

Ordinary to Extraordinary

*How God Uses Ordinary People
to Do Extraordinary Things*

A Nine-Week Devotional Journey
through the Old and New Testaments

Pastor Chris McCormick

Calvary Church

Ordinary to Extraordinary: How God Uses Ordinary People to Do Extraordinary Things

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Printed in the United States of America

Dedication

*To my wonderful wife Cindy and my family —
who have walked with me through every season,
and whose love and patience have made me
a better pastor, a better man, and a better follower of Jesus.*

*And to the congregation of Calvary Church —
ordinary people who inspire me every week
with your extraordinary faithfulness to God.*

*This book exists because you were willing to listen.
My prayer is that it will call even more people
to say their own “yes” to the God who uses ordinary people
to do extraordinary things.*

Series Introduction

On Being Ordinary

There is a word that most of us would not choose to describe ourselves, yet would probably accept if we are being honest: ordinary. Not in a self-deprecating way — not as an expression of low self-esteem or false modesty — but in the simple, factual sense. We are not famous. We are not powerful. We do not appear on lists of the most influential people in the world. We go to work, raise our families, attend our churches, try to love our neighbors, and wonder, sometimes, whether any of it adds up to something that matters.

The Bible has a great deal to say to people like us. And most of what it says is not what we expect.

We have been taught — by the culture around us and sometimes by the church itself — to think of significance in terms of scale. Big platforms. Large audiences. Dramatic moments. The people who appear to be doing something extraordinary are the ones whose names we know, whose stories get told, whose contributions are celebrated. The rest of us, by implication, are in the supporting cast.

But that is not how God tells the story.

When you read the Bible carefully — not just the famous passages and the celebrated figures, but the whole sweep of the narrative — you begin to notice something remarkable. Again and again, at the most critical moments of God's redemptive story, the instrument He chooses is not the obvious one. It is not the most powerful person in the room, or the most educated, or the most gifted, or the one with the most impressive credentials. It is often a person whose name most readers have forgotten before they reach the next chapter.

A craftsman from the wrong tribe. Two midwives with no political power. An elderly wealthy man in a region of mixed loyalties. A foreign court official excluded by law from the assembly of Israel. A man who grew up in a royal household and walked away from everything it offered. A Gentile believer from a city in Asia Minor, known primarily for showing up reliably. A messenger who nearly died completing his mission. A man who searched through an imperial city to find a friend in a dungeon. A church planter from a town the rest of the world had already written off.

These are the people in this book. You may not have heard of most of them. That is precisely the point.

What made each of these ordinary people usable by an extraordinary God was not an unusual gift or a remarkable circumstance. It was something far simpler, and far more available to each of us: they said yes. When God's purposes intersected with their moment and their position, they did not disqualify themselves. They did not wait until they felt more qualified, more

prepared, or more certain of the outcome. They looked at what was in front of them and chose faithfulness over fear.

Three truths run through every story in this book, and they are worth holding in your mind as you read:

First: God wants to use you.

Not a theoretical version of you with better gifts and fewer flaws. You, as you are, where you are, with what you have. The people in these pages were not exceptional specimens of human virtue. They were flawed, fearful, limited people who made themselves available to a God who is none of those things. If He could use them, He can use you.

Second: The standard is faithfulness, not the amount of talent or skill.

Jesus told a parable about this in Matthew 25. Three servants received different amounts of resources, and the ones who were commended were not the ones who had received the most — they were the ones who had been faithful with whatever they had been given. The playing field of faithfulness is perfectly level. It does not advantage the gifted or penalize the ordinary. It simply asks: what will you do with what you have?

Third: You say the “Yes.” God determines the “When and Where.”

None of the people in this book chose their moment. They did not design the circumstances that called for their particular response. They simply kept saying yes — and when the moment arrived, they were ready.

The theme verse for this entire journey is Ephesians 2:10, and I would encourage you to commit it to memory before you begin:

Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)

“For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.”

You are God’s masterpiece. Not a rough draft. Not a discarded attempt. A masterpiece — created with intention and care, placed in this moment in history, equipped with the specific combination of gifts, experiences, and relationships that God knew would be needed for the good works He has prepared for you to walk in.

Those good works were planned long ago. Before you were born. Before you had done anything to earn or disqualify yourself from them. They are already waiting for you in the days ahead. The question is not whether God has prepared a place for your faithfulness. He has. The question is whether you will show up for it.

My prayer as you begin this nine-week journey is a simple one: that by the time you reach the final page, you will have been so convinced by the evidence of these ordinary, extraordinary lives — and so moved by the grace of the God who used them — that you will say your own yes. And mean it. And live it.

The world has enough people waiting to feel extraordinary before they begin. What God is looking for are people who are willing to be faithful right now, with what they have, where they are.

That is enough. It has always been enough. These nine lives prove it.

— *Pastor Chris McCormick*

Week One

Bezalel

The Tabernacle Craftsman

Three Truths to Carry Through This Book

1. God wants to use you.
2. The standard is faithfulness, not the amount of talent or skill.
3. You say the “Yes.” God determines the “When and Where.”

“For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.” — Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)

Bezalel is one of the lesser-known figures in the Old Testament, yet his story carries a remarkable message for every believer. He was not a priest, a prophet, or a military hero. He was a craftsman — a man whose hands worked with gold, silver, wood, and stone. But God chose him by name, filled him with His Spirit, and entrusted him with one of the most sacred building projects in all of Scripture: the construction of the Tabernacle. This week, we will explore seven principles from Bezalel’s life that speak directly to how God wants to work through ordinary people in the everyday moments of their lives.

Week One, Day One

God Calls You By Name

Exodus 31:2 (NASB)

“See, I have called by name Bezalel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah.”

There is something profound — something almost startling — about the way God chose Bezalel. He did not send out a general announcement to the camp of Israel asking for skilled craftsmen. He did not run a search for the most qualified candidate. He called one man, by name, and said, “This is the one.”

In a wilderness of perhaps two million people, Bezalel was not a nameless face in the crowd to God. He was a specific, deliberate, personal choice. The Hebrew language makes this even more vivid — God essentially said, “I have summoned him. I have singled him out.” Bezalel was chosen before he knew he was being called.

I think about my own early days in the working world. When I moved from Illinois to Toledo for my first job out of college, I was twenty-two years old and knew no one. It would have been easy to feel invisible — just another new hire in a big company. But God knew exactly where I was and what I needed. He was already arranging the circumstances of my life before I thought to ask Him to.

That is the nature of a God who calls by name. He sees you — not as a category or a demographic, but as a person with a history, a set of gifts, and a role in His story. You are not a “warm body” filling a slot in God’s plan. You are a deliberate choice. Long before you sensed any calling on your life, God already knew your name and what He intended to do through you.

The question is not whether God has called you. He has. The question is whether you are listening for the sound of your name.

A Prayer for Today

Lord, in the noise and busyness of my daily life, help me to hear You calling my name. Remind me today that I am not invisible to You — that You have known me, chosen me, and set me apart for a purpose only I can fill. Give me ears to hear and a heart that is ready to say yes. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Week One, Day Two

Spirit First, Skills Second

Exodus 31:3 (NLT)

“I have filled him with the Spirit of God, giving him great wisdom, ability, and expertise in all kinds of crafts.”

Notice the order in God’s description of Bezalel. Before God mentions a single skill — before gold, silver, bronze, woodcarving, or gemstone setting — He says, “I have filled him with the Spirit of God.” The Spirit comes first. The skills come second.

This is not a minor detail. It is the governing principle of how God equips ordinary people for extraordinary work. Bezalel’s abilities were not simply natural talent that God decided to borrow for a building project. They were the overflow of a life filled with the Spirit of God. The Spirit was the source; the craftsmanship was the result.

This ought to reframe the way we think about our own abilities. We tend to evaluate ourselves by our skills — what we can do, what we have learned, what our résumé says. God evaluates us by a different measure entirely. He looks first for the presence of His Spirit, and then works through whatever abilities He has placed in our hands.

I spent thirty-four years in the oil refining industry, and I can tell you from experience that technical skill alone does not determine whether a person makes a lasting contribution. I watched brilliant engineers whose expertise produced nothing of enduring value, and I watched others — perhaps less gifted on paper — whose work outlasted their careers because it was done with a spirit of integrity, diligence, and purpose. There is something that flows through a life surrendered to God that skill alone cannot manufacture.

Have you asked God to fill you with His Spirit so that your abilities — whatever they are — can be maximized for His purposes? That is not a one-time prayer. It is a daily invitation.

A Prayer for Today

Father, before I think about what I can offer You today, I ask first to be filled with Your Spirit. Let everything I do — my work, my conversations, my service — flow from that filling rather than from my own striving. I surrender my abilities to You afresh this day. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Week One, Day Three

Your Skills Come From the Lord

Deuteronomy 8:18 (NLT)

“Remember the Lord your God. He is the one who gives you power to be successful, in order to fulfill the covenant he confirmed to your ancestors with an oath.”

One of the quiet dangers of competence is that it breeds self-sufficiency. The more skilled we become, the easier it is to forget where those skills originated. We practiced. We studied. We put in the hours. And so, without even intending to, we begin to take credit for what God gave.

Moses warned the people of Israel about exactly this temptation. As they were about to enter a land of abundance, he cautioned them not to look at their prosperity and say, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” The antidote, he said, was to remember — to keep returning, again and again, to the truth that every good gift flows from God.

Bezalel’s skills were extraordinary. He was a master craftsman in gold, silver, bronze, wood, and gemstones. But those abilities were not accidents of biology or the product of his own initiative alone. God says plainly: “I have filled him.” The gifts were given before they were developed.

This does not diminish the hard work of learning and growing. It simply places that work in its proper context. Your education, your experience, your natural aptitude — these are stewardships, not possessions. You did not give yourself your mind, your hands, or your years of accumulated knowledge. God did. And because He gave them, He has every right to direct how they are used.

The practical implication is this: whatever you are good at, hold it with an open hand. Offer it back to the One who gave it. Ask Him regularly, “Lord, how do You want to use what You have placed in me?” That question, asked sincerely, has a way of opening doors you never expected.

A Prayer for Today

Lord, I confess that I sometimes forget that every ability I have comes from You. Today I choose to remember. I offer back to You the skills, the experience, and the knowledge You have entrusted to me. Show me how to use them in ways that serve Your purposes and not just my own ambitions. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Week One, Day Four

God Uses the “Unqualified”

Exodus 31:2 (NLT)

“Look, I have specifically chosen Bezalel son of Uri, grandson of Hur, of the tribe of Judah.”

Under the Mosaic law, the Tabernacle was the exclusive domain of the Levites. They carried it, assembled it, dismantled it, and maintained it. It was, in every institutional sense, their territory. So when God chose the chief craftsman to build the Tabernacle — the man who would oversee the construction of the most sacred space in Israel — you might expect Him to choose a Levite.

He chose a man from the tribe of Judah.

Bezalel was not from the “right” tribe. He did not have the credentials that conventional wisdom would have required for this assignment. By the standards of his day, he was — at least on paper — unqualified for the role God gave him.

This is a pattern that runs throughout Scripture and throughout the history of the church. God seems almost to delight in choosing people who do not fit the expected profile. He chose a shepherd boy to be king. He chose a fisherman to lead the early church. He chose a persecutor of Christians to carry the Gospel to the Gentile world. And He chose a craftsman from Judah to build His dwelling place.

What does this say to us? It says that when you feel unqualified — when you look at the task before you and think, “I am not the right person for this” — you may be in exactly the right position for God to work through you. Your lack of obvious credentials is not an obstacle to God. It is often the very condition that makes His power most visible. Do not disqualify yourself from what God is calling you to. He already knew your background when He called your name.

A Prayer for Today

Lord, I thank You that You do not require a perfect résumé to use a willing heart. Where I have felt disqualified by my background, my failures, or my lack of credentials, remind me today that You chose Bezalel from the wrong tribe and used him to build Your house. Use me, too, Lord — just as I am. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Week One, Day Five

Pour Into Others

Exodus 35:34 (NLT)

“And the Lord has given both him and Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, the ability to teach their skills to others.”

Bezalel could have been the sole craftsman. With the supernatural filling of skill and wisdom God had given him, he was almost certainly capable of producing extraordinary work on his own. But God did not design the Tabernacle to be a one-man project. He gave Bezalel a co-worker named Oholiab, and then He gave both of them an additional gift: the ability to teach. God’s design was never for Bezalel’s gifts to stop with Bezalel. They were meant to flow outward — into Oholiab, into the gifted craftsmen who came alongside them, into everyone who gathered to contribute to the work. The Tabernacle was not built by one extraordinary person. It was built by a community of people whose skills were multiplied through relationship and investment.

I saw this principle at work in my own life in the most unexpected way. When I arrived in Toledo as a young man, fresh out of college and new to everything, I met an office mate named Dave. He was not my mentor in any formal sense. He never sat me down for a discipleship program. He simply went about his work with quiet integrity and wove his faith naturally into our daily conversations. That consistent, low-key investment was one of the primary ways God deepened my own walk with Christ.

Dave was doing what Bezalel did — not hoarding his gifts, but letting them spill over into the people around him. You may not think of yourself as a teacher or a mentor. But you have knowledge, experience, and faith that someone near you needs. The question is whether you are willing to let it flow. Who in your world is watching the way you work and live? Who might God be calling you to pour into?

A Prayer for Today

Father, forgive me for the times I have kept my gifts, my knowledge, and my faith to myself. Open my eyes today to the people around me who need what You have placed in me. Give me the generosity to invest in others — not for recognition, but because Your kingdom grows when we pour ourselves out. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Week One, Day Six

Finish the Work

Exodus 39:32 (NLT)

“So the people of Israel followed all of the Lord’s instructions to Moses. Then Moses inspected all their work. When he found it had been done just as the Lord had commanded, he blessed them.”

The Tabernacle was a massive undertaking. Consider what Bezalel and his team built: the structure itself, with its frames, crossbars, and curtains; the Ark of the Covenant overlaid with pure gold; the table, the lampstand, the altars; the washbasin; the courtyard enclosure; and every piece of sacred furniture and utensil in between. And the priests’ garments. And the anointing oil. And the incense.

It would have been easy to reach a point of “good enough” and stop. The people were living in the wilderness. Resources were finite. Fatigue was real. But Bezalel and his co-workers did not stop until every last item was complete and built exactly as God had commanded. Moses inspected the work and found it done just as the Lord had instructed — not approximately, not mostly, but fully.

There is a kind of faithfulness that shows up not at the beginning of a task but at the end of it. Anyone can start with enthusiasm. The real test of character is whether you finish — and whether you finish well.

Jesus told the parable of the talents precisely to make this point. The servants who were commended were not simply those who received much or started boldly. They were the ones who remained faithful to the finish. “Well done, good and faithful servant” is a word spoken at the end of the work, not the beginning.

Whatever God has placed in your hands today — a relationship, a responsibility, a season of service — press through to completion. Do not let weariness or distraction cause you to leave undone what God has called you to finish. The blessing, as Moses demonstrated, comes at the end.

A Prayer for Today

Lord, give me the staying power to finish what You have called me to begin. When weariness sets in, remind me that faithfulness is measured at the finish line, not the starting block. Help me to complete the work You have placed in my hands — not halfway, but fully, and to Your glory. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Week One, Day Seven

Your Work Outlasts You

2 Chronicles 1:5 (NLT)

“But the bronze altar made by Bezalel son of Uri and grandson of Hur was there at Gibeon in front of the Tabernacle of the Lord. So Solomon and the people gathered in front of it to consult the Lord.”

Four hundred to five hundred years. That is roughly how much time passed between Bezalel constructing the bronze altar in the wilderness and Solomon using that same altar to consult the Lord at Gibeon. Bezalel had been dead for generations. The wilderness journey was ancient history. And yet, his work was still standing, still serving, still being used as the place where God’s people came to seek His face.

Bezalel had no way of knowing, as he hammered and shaped that altar, that it would still be in use half a millennium after he put down his tools. He simply did faithful work in his own generation — and God allowed that faithfulness to echo across centuries.

This ought to reorient the way we think about the significance of what we do. We tend to measure impact by what we can see — immediate results, visible responses, things that happen within our own lifetime. But faithful work done for God has a way of outlasting our expectations, our years, and even our lives.

The Sunday school teacher who faithfully opens God’s Word with a classroom of restless children may never know — this side of eternity — that one of those children grew up to lead hundreds to Christ. The believer who quietly models integrity in the workplace may not live to see the colleague whose life was changed by watching them. The parent who prays faithfully over children and grandchildren plants seeds that may not bloom for another generation.

Your work for God is not wasted, even when it feels unnoticed. Build faithfully. Teach willingly. Serve consistently. You are constructing something that may still be standing — and still bearing fruit — long after you have gone home to the Lord.

A Prayer for Today

Lord, free me from the need to see immediate results from my faithfulness. Help me to build well in my own generation, trusting that You are the One who determines how far the fruit of faithful work will travel. May what I do for You today outlast my own brief years and bring glory to Your name long after I am gone. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Week Two
Shiphrah and Puah
Do The Hard Thing

Three Truths to Carry Through This Book

1. God wants to use you.
2. The standard is faithfulness, not the amount of talent or skill.
3. You say the “Yes.” God determines the “When and Where.”

“For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.” — Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)

They are among the most unlikely heroes in all of Scripture — two midwives whose names most Bible readers have never paused to consider. Yet Shiphrah and Puah made a decision that changed the course of history. Ordered by the most powerful ruler in the ancient world to kill every Hebrew baby boy at birth, they quietly, persistently refused. Their weapon was not force or influence — it was the fear of God, which proved stronger than the fear of Pharaoh. This week, we will draw seven life-changing principles from their extraordinary act of ordinary courage.

Week Two, Day One

The Fear That Overrides All Fear

Exodus 1:17 (NLT)

But because the midwives feared God, they refused to obey the king's orders. They allowed the boys to live, too.

There are many things in this world that can make a person afraid. An angry employer. A threatening authority. The loss of a livelihood. The prospect of punishment. Pharaoh, the most powerful ruler on earth, represented all of these fears at once — and he was directing his wrath squarely at two Hebrew midwives named Shiphrah and Puah.

And yet they did not comply. Not because they were fearless women who felt no anxiety — but because they feared someone greater than Pharaoh. The Bible gives us the reason plainly: they feared God. That single phrase is the hinge upon which their entire story turns.

The fear of God is widely misunderstood. It is not the terror of a cowering subject before an unpredictable tyrant. It is the deep, settled reverence of someone who understands that God is the ultimate authority in the universe — that His word outweighs every earthly command, His approval matters more than any human verdict, and His purposes will not be thwarted by the edicts of kings. When that reality takes root in a person's heart, it changes the calculus of every decision they face.

Shiphrah and Puah had that kind of faith. They looked at the most powerful man in the ancient world and concluded — quietly, resolutely — that God was still greater. And so when Pharaoh's command collided with God's purposes, there was no real contest.

What fear is pressing on your life today? What voice is telling you to compromise, stay silent, or look the other way? The same God who gave these two women the courage to defy a king is the God who walks with you today. A greater fear — rightly understood — has the power to silence every lesser one.

A Prayer for Today

Lord, grow in me a deeper reverence for You — a fear that is not dread but love, not paralysis but courage. Where I have allowed the pressure of people or circumstances to crowd out my obedience to You, forgive me and restore my confidence that You are greater than anything I face. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Two, Day Two

When Obedience to God Conflicts With Human Authority

Acts 5:29 (NLT)

But Peter and the apostles replied, "We must obey God rather than any human authority."

Most of the time, obeying God and obeying the authorities in our lives point in the same direction. We pay our taxes, follow the laws of the land, submit to our employers, and honor the structures God has placed around us. Scripture is clear that governing authorities exist by God's design, and respect for those authorities is part of a life of faith.

But Shiphrah and Puah faced the moment that most believers will encounter at least once in their lives — the moment when a human command and God's command point in opposite directions. Pharaoh said kill. God said do not murder. There was no middle ground.

What is remarkable is how these two women navigated that collision. They did not stage a rebellion. They did not publicly denounce Pharaoh. They did not organize a resistance movement. They simply — quietly, persistently, at great personal risk — refused to do the one thing they were commanded to do that violated God's law. In every other respect, they remained within the system.

This is a difficult balance to hold, and the New Testament does not pretend otherwise. Peter and the apostles were arrested, brought before the same council that had condemned Jesus, and commanded to stop speaking in His name. Their answer was not defiance for its own sake — it was a calm, principled statement of priority: God first.

We live in a world that will increasingly ask us to choose. The question Shiphrah and Puah force us to answer in advance is this: Have I settled in my heart who has the final authority over my life? Because the time to decide that is before the moment of pressure arrives — not during it.

A Prayer for Today

Father, I thank You for the authorities You have placed in my life, and I ask for a heart that submits willingly and honors those in leadership. But above all, anchor my soul in Your Word so that when the moment comes to choose, I already know where I stand. Give me the quiet courage of Shiphrah and Puah. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Two, Day Three

Courage Has a Name — and Two of Them Are Women

Exodus 1:15 (NLT)

Then Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, gave this order to the Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah.

The biblical writer does something quietly subversive in the opening verses of this story. Pharaoh — the most powerful man in the world, the ruler of the mightiest empire of the ancient Near East — is not named. He is simply "the king of Egypt." But the two women he tried to use as instruments of genocide? They are named. Shiphrah. Puah. Their names are recorded for all of history.

This was intentional. In the ancient world, to be named in a written text was to be remembered. The biblical writer is making a statement: history will remember the courageous, not the powerful.

Shiphrah and Puah were Hebrew midwives — women who occupied a position of great trust and influence in their community. Midwives were considered guardians of the next generation, respected for their wisdom and their role in bringing life into the world. Pharaoh chose them precisely because of their access and influence. He thought they could be leveraged.

He was wrong. Their position gave them not just access, but accountability — to the God who gives life. And that accountability proved stronger than any royal decree.

God has a long history of using people the world overlooks or underestimates to accomplish His most important work. These two women were not generals, kings, or prophets. They were practitioners of a humble, hands-on craft. And God used them to preserve the generation that would eventually walk out of Egypt. Never underestimate what God can do through a willing, faithful person — regardless of their title, their gender, or their place in the social order.

A Prayer for Today

Lord, thank You for the reminder that You see and name those whom the world overlooks. Help me to remember that my faithfulness in the role You have given me — however humble it may seem — matters to You and to Your purposes. Use me where I am, with what I have. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Two, Day Four

God Remembers the Names the World Forgets

Exodus 1:20-21 (NLT)

So God was good to the midwives, and the Israelites continued to multiply, growing more and more powerful. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.

God's response to Shiphrah and Puah's faithfulness is tender and specific. He did not reward them with fame, wealth, or public recognition. He gave them families of their own. For women in the ancient world — for women who had spent their lives bringing other people's children into the world — this was a gift of profound personal meaning.

God noticed what they valued. He rewarded them in the currency of their own deepest longings.

This is a pattern you find all through Scripture. God does not distribute generic blessings to faithful people. He meets them in the particular contours of their lives and loves. He knew what Shiphrah and Puah longed for, and He gave it to them — because they had been faithful with what He entrusted to them.

I have seen this in my own journey. There have been seasons when I served in ways that felt invisible — no recognition, no applause, no visible result. But looking back across the years, I can trace the ways God honored faithfulness in those quiet seasons with gifts I never anticipated, opening doors I could not have opened myself.

The world forgets most of the people who do the most important work. God forgets none of them. If you are in a season of faithful, unnoticed service — pressing on without recognition, holding the line without an audience — take heart. The God who gave families to two midwives in ancient Egypt is keeping careful account of every act of faithfulness offered in His name.

A Prayer for Today

Father, in the seasons when my faithfulness goes unnoticed by the people around me, remind me that You see every act of obedience and every quiet sacrifice. I trust that You reward faithfulness in ways that are better than anything I could arrange for myself. Help me to keep going. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Two, Day Five

Staying Submitted While Standing Firm

Romans 13:1 (NLT)

Everyone must submit to governing authorities. For all authority comes from God, and those in positions of authority have been placed there by God.

One of the most nuanced things about the story of Shiphrah and Puah is what they did not do. They did not lead a revolt. They did not publicly shame Pharaoh. They did not recruit others to defy him. When Pharaoh summoned them to account for the living Hebrew boys, they appeared before him. They answered his question — carefully, wisely, without unnecessary confrontation.

Submission to authority and obedience to a specific command are not the same thing. Shiphrah and Puah understood this distinction intuitively. They remained within the system while refusing to use their position within that system to carry out an evil act. That is a remarkably sophisticated ethical stance for two women operating under crushing imperial pressure.

The New Testament affirms this principle from multiple angles. Paul instructs believers to submit to governing authorities. Peter says the same. And yet both men were eventually imprisoned for preaching the gospel in defiance of official commands to stop. None of them saw a contradiction between these two positions, because there is no contradiction — there is a distinction.

We honor authority. We respect the structures God has placed in our world. We do not resist or undermine them unnecessarily. But we reserve the right — and in some cases the obligation — to say, quietly and firmly, "Not this. Not this one thing that crosses the line God has drawn."

Living that out with grace, without unnecessary conflict, is one of the most demanding forms of Christian witness. Shiphrah and Puah model it beautifully. They were not rebels. They were faithful people who knew exactly where the line was — and would not cross it.

A Prayer for Today

Lord, give me the wisdom to honor the authorities in my life while holding firm to the boundaries You have set. Keep me from unnecessary conflict on one hand and from cowardly compliance on the other. Help me to model the same quiet, principled faithfulness that Shiphrah and Puah displayed. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Two, Day Six

One Act of Courage Sets the Stage for the Next

Exodus 1:21 (NLT)

| *And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.*

The story of Shiphrah and Puah does not end with them. It flows directly into what comes next — because one of the Hebrew baby boys who lived because of their courage was placed in a basket in the Nile by his desperate mother, found by Pharaoh's daughter, and raised in the palace of the very king who had ordered his death. His name was Moses.

Shiphrah and Puah had no way of knowing they were part of that story. They were simply two women doing the right thing in a desperate moment. But their faithfulness was a link in a chain that stretched from their cistern to the Red Sea, from the Exodus to the Promised Land, and ultimately — through the lineage of Israel — to a manger in Bethlehem.

This is the nature of obedience. It almost never reveals its full consequences in the moment. We see the immediate cost — the risk, the fear, the potential loss. We rarely see the downstream effect. But God does. He weaves single acts of faithfulness into stories that span generations.

Your faithfulness today is setting a stage you cannot yet see. The kindness you show, the stand you take, the truth you speak at personal cost — these are not isolated events. They are threads in a larger tapestry that God is weaving across time. Trust Him with the outcome. Your job is not to see the whole picture. Your job is to do the right thing in the moment you are in.

Shiphrah and Puah were faithful in their moment. God took it from there — and changed the world.

A Prayer for Today

Father, help me to trust that my faithfulness in this moment is part of something much larger than I can see. Free me from the need to know the outcome before I obey. I choose to do what is right today and leave the rest in Your hands, trusting that You are weaving all things together for Your glory. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Two, Day Seven

Prepare Today for the Test Tomorrow

Proverbs 19:23 (NLT)

|*Fear of the Lord leads to life, bringing security and protection from harm.*

Shiphrah and Puah did not develop their courage in the moment Pharaoh gave his terrible order. The fear of God that drove their decision was not something they summoned on the spot — it was something already present in them, the fruit of a way of life they had been living before the crisis arrived.

This is one of the most practical lessons from their story. The character we display under pressure is the character we have already been building in the ordinary seasons. No one becomes courageous in an instant. No one develops a deeply rooted fear of God in a moment of crisis. These things are cultivated in the daily choices, the quiet obediences, the small acts of faithfulness that no one else sees.

In my years in the oil refining industry, I worked around processes that required careful, daily maintenance precisely because we knew that failures under pressure are almost always the result of neglect in ordinary conditions. The equipment that holds up in an emergency is the equipment that has been faithfully maintained. Character works the same way.

If you want to stand firm when the pressure comes — and it will come — the time to prepare is now. Read God's Word daily, not just in crisis. Pray consistently, not only in desperation. Practice faithfulness in the small things so that when the large things arrive, you are not trying to build something from nothing.

Shiphrah and Puah were ready when Pharaoh came calling because they had already decided who they belonged to. Have you? The best time to make that decision is today — long before the moment of testing arrives.

A Prayer for Today

Lord, I want to be prepared for the moments that will test my faith, and I know that preparation happens now — in the ordinary days, in the quiet disciplines, in the daily choices to follow You. Grow in me a consistent, deepening walk with You so that when the pressure comes, I am already standing on solid ground. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Three
Barzillai the Gileadite
Faithful in Every Season

Three Truths to Carry Through This Book

1. God wants to use you.
2. The standard is faithfulness, not the amount of talent or skill.
3. You say the “Yes.” God determines the “When and Where.”

“For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.” — Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)

He appears in only a handful of verses, and most Bible readers pass right over his name. But Barzillai the Gileadite — wealthy, elderly, and under no obligation to anyone — chose one of the most dangerous moments in Israel’s history to demonstrate extraordinary loyalty to God’s anointed king. And then, when the king offered him everything in return, Barzillai quietly declined and redirected the blessing to the next generation. This week, we will sit with a man who understood what it means to be faithful in every season of life — and what it looks like to hold both honor and resources with an open hand.

Week Three, Day One

Show Up at the Worst Moment

2 Samuel 17:27-29 (NLT)

When David arrived at Mahanaim, he was warmly greeted by Shobi son of Nahash... and by Barzillai of Gilead from Rogelim. They brought sleeping mats, cooking pots, serving bowls, wheat and barley, flour and roasted grain, beans, lentils, honey, butter, sheep, goats, and cheese for David and those who were with him.

King David was in the worst crisis of his reign. His own son Absalom had seized the throne. His closest advisors had defected. He had fled Jerusalem with barely what he could carry, crossing the Mount of Olives in grief, heading into the wilderness. Everything David had built over decades of faithful kingship was teetering on the edge of collapse.

This was the moment Barzillai chose to show up.

He did not wait to see how things would unfold. He did not calculate whether backing David was a wise investment. He saw that God's anointed king was in desperate need, and he responded with lavish, practical generosity — sleeping mats, cooking pots, grain, honey, butter, livestock. Not a token gesture. A complete provision for an entire army in crisis.

There is a particular kind of faithfulness that shows itself only in the worst moments — when the outcome is uncertain, when supporting someone carries genuine risk, when the crowd has moved the other direction. Barzillai had that faithfulness. He was not a fair-weather friend. He was the kind of person who was most present when presence was most costly.

I suspect you know someone like that. Perhaps you have been the recipient of that kind of love in a hard season. And perhaps God is calling you to be that person for someone in your life right now — not when it is convenient, not when the outcome is clear, but now, in the middle of their difficulty. Show up. Bring what you have. That is the Barzillai way.

A Prayer for Today

Lord, make me the kind of person who shows up when it costs something — who does not wait for the situation to resolve before I offer my support. Give me eyes to see who in my life needs a Barzillai right now, and give me the courage and generosity to be that person for them. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Three, Day Two

Use What You Have

Deuteronomy 8:18 (NLT)

Remember the Lord your God. He is the one who gives you power to be successful, in order to fulfill the covenant he confirmed to your ancestors with an oath.

The Bible tells us that Barzillai was very wealthy. He was eighty years old and had accumulated considerable resources over the course of his long life. When David arrived at Mahanaim in desperate need, Barzillai did not hold those resources at arm's length and offer only his sympathies. He opened his storehouses and gave abundantly.

Barzillai seemed to understand something that wealthy people do not always grasp — that what he possessed was not ultimately his own. God had prospered him, and that prosperity carried with it a responsibility. When God's anointed was in need, Barzillai's resources were available for God's purposes.

This principle applies equally to those of us who are not wealthy in material terms. Each of us has something — time, skill, experience, relationships, knowledge, a listening ear, a spare room, a vehicle, a meal we can cook. The question Barzillai forces us to ask is not "How much do I have?" but "Am I willing to use what I have when God's purposes call for it?"

The widow of Zarephath had only a handful of flour and a little oil — barely enough for one last meal for herself and her son. When the prophet Elijah arrived and asked her to use it for him first, she obeyed. And the flour and the oil did not run out. What we offer to God in faith, He has a way of multiplying far beyond what we gave.

Take stock today. What has God entrusted to you? And is it available to Him — truly available, not just in principle but in practice — when He brings someone across your path who needs what you have to give?

A Prayer for Today

Father, everything I have comes from You, and I want to hold it with an open hand. Show me the needs around me that I am uniquely positioned to meet, and give me the generous spirit of Barzillai — willing to use what You have given me for Your purposes and the good of others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Three, Day Three

Loyalty When It Costs Something

Proverbs 17:17 (NLT)

| *A friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help in time of need.*

Barzillai's support of David was not a low-risk proposition. Absalom's rebellion had significant momentum. Many of David's own advisors — including his close friend Ahithophel — had defected to Absalom's side. At the moment Barzillai brought his provisions to Mahanaim, it was not at all clear that David would survive, let alone reclaim his throne.

To throw your resources and your reputation behind a fugitive king, when powerful people had already calculated that his cause was lost, was an act of genuine courage. Barzillai was not simply being generous — he was taking a side in a dangerous conflict, and he chose loyalty over safety.

Loyalty of this kind is rare. Proverbs tells us that a friend is always loyal — the word "always" doing enormous weight-bearing work in that short sentence. Not loyal when it is comfortable. Not loyal when the person is winning. Always. Including when loyalty is costly, inconvenient, or risky.

I think of the people in my own life who have demonstrated this kind of faithfulness — who stood with me in difficult seasons when standing with me offered them nothing in return. That kind of loyalty is one of the most Christ-like things one human being can offer another. Jesus, after all, demonstrated the ultimate loyalty — remaining faithful to us when we had nothing to offer Him, and when the cost was everything.

Are you that kind of loyal friend? Do the people in your life know that you will be with them in their worst moments, not just their best ones? Barzillai challenges us to examine our relationships and ask whether our loyalty has any real depth to it.

A Prayer for Today

Lord Jesus, You are the friend who is loyal at the cost of everything — who stayed with us all the way to the cross. Grow that same loyal love in me. Help me to be the kind of friend who shows up in the hard seasons, who does not calculate the cost of commitment before I offer it. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Three, Day Four

You Are Never Too Old

Psalm 92:14 (NLT)

|*Even in old age they will still produce fruit; they will remain vital and green.*

Barzillai was eighty years old when he provided for David's army and then walked to the Jordan River to escort the king home. He was old enough to stay home, to let younger people handle the work, to offer his sympathies from a safe distance. No one would have faulted him for it.

Instead, he made the journey to the Jordan. He blessed the king. He conducted himself with wisdom, grace, and dignity all the way to the end of the story. His age had not diminished his faithfulness — if anything, it had refined it.

Our culture has a complicated relationship with aging. We tend to see the later seasons of life as a time of declining usefulness, a winding down rather than a continuing forward. But Scripture paints a very different picture. Simeon and Anna were elderly when they recognized the infant Jesus in the Temple and proclaimed His significance to all who would hear. Moses was eighty years old when God called him to lead the Exodus. Caleb was eighty-five when he asked Joshua for the hardest territory in the Promised Land.

God does not retire His people. He may change the nature of the assignment. He may adjust the pace and the form of the service. But the calling to faithfulness, generosity, wisdom, and love does not come with an expiration date.

Whatever season of life you are in — and wherever you are on the arc from youth to old age — God has something for you to do. The question is not whether you are old enough or young enough. The question is whether you are willing. Barzillai, at eighty, was willing. Are you?

A Prayer for Today

Lord, thank You that You do not discard Your people as they age. Help me to embrace every season of life as an opportunity to serve You and bless others. Whether I am young or old, remind me that faithfulness is always in season, and that You have work for me to do right up until You call me home. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Three, Day Five

Hold Honor With an Open Hand

2 Samuel 19:36-37 (NLT)

Just to go across the Jordan River with the king is all the honor I need! Then let me return again to die in my own town, where my father and mother are buried. But here is your servant, my son Kimham. Let him go with my lord the king and receive whatever you want to give him.

When King David offered Barzillai a permanent place of honor at the royal court in Jerusalem — a position of comfort, prestige, and provision for the rest of his days — Barzillai declined. Not because the offer was ungenerous. It was an extraordinary gift. He declined because he knew himself well enough to know that it was not what God had for him in this season of his life.

There is a remarkable self-awareness in Barzillai's response. He did not romanticize his abilities or pretend he was younger than he was. He acknowledged honestly that the pleasures of court life would be largely lost on him at eighty — that food, music, and the stimulation of palace life were no longer the things that moved him. He knew his season. And he was at peace with it.

What is most striking is what he did with the honor David offered. He redirected it — to his son Kimham. He asked that the blessing intended for him be given to the next generation instead. He held the honor with such an open hand that he was able to pass it on without grief or grasping.

This kind of security — the security of a person who knows who they are before God and does not need the validation of a position or a title — is genuinely rare. Most of us find it much harder to decline honor than to decline hardship. But Barzillai shows us what it looks like to receive recognition graciously and then release it generously.

What honors, positions, or recognitions are you holding too tightly? Is there something God is asking you to pass along to someone else — to hold open-handed rather than clenching it close?

A Prayer for Today

Father, free me from the need to grasp at honor and recognition. Give me the settled security of a person who knows they are loved and valued by You — so completely that I can hold earthly honors loosely and pass blessings along to others without loss or grief. Teach me the open-handed life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Three, Day Six

Pass the Torch

2 Timothy 2:2 (NLT)

You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.

Barzillai's greatest act may not have been the provision he gave David at Mahanaim, remarkable as that was. It may have been the moment at the Jordan when he looked at his son Kimham and said, in effect: "The future belongs to you. Take the blessing I have earned and build on it."

This is the heartbeat of mentorship — not holding onto what we have accumulated, but actively transferring it to the generation that comes after us. Barzillai modeled something that does not come naturally to most of us: the willingness to step back so that someone else can step forward, even when we are still capable of occupying the space ourselves.

The Apostle Paul understood this deeply. His entire ministry strategy included raising up the next generation — Timothy, Titus, Epaphras, and others — so that the gospel would continue to spread long after he was gone. He did not simply work; he worked with others, investing in them so that the work would outlast him.

I think about the men and women in ministry and in the working world who poured into me over the years — who gave me opportunities before I felt fully ready, who trusted me with responsibility that stretched me, who spoke words of affirmation and correction that shaped who I became. They were doing what Barzillai did. They were passing the torch.

Who in your life needs you to do that for them? Who is ready for more responsibility, more trust, more investment from you? The torch you carry was given to you by someone else. Part of your calling is to pass it on.

A Prayer for Today

Lord, help me to think not only about what I am building, but about who I am building into. Show me the people around me who need the investment of my time, wisdom, and encouragement. Give me the generosity of spirit to pass the torch while I still have the strength to hold it high. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Three, Day Seven

Your Faithfulness Outlives You

1 Kings 2:7 (NLT)

Be kind to the sons of Barzillai of Gilead. Make them permanent guests at your table, for they took care of me when I fled from your brother Absalom.

On his deathbed, King David gave his son Solomon a list of things to remember and things to do. Among them was this: be kind to the sons of Barzillai. David was dying — and one of his last acts was to ensure that the legacy of a loyal friend would continue to be honored long after both of them were gone.

Barzillai had been dead for years by the time David spoke these words. Yet his faithfulness was so vivid in David's memory, so significant in the story of his reign, that it was still shaping decisions at the highest level of the kingdom. One faithful act — showing up at Mahanaim with food and supplies for a fugitive king — had rippled forward across a decade and into the next generation.

We tend to underestimate the lasting power of faithfulness. We think in terms of immediate results — what happened, who noticed, whether it made a difference we could see. But faithfulness has a way of outlasting our ability to track it. The kindness you extend today, the stand you take, the loyalty you demonstrate — these things echo forward in ways you will not fully know this side of eternity.

This is not a reason for pride. It is a reason for hope — and for continued faithfulness even when the immediate results are invisible. The God who remembered Barzillai's generosity and wove it into the story of Israel is the same God who sees your faithfulness today.

Live in a way that will still be blessing people when you are gone. Not for your legacy's sake, but for love's sake — for the sake of the God who calls us to faithful lives and promises that nothing done in His name is ever wasted.

A Prayer for Today

Father, I want to live in a way that blesses people long after I am gone — not for the sake of being remembered, but because I love You and I love the people You have placed in my life. Help me to be faithful in this season, trusting that You will carry the fruit of that faithfulness further than I can see. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Four

Ebed-Melech

Courage When Standing Alone

Three Truths to Carry Through This Book

1. God wants to use you.
2. The standard is faithfulness, not the amount of talent or skill.
3. You say the “Yes.” God determines the “When and Where.”

“For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.” — Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)

Jerusalem was under siege, the prophet Jeremiah had been thrown into a muddy cistern to die, and the powerful officials who put him there were satisfied with their work. In this moment of collective moral failure, one man acted — a foreign court official named Ebed-Melech, whose name simply means ‘servant of the king.’ He had no obvious reason to risk everything for a prophet in a pit. But he did it anyway. This week, we will explore what drove this remarkable man to stand alone — and what God did in response to his courage.

Week Four, Day One

God Sees You Where You Are

Jeremiah 38:7 (NLT)

| *But Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, an important court official, heard that Jeremiah was in the cistern.*

Ebed-Melech was far from home. An Ethiopian serving in the court of a Judean king, he was a foreigner in every sense — culturally, ethnically, and religiously distinct from the people around him. He occupied a position that carried its own social limitations. By the standards of his day, he was an outsider, a man on the margins of the circles that mattered.

And yet, at the precise moment when God needed someone to act, Ebed-Melech was exactly where God needed him to be. He was in the palace. He had access to the king. He heard what happened to Jeremiah. And his heart would not let him stay silent.

There is something profoundly encouraging about this. God did not reach into the inner circle of Jerusalem's power brokers to find His instrument. He used the man from Ethiopia — the one no one would have put on the list of likely heroes. God had placed Ebed-Melech exactly where He needed him, at exactly the right moment, for exactly this purpose.

You may feel, at times, like you are on the margins — in a position that seems peripheral, in a place that feels accidental, surrounded by people who seem more qualified or more connected than you. But the story of Ebed-Melech says something different. God knows exactly where you are. He placed you there. And He is fully capable of using the person in the unexpected position to do the most important work.

The question is not whether God can see you in your current circumstances. He can. The question is whether you are paying attention to what He might be asking you to do from right where you are.

A Prayer for Today

Lord, I thank You that You see me exactly where I am — not where I wish I were, not where I used to be, but here. Open my eyes to the opportunities and the needs around me in this place, and give me the courage to act when You show me what to do. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Four, Day Two

Placed Here for This Moment

Esther 4:14 (NLT)

| *Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?*

The words Mordecai spoke to Esther echo across the entire biblical narrative of God's providential placement of ordinary people in extraordinary situations. Esther was in the palace not by her own ambition but by a series of circumstances she had not orchestrated. And precisely because of where she was — as queen, with access to a king — she was the one person positioned to save her people.

Ebed-Melech's story has the same shape. He was in the palace court of King Zedekiah — not a position he had designed for himself, but one he occupied nonetheless. And on the day that Jerusalem's powerful officials threw the prophet Jeremiah into a cistern to die, Ebed-Melech was the one man in the right place, with the right access, and the right heart to do something about it.

He did not waste his position. He did not tell himself it was someone else's responsibility. He rushed from the palace to where the king was holding court and made his case for Jeremiah's life with urgency and clarity. His presence in the palace — which might have seemed merely a matter of circumstance — turned out to be a matter of divine appointment.

God's providence is not accidental. The job you hold, the neighborhood you live in, the relationships you have, the particular access and influence your position affords you — none of it is random. It is placement. God puts His people where He needs them, often long before the moment of need arrives.

Consider your own position today. Who do you have access to that others do not? What needs are visible to you that might be invisible to someone else? You may be exactly where God needs you to be — for just such a time as this.

A Prayer for Today

Father, help me to see my current position — my job, my relationships, my place in the community — not as accidental but as providential. Show me how You want to use the access and influence You have given me for Your purposes and for the good of others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Four, Day Three

A Track Record That Opens Doors

Luke 16:10 (NLT)

If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you won't be honest with greater responsibilities.

When Ebed-Melech approached King Zedekiah on behalf of Jeremiah, the king listened. In a court full of powerful advisors who wanted Jeremiah dead, a foreign eunuch walked up to the king in a public setting and told him that what had been done to the prophet was evil — and the king reversed course.

Why did Zedekiah listen to Ebed-Melech? The text does not spell it out, but the answer is implied by everything we know about how influence works in human relationships. Ebed-Melech had earned it. He had spent his time in the palace building a reputation for integrity, dependability, and trustworthiness. When he finally spoke up in a high-stakes moment, his words carried weight because his character had already established their credibility.

This is the quiet power of faithfulness in the everyday. No one becomes influential in a crisis moment without first becoming trustworthy in the ordinary ones. The person whose word carries weight in the room is the person who has consistently kept their word when nothing dramatic was at stake. The person whose courage is respected is the person who has demonstrated integrity in the small decisions that no one was watching.

Joseph understood this. He was faithful in Potiphar's house, faithful in prison, and when Pharaoh needed a man he could trust with the future of Egypt, Joseph's track record had already made the case. Nehemiah understood this. Years of faithful service as the king's cupbearer gave him the relational capital to ask for something extraordinary.

Your daily faithfulness is not just a spiritual discipline — it is an investment in the influence God may want you to exercise at a future moment you cannot yet see. Keep building the track record.

A Prayer for Today

Lord, help me to be faithful in the small things — in the ordinary responsibilities, the daily commitments, the choices no one else sees. Grow in me the kind of integrity that builds trust over time, so that when You call me to a significant moment, I am already prepared to be heard. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Four, Day Four

Speak Up When No One Else Will

Jeremiah 38:9 (NLT)

"My lord the king," he said, "these men have done a very evil thing in putting Jeremiah the prophet into the cistern. He will soon die of hunger, for almost all the bread in the city is gone."

There are moments in life when the right thing to do is absolutely clear — and absolutely costly. Everyone in King Zedekiah's court knew that throwing a man into a cistern without food or water was a death sentence. The powerful officials who gave the order knew it. The guards who carried it out knew it. Even the weak king who permitted it knew it. But no one spoke up.

No one except Ebed-Melech.

He did not mutter his objections to a trusted colleague in a private corner of the palace. He went to where the king was holding public court — the Benjamin Gate, a very public setting — and named what had been done plainly and without softening: these men have done a very evil thing. In a culture that prized indirect speech and political maneuvering, this was startlingly direct.

Courage often looks like this — not grand heroism, but the willingness to say in a public setting what everyone already knows is true but no one has been willing to say. It is the student who tells the teacher a classmate is being bullied. It is the employee who names a pattern of dishonesty in a meeting room full of silence. It is the friend who says the hard thing that everyone else is afraid to say.

Speaking up when no one else will is one of the most demanding forms of courage. It requires both the conviction that something is wrong and the willingness to bear the personal cost of naming it. Ebed-Melech had both. His willingness to speak saved a prophet's life. Your willingness to speak might save someone too — in ways you cannot predict.

A Prayer for Today

Lord, give me the courage to speak up when I see injustice or wrong — not with harshness or self-righteousness, but with the clear, calm directness of someone who knows what is true and is willing to say it. Let me not stay silent when my voice might make a difference. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Four, Day Five

Don't Let Your Past Limit Your Future

Isaiah 56:4-5 (NLT)

I will bless those eunuchs who keep my Sabbath days holy and who choose to do what pleases me and commit their lives to me. I will give them — within the walls of my house — a memorial and a name far greater than sons and daughters could give.

Ebed-Melech carried limitations that were not of his choosing. He was a foreigner in a land not his own. He was a eunuch — a status that, under the Mosaic law, excluded him from full membership in the congregation of Israel. He could not change his ethnicity. He could not undo whatever circumstances had led to his situation. His past and his condition were simply facts he lived with.

And yet he did not allow those facts to define the ceiling of his service to God. He could have concluded that a man in his position — outside the assembly, excluded by law from certain privileges of belonging — had no meaningful role to play in God's story. He could have kept his head down, done his job, and left Jeremiah to die in the cistern like everyone else.

He chose differently. He chose to act on what he knew was right, regardless of what his past or his position said about his standing. And God met him there — not just in the moment, but with a personal promise of protection and life delivered directly through the prophet Jeremiah himself.

The prophet Isaiah, writing a generation before these events, had already declared God's heart for people in Ebed-Melech's position. God's family has always been wider than the walls of any human institution. His grace reaches people that religious systems exclude. His call goes out to those who have been told they do not qualify.

What from your past are you allowing to tell you that you are not usable, not qualified, not worthy of a role in God's story? Bring it to the One whose grace is greater — and listen for what He says instead.

A Prayer for Today

Father, I thank You that Your grace is greater than my past, my failures, and the limitations placed on me by circumstance. Help me to stop disqualifying myself from what You are calling me to do. I choose today to act on what I know is right, and I trust You to meet me there. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Four, Day Six

Keep Your Eyes Open

Jeremiah 38:7 (NLT)

But Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, an important court official, heard that Jeremiah was in the cistern.

The story of Ebed-Melech begins with a single, simple act: he heard what had happened to Jeremiah. In a palace full of people, he was the one who paid attention. He was the one whose heart was tuned to what was happening around him — not just to his own responsibilities and interests, but to the circumstances of others.

This is more significant than it might appear. It would have been entirely possible for Ebed-Melech to spend that day absorbed in his own duties, his own concerns, his own small corner of palace life. Jeremiah's situation was none of his official business. No one had asked him to get involved. The powerful people around him were certainly not drawing attention to what they had done.

But Ebed-Melech had the kind of awareness that comes from a heart that is oriented outward — toward others, toward what God might be doing, toward the needs that exist just beyond the edges of personal convenience. He heard. He noticed. And then he acted.

This quality of attentiveness is something we can cultivate — or neglect. In a world full of noise and distraction, where our attention is constantly being claimed by screens and schedules and our own internal preoccupations, the discipline of paying attention to the people around us requires intentionality. It means beginning the day with a prayer that is as much outward as inward: Lord, what do You want me to notice today? Who needs what only I can offer from where I am?

Ebed-Melech's story began the moment he opened his ears and his heart to something beyond himself. Yours might too.

A Prayer for Today

Lord, open my eyes and my ears to the needs around me that I am prone to overlook. Give me a heart that is oriented outward — attuned to what You are doing and to the people who need what only I can offer from where You have placed me. Help me to notice, and then to act. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Four, Day Seven

God Is Faithful to Those Who Are Faithful

Jeremiah 39:17-18 (NLT)

"Because you trusted me, I will give you your life as a reward. I will rescue you and keep you safe. I, the Lord, have spoken!"

When Jerusalem finally fell to the Babylonians — as Jeremiah had prophesied it would — the destruction was catastrophic. King Zedekiah's sons were killed before his eyes. His advisors were executed. His household was taken captive. The city was burned. Almost everyone associated with the royal court suffered the consequences of years of unfaithfulness to God.

But Ebed-Melech had received a promise. Before the city fell, God had spoken through Jeremiah specifically to this Ethiopian eunuch — this outsider, this man whom the religious system of his day would have considered peripheral — with words of personal assurance: I will rescue you. I will keep you safe. You trusted me, and I will give you your life as a reward.

Just as Ebed-Melech had rescued Jeremiah from the cistern, God rescued Ebed-Melech from the destruction of Jerusalem. The symmetry is beautiful and intentional. God is not merely just — He is personal. He keeps track of those who trust Him, and He honors that trust in ways that are specific and meaningful.

Ebed-Melech did not take his courageous stand in order to receive a reward. He acted because it was right, because a prophet of God was going to die and he was the one person positioned to prevent it. But God, who sees every act of faithful courage, did not let it pass without notice — or without response.

This is the character of God. He is not a distant administrator distributing generic outcomes. He is a personal Father who sees His children, knows their names, notices their faithfulness, and honors it in ways uniquely suited to who they are. Be faithful today. God is keeping careful account.

A Prayer for Today

Lord, I am encouraged today by the reminder that You see every act of faithful courage — that nothing done in trust and obedience is overlooked or forgotten by You. Help me to be faithful not for the reward, but because I love You and I trust You. And I thank You that You are faithful to those who are faithful to You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Five

Manaen

Breaking the Cycle

Three Truths to Carry Through This Book

1. God wants to use you.
2. The standard is faithfulness, not the amount of talent or skill.
3. You say the “Yes.” God determines the “When and Where.”

“For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.” — Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)

A single verse in Acts 13 introduces us to Manaen — and in doing so, raises one of the most profound questions in human experience: How do two people, raised in identical circumstances with identical advantages, end up living completely different stories? Manaen grew up as the childhood companion of Herod Antipas — the man who beheaded John the Baptist and mocked Jesus at His trial. They shared the same table, the same tutors, the same access to wealth and power. Yet Manaen ended up as a prophet and teacher in the church that launched the gospel to the Gentile world. This week we will explore what made the difference — and what it means for us.

Week Five, Day One

Same Environment, Different Outcome

Acts 13:1 (NLT)

Among the prophets and teachers of the church at Antioch of Syria were Barnabas, Simeon (called "the black man"), Lucius (from Cyrene), Manaen (the childhood companion of King Herod Antipas), and Saul.

One verse. That is all the Bible gives us about Manaen — one sentence tucked into the opening of Acts 13. But within that single sentence is one of the most compelling contrasts in all of Scripture. Manaen grew up as the childhood companion of Herod Antipas — the man who beheaded John the Baptist, mocked Jesus at His trial, and clamored for power his entire life. Same upbringing. Same tutors. Same table. Same access to wealth, education, and influence. And yet Manaen ended up as a prophet and teacher in the church that launched the first great missionary journey to the Gentile world.

How does that happen? How do two people, raised in the same environment with the same advantages, end up living such radically different stories?

The answer is not found in their circumstances. It is found in their hearts. Antipas used his position to accumulate power, indulge his appetites, and silence the voices — including God's — that challenged him. Manaen surrendered his position, joined a persecuted movement, and gave his life to helping others find the One he had found.

Environment shapes us. There is no question about that. The homes we grew up in, the values we were taught or denied, the wounds and the advantages of our early years — these things leave marks. But they do not determine our destiny. The condition of the heart matters more than the circumstances of the upbringing.

What environment are you tempted to blame for the person you have become? And what might it look like to, like Manaen, choose a different path — regardless of where you started?

A Prayer for Today

Lord, I thank You that my upbringing does not have to define my future. Where I have used my background as an excuse for the person I have become, forgive me and help me to choose differently. I want to be someone like Manaen — whose story is defined not by where they started but by where You took them. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Five, Day Two

The Condition of the Heart

1 Samuel 16:7 (NLT)

But the Lord said to Samuel, "Don't judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The Lord doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

Herod Antipas had everything the world values. Royal lineage. A Roman education. Wealth. Political power. Connections at the highest levels of the empire. If you had looked at Antipas and Manaen from the outside during their years together in Rome, you might have struggled to see meaningful difference between them. They had the same advantages, the same education, the same social world.

But God, who looks at the heart, would have seen something very different.

Manaen's heart was oriented toward truth. Perhaps the Essene faith of his grandparents had planted seeds — a looking for the Messiah, a hunger for something more than the glittering emptiness of Roman court life. Perhaps there were moments, growing up alongside Antipas, when Manaen observed the corrosive effects of power and appetite and something in him recoiled. We do not know the details. We only know the outcome: at some point, Manaen encountered the gospel and gave his life to Jesus.

Antipas, given the same opportunity, chose differently. He met John the Baptist — and had him killed. He stood face to face with Jesus of Nazareth — and mocked Him. The information was available. The opportunity was present. But the heart was closed.

The heart is not a fixed thing. It can be softened or hardened, opened or closed, through the choices we make and the voices we listen to over time. What is the condition of your heart today? Is it moving toward Jesus — hungry, open, responsive? Or is it gradually closing, becoming more resistant to the voice of God?

A Prayer for Today

Lord, examine my heart today and show me honestly what You find there. Where it has grown hard or cold or resistant to Your voice, soften it. Cultivate in me the kind of heart that Manaen had — open to You, hungry for truth, willing to follow wherever You lead. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Five, Day Three

What Your Parents Plant

Proverbs 22:6 (NLT)

Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it.

Manaen's family background is significant. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, Manaen was the grandson of an Essene prophet named Menachem — a man who had predicted to a young Herod the Great that he would become the king of the Jews. When the prediction came true, Herod rewarded Menachem's family by having the young Manaen raised as the childhood companion of his son Antipas.

So Manaen grew up in two worlds simultaneously. In one world, he had access to all the wealth, power, and sophistication of the Herodian court. In another — in the tradition of his family, in the faith of his grandparents — he had been planted in a soil that was looking for the Messiah.

That family planting mattered. The seeds his grandparents and parents had sown — a reverence for God, a hunger for the coming One, a framework for understanding what truly matters — did not disappear when Manaen moved into the palace. They lay dormant, perhaps, through years of Roman education and royal privilege. But when the gospel came, those seeds found their moment.

This is one of the most important things a parent or grandparent can do — plant seeds of faith that may not bloom in your lifetime. You may not see the fruit. You may wonder whether anything took root. But the Word of God does not return empty, and the prayers you pray over your children and grandchildren are not wasted.

If you have children or grandchildren in your life, invest in them spiritually. Tell them the stories of God's faithfulness. Pray with them and for them. You are planting something that may outlast you — and change the world.

A Prayer for Today

Father, I thank You for the people who planted seeds of faith in my life. Help me to be that kind of planter for the next generation — faithful, patient, and trusting that You will bring the harvest in Your own time. And for any seeds I have planted that I cannot yet see bearing fruit, I trust them to Your care. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Five, Day Four

The Courage to Be Different

Romans 12:2 (NLT)

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

Consider the social pressure Manaen must have faced when he chose to follow Jesus. He had grown up in Herod's household — a world defined by Roman power, political calculation, and the pursuit of wealth and influence. His friends, his social circle, his entire network of relationships would have been shaped by that world.

And then he became a follower of Jesus — a member of a persecuted sect that the authorities were actively trying to suppress. He surrendered his royal privilege and joined a movement of ordinary people from all walks of life. He became, as Acts describes him, a prophet and teacher in a church that included a man called 'the black man,' a North African from Cyrene, a Jew from Cyprus, and a former persecutor of Christians.

This was not a socially advantageous move. It was an act of courageous nonconformity — choosing a different path from the one his background and his peer group had laid out for him.

The pressure to conform to the world around us is real and persistent. It does not usually come in dramatic form — more often it is subtle, gradual, and social. The drift away from distinctly Christian values happens slowly, through a thousand small accommodations, until we look up one day and realize we are living more like Antipas than Manaen.

The antidote Paul gives us in Romans 12 is transformation — not by willpower, but by the renewing of the mind. Letting God reshape the way we think, so that what we value and what we choose gradually becomes more aligned with His purposes than with the world's expectations. That is the path Manaen chose. It is available to each of us.

A Prayer for Today

Lord, give me the courage to be different from the world around me — not for the sake of being distinctive, but because I want to be genuinely transformed by You. Renew my mind. Reshape my values. Help me to follow You even when the path You call me to diverges from the one everyone else seems to be taking. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Five, Day Five

God Redeems Your Background

Romans 8:28 (NLT)

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.

Manaen's unusual background — raised in the Herodian court, educated in Rome, steeped in the culture of power and empire — was not wasted when he became a follower of Jesus. God redeemed it.

Scholars believe that Luke, the author of both his gospel and the book of Acts, may have used Manaen as one of his primary sources for the detailed inside knowledge of the Herod household that appears throughout his writings. If that is the case, then Manaen's years at Herod's table — which might have looked, from one angle, like time spent in a morally compromised environment — became the very source material for portions of the New Testament.

God wastes nothing. The hard years, the wrong turns, the environments you would not have chosen, the experiences that shaped you in ways you are still processing — none of it is disqualifying. In the hands of a redemptive God, all of it becomes material.

I spent thirty-four years in the oil refining industry, and when I entered ministry, I carried with me a way of thinking about complex systems, problem-solving, and organizational dynamics that proved genuinely useful in ways I had not anticipated. The years I thought of as my "other life" turned out to be preparation for the life I was moving into.

What experiences from your past — including the difficult ones — might God want to redeem for His purposes? Bring them to Him with open hands. He is the God who causes all things to work together for good.

A Prayer for Today

Father, I thank You that You waste nothing — not my failures, not my difficult seasons, not the environments I would not have chosen. Take everything from my past and redeem it for Your purposes. Help me to see my background not as baggage but as preparation — and show me how to use it for Your glory. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Five, Day Six

Royal Privilege Surrendered

Philippians 3:7-8 (NLT)

I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

Paul's words in Philippians 3 could have been written by Manaen. Paul had extraordinary credentials — education under Gamaliel, a Pharisee of Pharisees, zealous beyond his peers, blameless according to the law. He had every reason, by the standards of his world, to be proud of his position and protective of his privileges.

And he counted it all as loss compared to knowing Christ.

Manaen made the same calculation. He had grown up with access to royal power, Roman education, and the social networks of the Herodian court. He could have spent his life leveraging those advantages for personal gain — as his childhood companion Antipas did. Instead, he surrendered his royal privilege and became a servant of a crucified Galilean carpenter.

This is the paradox at the heart of the gospel: the things the world considers most valuable — power, position, wealth, prestige — are precisely the things that most easily become obstacles to the kingdom of God. Not because they are inherently evil, but because they are so easily mistaken for the point, when they are only ever instruments.

Manaen saw through the glitter of the Herodian world to something more real, more lasting, more worth having. What are you holding onto that might need to be surrendered? What privilege or position might God be asking you to hold more loosely — not to waste it, but to make it truly available to Him?

A Prayer for Today

Lord Jesus, help me to see clearly what is truly valuable and what is merely glittering. Where I am clinging to privilege, position, or comfort in ways that are limiting my availability to You, give me the grace to surrender those things and find in You something infinitely better. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Five, Day Seven

God Positions You for Purpose

Acts 13:2-3 (NLT)

One day as these men were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Appoint Barnabas and Saul for the special work to which I have called them." So after more fasting and prayer, the men laid their hands on them and sent them on their way.

The church at Antioch was a remarkable community. It was racially and culturally diverse in ways that were almost unheard of in the ancient world — Jews and Gentiles, Africans and Asians, former slaves and former royalty, all worshipping together under the leadership of a Spirit-filled team that included Manaen.

And it was from this community — this diverse, Spirit-filled, fasting-and-praying community — that the first great missionary journey to the Gentile world was launched. Barnabas and Saul were sent out from Antioch, setting in motion a movement that would carry the gospel from Asia Minor to Europe and eventually to the ends of the earth.

Manaen was part of that. His years in Herod's court had given him a unique understanding of both Jewish and Gentile culture — knowledge that would have been invaluable in a church trying to navigate the complex terrain of a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural congregation. God had positioned him, through the unlikely path of a royal household and a Roman education, to serve at exactly the point in history where that background was most needed.

Your path to where you are today may have seemed winding, even random. The different seasons, the varied experiences, the unlikely combinations of skills and knowledge you carry — these are not accidents. God has been positioning you.

The question is not whether God has a purpose for your life. He does. The question is whether you are willing to offer all of who you are — including the parts of your story you did not choose — to the One who has been shaping it all along.

A Prayer for Today

Father, I trust that You have been positioning me — through every season, every experience, every unlikely turn of my story — for purposes I am still discovering. Help me to offer all of who I am, including my background and my history, to Your service. Use me where You have placed me, for Your glory. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Six

Tychicus

The Dependable One

Three Truths to Carry Through This Book

1. God wants to use you.
2. The standard is faithfulness, not the amount of talent or skill.
3. You say the “Yes.” God determines the “When and Where.”

“For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.” — Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)

He is not the most famous name in Paul’s circle, and he will never be the subject of a blockbuster film. Tychicus did not preach the great sermons, plant the famous churches, or perform the dramatic miracles. What he did, consistently and without fanfare, was show up. He traveled, delivered, encouraged, filled in, and returned — again and again, over the course of Paul’s entire ministry. He was the kind of person Paul could simply send, knowing the mission would be completed. This week, we will discover why that kind of dependability may be one of the most extraordinary gifts a person can offer.

Week Six, Day One

The Ministry of Showing Up

Ephesians 6:21-22 (NLT)

Tychicus will give you a full report about what I am doing and how I am getting along. He is a beloved brother and faithful helper in the Lord's work. I have sent him to you for this very purpose — to let you know how we are doing and to encourage you.

Tychicus is not a name that appears in most conversations about the heroes of the New Testament. He did not write any of the letters. He did not plant any of the churches. He did not preach the sermon at Pentecost or survive a shipwreck or raise the dead. He was not flashy, not famous, not the kind of person around whom legends accumulate.

He was the kind of person Paul could always count on to show up.

Five times Tychicus is mentioned in the New Testament, and every single time, he is doing something practical and essential for the advance of the gospel — traveling with Paul, delivering letters to churches, filling in for other ministers so they could be deployed elsewhere, enabling Timothy to come to Rome when Paul needed him most. He was the infrastructure of Paul's ministry, the dependable backbone that kept everything moving.

Do not underestimate the ministry of showing up. In every community, in every church, in every organization that does anything meaningful, there are people like Tychicus — who are simply, consistently, reliably present. Who do what they say they will do. Who arrive when they are expected and stay until the work is finished. Who do not need their name on the program to find meaning in their service.

These people are not ordinary. They are extraordinary — because the discipline of consistent, faithful presence is one of the rarest and most valuable things in the world. Is that you? Could it be?

A Prayer for Today

Lord, help me to be a person who simply shows up — who is reliably present, consistently faithful, and genuinely useful to the people around me. Free me from the need for recognition, and help me to find deep satisfaction in the faithful work that no one else sees. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Six, Day Two

Don't Be a Demas

2 Timothy 4:10 (NLT)

Demas has deserted me because he loves the things of this life and has gone to Thessalonica.

Paul mentions Demas in the same breath as Tychicus in his final letter — but as a cautionary contrast. Demas had been a co-worker, listed alongside Mark, Luke, and Aristarchus as a trusted companion. He was present in the good seasons. He was there when the ministry was moving forward, when the churches were growing, when being associated with Paul carried a sense of significance and momentum.

But when Paul was in his darkest hour — imprisoned in the Mamertine dungeon, facing likely execution — Demas was gone. He loved the things of this life, Paul says, with a sadness that is palpable across the centuries. The cost had become too high, and Demas chose comfort over commitment.

Tychicus, by contrast, was still there. Still deployable. Still trustworthy. Still willing to make the journey, carry the letter, fill the gap. When Paul needed someone to go to Ephesus so that Timothy could come to Rome, it was Tychicus who got the call — because Tychicus had never given Paul a reason to doubt him.

The question Demas and Tychicus together force us to ask is uncomfortably direct: When the cost of faithfulness rises, do I stay or do I go? It is easy to be committed to God, to a church, to a ministry, to a person — when commitment is easy. The test of real faithfulness is what we do when staying becomes costly.

We all have a Demas moment — a point at which the things of this life compete seriously with our commitment to God. How we respond in that moment reveals what we actually love most.

A Prayer for Today

Lord, I do not want to be a Demas — someone who is present in the good seasons and absent in the hard ones. Strengthen my commitment to You and to the people You have placed in my life so that it does not waver when the cost rises. Help me to be a Tychicus, not a Demas. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Six, Day Three

The Power of Encouragement

Colossians 4:7-8 (NLT)

Tychicus will give you a full report about how I am getting along. He is a beloved brother and faithful helper who serves with me in the Lord's work. I have sent him to you for this very purpose — to let you know how we are doing and to encourage you.

Paul uses nearly identical language about Tychicus in both his letter to the Ephesians and his letter to the Colossians: he is sending Tychicus for this very purpose — to encourage them. This was not incidental to Tychicus's mission. It was the mission. Paul valued the gift of encouragement so highly that he sent one of his most trusted companions on a long journey specifically to deliver it in person.

Encouragement is not a soft skill or a secondary ministry. It is one of the listed gifts of the Holy Spirit, and its absence is felt in ways that are immediately measurable — in discouragement, in dropout, in the slow erosion of confidence that happens when people feel unseen and unsupported.

What made Tychicus an effective encourager was not a personality type or a natural disposition toward optimism. It was the combination of genuine relationship, faithful presence, and truthful care. He knew the people he was encouraging. He had been with Paul through the difficult seasons and could speak honestly about what was happening. His encouragement was not hollow — it was grounded in real knowledge and real faithfulness.

This is what authentic encouragement looks like. Not empty affirmation, not the social lubricant of vague positivity, but the deeply personal word spoken by someone who knows you and has earned the right to be heard. It requires the investment of relationship and the discipline of paying attention.

Who in your life right now needs a word of genuine encouragement? Not a text emoji, but a real, personal, specific word from someone who sees them. Could you be that person this week?

A Prayer for Today

Lord, help me to be a genuine encourager — someone whose words carry weight because they are rooted in real relationship and honest care. Show me who around me is discouraged or unseen, and give me the right words to speak life into them this week. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Six, Day Four

Fill the Gap

Titus 3:12 (NLT)

I am planning to send either Artemas or Tychicus to you. As soon as one of them arrives, do your best to meet me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to stay there for the winter.

One of the most distinctive things about Tychicus's ministry is the variety of ways he was useful. He delivered letters. He traveled with Paul. He escorted Onesimus back to Philemon. He filled in for Titus in Crete so that Titus could come to Paul. He was sent to Ephesus to free up Timothy. He is, in every instance we encounter him, serving in whatever capacity the moment requires.

Tychicus did not seem to have a fixed job description. He had a disposition — a willingness to fill whatever gap needed to be filled, to serve in whatever capacity was most needed, to deploy where the mission required rather than where he was most comfortable or most recognized.

In every church, every ministry, every organization, there are gaps. Things that need to be done that no one has claimed. Roles that are vacant, needs that are unmet, moments that call for someone to step up without being asked. Most of us walk past those gaps waiting for someone else to fill them, or waiting to be asked, or waiting for a role that fits our preferred description.

Tychicus walked toward the gaps. He saw something that needed doing and did it. He received a request and fulfilled it. He was sent somewhere and went. This simplicity — the willingness to just fill the gap — is rarer and more valuable than almost any specialized skill.

Where is there a gap in your world right now that you could fill? Not the gap you wish existed, not the one that would be most impressive to fill — but the one that is simply there, waiting for someone willing?

A Prayer for Today

Lord, give me the eyes to see the gaps around me and the willingness to fill them without waiting to be asked. Free me from the need to serve only in ways that suit my preferences or earn recognition. Help me to be as useful and as flexible in Your hands as Tychicus was in Paul's. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Six, Day Five

Faithful in the Small Things

Luke 16:10 (NLT)

If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you won't be honest with greater responsibilities.

There is something quietly significant about the fact that Paul trusted Tychicus with some of the most important correspondence of his ministry. The letters to the Ephesians, the Colossians, and Philemon — three of Paul's prison epistles, texts that have shaped Christian theology and practice for two thousand years — were delivered by Tychicus. He was trusted with letters that would be read aloud to entire congregations and preserved as authoritative Scripture.

That level of trust is not given to someone whose track record is unreliable. Paul picked Tychicus for this assignment because Tychicus had already demonstrated, in smaller things, that he was the kind of person who could be trusted with larger ones. He had traveled faithfully. He had served consistently. He had shown up reliably in season after season of ministry.

Jesus's principle in Luke 16 is simply a description of how trust works. It is not built in a single impressive moment. It is accumulated through a long series of ordinary moments — kept promises, completed tasks, reliable follow-through. The person who is trusted with significant responsibility has almost always first proven themselves trustworthy with insignificant responsibility.

This should change the way we think about the small, unremarkable tasks in front of us. The errand that seems beneath us. The commitment that no one will notice if we quietly let slide. The follow-through that requires more effort than the original task seemed to warrant. These are not interruptions to the important work. They are the important work — because they are what faithfulness is built from.

Do the small things well. The large things will follow.

A Prayer for Today

Father, help me to take seriously the small responsibilities in front of me today. Let me not despise them or treat them carelessly, but do them with the same integrity and care I would bring to something more visible or more significant. Build in me, one faithful day at a time, a track record worthy of Your trust. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Six, Day Six

Dependability Multiplies Ministry

2 Timothy 4:12 (NLT)

I sent Tychicus to Ephesus.

Five words. In one of Paul's most urgent letters — written from death row, full of final instructions and farewell — Paul mentions Tychicus in five words. He does not feel the need to explain who Tychicus is or why he was sent. The readers already know. Tychicus is simply the person Paul sends when something important needs to be done.

In this case, Paul sent Tychicus to Ephesus so that Timothy — who was serving there — could be freed to come to Rome, where Paul was facing execution and needed his young protégé. Tychicus's willingness to go to Ephesus made Timothy's journey to Rome possible. His faithfulness multiplied the ministry of everyone around him.

This is the hidden mathematics of dependability. When you are the kind of person who can simply be sent — trusted to arrive, to serve, to fill the role — you make other people's ministries possible. You free up those who are needed elsewhere. You become a force multiplier in the kingdom of God, not because of any spectacular gift, but because of the simple power of being reliably present.

I have seen this dynamic in both the corporate world and in ministry. The most effective organizations are not built around a few superstars — they are built around a deeper bench of reliable, faithful people who do their work consistently, free up others to do theirs, and keep the whole enterprise moving forward. Tychicus was that person for Paul. Paul could focus on writing, on prayer, on the big-picture work of the gospel because Tychicus was handling the things that needed handling.

Who is your faithfulness freeing up? Whose ministry are you making possible by being reliably present in your own?

A Prayer for Today

Lord, help me to see that my faithfulness in my role makes other people's faithfulness in their roles possible. I want to be the kind of person who multiplies ministry by being reliably present — who frees others up by being trustworthy. Use my faithfulness to advance something larger than I can see. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Six, Day Seven

Serving Without the Spotlight

Colossians 3:23-24 (NLT)

Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. Remember that the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward, and that the Master you are serving is Christ.

If Tychicus had been motivated by recognition, he would have quit early. He carried letters he did not write, to churches he had not planted, on behalf of a ministry whose public face was someone else. He traveled long, dangerous roads to deliver messages that would be read in his presence and then filed away under Paul's name. He filled roles vacated by other people, served in capacities defined by other people's needs, and slipped in and out of the narrative of Acts and Paul's letters without a single story of his own.

And yet Paul called him a beloved brother, a faithful helper, a fellow servant in the Lord's work. The commendation was not public or spectacular. It was personal, genuine, and lasting — because it came from someone who had watched Tychicus serve without seeking the spotlight for years.

Colossians 3 gives us the motivational key to this kind of service: working as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. When your primary audience is God rather than the people around you, the absence of recognition stops being a problem. God sees every journey taken in His name, every letter delivered, every gap filled, every moment of faithful presence that no one else will ever know about.

The vast majority of kingdom work is done in exactly this way — invisibly, reliably, without applause. It is done by people who have settled something in their hearts about who they are serving and why. They are not performing for an audience. They are faithful to a Person.

Who are you ultimately working for? The answer to that question will determine whether the absence of recognition discourages you — or simply does not matter.

A Prayer for Today

Lord Jesus, help me to fix my eyes on You as the audience for my service — so that whether I am seen or unseen, recognized or overlooked, I am serving with the same faithfulness and the same joy. I want to work for You, not for the approval of people. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Seven
Epaphroditus
Risking It All for God

Three Truths to Carry Through This Book

1. God wants to use you.
2. The standard is faithfulness, not the amount of talent or skill.
3. You say the “Yes.” God determines the “When and Where.”

“For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.” — Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)

The church in Philippi wanted to help Paul. Their spiritual father was in a Roman prison a thousand miles away, and they were determined to reach him. So they did something that required a volunteer — someone willing to make a dangerous, exhausting journey carrying a precious cargo to a man in chains. Epaphroditus said yes. He nearly died doing it. And in the few verses Paul devotes to him in his letter to the Philippians, we see a portrait of what it means to be genuinely all-in for Jesus — not in emotion or intention, but in costly, faithful action.

Week Seven, Day One

All In

Philippians 2:30 (NLT)

For he risked his life for the work of Christ, and he was at the point of death while doing for me what you couldn't do from far away.

Paul uses three descriptions for Epaphroditus that, taken together, paint a portrait of total commitment: true brother, fellow worker, fellow soldier. Paul applied these three designations to no one else in all of his letters. They represent the full spectrum of what it means to be all-in for Jesus — the relational bond of family, the shared labor of partnership, and the sacrificial courage of combat.

Epaphroditus earned all three. He was entrusted by the church in Philippi to make an eight-hundred-to-a-thousand-mile journey to deliver provisions to Paul in a Roman prison. Somewhere on that journey — or in Rome itself — he fell desperately, nearly fatally ill. And yet he completed his mission. He delivered what he carried. He did for Paul what the Philippians could not do from a distance.

This is what all-in looks like when it costs something real. Not the emotional enthusiasm of a good Sunday morning, but the steady, press-through-the-hardship commitment of someone who has decided that the mission matters more than personal comfort or safety. Epaphroditus did not turn back when he became ill. He did not decide the risk was too great. He kept going.

The Christian life calls us to this kind of commitment. Not recklessness — but a genuine willingness to accept cost and inconvenience and difficulty in the service of something that matters eternally. The question Epaphroditus asks each of us is simple and uncomfortable: Are you all in? Not in word, not in intention, but in the actual choices you make when following Jesus becomes costly?

All-in is not a feeling. It is a decision, made in advance, that gets tested in the details of daily life.

A Prayer for Today

Lord, I want to be genuinely all-in for You — not just in my intentions but in my actual choices when following You costs something. Where I have been holding back, give me the courage of Epaphroditus. I give You all of me today, not just the parts that are comfortable to surrender. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Seven, Day Two

Who Sent You?

Philippians 4:18 (NLT)

At the moment I have all I need — and more! I am generously supplied with the gifts you sent me with Epaphroditus. They are a sweet-smelling sacrifice that is acceptable and pleasing to God.

Epaphroditus did not arrive in Rome with his own agenda. He came as a representative — the messenger and minister of the church in Philippi, carrying not just provisions but the love, the faith, and the sacrifice of an entire congregation. Paul's description of the gift as a sweet-smelling sacrifice to God is not just gratitude; it is theology. The Philippians' generosity, carried by Epaphroditus's courage, was an act of worship.

Behind every faithful servant there is usually a community of people whose prayers, resources, and encouragement make the mission possible. Epaphroditus could not have made that journey without the Philippians' provision. The Philippians' generosity could not have reached Paul without Epaphroditus's willingness to go. The mission required both.

This should change the way we think about our role in the kingdom of God. Not everyone is called to make the thousand-mile journey. But everyone is called to participate in the mission — whether by going, by giving, by praying, or by sending. The Philippians' gift was as much a part of God's provision for Paul as Epaphroditus's journey.

I think about the people who have supported my ministry over the years — who prayed faithfully, gave generously, encouraged consistently. They may never know the specific ways their faithfulness made a difference. But God does. Every prayer, every gift, every word of support is a sweet-smelling sacrifice, acceptable and pleasing to Him.

Who are you sending? Who are you supporting? Your generosity and your prayers may be the wind beneath someone else's wings today.

A Prayer for Today

Father, thank You for the community of faith that makes individual ministry possible. Help me to be a generous sender as well as a willing goer — to pray faithfully, give generously, and support the people You have placed in my life who are on the front lines of Your mission. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Seven, Day Three

Trustworthy With the Precious Things

Luke 16:11 (NLT)

And if you are untrustworthy about worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches of heaven?

The church in Philippi entrusted Epaphroditus with a significant responsibility. He was carrying physical provisions — which represented real sacrifice from a congregation that was not wealthy — on an eight-hundred-to-a-thousand-mile journey to a man in a Roman prison. Every mile of that journey was an opportunity for the cargo to be lost, diverted, or abandoned.

Epaphroditus was chosen for this mission because he had already proven, in the smaller things of church life in Philippi, that he was a person who could be trusted. When the Philippians put a precious gift in his hands and pointed him toward Rome, they were confident it would arrive.

Trustworthiness is not a trait that appears suddenly in high-stakes moments. It is built in the accumulation of low-stakes moments — the commitment kept when no one was watching, the resource managed carefully when cutting a corner would have been easy, the task completed faithfully when an excuse would have been accepted.

In my years working in the refining industry, I observed that the people given the most significant responsibilities were almost never the most talented people. They were the most trustworthy ones — the ones whose past behavior gave you confidence that what they said would happen, would happen. Trust is earned slowly and spent quickly, and the people who understood that were the ones given the most important work.

God operates by the same principle. Are you building the track record that would lead Him to say: this one I can trust with the precious things?

A Prayer for Today

Lord, I want to be genuinely trustworthy — in the small things and the large ones, when someone is watching and when no one is. Build in me the kind of faithfulness that earns trust over time, so that You and the people around me can place precious things in my hands with confidence. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Seven, Day Four

God Sees Your Need

Philippians 4:19 (NLT)

And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.

Paul was in a Roman prison, a thousand miles from the church that loved him most, with no income and no immediate means of providing for his own needs. He could not send for help. He could not see who might be moved to respond. By every external measure, his situation was one of profound vulnerability and dependence.

And then Epaphroditus arrived from Philippi.

Paul did not orchestrate this. He had not sent a request. The Philippians, moved by the Holy Spirit, had discerned his need from a distance and sent one of their own to meet it. What looks, from one angle, like an act of human generosity is, from another angle, the provision of God — working through the willing hearts and open hands of an ordinary church in Macedonia.

This is how God usually provides. Not through miraculous intervention from outside the human story, but through the faithfulness and generosity of ordinary people who are paying attention and responding to what they sense from the Spirit. Epaphroditus was God's provision for Paul. The Philippians were God's provision for Paul. And Paul's declaration — that God will supply all your needs from His glorious riches — was not a theological abstraction. It was a testimony born from the experience of watching God provide through exactly this kind of human faithfulness.

God sees your need today. He may already be moving in the heart of someone in your life to respond. And He may be calling you to be the answer to someone else's need that you have not yet noticed.

A Prayer for Today

Father, thank You that You see my needs and that You are already at work providing for them — often through the faithful generosity of people around me. Help me to trust Your provision and to be alert to the ways You are calling me to be Your provision in someone else's life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Seven, Day Five

What You Used to Be Is Not Who You Are Now

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NLT)

| *This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!*

Epaphroditus's name was a daily reminder of who he used to be. Epaphroditus is a Greek name meaning "devoted to Aphrodite" — the goddess of love and fertility. Every time someone called his name, they were, in a sense, invoking his pagan past. He could not change his name. He could not escape the reminder.

But he could choose what that reminder meant to him. And apparently, rather than carrying it as a burden or a source of shame, Epaphroditus allowed it to fuel his devotion to the One who had changed his life. His name, once an expression of loyalty to a false god, now described someone who was devoted — body, soul, and strength — to the living God.

This is the transforming power of the gospel. It does not erase our history. It redeems it. The same name, the same past, the same person — but now belonging to Christ, living for a different purpose, oriented toward a different end. The old life is gone. A new life has begun.

Many of us carry names — not literal ones, but labels, associations, histories — that feel like they define us. The failure that everyone knows about. The reputation that preceded us into this community. The patterns we struggled with before we came to faith. The gospel says something different about these things. They are not your identity. They are your history. And in Christ, your history is being rewritten.

What you used to be is real. But it is not who you are now. Let Epaphroditus remind you of that today.

A Prayer for Today

Lord Jesus, thank You that Your grace does not just forgive my past — it transforms my future. Help me to live fully in the new identity You have given me, not dragged back by the old labels or old patterns that want to define me. I am Yours, and that is who I am now. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Seven, Day Six

Generosity That Moves the Gospel Forward

2 Corinthians 9:7 (NLT)

You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. For God loves a person who gives cheerfully.

The generosity of the Philippian church was not reluctant or obligatory. They had given to Paul on multiple occasions — when he was in Thessalonica, when he was in Corinth, and now in Rome. They gave consistently, sacrificially, and apparently with joy. Their generosity was a spiritual discipline that had become a spiritual culture.

And that generosity, carried by Epaphroditus across nearly a thousand miles, had real consequences. It supplied Paul's physical needs at a critical moment. It enabled him to continue his ministry while imprisoned. It was the material fuel behind some of the most significant letters in all of Christian history — Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon — documents written during the very imprisonment that the Philippians' gifts helped Paul endure.

We do not always see the downstream consequences of our generosity. The gift given to support a missionary family may one day produce fruit in a community we will never visit. The tithe offered faithfully may fund a program that leads a teenager to faith. The financial sacrifice that felt significant in the moment may be a link in a chain that stretches further than we can imagine.

This is why Paul connects generosity to God's own character — God loves a cheerful giver. Generosity is not primarily a financial transaction. It is a participation in the character of God, who gave His own Son, who provides for His people through the open hands of His children.

Where is God calling you to give — of your time, your treasure, your skill — in ways that might move the gospel forward in ways you cannot yet see?

A Prayer for Today

Father, make me a genuinely generous person — not giving out of obligation or pressure, but with the open-handed joy of someone who has received so much that giving feels natural. Show me where my generosity today might be the link that carries Your gospel further than I can see. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Seven, Day Seven

A Sweet-Smelling Sacrifice

Philippians 2:17 (NLT)

But I will rejoice even if I lose my life, pouring it out like a liquid offering to God, just like your faithful service is an offering to God.

Paul uses the language of worship to describe what Epaphroditus did. The provisions delivered, the journey completed, the illness endured and survived — all of it was a sweet-smelling sacrifice, acceptable and pleasing to God. Epaphroditus's service was not merely logistical. It was liturgical. It was an act of worship offered through the medium of faithful, costly action.

This reframes everything we do for God. The meeting you stay to help clean up after. The meal you cook for a grieving family. The hour you spend listening to someone who has no one else to talk to. The journey you make — whether across a city or across an ocean — to bring help or hope to someone in need. All of it, offered in faith and love, rises before God as worship.

We tend to draw a sharp line between the sacred and the secular — between what we do in church and what we do in the rest of our lives. Paul and Epaphroditus collapse that distinction. When a man travels a thousand miles through danger and illness to bring provision to a suffering friend, God receives it as an offering. When a church sacrifices financially to support someone they love, God receives it as worship.

Your life — all of it, not just the Sunday parts — is an offering. The question is what kind of offering it is. Is it given freely, cheerfully, with the abandon of someone who holds their life loosely? Or is it given reluctantly, with one hand on the gift and one eye on what it costs?

Epaphroditus gave freely. The result was a sweet-smelling sacrifice that still speaks, two thousand years later, of what it looks like to pour yourself out for the sake of Christ.

A Prayer for Today

Lord, I want my life to be a sweet-smelling offering to You — not just the parts I set aside for 'ministry,' but all of it. Help me to see every faithful act, every sacrifice made in love, every ordinary moment of service as an act of worship. I pour out my life before You today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Eight

Onesiphorus

The Ministry of Presence

Three Truths to Carry Through This Book

1. God wants to use you.
2. The standard is faithfulness, not the amount of talent or skill.
3. You say the “Yes.” God determines the “When and Where.”

“For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.” — Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)

Paul’s second imprisonment in Rome was nothing like his first. The Mamertine dungeon was dark, underground, and airless — a place people avoided, not visited. Almost everyone had deserted Paul. The ones he had trusted, the ones who had promised their support, had drifted away when the cost became too high. In that darkness, one man sought him out. Onesiphorus searched hard for Paul until he found him — and then he stayed. This week, we will explore the extraordinary power of the most ordinary gift one person can give another: simply being present.

Week Eight, Day One

When Everyone Else Left

2 Timothy 1:15-16 (NIV)

You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes. May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains.

Paul's words carry the weight of profound loneliness. Everyone in the province of Asia had deserted him. He names two men — Phygelus and Hermogenes — who had once been trusted companions and were now gone. The second Roman imprisonment was not like the first. The first had been relatively open — friends could visit, ministry could continue, the future was uncertain but not yet sealed. The second was Mamertine — an underground dungeon, dark and airless, a holding place for those awaiting execution.

In that place, everyone left. Except Onesiphorus.

When the disciples fled from Gethsemane the night Jesus was arrested, leaving Him alone in the hands of His accusers, Jesus did not express surprise or anger. He understood the nature of fear. But He remembered — and in His final moments, He spoke of being with the Father even when all human companionship had failed.

Onesiphorus was a living demonstration of what Jesus promised: that His followers would not leave others alone in their darkest moments. Paul was in his darkest moment. Onesiphorus sought him out, found him, and stayed. This simple act — in a dungeon, at personal risk, when every social calculation argued against it — is one of the most Christlike things recorded in the New Testament.

Who in your life is in their Mamertine right now — isolated, forgotten, in a dark place that most people are avoiding? The ministry of Onesiphorus may be the most important thing you do this week.

A Prayer for Today

Lord, give me the courage of Onesiphorus — to seek out the people who are in dark and lonely places and to be with them, even when it costs me something. Help me not to be one of those who drifts away when friendship becomes inconvenient. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Eight, Day Two

A Breath of Fresh Air

2 Timothy 1:16 (NIV)

May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains.

Paul uses a word for Onesiphorus's effect on him that appears nowhere else in the New Testament. The Greek word translated "refreshed" carries the image of a fresh movement of air — a breeze in a stifling place. In the Mamertine dungeon, underground and lightless, with no windows and no fresh air, the word is achingly specific. Onesiphorus was, literally and figuratively, a breath of fresh air to Paul.

You do not have to say the perfect words to bring refreshment to someone in a dark place. You do not have to have answers or wisdom or a plan for how to fix things. Sometimes the most powerful thing you can offer is simply your presence — the fact of being there, of not being afraid to sit in the hard place alongside someone who has no way out of it.

Over and over again, when I speak with people who have come through significant loss or suffering, I hear the same thing: I don't remember what people said, but I remember who was there. The person who showed up at the hospital. The one who sat in silence at the graveside and did not try to fill it with words. The friend who called, not with advice, but simply to say: I am here.

This is the ministry of refreshment. It does not require eloquence or expertise. It requires the willingness to be present in a place that is uncomfortable, with a person who is suffering, for as long as they need you there. It is one of the simplest and most profound gifts one human being can offer another.

Ask God today to show you who needs this kind of refreshment — and then simply go.

A Prayer for Today

Father, teach me the ministry of presence. Help me to be a breath of fresh air to someone who is in a dark and difficult season — not with clever words or solutions, but simply with the gift of my company and my care. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Eight, Day Three

Not Ashamed of the Chains

Romans 1:16 (NLT)

For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes.

To visit Paul in the Mamertine dungeon was to publicly associate yourself with an enemy of Rome. The charge against Paul was not just religious deviance — it was political. Nero had blamed the great fire of Rome on Christians, and Paul was being held as a ringleader of this supposedly subversive movement. To be seen at Mamertine, seeking out Paul, was to potentially invite the same suspicion and the same fate.

Onesiphorus went anyway. Paul says it plainly: he was not ashamed of my chains. He did not distance himself from Paul's imprisonment or regard Paul's situation as an embarrassment to be avoided. He walked into the most dangerous place he could have walked into, in full view of whoever was watching, and identified himself with the prisoner.

Shame is one of the most powerful forces that keeps believers from visible identification with Jesus and with His people in difficult circumstances. We are not ashamed of Jesus in theory — but we may be reluctant to sit publicly with the person whose association with Christ has made them an object of ridicule or suspicion. We may hesitate to identify with the Christian community in contexts where that identification carries a social cost.

Onesiphorus models the alternative. Unashamed presence. The willingness to walk through a door that everyone else is walking away from, to be seen with the person others are avoiding, to let your association with someone in chains say something public about whose side you are on.

Is there someone in your life whose chains you need to stop being ashamed of — and simply stand beside?

A Prayer for Today

Lord, free me from the shame that keeps me from visibly standing with people who are suffering or struggling or unpopular. Give me the unashamed courage of Onesiphorus — to walk toward the people others are walking away from and to let my presence say something about whose side I am on. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Eight, Day Four

Search Until You Find Them

2 Timothy 1:17 (NIV)

On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me.

Finding Paul in Rome would not have been a simple matter. Mamertine was not an address you could look up. It was a place the authorities kept somewhat obscure precisely because they did not want to encourage visitors. Onesiphorus had to ask questions, follow leads, navigate the bureaucracy and danger of imperial Rome — all while knowing that the very act of searching for a political prisoner made him a person of interest.

He searched hard for me until he found me. The word Paul uses implies diligent, persistent, determined effort. Onesiphorus did not make a casual inquiry and give up when the first answer was discouraging. He kept searching.

There is a lesson here about the nature of genuine pastoral care — and genuine friendship. It is not passive. It does not wait for the person in need to find their way to you, to show up at your door, to make the first move. It goes looking. It takes the initiative. It does the work of finding people who may have retreated into their darkness and become unreachable by ordinary means.

Jesus described this quality in His three parables of the lost in Luke 15. The shepherd leaves the ninety-nine to search for the one. The woman lights a lamp and sweeps the whole house to find the lost coin. The father runs down the road toward the son who is still a long way off. In each case, the rescuer does the active, determined work of finding and restoring the one who is lost.

Who might God be calling you to search for — persistently, actively, without giving up on the first discouraging response?

A Prayer for Today

Lord, give me the persistence of Onesiphorus — the willingness to search diligently for people who have retreated into isolation or difficulty. Help me not to give up on the ones who are hardest to reach, but to keep looking until I find them. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Eight, Day Five

Your Presence Is the Message

Psalm 23:4 (NLT)

Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.

What Onesiphorus brought to Paul in Mamertine was not primarily information, resources, or strategy. He brought himself. And Paul tells us, in the way he writes about it — with evident emotion, with a prayer of blessing for Onesiphorus's entire household — that this was enough. More than enough. In a dark, airless dungeon at the edge of the world, the presence of a faithful friend was the difference between despair and something that could be survived.

What made the difference to David in the valley of the shadow of death, in Psalm 23, was not an escape route or an explanation. It was the presence of God beside him. The rod and the staff did not remove the darkness — they accompanied him through it. Presence is the comfort. Accompaniment is the message.

When we are filled with the Holy Spirit and we bring ourselves into the presence of a suffering person, we bring more than ourselves. We bring the One who lives within us — the Comforter, the Counselor, the One who walks beside us through the darkest valleys. This is why simple presence, offered in faith, has such disproportionate power. It is not just a human gesture. It is a conduit.

You do not need a theology degree to offer this kind of ministry. You do not need the right words or a plan or a solution. You need a willing heart and the courage to show up. The Holy Spirit within you will do the rest.

Be present. Be available. Let the Spirit within you be the comfort that the person in front of you needs.

A Prayer for Today

Holy Spirit, fill me so completely that when I walk into a room where someone is suffering, I bring more than my own company. Make my presence a vehicle for Your comfort, Your peace, and Your love. Help me to trust that simply being there, in Your name, is enough. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Eight, Day Six

Let Your Family See Your Follow-Through

2 Timothy 1:16 (NIV)

| *May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus.*

Paul's prayer for Onesiphorus includes his entire household. This is not incidental. The household would have known what Onesiphorus was doing — the long journey to Rome, the search through a dangerous city for a prisoner in an imperial dungeon, the repeated visits at personal risk. His family watched him do all of this.

They saw his follow-through. They watched him do a costly thing because it was right, even when every calculation of personal safety argued against it. And because they watched, they learned something about what faithfulness to Jesus actually looks like when the cost is real.

One of the most powerful forms of spiritual formation happens not in classrooms or sermons but in the ordinary observation of a faithful life. Children learn courage from watching courageous parents. They learn generosity from watching open-handed lives. They learn what it means to follow Jesus in hard circumstances from watching the people closest to them make costly choices in His name.

Paul's prayer for Onesiphorus's household may be a recognition of exactly this — that the faith Onesiphorus demonstrated was already rippling outward into the people who lived closest to him. His follow-through was shaping the next generation.

What are the people in your household learning from watching you follow Jesus? When faithfulness costs something — when doing the right thing requires real sacrifice — do they see you do it anyway? Let them. That may be the most important discipleship you ever offer.

A Prayer for Today

Lord, help me to live my faith in ways that are visible to the people in my household — not as a performance, but as a genuine example of what it looks like to follow You when it costs something. May the people closest to me be shaped by what they see in my life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Eight, Day Seven

Commitment That Costs Something

Proverbs 25:19 (NLT)

Putting confidence in an unreliable person in times of trouble is like chewing with a broken tooth or walking on a lame foot.

Proverbs 25:19 is almost funny in its vividness — and completely accurate. The feeling of biting down on something when you have a broken tooth, or of stepping on a foot that cannot support your weight, is precisely the feeling of discovering that someone you counted on in a moment of crisis was not really there. It is a particular kind of pain, made worse by the element of surprise.

Onesiphorus was the opposite of that experience for Paul. In a season where almost everyone had proven to be exactly like the broken tooth — present in theory, missing in practice — Onesiphorus was the exception. He bore Paul's full weight without buckling. He was not just committed in words; he was committed in the costly, inconvenient, dangerous reality of seeking out a prisoner in an imperial dungeon and staying with him.

We live in an age of stated commitment that often dissolves under pressure. We are good at expressing loyalty, at signing up for things, at being present in the easy seasons. The test of real commitment is what happens when staying becomes more expensive than leaving.

John-Mark, who bailed on Paul's first missionary journey, is a reminder that even good people sometimes fail the commitment test — and that the story does not end there. He eventually proved himself and was restored to Paul's confidence. But the path back required demonstrated commitment, not just renewed intention.

The question Onesiphorus leaves us with is simply this: When it costs something real, do I stay? Not in every season, not in the moments of easy faithfulness, but in the hardest ones — am I the person people can count on, the one who does not buckle when the weight is real?

A Prayer for Today

Lord, grow in me the kind of commitment that holds when the cost is real — that does not evaporate when staying becomes inconvenient or risky. Help me to be the person others can count on in their hardest moments, because I have found in You the strength to keep my commitments when everything in me wants to walk away. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Nine

Epaphras

The Ministry of Intercession

Three Truths to Carry Through This Book

1. God wants to use you.
2. The standard is faithfulness, not the amount of talent or skill.
3. You say the “Yes.” God determines the “When and Where.”

“For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.” — Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)

We come to the final week of our journey with a man whose primary ministry was one that could be carried out from anywhere — even a prison cell in Rome. Epaphras planted churches in Colossae, Hierapolis, and Laodicea. He made a thousand-mile journey to advocate for his congregation. And through it all, he prayed — earnestly, specifically, persistently — for the people he loved. Paul honored him with one of the most exalted titles in his letters: a slave of Christ Jesus. This week, we will learn from a man who discovered that prayer is not a last resort. It is the foundation of everything.

Week Nine, Day One

Going Back Home

Colossians 1:7-8 (NLT)

You learned about the Good News from Epaphras, our beloved co-worker. He is Christ's faithful servant, and he is helping us on your behalf. He has told us about the love for others that the Holy Spirit has given you.

Epaphras most likely came to faith through Paul's extended ministry in Ephesus — that remarkable three-year period when all of Asia heard the word of the Lord. He could have stayed in Ephesus, attached himself to Paul's travelling team, and spent his life following the gospel to exciting new places. Many did exactly that.

Instead, Epaphras went home. He returned to Colossae — a city in decline, diminished in importance and prestige, the kind of place that ambitious people leave rather than return to. And he planted a church there. And then in Hierapolis. And in Laodicea. Three churches, all growing out of one man's decision to carry the gospel back to the people he came from.

There is something deeply significant about this. The people of Colossae were not on anyone's strategic priority list. Their city had been eclipsed by larger, more important places. But to Epaphras, they were not a demographic or a strategic opportunity. They were his people. He knew them. He was one of them. And he could not imagine receiving the gift of the gospel and not bringing it back to share.

The most natural mission field for most of us is not the far country — it is the near one. The family we grew up in. The neighborhood we live in. The workplace we show up at every day. The people who already know us, who would listen to us precisely because of that history, who need what we carry in ways that a stranger cannot reach.

Has God given you something worth bringing back home?

A Prayer for Today

Lord, help me to see the people nearest to me — my family, my neighbors, my colleagues — as a mission field that You have uniquely prepared me to reach. Give me the heart of Epaphras, who could not keep the gospel to himself but brought it back to his own people. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Nine, Day Two

The Advocate

Colossians 1:7 (NLT)

He is Christ's faithful servant, and he is helping us on your behalf.

Epaphras made a long and hazardous journey from Colossae to Rome — a distance of over a thousand miles — because the church he had planted was in trouble. A dangerous theological distortion was threading itself through the congregation, undermining the centrality of Christ and threatening to lead new believers away from the truth of the gospel. Epaphras could not address it adequately from within. He needed help.

So he went to Paul. He traveled to Rome, explained the situation in detail, and advocated for the Colossians — for people who could not speak for themselves in that moment, who did not know how serious their situation was, who needed someone with access to stand in the gap and plead their case.

This is the ministry of advocacy — the willingness to use your access, your relationships, and your influence on behalf of people who lack those resources themselves. It is one of the most quietly powerful things a person can do. Epaphras's advocacy for the Colossians is why we have the letter to the Colossians in our Bibles. His willingness to make the journey and make the case produced one of the most theologically significant documents in Christian history.

Who in your life needs you to advocate for them — to use your access or your relationships or your voice on their behalf? The struggling student who needs someone to speak to a teacher. The employee whose situation is invisible to leadership. The person in your community who has no advocate in the systems that make decisions about their life.

Advocacy is love made active. Epaphras showed us what it looks like.

A Prayer for Today

Father, show me who in my world needs an advocate — someone who will use their access and their voice on behalf of people who cannot speak for themselves. Give me the willingness to make the journey, have the conversation, and stand in the gap for others as Epaphras did. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Nine, Day Three

Face the Problem Head-On

Galatians 6:1 (NLT)

Dear brothers and sisters, if another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path.

One of the temptations when we see a problem in a community we love is to minimize it — to tell ourselves it is not as serious as it seems, that it will probably resolve on its own, that getting involved will only make things worse. This temptation is especially strong when the problem is theological, because theological disputes can fracture relationships and create conflict in communities that value peace.

Epaphras did not minimize the problem in Colossae. He recognized that the theological distortion threatening his congregation was serious — serious enough to make a thousand-mile journey to address it, serious enough to involve the most authoritative voice available to him, serious enough to pursue with urgency. His love for the Colossians would not let him look away. This is what genuine care looks like when it is confronted with a genuine problem. Not avoidance. Not minimization. Not the false peace of pretending everything is fine when it is not. Epaphras faced the problem head-on — not with anger or self-righteousness, but with the urgency of someone who understood what was at stake.

Paul says we should address these things gently and humbly — which is an important qualifier. The goal is restoration, not victory. The posture is care, not condemnation. But the willingness to act, to name the problem, to seek the help that is needed — that is not optional when someone we love is in danger.

Is there a problem in your community, your family, or your own life that you have been avoiding out of fear of conflict? Epaphras challenges us to face it — gently, humbly, but clearly and without delay.

A Prayer for Today

Lord, give me the courage to face the problems I have been avoiding — in my community, in my relationships, in my own life. Help me to address difficult things with the urgency that genuine love requires, and with the gentleness and humility that genuine wisdom demands. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Nine, Day Four

A Slave of Christ Jesus

Colossians 4:12 (NLT)

Epaphras, a member of your own fellowship and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends you his greetings.

Paul reserved the title "servant of Christ Jesus" — which in the Greek is more accurately rendered "slave of Christ Jesus" — for very few people. He applied it to himself. He shared it with Timothy. And he bestowed it on Epaphras. For an apostle who chose his words with great care, this is a remarkable designation for a man from a small, declining city in the Lycus Valley.

The language of slavery is uncomfortable to modern ears, and rightly so given the history of that institution. But in the first century, Paul was using it to describe something very specific: a total belonging, a complete availability, a life held not for one's own purposes but for the purposes of another. To be a slave of Christ Jesus was to have surrendered the agenda of self and placed oneself entirely at the disposal of the Master.

Epaphras had done exactly that. He planted churches in three cities. He made a thousand-mile journey to advocate for his congregation. He ended up in prison alongside Paul, unable to go home, unable to deliver the letters he had helped to inspire. He could not control where his obedience to Christ would take him — only that he would follow wherever it led.

This is the life of radical availability. Not the life that serves God when it is convenient and comfortable, but the life that says: wherever You send me, I will go. Whatever You ask, I will do. I am not my own. I belong to You.

Is that the life you are living? Is there a deeper surrender available to you today — a fuller release of the agenda of self into the hands of the One who bought you?

A Prayer for Today

Lord Jesus, I want to be genuinely Yours — not partially available but fully surrendered, not serving You on my own terms but on Yours. Help me today to release more of my own agenda and place myself more completely in Your hands. I am not my own. I belong to You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Praying With Specific Purpose

Colossians 4:12 (NLT)

He always prays earnestly for you, asking God to make you strong and perfect, fully confident that you are following the whole will of God.

Epaphras did not pray for the Colossians in vague, generic terms. Paul's description of his intercession is remarkably specific: he was asking God to make them strong and perfect, fully confident that they were following the whole will of God. He knew what they needed. He knew what they were facing. And he prayed for exactly that.

This kind of specific, targeted prayer is only possible for someone who is genuinely connected to the people they are praying for — who knows their struggles, understands their circumstances, and cares enough to think carefully about what they actually need rather than offering a generic blessing.

Epaphras was Colossae's biggest cheerleader and most diligent intercessor simultaneously. He had planted the church, watched it grow, worried about its theological health, made the journey to address its crisis — and through all of it, he was praying. Not prayer as a last resort when everything else had failed, but prayer as a continuous thread running through every other form of engagement.

This integration of prayer and action is one of the marks of mature faith. Epaphras acted — he traveled, he advocated, he engaged the problem. And Epaphras prayed — earnestly, specifically, persistently. The two were not alternatives. They were partners.

Who are you praying for specifically right now? Not generally — but with the knowledge of their particular situation and the specific requests that knowledge generates? That kind of prayer is a ministry. It is the ministry Epaphras could not stop giving even from a prison cell in Rome.

A Prayer for Today

Father, teach me to pray specifically — to know the people I care about well enough to ask for exactly what they need, rather than offering vague blessings. Help me to be an Epaphras for the people in my life — a consistent, earnest, knowledgeable intercessor. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week Nine, Day Six

When All You Can Do Is Pray — Do That

Colossians 4:13 (NLT)

I can assure you that he prays hard for you and also for the believers in Laodicea and Hierapolis.

Epaphras was in prison. He could not go back to Colossae. He could not deliver Paul's letter to the church he had planted. He could not escort Onesimus home to Philemon. He could not do most of the things he had come to Rome to do — because he was in chains.

What he could do was pray. And Paul assures the Colossians that Epaphras was doing exactly that — and not just for Colossae, but for the believers in Laodicea and Hierapolis as well. Three churches, all needing what Epaphras could no longer give in person, all receiving what he could still give from a cell: earnest, persistent, agonizing intercession.

There is a temptation, when we are limited by circumstances, to conclude that we cannot do anything meaningful. The illness that keeps us homebound. The age or physical limitation that has narrowed the range of what we can do. The season of life in which the active forms of service we once gave are no longer available to us. In these seasons, it is easy to feel useless.

Epaphras in prison is a direct rebuttal to that feeling. From a cell, unable to travel or speak or deliver letters, he was doing one of the most significant things any person can do for another: he was bringing them before the throne of God with earnest, specific, persistent prayer. That is not a consolation prize for people who cannot do the real work. That is the real work.

Whatever your limitations today — pray. It is always available. It is always powerful. And it is always, always enough.

A Prayer for Today

Lord, forgive me for the times I have treated prayer as a last resort rather than a first response — as a fallback when I cannot do the 'real' work. Help me to see intercession for what it is: one of the most powerful and significant things I can do for the people I love. Make me a faithful prayer warrior. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Prayer as a First Response, Not a Last Resort

Philippians 4:6-7 (NLT)

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

The entire series of people we have studied — Bezalel, Shiphrah and Puah, Barzillai, Ebed-Melech, Manaen, Tychicus, Epaphroditus, Onesiphorus, and now Epaphras — were ordinary people who said yes to an extraordinary God. Each of them, in their own way and in their own moment, made themselves available to be used for purposes larger than themselves.

Epaphras brings us to the foundation that underlies all of it: prayer. Not prayer as a religious duty performed before the real work begins. Not prayer as a fallback when everything else has been tried. Prayer as the primary language of a life lived in conscious dependence on God — the ongoing conversation between a creature and his Creator that makes everything else possible.

Paul's instruction in Philippians 4 is not a technique for stress management. It is a description of what a life of prayer looks like from the inside: a constant turning toward God with everything — the worries, the needs, the gratitude, the confusion — and a corresponding experience of peace that does not depend on circumstances.

Epaphras had learned this. In the middle of a crisis, from a prison cell, separated from the people he loved most, he prayed. Not because he had nothing else to do — but because prayer was already the atmosphere he breathed, the first language of his relationship with God.

As we close this journey through ordinary lives made extraordinary by God's grace, the invitation is simple: say yes. Say yes to God's call on your life, whatever form it takes. Say yes to the people He places in your path. Say yes to the service that seems too small to matter. And say yes to prayer — not as a last resort, but as your first response to everything. That is where the extraordinary begins.

A Prayer for Today

Lord, as I come to the end of this journey through ordinary lives made extraordinary by Your grace, I am moved by the simple common thread: each of these people said yes to You. I want to say yes too — to Your call, to Your purposes, to the people You place in my life. And I want to say yes to prayer, not as a last resort but as my first response to everything. Use me, Lord. I am available. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Conclusion

Nine Lives, One God, One Invitation

We have traveled a long road together. From the wilderness of Sinai to the courts of Jerusalem, from the siege of Babylon to the prison cells of imperial Rome, we have sat with nine ordinary people whose lives were made extraordinary by the grace of a God who specializes in using the unlikely, the overlooked, and the unqualified.

Let us look back at them one last time — not to rehearse their stories, but to hear the single note that runs through every one of them.

Bezalel was a craftsman from the wrong tribe. He had no priestly credentials, no political connections, and no reason to expect that his skills would ever be used for anything more than ordinary work. Yet God called him by name, filled him with the Holy Spirit, and used his hands to build the dwelling place of God among His people. His bronze altar was still being used four hundred years after he put down his tools.

Shiphrah and Puah were two women with no power, no platform, and no protection from the wrath of the most powerful ruler on earth. They had only one thing: the fear of God, which proved stronger than the fear of Pharaoh. Their quiet act of defiance preserved the generation that walked out of Egypt — and preserved the life of the man who led them.

Barzillai was eighty years old, wealthy, and under no obligation to anyone. He could have stayed home and let the drama of Absalom's rebellion resolve itself. Instead, he showed up at the worst moment with the most practical help — and then, when offered great honor in return, redirected the blessing to the next generation with the open-handed generosity of a man who understood whose everything really was.

Ebed-Melech was a foreigner and an outsider, excluded by law from the assembly of Israel, serving in a palace full of people more powerful than he was. When everyone else stayed silent, he walked to the king in a public place and named what had been done plainly: this is evil. His courage saved a prophet. God's promise of protection saved him.

Manaen grew up at the same table as one of the most morally compromised rulers in the New Testament — and chose a completely different path. He surrendered royal privilege for a persecuted faith, and God used his unique background to help launch the first great missionary journey to the Gentile world.

Tychicus never had his name on the program. He carried letters he did not write, to churches he had not planted, on behalf of a ministry whose public face was someone else. He was simply, consistently, reliably present — and that dependability made everything else possible.

Epaphroditus risked his life to carry a care package from Philippi to Paul in a Roman prison. He nearly died completing the mission. Paul called him a true brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier — the only person in all of his letters to receive all three of those commendations. His willingness to go all-in was a sweet-smelling sacrifice, acceptable and pleasing to God.

Onesiphorus went looking for Paul in the darkest place in Rome when everyone else had left. He searched hard until he found him. He sat with him in that underground dungeon — not with perfect words or clever answers, but simply with his presence. And Paul, writing his last letter from death row, could not speak of him without praying a blessing over his entire household.

Epaphras planted churches in cities the rest of the world had written off. He made a thousand-mile journey to advocate for his people. He ended up in prison. And from that cell, unable to travel or deliver letters or do most of what he had come to Rome to do, he prayed — earnestly, specifically, persistently — for the churches he loved. Paul gave him one of the highest titles in all of his letters: a slave of Christ Jesus.

Nine lives. Nine different moments. Nine different gifts and circumstances and challenges. And one common thread running through every single one of them: they said yes.

They said yes before they knew what the yes would cost. They said yes without being certain of the outcome. They said yes with whatever they had — their skills, their courage, their loyalty, their presence, their prayers — and trusted God to do with it what only He could do.

And He did.

He always does.

Now the invitation comes to you. Not to be Bezalel or Shiphrah or Barzillai — but to be yourself, fully surrendered to the God who made you and placed you in this particular moment of history with this particular combination of gifts and experiences and relationships. The good works He has prepared for you to walk in are not generic. They are specific. They have your name on them.

The world is full of people waiting to feel extraordinary before they begin. God is looking for something different. He is looking for people who are willing to be faithful right now — with what they have, where they are, for as long as He asks.

That is enough. It has always been enough.

Ephesians 2:10 says it one final time, and I want to leave it ringing in your ears as you close this book:

Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)

“For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.”

You are His masterpiece. The good things were planned long ago. They are waiting for you.

Say yes.

— *Pastor Chris McCormick*

About This Book

Do you ever wonder whether your life — ordinary as it feels — could actually matter to God?

Most of us would not use the word *extraordinary* to describe ourselves. We are not famous. We are not powerful. We do not have platforms or impressive credentials. We go to work, raise our families, serve our churches, and wonder sometimes whether any of it adds up to something that truly counts.

Ordinary to Extraordinary is written for people who feel exactly that way.

Drawing from nine largely forgotten figures of Scripture — from both the Old and New Testaments — Pastor Chris McCormick shows that at the most critical moments of God’s redemptive story, the instrument He consistently chooses is not the most obvious one. It is not the most gifted, the most educated, or the most credentialed. It is the one who simply said yes.

A craftsman from the wrong tribe. Two midwives with no political power. A foreign court official excluded by law from the assembly of Israel. A church planter from a town the world had already written off. These are the people in this book — and their stories carry a message that may change the way you see your own.

Over nine weeks of daily devotions, you will discover three transforming truths:

- 1. God wants to use *you*.** Not a theoretical version of you, but you as you are, where you are, with what you have.
- 2. The standard is faithfulness, not talent or skill.** The playing field of faithfulness is perfectly level — it does not advantage the gifted or penalize the ordinary.
- 3. You say the “Yes.” God determines the “When and Where.”** None of the people in this book chose their moment. They simply kept saying yes — and when the moment arrived, they were ready.

“For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.”

— Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)

Dr. Chris Len McCormick is an associate pastor of Calvary Church in Maumee, Ohio. A chemical engineer who spent 34 years in the oil refining industry before answering a full-time ministry calling he has carried since 1991, he holds a Doctor of Ministry degree from the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary in Springfield, Missouri. He writes from the conviction that God uses ordinary people — because He always has.