This incurable disease would eventually steal it all, including Naaman's life. He would be unclean, isolated, rejected, shunned. His case is extreme, but it serves as an example for us all.

We all have a *but*, and it's a problem. (If you read that out loud it sounds terrible. I'm sorry; there was no other way.) Because you are created in the image of God, knit perfectly and wonderfully in your mother's womb and cherished by him, you have value and worth and honor. You are dazzling and delightful. You are dearly loved. You have gifts, talents, and innumerable things going for you. You have strengths and skills, power and potential.



Hang-ups have a way of hijacking our identity.

But—there's something in the way. Something that limits our freedom, confuses our purpose, steals our joy. No matter what great things we have going for us, this thing constantly lurks on the fringe of our attention, subtly inhibiting, hindering, holding us back. For Naaman it was leprosy; for some it's crippling fear; for some it's anger or unforgiveness; for some it's a desperate need for approval; for some it's an issue or habit that's hung around so long it has become an accepted part of life. Hang-ups have a way of hijacking our identity. We wear the badge. It's who we are. *Naaman was a leper.*

Now, Naaman couldn't have carried on as commander with this issue out in the open; he had to hide it as long as he possibly could. We do the same. We wear long sleeves, so to speak. We know how to compensate

for that weakness we've had with us for such a long time. We can still cope and manage life pretty well. Perhaps "it's no big deal," so we just shrug our shoulders and pretend it doesn't bother us. That much. But deep down we know there is something not quite right, something that subtly robs our peace and joy, something that clings to us and keeps us bound. Something we just can't kick.

And like leprosy, it spreads. Left alone, our hidden heartsickness always spreads. We think we're fine (we look fine!), sailing along in our long sleeves, but then that one thing—that person, that comment, that one hormonal moment—yanks off our protective layer, and we realize the problem is still there. It had been there all along, underneath. We resolve to deal with it. How? Add a turtleneck. Maybe some gloves. Don't get close to any situation where baring our skin or our souls is required. We become careful, cautious, learning to control our environment so our lack is less apparent.

But this isn't life. This isn't freedom. And we know it. Somewhere deep down, we know: this isn't the me I was created to be. This isn't the life I was meant to live.

If you identify at all, great. You're in good company. My hope is that we're all a bit fed up with this. My hope is that we'll finally say, "You know what? I've had it up to here with turtlenecks, and I'm sick of wearing gloves. I'm done with settling for surface solutions to my deep-down issues. I can't control this situation, and I hate feeling stuck. No matter what it takes, I want to be healed, I want to be whole, I want to be changed from the inside out. I want to be *free*."

If there is even a hint of that beautiful desperation in your heart, I'll take it. If you're fed up beyond words and sick to death of this blasted situation, that's even better. Desperation isn't a fun feeling, but it leads to transformation if we'll let it. See, change happens when the discomfort of our problem exceeds the discomfort of changing. Change is hard, but nothing is harder than living bound by our limitations and trying to convince ourselves that this is abundant life. Nothing is harder than living stuck.

This book is an invitation to live unstuck. To be healed, whole, changed from the inside out. To find freedom, purpose, and joy. In other words, it's an invitation to be transformed.



So, new friend, let's begin. What would be the *but* in the sentence of your life? Of course, there are probably quite a few. This definitely isn't a one-and-done sort of deal; in fact, it may take us a while to work through just the first half of our sentence. We need to know who we are before we can tackle what we're not. Don't worry, we'll work on that too. Just relax and write (in pencil) your initial sentence. There will be more, but we need one to begin with. God changes our lives one sentence at a time.

Now, here's the thing: we all long to see transformation—in our lives and in this world. But often we miss the most powerful catalyst for effecting true transformation in our lives: the dirty waters of daily life.



Often we miss the most powerful catalyst for effecting true transformation in our lives: the dirty waters of daily life.

See, Naaman was desperate for healing, so when he hears about the powerful prophet Elisha, he quickly speeds off in search of a supernatural encounter. He pulls out all the stops, loading his chariot with ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothes (2 Kings 5:5). Surely that will get him the finest treatment available. Pouring more money into a problem is often our first response; we think the result somehow depends on our own resources. We think we'll show God how serious we are by making our own elaborate plans and provisions.

Next, Naaman prepares himself for a grand encounter with the legendary prophet. What will it be like to see Elisha in person? Seeing this spiritual celebrity—that will surely bring the change Naaman desperately needs. He approaches Elisha's home. Here is the moment he's been

waiting for. His heart pounds. His expectations soar. Will the transformation come through flashes of lightning? Thunder and a booming voice from heaven? Will it come through shouts and summoned power from on high? How will it happen? It will be something spectacular, to be sure!

Some of you know the story: Elisha doesn't even bother to come out and meet him.

Excuse me? I can see Naaman, appalled. I know what he's thinking: *How dare Elisha not show up the way I wanted him to!*

Elisha sends word instead: "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times" (2 Kings 5:10). Naaman is livid. *What? In that dirty, smelly water? I thought my transformation would be more spectacular than this.*

Naaman is angry and goes away, saying, "Behold, I thought that [Elisha] would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage" (2 Kings 5:11–12).

Forget it, Naaman says. I quit. He storms off, angry and disappointed.

Oh, friends, how often we want God to transform us on our terms! How often we think the answer to our problems is pouring out more money, getting more gear, seeing another spiritual celebrity, or seeking some spectacular experience. How often we balk at God's bidding when he tells us to simply go and dip down deep into what is right in front of us, the waters we most despise, because that is where true healing is found. How we wish for a prophet to wave his hand over us and miraculously make us mature, make us well, make us new. How we wish we could just walk through the doors of church and have the "godly dust" sprinkle down on us and make us whole. Can't we just get a spiritual spray-tan?

Truth: you are made new by dipping into the dirty, dusty dailiness of life. By letting your days transform your life.

It is the mundane, overlooked, ordinary stuff of life that changes us from the inside out. That heals us. That transforms us.

It is the sacred mundane that makes us new.

Friends, God has used this story countless times in my life. When I sobbed every Sunday after church because my son's behavior baffled me and I was embarrassed beyond words, God led me to Naaman and told me those humbling waters would heal my soul. Even today, every time I pitch a fit over some situation, God gently reminds me, "I love you. These are my waters of sanctification for you." How I've begged for my own waters and my own way! Yet in his infinite wisdom, God has chosen the waters right in front of me, and he quietly calls me to dip down into *here*.



Not surprisingly it is the servants of Naaman who talk some sense into the man. These lowly, humble folks who take care of the mundane tasks, they are the voice of reason: "My father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you; will you not do it?" (2 Kings 5:13).

This book is my humble plea: *Will you not do it?*

Will you not dip down deep into your dirty days and let God transform your life?

Thankfully, Naaman listened: "So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God" (v. 14).

I must interject here. Don't you love that Naaman had to dip seven times? Picture the scene. Here is esteemed, high-ranking, handsome, successful, powerful, popular Naaman, with all his gold and silver and chariots, gritting his teeth as he reluctantly goes down to the water and humbles himself by wading slowly in, deeper and deeper. He cannot go halfway. There's no way to go under the water without getting all the way wet. There's just no dignified way to do this. And after he finally swallows his pride and goes under once, he comes up and takes a breath, and the servants softly remind him, "Again."

Again. Oh yes. This is the sanctifying word of the sacred mundane. Often we hear the hard word, and we do the humbling thing, and then we

get up the next morning, and wouldn't you know it—our loving Father says, "Again."

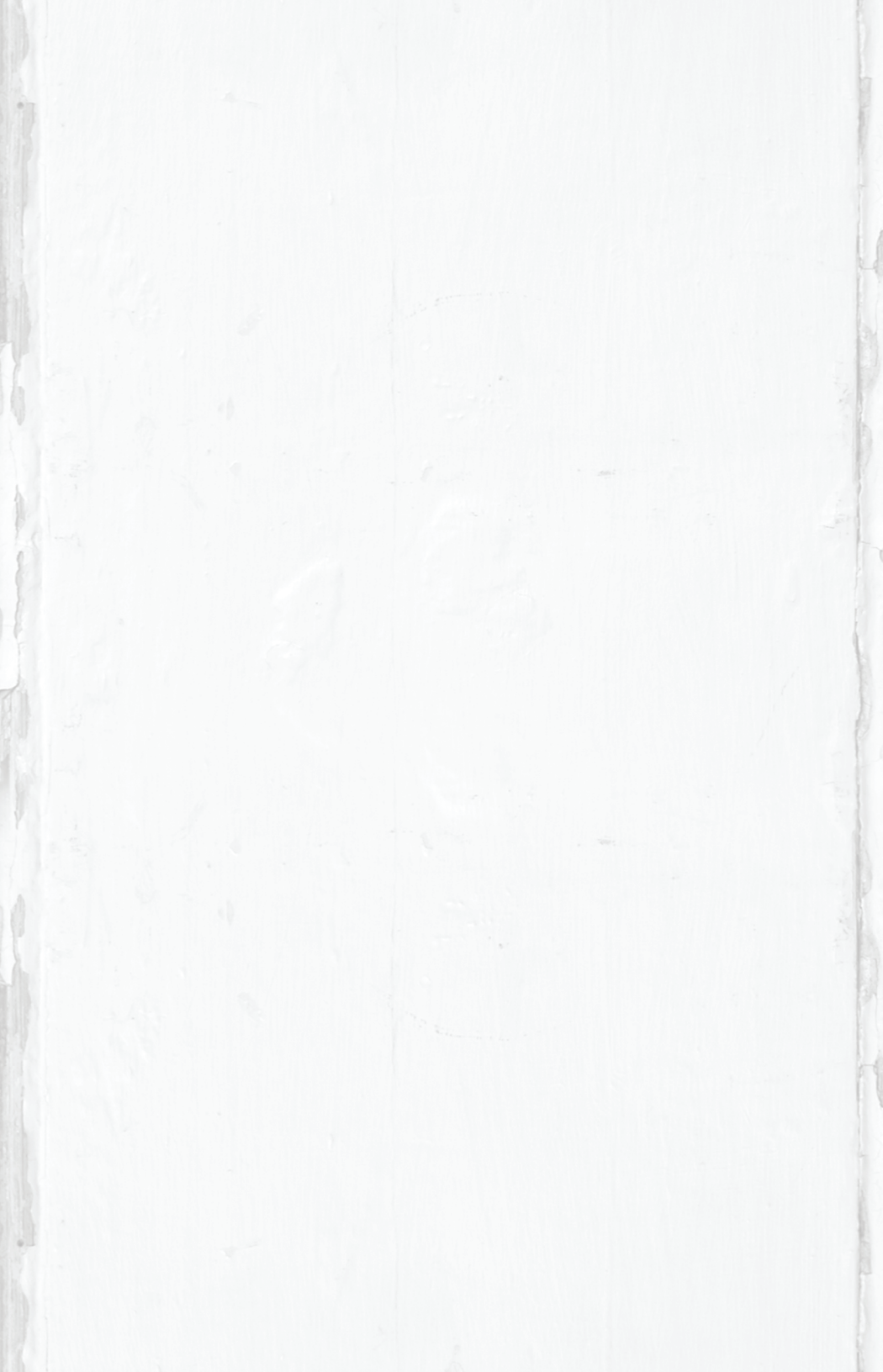
Again, again, again, again, again, again.

Over and over and over and over. Seven times Naaman had to dip until his pride was thoroughly washed away. Then we read the glorious ending: "And his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean" (2 Kings 5:14).

No more did Naaman's sentence read, "but he was a leper." Now there was a new conclusion: "and he was clean."

The sentence of Naaman's life was forever changed.

How does God want to change the sentence of your life? I invite you to come, pencil in hand, and let the Good Author rewrite the broken fragments of your life. It's safe here. Not one of us has "arrived." We all have *buts*, but God wants us to be free. So, let's shed our turtlenecks, enjoy the fresh air, and get real about the stuff that's underneath. In the pages that follow I'll share my own Naaman story, my humbling, stumbling journey into the sacred mundane. We'll dip down deep into those dirty waters together and let our days transform our lives.



1

LET Him In



Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

—Revelation 3:20

IT ALL BEGAN WHEN I let her in. I remember those few moments quite clearly, like slow motion, not unlike the way an automobile accident victim recalls those split seconds before contact. Running into Penielle¹ was like a car crash for my comfort, and when I let her in that day, in that moment we made contact, my tidy little life careened out of control. I had no idea then how everything would change, how she would permeate every part of our home, our life. How we would never be the same again.

See, she had this slippery way of getting into everything. She filled every space. Years of addictive, abusive behaviors aren't immediately or easily unlearned. Boundaries, to her, were like low field fences to country children—made for climbing right over and running free, laughing all the way. But that wasn't the most unsettling part.

The part that messed with me was how I saw Jesus in her face. Her face that flashed with anger and twisted in pain and danced with laughter, all in one conversation. I knew what Mother Teresa had said about seeing Jesus in the face of the poor. But this? This infuriating and intoxicating

presence that paraded into my home, into the everyday fabric of my life—could *this* be Jesus in disguise?

Could he be everywhere?

Unsettling. Letting her in was unsettling.

Letting Jesus in is unsettling too. I want to be clear, before we go further, that what we are about to embark on is unsettling. The world tells us we can add a dash of God here and there, a little religion or a splash of spirituality, like flavor for our lives. There are many, many varieties to choose from; we can pick what pleases our spiritual palette. But letting Jesus into your life, your real life, is absolutely nothing like salting your chicken. It's more like inviting a wrecking ball to dinner. In the most glorious way, Jesus messes with everything. He is an earthquake-ish sort of unsettling.

But—Jesus is so good and glorious and altogether lovely, life-giving, and life-changing that I guarantee you'll never regret letting him in. Everything he touches, he transforms. He brings hope, life, healing. He can turn every evil on its head and use it for our good. There is nothing else like what he does. He can redeem any relationship, heal any wound, calm any storm, part any sea, save any lost, and make masterpieces out of our worst messes. I guarantee you will never regret letting him into your life.



In my home, we have a wide variety of personalities. Most notably, we have my husband, Jeff, who is kind and capable and godly and wise, and who also happens to be the victim of an unfortunate genetic disorder that makes him incapable of being tidy. Really, it's a thing. It is probably just an unfortunate by-product of being a genius, but he cannot organize a physical space to save his life. He piles. He piles and piles and piles and piles. And I cry.

We've come a long way. I am an ordered, tidy person. I'm not as brilliant as Jeff, but I can find my car keys. We've worked things out over the

past fourteen years, and our home is a happy mix of the order I crave and the relaxed imperfection he needs.

But there is one space Jeff won't let me in. His office. This room is a picture of what our life would be like if it were under his command alone, without the influence of his wife. It's terrifying. It is not good that man should be alone, people. However, we're currently in the process of moving, so my brilliant, godly, humble, wise husband has agreed it's time.

He'll let me in. Now, because I genuinely love him, I am going to honor his space. I'm not entering his space to shame him, poke fun, wag my finger, or shake my head in disgust. I fiercely love my man. He is the most godly, humble, gentle, kind, hardworking, faithful man I have ever met. I have committed my life to being the best helper I can possibly be to him. This means that when he lets me help, I will always act in a way that is for his good.

But it's going to be a mess. It's going to be unsettling. It's going to be dumping out drawers and sorting through piles and hauling mountains of garbage to the dump. It's going to mean things get worse before they get better. But if he'll trust me, I promise I can make things better for him. I'll do the hard work; I'm really good at this. I'll even teach him habits and tricks to help him become more organized going forward. I'll help him be all he was meant to be. I'm his helper—that's what I was made to do.

Did you know the same Hebrew word for "helper" that describes wives also describes God? He's our *ezer*. How fabulous is it that our job description is likened to God's!

There is a slight difference, of course, between God and me, but it's a good place to begin. He gives us an invitation to let him into our real lives, our ordinary, mundane lives. He stands at the door and knocks, patiently waiting to be invited in, knowing full well he can lovingly make something glorious out of our mess. Meanwhile we're often inside thinking we have to do it all on our own, wondering why we're stuck. We keep thinking we'll invite him over as soon as we have our lives tidied up a bit. Just a few more rounds of New Year's resolutions, then we'll be ready to

have Jesus to tea. Certainly, he can't come over while we're still yelling at the kids and sipping wine from a mug.

Others of us have boarded up the windows and locked the doors because we've been given a tragically faulty view of God. We're terrified to let him in because we think he's the one behind the blow we've been dealt. We've gotten sovereignty terribly skewed and we think he hands out stuff like cancer for fun, that at any moment he might give us the gift of some horrific tragedy, so why would we want to get too close? Besides, if he hates gays and oppresses women and condones slavery, why would we want him in here? Not only that, we've probably *all* been wounded by his followers at some point. Won't the boss just be a bigger version of them? We have legitimate reasons for our reluctance to let God deeply into our lives.

Perhaps others of us aren't even home to invite God in because we think we must leave our ordinary, dreary mundanity behind to find something significant. Like Naaman, we substitute *spectacular* for *spiritual*, so we seek something *out there*. We're desperately looking for healing, wholeness, transformation, change. Some of us search in endless Christian conferences and some in shopping malls, but it's really all the same. We're all prodigals, out looking for abundant life, and the Father says, "Come home."

—————
We're all prodigals, out looking for abundant life,
and the Father says, "Come home."

The good Father is back at home—at our home—waiting. Jesus is knocking. And he is the greatest good, he gives the best gifts, his path is joy, his way is peace. He has precious and great promise-gifts that most of us haven't even begun to unwrap, and he's just waiting to be let into our ordinary days so he can make something more marvelous than we can imagine. This is good news, isn't it? All we have to do is go back home and let God into our lives. Our real lives. Our daily lives. The mundane.

The secret to true transformation isn't something to go find but Someone to let in.

WHO IS THIS?

My family and I currently live in the city with a bus stop at our front porch. Since a wide variety of interesting folks frequent the front of our house, and since I'm home with my littles all during the day, we always ask, "Who is it?" before opening the front door. In fact, we have often stood, frozen, my finger to my lips, waiting for some questionable character to quit knocking and leave.

We instinctively know we had better figure out who it is we're letting into our house. And if we're allowing someone in to *live* with us, we had better really figure out what exactly it will entail. We need to ask the following questions:

Who is this?

Where will she stay?

How long will she be here?

What will her role be in our home?

What are her expectations?

How will her presence change the environment?

Jeff and I wish we had asked these questions before letting Penielle (and others) in. And strangely enough, we wish Christians would ask these same questions when contemplating whether they will let Jesus come into their lives.

Whenever Jesus comes on the scene, the constant question is, "Who is this?" Matthew 21:10 tells us, "When [Jesus] entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, 'Who is this?'" King David's prophetic poetry asked, centuries earlier, "Who is this King of glory?" (Ps. 24:10). Even Jesus himself, after hearing all the various opinions concerning his identity, pointedly questions his disciples, "But who do you say that I am?" (Matt. 16:15).

Before we can go on, we must answer this question ourselves: Who is this?

See, Jesus comes as King or nothing at all. This beautiful Savior, who stands at the door of our lives and knocks, is not our life coach, counselor, teacher, or daily dose of inspiration. He is not going to give us a new life by Friday. He loves us too much to give us a spiritual spray-tan. He will not be a quiet houseguest who keeps to his room and lets us peek our head in only to ask him for a pithy inspirational quote. Before we let him in, we must make the weighty decision to let him be everything he really is. As C. S. Lewis has famously said,

You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.²

When the mighty leader of Israel, Joshua, saw an angel of the Lord, he asked the same question: Who is this? Joshua wisely wanted to know, “Are you for us, or for our adversaries?” But the angel responded, “No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come.” At this, Joshua “fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, ‘What does my lord say to his servant?’ And the commander of the LORD’s army said to Joshua, ‘Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.’ And Joshua did so” (Josh. 5:13–15).

I love this. Joshua asks if this person is for him or against him, and the angel responds: No. No, I am not “for you” in the sense that I fall in line with your own agenda. No, I am not “against you” in that I am seeking your demise. I am neither, because I am the authority. I am actually the One in charge.

Joshua rightly falls on his face in worship and immediately asks for his marching orders, submitting his will to the authority of God. Interestingly, what did God tell him to do? “Take off your sandals, Joshua, because where you are standing is holy.”

When we invite God into our mundane, he's not for us or against us in this same sense. He is the commander. He is the authority. We bow our faces and take off our shoes and recognize this isn't our army. The holy is here. Here is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the Creator of heaven and earth, Yahweh, the Eternal God, the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. In him all things that were made, were made. He holds all things together. He is the Almighty God and he is good. The end. This decision must be made: Will I let him in as Lord?

I know this is all really heavy right from the start. I wish we could begin differently. Actually, I don't. All good and glory and peace and freedom is found in falling on our faces to worship the one true God. It's really a waste of time to mess with anything else. Jesus won't ride shotgun. It's best we just go ahead and get out of the driver's seat and let him drive.

Let's not bother asking him to bless our lives until we will let him have our lives.



Let's not bother asking him to bless our lives
until we will let him have our lives.

The quickest route to the glorious good he intends for us is to fall at his feet and recognize his matchless worth. Then, wonder of wonders, we will discover something absolutely amazing: doing life with Jesus is *awesome*. He is the coolest, funniest, smartest, most compassionate, powerful, life-giving, helpful, comforting, amazing person you could ever fathom. Actually, he's about a bazillion times better than we can imagine, and once we let him in, we get the eternity-long pleasure of getting to know this supremely wonderful Being.



When the nation of Israel was struggling and disobedient, God got fed up and told Moses they could go on ahead into the Promised Land—they

could have the territory, the milk and honey—but he himself wouldn't be in their midst (Exod. 33:3). Moses's response will be ours if we have a lick of sense: "If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here" (v. 15).

We need God's presence more than life itself. We need him more than a sentence changed, more than a problem fixed or even a disease healed. These are all glorious by-products of his power, but we need *him* most of all. And by his amazing grace, he offers himself to us freely. Jesus said, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (John 14:23).

Jesus comes to make his home in our hearts. In our lives. He openly acknowledges his intention of healing every hurt, binding up every wound, uprooting every idol, of cleansing and transforming our lives. He loves us exactly as we are, and far too much to let us stay stuck.

So, if we take the simple questions from earlier and ask them about Jesus, what do we find?

Who is this? Jesus Christ, the Son of God, King of Kings.

Where will he stay? Everywhere. He requires access to every room, every closet, every messy corner of our lives.

How long will he be here? Forever. He will never leave us or forsake us.

What will his role be in our home? Lord and Master. Lover and Friend.

What are his expectations? That we love and obey him.

How will his presence change the environment? Total transformation. He will make all things new.

I hope this clarifies who we're letting in. And just in case this Jesus-talk is a bit unfamiliar to you, I invite you to flip over to "The Gospel of Naaman" beginning on page 182. There you'll find more about this Jesus guy and the good news that he brings.

And so, I ask you: Will you let him in?

OUR SOLE OCCUPATION

No matter our gender, title, income, marital status, age, or stage of life, we all have the same job. Whoever or wherever we are, "Our sole occupation

in life is to please God.”³ This is what we were created to do, in all things at all times. Ephesians 5:10 exhorts us to “find out what pleases the Lord” (NIV). So then, what pleases him?

Often we think of pursuing our own pleasure and passion as our own personal way of pleasing God. True, it is wonderful to experience a feeling of pleasure when we do what we love, and surely our Creator has wired us with certain inclinations and passions. However, feelings just aren’t sufficient for determining something as important as how to fulfill our sole vocation in life. Thankfully, finding out for certain what pleases God is rather simple, and it just so happens to be the same thing you and I are currently seeking.

What pleases God? Transforming us. His will is our sanctification: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Thess. 4:3). Sanctification is the Bible word for transformation. It describes the process of us becoming more like Jesus.

It is the will of God to change us from the inside out, to conform us to the image of his Son, to turn our lowly lives into glorious lives, to display his goodness for all the world to see. Our chief aim is to glorify God, and Jesus tells us exactly how this happens: “By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples” (John 15:8).


God is pleased, God is glorified, God is happy
when our lives bear fruit.

God is pleased, God is glorified, God is happy when our lives bear fruit. And there’s more good news: this can happen whether or not we travel to a foreign country, work in vocational ministry, get married, win a race, or have our name attached to some “great work” for God. Remember, the fruit to which Jesus is referring is *spiritual* fruit. You know, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law” (Gal. 5:22–23).

Bearing fruit is what glorifies and pleases God, because the fruit of the Spirit are the things God is. Big buildings don't necessarily glorify God. Love does. Big followings don't necessarily glorify God. Faithfulness does.

God may choose to do spectacular things through your life, but first he must do spiritual things in your life.

Many people rise as great athletes, performers, pastors, and missionaries. They may have millions of fans and followers worldwide. They may please many. Yet those who please God are men and women who bear spiritual fruit, who reflect the character of God from the inside out. This can be done in the spotlight or the shadows, whether running for president or running water for a child's bath. If God's pleasure is our goal, then all of life becomes significant.

Every year, many "great" spiritual leaders fall away because of sin and selfishness, leaving an aftermath of thousands who are hurting, confused, and disillusioned with God. I have experienced it personally. We can no longer glorify "great works" more than godly character.

Scripture is clear: "Those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:8). "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16). God is glorified when we bear spiritual fruit in our lives and so prove to be Jesus's disciples. He is pleased to make us look more and more like him.



He knows *our* "great works" will never give us lasting joy unless *his* great work, transformation, is done in our lives.

In short, God loves us so much that he wants us to be like him. He knows our greatest joy is found in knowing, loving, and becoming like him. He knows *our* "great works" will never give us lasting joy unless *his* great work, transformation, is done in our lives. Outward successes will never satisfy unless sanctification accompanies, deep within our souls. Because of his extraordinary love, God goes to great lengths to woo us and win our hearts, to work his way through our lives so that no

dark corners keep us bound in shame. Relentlessly, graciously, he moves through every mundane moment of our lives, using all that is ordinary to transform us into glory. He replaces bondage with freedom, apathy with purpose, despondency with joy. All in the midst of our regular routines. This is what pleases God.

MATERIAL FOR SACRIFICE

Let's back up for a bit and look at how this sacred mundane thing began. At twenty years old, I was on fire for God. I was eager to devote my life to sacred work. Inspired by William Carey, I wanted to expect great things from God and attempt great things for God. I plunged headlong into the sacred waters of church work, attending a ministry training school, traveling and leading overseas mission trips, teaching classes, leading Bible studies, writing gospel dramas, discipling college women, you name it. There was only one problem.

I was miserable.

I wanted to please God, but the reality was that life was about 2 percent holy high and 98 percent ordinary, irritating, boring stuff. Nothing I hoped for was coming to pass. The man I loved did not love me. My thriving "ministry" mostly included a lot of toilet scrubbing, taking out the trash at church, and late-night, long hours spent with people who drained me dry. On the outside, I might have looked fine, but deep down I saw no eternal purpose in much of what my job entailed. I longed to be free from my tendency to turn to food for comfort. I found myself slipping more and more into depression, wondering what happened to my joy. I desperately wanted *a* change and wanted *to* change. But I didn't know how.

I don't even remember what specific straw broke the proverbial camel's back, but one morning another mundane day stretched out excruciatingly ordinary before me and I just couldn't get out of bed. As minutes turned to hours I finally told myself what I told everyone else: trust God and do the next thing.

I pulled my Bible from the nightstand and flipped to find the brown ribbon that marked the place for my daily reading. My eyes fell on

Leviticus 5. *Awesome. I'm in Leviticus. Discharges and nakedness. This will be inspiring.*

Paying half attention, I began to read: “If anyone touches . . . a carcass of an unclean wild animal . . . or a carcass of unclean swarming things . . .”

That did it. *Seriously? Lord, please. Carcasses of swarming things? For crying out loud! My heart is broken, I'm dying inside, and this is all you have to say?*

I almost put the Bible down, but turned the page instead and began chapter six. A dozen verses later, my gracious God whispered through his Word: “The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it shall not go out. The priest shall burn wood on it every morning. . . . Fire shall be kept burning on the altar continually; it shall not go out” (Lev. 6:12–13).

The fire shall always be kept burning. It shall not go out. With the clarity, if not the volume, of an audible voice, I heard: I am giving you material for sacrifice.

Material for sacrifice.

I truly wanted to live a life that pleased God, that glorified God. Yet I found my life was full of pain. It was full of ordinary days. It was full of disappointment. It was full of toilet scrubbing and trash toting. How was I to glorify God with that?

Material for sacrifice. The fire on the altar shall be kept burning.

It didn't all make sense just then, but as I peered at those words in the most mundane of Bible books, I saw that God was giving me a wide variety of things—hopes, dreams, longings, ideas, routine tasks, ordinary days, even pain—opportunities for me to offer them back up to him as a sacrifice of praise.

Every dream yet unfulfilled: sacrifice material.

Every tedious task: sacrifice material.

Every frustrated plan: sacrifice material.

Every hurt and rejection: sacrifice material.

At the time, this revelation was enough, but later I would look it all up. What is a sacrifice anyway? The word *sacrifice* comes from the Latin *sacrificus*, from *sacra*, meaning “sacred,” and *facere*, meaning “to do, to perform.” Our English word *sacrifice* literally means “sacred doing” or

“sacred performing.” In Hebrew (stick with me here), the word for “sacrifice” in these Leviticus passages is *korban*, which comes from a root that means “to come close.” In other words, a *korban* is a vehicle for mankind to come close to God.

A sacrifice, then, is the sacred act of offering something to God for the purpose of drawing near to him. Our days, our pain, our dreams, our bodies, our lives—offered up to God for the purpose of drawing near. Sacrifice material. All of life, a sacred offering.

But wait—what about Jesus? Isn’t he the true sacrifice, offered once and for all so we no longer have to offer sacrifices? Isn’t all that Old Testament altar stuff done and gone? We don’t have to sacrifice anymore, right? Hebrews 13:15–16 explains, “Through [Jesus] then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.” Isn’t this awesome? Because of Jesus’s once-and-for-all atoning sacrifice (removing all guilt for our past, present, and future sin) we may freely and joyfully approach the throne of God and offer our ongoing, living sacrifice of praise.

The sacrifice of atonement was Jesus’s work; the sacrifice of praise is ours. It’s through his sacrifice that we offer ours. We are positionally pleasing to God because of Christ’s sacrifice; we are practically pleasing to God because of ours.




The sacrifice of atonement was Jesus’s work;
the sacrifice of praise is ours.

This sacrifice of praise that pleases God involves the ordinary, mundane tasks we do each day. The taking of every moment and continually offering it up in worship.

Romans 12:1 says the same thing: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”

My life, a “living sacrifice,” is intended to be a continual act of praise. That is what it means to glorify God, please God, and enjoy God, entering each moment as a sacred place of worship and letting him transform me in the process.

Brother Lawrence said the same thing: “Sanctification does not involve changing what we do, but in doing our normal activities for God’s sake.”⁴ We are transformed as we worship God through our ordinary days. True worship isn’t a song we sing; it’s a life we live. It’s a sacrifice. A continual offering.


 True worship isn’t a song we sing;
 it’s a life we live.

This is how the mundane becomes sacred. We hallow it. To “hallow” means to “make holy.” When we set about our unspectacular days with the express purpose of offering everything up as a sacrifice of praise, we make holy the ordinary. John Keble said it this way in his hymn:

If on our daily course our mind
 Be set, to hallow all we find,
 New treasures still, of countless price,
 God will provide for sacrifice.

If we set our minds to make holy all that we find, God will provide treasures, plenty of material for sacrifice, and limitless opportunities for worship.



Back in my room, I looked up from Leviticus and out the window at the parking lot full of cars, the garbage bins, the bicycles. Could this mean that all of life was sacred? Was it possible to enter every moment as a

sacrifice of praise? To offer all to God? To let him use everything to make me more like him?

I looked back at the ordinary words resting on the page. I had no idea how this truth would grow to touch every fiber of my being. But this, I knew, would be the foundation for the rest of my days. I found in my desk a tiny blank notebook, opened to the first page, and with trembling hand, wrote in pen the manifesto of my life:

Sacred mundane

HUPOMONE

Now that we've covered the backstory, let's get busy. The rest of our time together involves practice. I believe God has given us some mind-blowing truths and insights and wisdom from his Word, and I can't wait to share more of my ongoing, humbling-fumbling journey learning this stuff. But please promise me you will practice each step we take. Deal? This'll only work if you do! Let's agree to let our days transform our lives.

How exactly? LET. We must grasp this glorious truth: LET is the key.

James 1:4 reads, "*Let* steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (emphasis mine). This is what we need, right? To be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. Yes, please! But interestingly, we become perfect and complete not by going out and doing something but by letting something happen to us. And yet, this letting is not entirely passive.

True, to surrender is to let go of something, but if you have ever surrendered something you know the doing so is anything but passive! It is usually a knock-down, drag-out battle against our flesh to say no to ourselves and surrender something to God. Similarly, to *let* something happen implies passivity, but this is focused effort if ever there was—to engage in the daily battle of letting steadfastness have its work in my life.

How do we let steadfastness have its full effect? Well, it is with great joy that I introduce you to one of my favorite words in all the world. Are

you ready? *Hupomone*. Isn't that great? *Hupomone* is the Greek word for "steadfastness" in James 1:4. Also translated "endurance," it is mentioned thirty-one times in the New Testament and is one of the best words in Scripture, hands down.

Hupomone does not mean just sitting, head down, and enduring something (the way many of us joylessly endure life's dull duties). Instead, it means

not only the ability to bear things, but the ability, in bearing them, to turn them into glory. It is conquering endurance. *Hupomone* is the spirit which no circumstance in life can ever defeat and no event can ever vanquish. *Hupomone* is the ability to deal triumphantly with anything that life can do to us.⁵

Go ahead and read that again.

Amen! This is what I want in my life, don't you?

So, how do we get us some *hupomone*? We're gonna need a double dose. How we get *hupomone* is clearly outlined in Romans 5:3–4: "We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope."

This is the process of transformation—when we *let* the ordinary inconveniences (sufferings) of daily life produce *hupomone* in us, changing our character from the inside out (spiritual fruit) and birthing hope in our hearts. See, every time we face a crisis and choose to believe, endure, and see God come through, our faith grows and we're more able to endure the next crisis. We become more Christlike in our character and our hope is drastically increased because we've proven God's faithfulness that much more. Each time God meets us, greater hope is birthed. Walking with Jesus should make us the most hopeful, joy-filled people in the world!

The dirty waters of daily life, the everyday muck we'd rather avoid, are exactly where this *hupomone* is produced. Sure, these things may not be "suffering" in the same sense as a death or disease, but they are the mini

sufferings of daily life, the kind we most often encounter. All these mini sufferings produce the endurance we will need when we inevitably face far greater challenges down the road.

These small, daily sufferings work for us; 2 Corinthians 4:17 makes this clear: “Our present troubles are small and won’t last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!” (NLT, emphasis mine). Other translations say “work” for us, or “achieve” for us, or “prepare” for us. It doesn’t get much clearer: all those little inconveniences you’re facing today are working for you. How so? By building spiritual strength. By producing *hupomone* in your life.

Hupomone is produced spiritually the same way muscles are produced physically. Now, friends, common sense tells us it is easier to lift our arms overhead when we’re not holding anything in our hands. (I told you I wasn’t brilliant, but I know this as fact.) Why in the name of all that is good would we put heavy things in our hands and lift them overhead, especially in reps of ten or twenty, and especially until we feel pain in our arms? Some of us even pay money to do this! Why would we choose to “feel the burn” and pursue a more painful path?

—  —

Hupomone is produced spiritually the same way
muscles are produced physically.

Glory. Glory lures us on. We want the glory of strong muscles, health, a fit body. We’re after the glory of victory, no matter how small. Most days I’m just after the glory of a clean house. The simple glory of a fresh cup of coffee lures me out of bed every morning.

We were made for glory. God created us with a hunger for glory, and that very hunger is glorious! Everyone seeks glory, but it is the kind of glory we’re after that distinguishes us. The world wants physical, visible, temporal glory. We, as Christ followers, see differently and seek differently. “This light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that

are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:17–18).

As believers who have the mind of Christ, we see this world with a completely different lens than unbelievers. We see the eternal. We see the unseen. We see that the sufferings here on earth are simply hand weights for our spiritual workout. They strengthen our faith, sharpen our discernment, deepen our character, increase our hope. Sometimes life hands us two-pound weights, and we skate through the day fairly easily. Sometimes the weights feel unbearable, and our shaking, trembling faith muscles are burning. We desperately want to quit.

But transformation is taking place. Just as our bodies are transformed through physical exercise, our lives are transformed through spiritual exercise. Through the testing of our faith. Remember James 1:4? How we let *hupomone* have its work in us? The sentence preceding says this, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance” (vv. 2–3 NASB). You already know what the biblical Greek word for “endurance” is there, right? *Hupomone!* There it is! *Hupomone* is produced how? By the testing of our faith. By the hand weights handed to us. Daily.



The only way to honestly “consider it all joy” when we encounter trials is to know that these trials are producing glory for us.

Why is this so important? Why belabor the point about suffering producing endurance? Because if it weren’t for the hope of glory, none of those exercisers would grab hand weights at all. If I didn’t believe exercise is good for me, I would never endure the pain. The only way to honestly “consider it all joy” when we encounter trials is to know that these trials are producing glory for us.

This is what pushes us through the pain when we don’t feel strong. The process of strengthening our muscles actually involves them being torn down, weakened by exercise, then allowing them to heal, and through

the process they are made stronger than before. My arms never feel strong when I'm hefting hand weights overhead for the hundredth time; they feel exactly the opposite. But in this weakness, this tearing down, healing will happen and greater strength will arise. This gives me the hope to push through the pain, trusting the process, looking toward the goal: Glory. Spiritual strength. *Hupomone*.

Our ordinary days, filled with tedious tasks and frequent frustrations, are working for us. When we *let* Jesus in and let all things produce spiritual strength in our lives, we live mysteriously powerful lives of peace and joy. We live as more than conquerors. We live unruffled and unfazed, and we offer this unshakable peace and joy to a desperate world in the name of Jesus Christ.

This is how we *let* our days transform our lives. We let him in and offer up everything as material for sacrifice on the altar of our lives, letting Christ use the dirty waters of daily life to heal us, strengthen us, and make us whole. Practically speaking, how do we do this? Stick with me. In the next six chapters, we will use this key word, LET, as a guide, leading us through a six-step process of learning to do exactly this.

We will LOOK, LISTEN, ENGAGE, EMBRACE, TRUST, and THANK. We will dip down into our days and LET him change the sentence of our lives. Let's go ahead and step into the sacred mundane.