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LEADING THE STRUGGLING CHURCH  
THROUGH DEATH TO NEW LIFE

TIMOTHY D. FOX

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To the people of Hydrant Church, who have embarked on this ridiculous journey of faith, hope, and love with me. I am daily grateful for the opportunity to serve with you to see the dream of God come true in our little part of the world.

To Anita, Noah, Sophia, and the rest my family who have supported and walked with me in every up and down of ministry in the church. Your love and faithfulness inspire me.

To The Wesleyan Church, you have given me a home and tribe for which I am grateful.



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## contents

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Foreword by Wayne Schmidt	9	
Preface	11	
One	Rethinking the Call	13
Two	Rethinking First Steps	33
Three	Rethinking the Way Forward	67
Four	Rethinking the Death of a Church	89
Five	Rethinking Obscurity	107
Six	Rethinking the Church's Why	125
Seven	Rethinking Big Dreams	153
Eight	Rethinking Leadership	179
Nine	Rethinking Strategy	197
Ten	Rethinking Discipleship	221
Eleven	A Rethinking Leader	237
Epilogue	257	
Notes	261	



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## foreword

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**E**arly in 2020, I sat in the packed worship space of Hydrant Church in Goldsboro, North Carolina. A room that normally seats about a hundred was filled wall-to-wall with pastors and lay leaders from smaller churches in several states. There was a diversity of generations and ethnicities from a variety of community contexts. Their churches were in different stages of their life cycles. Pastor Tim Fox and Hydrant Church were hosting their first ReThink Small conference.

Tim loves small churches and so do I. That was the size of church I grew up in. In The Wesleyan Church, three-quarters of our churches are under 120 in worship attendance, and most of those are under sixty. That would be true of many denominations.

That opening night, Tim compellingly communicated his own journey and how he fell in love with the small church. He does not bash other expressions of the church—he affirms the bride of Christ in all its shapes and sizes. But he believes the small church has some opportunities unique to its size. While many speak of the 200 *barrier* in attendance, he casts a vision for the 200 *blessing*. Smaller size is not a lid, but a strength to be leveraged.

*Rethinking Church* is Tim's story intertwined with the story of Hydrant Church. He shares it with transparency—the raw realities,

personal and pastoral. Not unlike the psalmist, he expresses his feelings about God, the church, others, and himself. There are mountaintops, yes, but also deep, dark valleys. Multiple times he recounts his own questioning of God, the church, himself, describing it as “whining.”

Some books, like this one, tell a great story, but *Rethinking Church* goes further. It is full of principles and practices to maximize the ministry of the smaller church, painting a picture of what obtainable excellence looks like.

It addresses a broader reality—and a specific opportunity. Many churches are dying. Many of those are missing the possibility of resurrection. Tim led Hydrant Church through a revitalization process, which at first seemed to be working, but then the wheels fell off. Unexpectedly, the journey led to a restart.

The story of Hydrant Church is a resurrection story. Hope prevails over despair, and life over death. Pastors and lay leaders of various giftings and ages will be inspired and equipped to lead their churches into the experience of abundant life.

Tim has a unique genius to leverage what others see as liabilities—a blessing that overflows for us all as this unique genius intersects with a deep desire to be generous in sharing with others. His vision is intensely local—for Hydrant Church and Goldsboro. But his heart is translocal as well. He invests in the equipping of other pastors and churches. It energizes him to see others flourish and experience resurrection power to reach full potential in Christ.

—Dr. Wayne Schmidt  
General Superintendent of The Wesleyan Church



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## preface

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I have been rethinking church for as long as I can remember. I was rethinking ministry models, pathways, and accepted norms before I realized I was doing it. The work is not always easy, and the first one to blaze a new path usually comes out bloody. Most of us don't like to let go of what we think we know, or exchange predictability for possibility. Our default is to be satisfied with slightly better than the status quo. I have often wondered what it would take to shake the church loose from some of its accepted realities. What would it take for us to experiment, find new tools, dream, and rethink church?

Apparently, the answer was a pandemic. I began writing this book long before COVID-19 was a part of the everyday conversation—before churches were asked to close their buildings and pastors were forced to learn how to “go live,” produce videos, and make disciples from at least six feet away. As we return to our buildings and our worship gatherings, we are blessed with a gift. We have been gifted the opportunity to rethink our churches. We have a nearly blank slate from which to start. I pray that as we sculpt a new normal for our churches, this book will be a resource to help you rethink church.

We cannot return to the status quo, where we keep scorecards that measure income, buildings, and attendance as the markers of success. We cannot return to ministries that make good citizens and church people, but anemic disciples. We must forge a new future, shaped by the mission of the kingdom of God, that brings to life the dream of Jesus. We cannot go back, though many will try. Many will return to the same overscheduled rhythms and codependent leadership that leads to unhealthy churches.

My prayer is that you will be one of the brave ones. I dare you to rethink church with me so that together we may discover all the possibilities and potential that God has placed within his great church. Your church is neither too small nor too large to change. We must rethink church for the sake of the mission. We must dream as Jesus dreamed, serve as Jesus served, make disciples as Jesus made disciples.

In these pages, many ideas that you have learned and depended on in ministry will be challenged and questioned. I will ask you to set aside many of the presumptions and beliefs that once served you well in your work. Today is a new day. The time is now. The opportunity is ours. Let's seize it together.



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MOVE BEYOND COMPLAINING  
TO LEADING.



I wish I could say that when things are not going my way in ministry I immediately see an opportunity to try something new and creative. In reality, my first reaction is often to whine. I am epically good at whining.

Whining is a function of my active imagination. I see with clarity all the things going wrong. Then I imagine all the ways they will continue to get worse. I imagine reasons to worry and stress, and start to believe this whole thing can't possibly work. I express all of this with a childlike tone of complaint.

When I give in to my insecurities, I feel small, insignificant, and incapable of doing what God is asking me to do. Instead of remembering my calling, I imagine ten new reasons why I can't possibly lead the church entrusted to my charge. When that insecurity is raging, it can manifest as arrogance, and I blame them. You know *them*. They are the unnamed masses who constantly criticize and won't commit, give, or even show up. They are part of the reason that leading the church sometimes feels like trying to get a bunch of toddlers to eat their vegetables. You know you are offering what's best for them, but inside, you wonder if it's worth the fight.

## PREPARED BY GOD

Ministry is difficult, but God is faithful.

I first said yes to Jesus' call at thirteen years old on a Thursday night of camp. Cliché, right? The nervous energy and emotion of youth camp filled the air, and I was moved to respond. I have never really doubted the authenticity of that moment, but nothing could have prepared me for the road I would walk in the years to come.

In the twenty-seven years since that day, I've received so many gifts from the church. Among other things, I've received great opportunities, family around the world, a sense of identity, and my beautiful wife. But while the church has given with one hand, it has often seemed to be taking with the other. Ministry and church leadership have been the source of many of the deepest wounds and greatest losses in my life. Maybe you've had a similar experience.

In a moment when I was tempted to give up and walk away from ministry, God revealed himself to me in a new way. In an effort to prove critics wrong, I had run too hard for too long and unintentionally isolated myself from those who could help me. Inevitably, I became focused on what was going wrong. In that dark place, wasting away along the edge of a prayer labyrinth, I begged God to let me leave the ministry. Then, God began to whisper in my ear. A breeze gently pressed on my back, and God said to me, "Your life and ministry will be like a sailboat without a rudder. My Spirit will be the wind that takes you wherever I want you to go. I will tell you when to put up the sails and when to take them down. Trust me."

God has used everything I have been through in the past to prepare me for what I do now. God is using everything I am doing now to prepare me for whatever he might have for me next. God doesn't waste anything. It is all Jesus' way of shaping us as his disciples and leaders. Written in these pages is my story. I share the obstacles, failures, and pathways forward, along with some lessons I have learned. I share them with the hope that others will find inspiration and their own path forward.

## CALLED BY GOD

My first calling as a pastor was in a medium-sized suburban church. I was charged, as their first full-time associate, to start the children's ministry. Previously, I had explained to God how I would love to do anything in church ministry *except* work with children. I had interviewed and was hired for the position of youth pastor, but before I actually started the job, the church asked me to consider children's ministry instead. In the ten weeks since my graduation I had already declined every other opportunity in order to take this job, so I had no choice. God has a sense of humor.

In that first job, I learned two things. First, I learned the joy of creating new ministries as an expression of my creativity and strategic imagination. Second, I learned *not* to tell God what I don't want to do. His ways often take us to the very places we would rather avoid.

Since that first assignment to create a new ministry, God has placed me in churches that have required me to start, revitalize, or restart ministries that have deteriorated. For nearly two decades, I have started or restarted in kids' ministry, middle school and youth ministries, sports ministry, discipleship ministries, worship venues, and churches.

Before coming to Goldsboro, I had been serving as the associate pastor in a large church. Just three months into that assignment, some issues brewing beneath the surface erupted like a volcano when a staff member was removed for what turned out to be years of misconduct. Then came the cover-ups and blaming that too often characterize the church's behavior in these situations. It was a terrible season, especially for those of us who wanted more transparency. By the end of my first year the environment had

become so toxic with fear and control that I knew my time there would be brief. After a year, I was asked to resign. I was unsure of our next step.

Almost immediately after resigning, we heard about a small Wesleyan church in Goldsboro, North Carolina, that needed a pastor. It was undergoing an implosion precipitated by the moral failure of its leader. My wife, Anita, and I had one thought at the time—“No more cleaning up anyone else’s mess.” I had done that too many times and paid a high price for my efforts. We were open to moving just about anywhere in the country, but we wanted to go somewhere healthy and secure, or at least stable. So we waited.

Several months later, we were still waiting. I had interviewed at a few places and had a few phone conversations, but nothing was coming together. I felt caught in between. Small churches that saw my resume seemed to presume I was overqualified and would be unhappy in a small church. Medium-sized and larger churches passed over my resume because I had not been a lead pastor in those larger settings. The largest churches saw me as a potential campus pastor, but I knew I was called to preach. During those months, our family bounced back and forth between my parents’ house and my in-laws’ basement for months. Exhaustion and anger were knocking at the door of my soul. I was emotionally over it all.

Early one morning, I was cooking cheesy eggs for my daughter Sophia, her favorite breakfast. It occurred to me that I was standing in my in-laws’ kitchen and using my in-laws’ pan to cook eggs my in-laws had bought. That’s when I prayed, “God, Joshua prayed that you would make the sun stand still so you could save his family that day. I need you to save my family today.” Then I wiped my eyes and served my daughter her eggs.

Forty-five minutes later, my phone rang. It was a leader from that small Wesleyan church in Goldsboro that had recently imploded. The voice on the other end of the line asked if we would come to North Carolina for an interview. I first said no, but after a short pause I reconsidered: “We would prefer to start with a phone interview.”

During the phone interview, we were surprised at the openness expressed by this small group of people. They seemed genuine in their desire to grow as a church and talked about wanting to serve their community. They believed that they were ready to change in ways that would lead the church to make a real difference in the community. Anita and I spent the evening praying and talking, then we agreed to come for a visit.

We intentionally tried to portray an unfiltered picture of who we are, as well as my leadership style, preaching, and expectations. We told them we didn’t dress up on Sunday. We talked with them about how different it is for a church to have a young pastor versus a pastor nearing retirement. We were open about our family boundaries, including what they could expect from Anita’s involvement. We had two very young children, and she wasn’t able to be a free staff person. Honestly, I tried to scare them off. In addition, the denominational leader warned the church board that if they called me to Goldsboro they would have to be prepared for significant and potentially painful changes. The vote was unanimous anyway.

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## PLACED BY GOD

Our family arrived in Goldsboro the same weekend as Beryl, the strongest off-season tropical storm to ever make landfall in the United States. I should have recognized it as a sign; instead, we were blissfully ignorant of the real storm approaching. Within eighteen months, the storm in the church grew to a full-blown, category five hurricane. It was a perfect storm of fear, bitterness, power struggles, and gossip, mixed with an attitude of “Let’s go back to the good ol’ days of church.” I was convinced that someone had made a mistake. I wasn’t sure if it was God, the people who voted, or me, but someone had messed up. I was confident that I should not be in Goldsboro. In reality, God had me just where I needed to be.

In the first year, it seemed the revitalization was going in the right direction. Then, we hit a roadblock. It seemed we had reached the limit of what the people were willing to tolerate. The changes—exciting at first—were becoming too much to handle. Nitpicking was on the rise. Complaining, doubt, second-guessing, and accusations characterized nearly every meeting. There was growing disunity. By summer, we had sixty people meeting in two different services. Both groups were hoping the other service would fail, so we would go back to one service. I nearly quit. Someone had messed up. I was not supposed to be here.

It wasn’t the first time I had felt this way. I tend to question God when things aren’t going the way I think they should go. I wonder why, every time I take a step forward, I get pushed back two steps. I doubt God’s wisdom when I find myself in a place where my gifts or strengths are underused or unappreciated. When things get complicated, I am tempted to believe that God has abandoned me. My first reaction is often to whine

and complain. In those times, I am sure that I'm not where I'm supposed to be.

I wonder if the disciples felt that way when they were trying to wake Jesus from his snooze in the storm. Exhausted from teaching, Jesus had fallen asleep in the bottom of the boat. As Jesus and his disciples crossed the sea, a fierce storm arose that frightened those seasoned sailors to death. They flipped out, whined, complained, and begged Jesus to fix it. After they woke him up, Jesus first spoke to the waves, and then addressed his disciples and questioned their faith. It is hard to whine and trust at the same time.

In 2008, I attended a one-day Catalyst event in Lynchburg, Virginia, where Andy Stanley and Craig Groeschel spoke about momentum. The lessons learned during those sessions have proven incredibly practical and helpful over the years. Groeschel shared about a time when his church was experiencing a significant issue and he was complaining to God about everything that was going wrong. Groeschel said that during one particular tirade, God interrupted the pity party with an imperative: "Stop whining. You're smart. Fix it."

As long as we are whining, we aren't working. What if, as leaders, we simply decided to stop whining? When we start the pity party, we lose sight of what is real and what is possible. When we whine, we stop communicating with God and start talking *at* him, as if God doesn't know what he's doing. When we grumble, we separate ourselves from the people we serve with blame, bitterness, and disappointment. Whining gets us nowhere; we fall further and further behind. So, let's agree to stop whining and start listening to what God might be saying to us.

God has created you for a purpose; God has called you with hope; and God is equipping you to do everything you are called to



do. What is God trying to say to you? What do you hear? Here are some possible messages God may want you to hear today.

- ☼ *I made you from dust and I have specifically formed your personality, strengths, mind, and gifts for the work that I have created you to do. (If this message speaks to you, read Ephesians 2:8–10.)*
  
- ☼ *I have led your steps from the first time you stood on wobbly legs. Everything you have learned and done has led you to this moment. Keep walking. Don't stop. (If this message speaks to you, read Proverbs 3:5–6.)*
  
- ☼ *I have been with you. I will always be with you. Every loss, sacrifice, challenge, pain, betrayal, and failure are significant to your story. It has all made you who you are. It has brought the best out of you. Nothing is wasted. I will use it all. (Read 1 Corinthians 15:58.)*
  
- ☼ *Don't give up. Don't shut down. I've got you. I am your strength. With me, you can persevere. You will make a difference. Persevere without exception. (Read Galatians 6:9.)*
  
- ☼ *I have all the resources you need to succeed. I will give you everything you need to do everything I am asking you to do. (Read Romans 8:32.)*

Within God's Spirit resides in you everything needed to do all that God is asking you to do. He has given you his Spirit, the very Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead. You are fully capable

of doing what you have been asked to do. Your experiences have perfectly equipped you for this moment in time. God called and placed you, and you are ready. Answer the call that God has placed within you so profoundly that it may as well be a part of your DNA. God chose you. You are the right person, the right fit.

I am convinced that not only has God saved us by grace, but by that grace, he has also equipped us for good works prepared ahead of time (see Eph. 2:1–10). Let's get to it. Let's fix it. What is *it* for you? Have you named it? Do you have any idea what you need to fix? If you are like I was, you may be saying, "Everything! It all needs gutting. It's all just a mess." It is probably not as bad as it seems, but I know it feels like the steeple is falling. The situations that we face in ministry feel so overwhelming and impossible.

This book is our story. It is my story and Hydrant Church's story. A lot of it was a mess. There are still a lot of messes. However, we chose to believe that God had created us with purpose. We decided to believe that he had placed our church in this place as a strategic outpost for the kingdom of God. We chose to believe that we were entrusted with the mission to love, serve, and teach the people he gave us. We wanted to find out what was possible. We chose hope instead of fear. We decided one day that we were going to stop whining and start fixing it. We were going to rethink church. We are still doing it today.

## THE TIME IS NOW

As leaders, one of the ways we move beyond whining to stay in the battle is to create a moment in time that reminds us of God's faithfulness, our identity, and our calling. As Chip Heath and

Dan Heath said, “If you’re struggling to make a transition, create a defining moment that draws a dividing line between Old You and New You.”<sup>1</sup>

This new you will have to wander out into the unknown. There will be times when it feels like no one is out there with you. There will be setbacks and failures. There will be people who come and go. There will be wounds and losses, and it may feel like God is slow in keeping his promises. You will need your defining moment, your stake in the ground, to inspire your perseverance no matter what happens and no matter the results. You only fail when you quit.

Paul reminds us that we have become servants of the gospel by the gift of God’s grace and that we should not grow weary in doing good, because in God’s economy our efforts are not wasted.<sup>2</sup> Remember the joy of your calling and the excitement of the first time you served. Remember that moment when you realized that this is truly what you were created to do.

## LEAD FORWARD

You have to keep going so others can follow. As leaders, we follow Jesus first and help others to do the same. You cannot lead where you are unwilling to go. We must be willing to go wherever Jesus calls us. We must be willing to do whatever he asks us to do. We must be prepared to face every challenge and overcome every obstacle. We must face our fears and act.

### **Follow Your God-Given Dream**

For most of us, the closest any of us will get to a real flesh-and-blood sword-slinging battle is in our dreams. In our sleep,

we embark on outrageous adventures and exciting journeys. At some point, we have all felt the desire to stop sleeping through our dreams and live them in the real world instead. Perhaps you haven't felt that tug in a while. If we ignore it for too long, it will dull into silence. Don't be discouraged; every once in a while, like a Siren, your dream will begin to sing and woo you back.

The Bible is full of women like Deborah, Esther, and Priscilla who heard and answered the invitation to wake up and live their dreams instead of sleeping through them. There are men like Joshua, Ezekiel, and Paul, who answered God's call to live their dreams. I am convinced that in the heart of every man and woman is that yearning to live the quest. It will mean risk and sacrifice. It is not a call that we answer calmly, casually, or in our spare time.

Jesus says that you only really discover what life is all about when you are willing to lose everything you think is important: "For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it" (Luke 9:24).

Additionally, he says that he is the portal, the doorway, into that new life and true freedom: "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:9-10).

### **Seize the Moment**

We walk into new life one day at a time, even one moment at a time. Each individual moment is pregnant with divine potential. We can rarely tell if the moment we are living will be a moment of eternal significance. You can tell when you let a moment of potential slip through your fingers. Many are tempted to spend

their time focusing on the moments they let slip away in the past. They live burdened by longing. Others fall into the temptation to focus on moments yet to come in their daydreams. The only constructive approach is to focus on this very moment. It is the single moment that we have, and it is the only one with which we can do anything.

No matter how mundane this moment seems, the miraculous may be waiting to unfold from within it. In his book *Seizing Your Divine Moment*, Erwin McManus challenges readers to learn to live and embrace every moment as though it were a moment charged with divine power and significance. Each moment is waiting for you to seize it and live it to the fullest.

You may be thinking to yourself. “No, this moment has no potential. This moment is so miserable that nothing good could possibly come from it. I just want to move on as fast as possible.” Thinking this way can keep us from seeing the power of this one moment. It fails to see that God is always with us and always at work. By choosing life and action in every moment, we are prepared to live into our divine and defining moments. As Chip and Dan said, “Defining moments rewire our understanding of ourselves or the world.”<sup>3</sup>

The Greek word from which we derive our English word “moment” is *atomos*.<sup>4</sup> You might recognize the words *atom* and *atomic*, which also come from *atomos*. It is the perfect picture of what hides in a moment. An atom is the smallest and most fundamental unit of an element. You cannot get much smaller than that—a lot like a single moment.

Within the atom, there is a nuclear capacity derived from the rapid release of energy in the fission of heavy atomic nuclei. In these atoms, there is a hidden power disproportionate to their

size. That power is released in a nuclear reaction produced by the process called fission. Fission is the process of rapid multiplication by splitting. When you seize a moment, you initiate the reaction. As Erwin McManus said, “The divine potential of a moment is unlocked by the choices we make. . . . If a moment is a gate through which your divine journey begins, then choice is the key that unlocks the adventure.”<sup>5</sup> Atomic reactions have a catalyst, a trigger. With the choices you make in each moment, you can become that catalyst for a potential earth-shaping explosion of divine power.

### Get Unstuck

Many of us simply fail to take time to enjoy the great and ordinary moments, to embrace them, to live in them genuinely. But there is another reason that many of us live years on end without experiencing the explosive power of a divine moment. It’s because many of us are *trapped* in a single moment from our past that haunts every subsequent moment of our lives. It is so easy to get stuck, but when we do, we fail to enter into what God has for us today.

We can get stuck in all sorts of moments, trying to relive that moment or wishing it had never happened. If we get stuck in past success or failures, we surrender our ability to experience the present or imagine the future. You can’t look forward when you are looking back. We have to let go of the past to step into the future. Many types of moments can trap us. It can be a moment of:

- ☉ pain
- ☉ anger
- ☉ triumph

- ☼ providence or luck (depending on how you look at life)
- ☼ success
- ☼ failure

We can even get stuck in holy moments in the past when God did something great.

## LOUNGING SAUL AND LUNGING JONATHAN

First Samuel 14 tells the story of an epic moment when two men made a choice. One man, King Saul, was stuck in a moment of failure choosing to do nothing, and the other, his son Jonathan, wanted to believe God enough to act. Jonathan seized a moment full of uncertainty and doubt and found God ready to act in that moment.

The army of Israel was camped in a valley. Saul had just heard that his crown was going to be given to another. His enemies, the Philistines, surrounded him, having both the high ground and the numbers. They had previously destroyed the workshops of every blacksmith in Israel, so Saul's army had no weapons. Fighters were deserting his movement in every direction. He was down to 600 men. The entire army only had two swords, his and the one his son Jonathan carried (see 1 Sam. 13:16–22).

Then Jonathan hatched a crazy idea. He told his armor-bearer that they were going to climb the cliffs up to the camp of their enemies. They would poke their heads over the edge of the cliff so that the enemy could see them. If the Philistines responded by daring them to attack, then they would attack. But if the enemy came their way, they would run fast.

Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, “Perhaps the LORD will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the LORD from saving, whether by many or by few” (1 Sam. 14:6).

Jonathan and his armor-bearer snuck out of camp. When they climbed the cliffs and revealed themselves, the enemy dared them to attack. So they did. Two men, with one sword, killed twenty of their enemies and sent the Philistine camp into chaos. The Philistines turned on each other and started to flee. When Saul received word of what was going on, he dragged himself from his comfy chair under the pomegranate trees. God joined in the fight, and Israel routed their enemy.

Why do some of us shrink back at the moment and some of us step up? There are many reasons.

Saul and Jonathan both believed the promise of God to deliver Israel from the Philistines. Both men were aware of the odds. They both knew that they were the only two with swords among the 600 fighting men. They both knew that God was powerful enough to miraculously defeat their enemies. But Saul lounged under a pomegranate tree while Jonathan risked everything to climb a cliff and taunt his enemies, motivated by his conviction that with God’s presence in his life, he could overcome any odds.

What was the most significant difference between these two men? I believe the main difference between lounging Saul and lunging Jonathan was that Saul was stuck. He was frozen by his fears. He was lost in the moment of his past failure. He could only see all the things they were lacking. From Saul’s perspective, they didn’t have enough men to attack. They didn’t have nearly enough weapons. There was no way they could win.

What was the failure that caused Saul to hesitate? In 1 Samuel 13, it’s told how Saul once rushed into battle without following



God's instruction to take time for worship first. Saul's impatient action led to failure, loss, and a punishment from God. After the army's defeat, Saul hid with those who had not yet abandoned him. That is why he was taking shelter under the pomegranate tree instead of acting on the promises of God.

## EVERY MOMENT A CHOICE

Where are you right now in your service to God? Are you lounging under the pomegranates or acting on God's promises? If you are hesitating, what is holding you back? Are you afraid to step into the future with all of its uncertainty? Are you stuck in a moment of the past, maybe a failure or wound? Do you feel small or ill-equipped? Have you been lazy, lying around under the pomegranate when you should be acting? Hurts to think about, doesn't it?

Every moment we face carries with it a choice. You are making a choice right now to pay attention to my message, ignore it, critique it, or to think about something else entirely, like what you are going to eat for lunch. If every moment is the gate through which we follow God into our divine adventure, then our choices are the keys that unlock that gate. Our choices either move us toward God or steer us away from him into a life marked with worry, doubt, and fears.

C. S Lewis writes in *Mere Christianity*:

Good and evil both increase at compound interest. That is why the little decisions you and I make every day are of such infinite importance. The smallest good act today is the

capture of a strategic point from which, a few months later, you may be able to go on to victories you never dreamed of. An apparently trivial indulgence in lust or anger today is the loss of a ridge or railway line or bridgehead from which the enemy may launch an attack otherwise impossible.

The beauty of the story of the Bible is that God is all about giving us second, third, fifth, and seventy-fifth chances. He is the voice whispering an invitation, again and again, to join in his divine adventure.

Sometimes we hear his voice and we quickly know the right choice. Other times it seems like we have to search for an elusive correct answer in a jungle of all the wrong ones. When you feel overwhelmed by the moment, challenge, or dilemma, consider how Jesus gave Peter another chance.

Peter and Judas had both failed Jesus. They had been unable to live up to their calling and let opportunities slip by them. Judas became so stuck in his moment of failure that he never escaped it. Peter, on the other hand, got up. He owned his failures and seized the second chance that Jesus gave him to be the rock that Jesus had called him to be.

In your moment of truth, what will you choose? Will you decide to seize a second chance and step into your adventure? Have you confused the blessings of God with comfort, security, preferences, or predictability? Are you lounging under the pomegranate tree or lunging to lead your people forward? Have you considered that God's greatest blessing comes when God calls us to be pioneers, explorers, and even conquerors? Will you dare to answer that call? When you do, you will live in the realm of God's activity.

Is your church small? Most are.

Does your church struggle financially? Most do.

Do you need more volunteers and leaders? Of course you do.

Is the church inwardly focused? Plenty of churches are.

Is your church stuck? Most are.

Is your church dying? Many are.

Are the odds stacked against you? Join the club.

The world around us has been radically changing for the last seventy years, but the church in America has consistently failed to keep up. We need to rethink ministry, discipleship, values, and outreach. Rethinking church is not about style. It has to go so much deeper than that, and it will require much more than some newer music or a good coffee bar. Now is our time. You can seize this moment. You can lead your church into a new day. The time is now. Let's get to it. Stop whining. You're smart. Fix it.



## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What has God been asking you to do? Do you have the courage to take a chance?

2. Like Saul, we all sometimes find ourselves stuck under the pomegranate tree when we should be acting. What has been preventing you from seizing your moment for the kingdom? Name the past successes and failures, complaints, excuses, fear, and lies that have held you captive.

3. You are facing a limited number of problems but an unlimited number of solutions. Therefore, what you really need is not more money, energy, or people. You need an idea, a solution. One idea is all you really need. Pray for wisdom, then make a list of every solution that you can imagine to your most pressing problem.

4. What truth from Scripture reminds you of your calling and God's provision for that calling?

5. If you could try any one thing in your church, without the fear of failure, what would it be? How would you go about executing it? What would it take to start working on it this week?