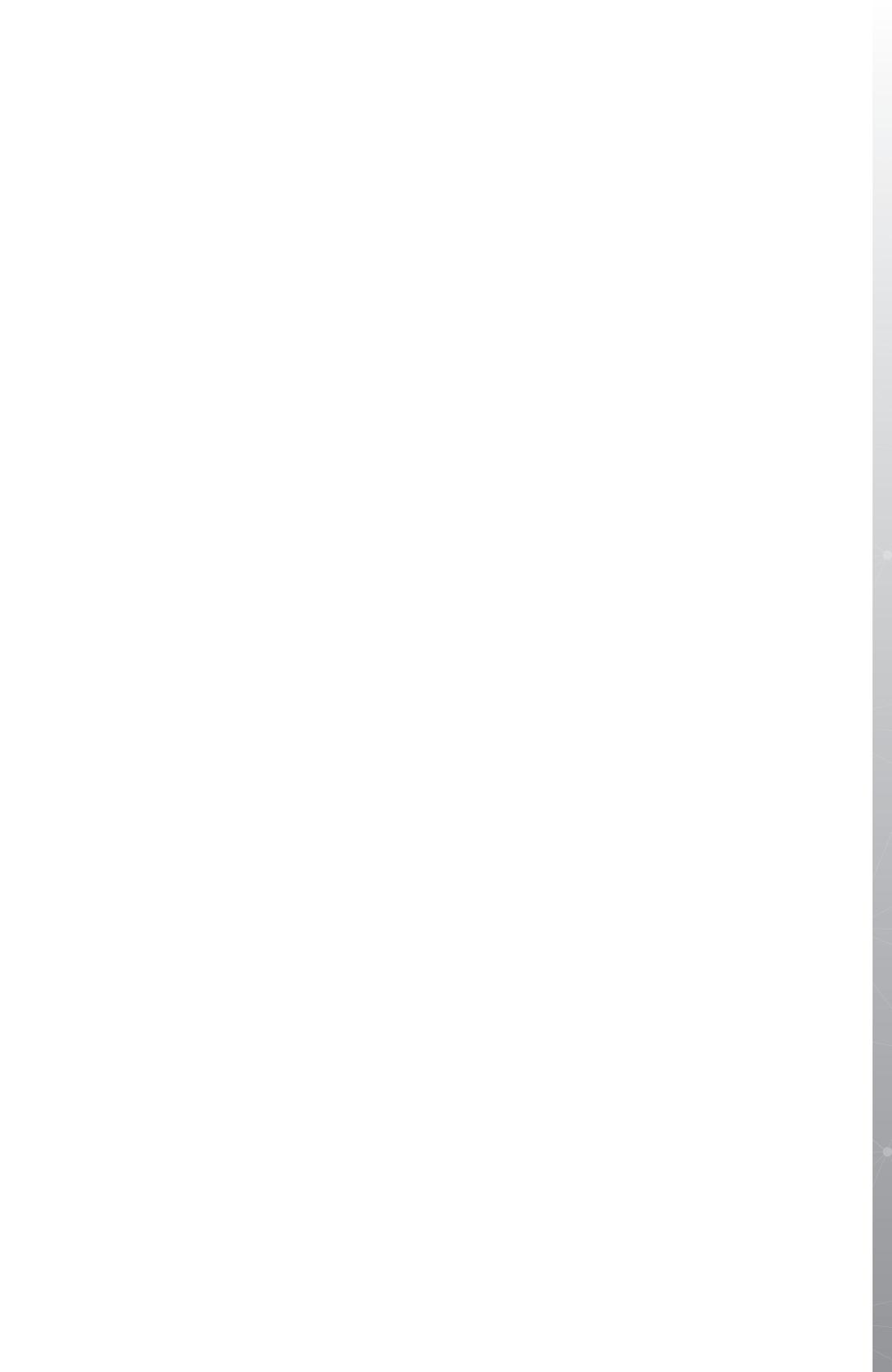




**the amazing
next**



waking up to the journey ahead

**the amazing
next**

brock morgan

The Amazing Next

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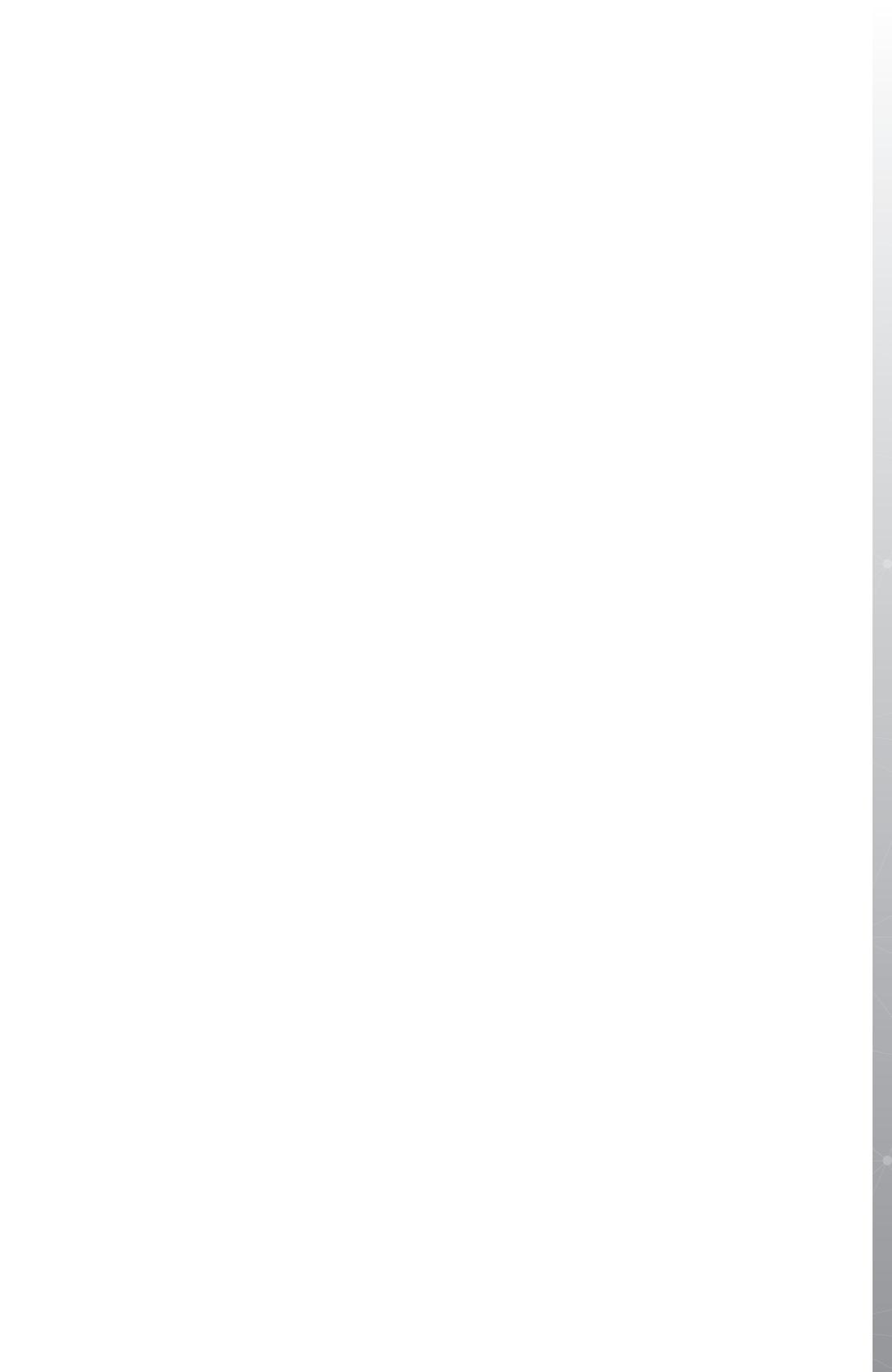
This is dedicated to all of our students at **Trinity**.
Thank you for your friendship and for how wide-open
you've been for this **amazing journey**.

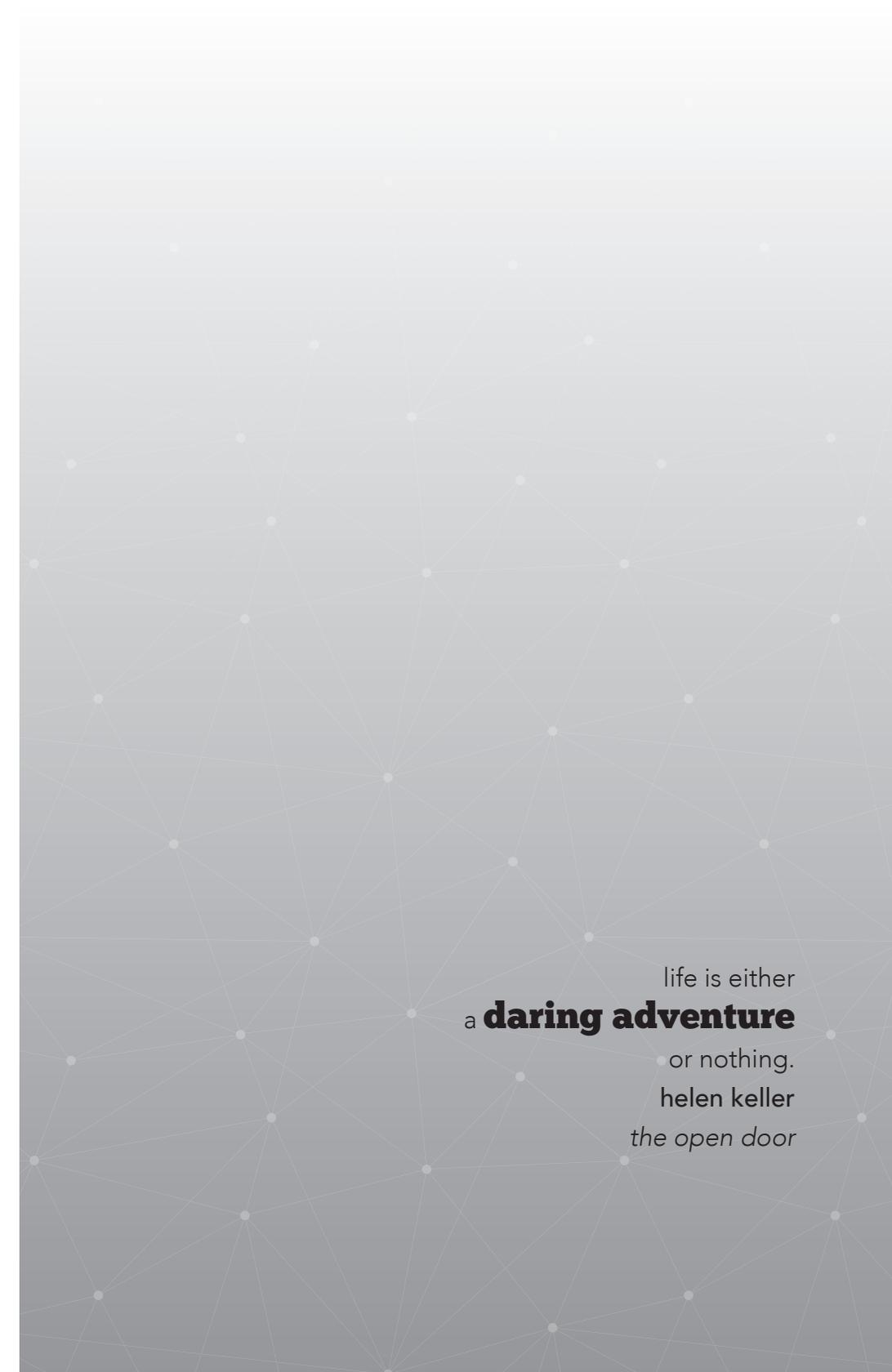
I have loved every second, and every page
in this book has had you in mind.

I have written this for you and for every student
who is longing for more
and is ready for the **adventurous,**
expectant life with the GOD who is on the move.

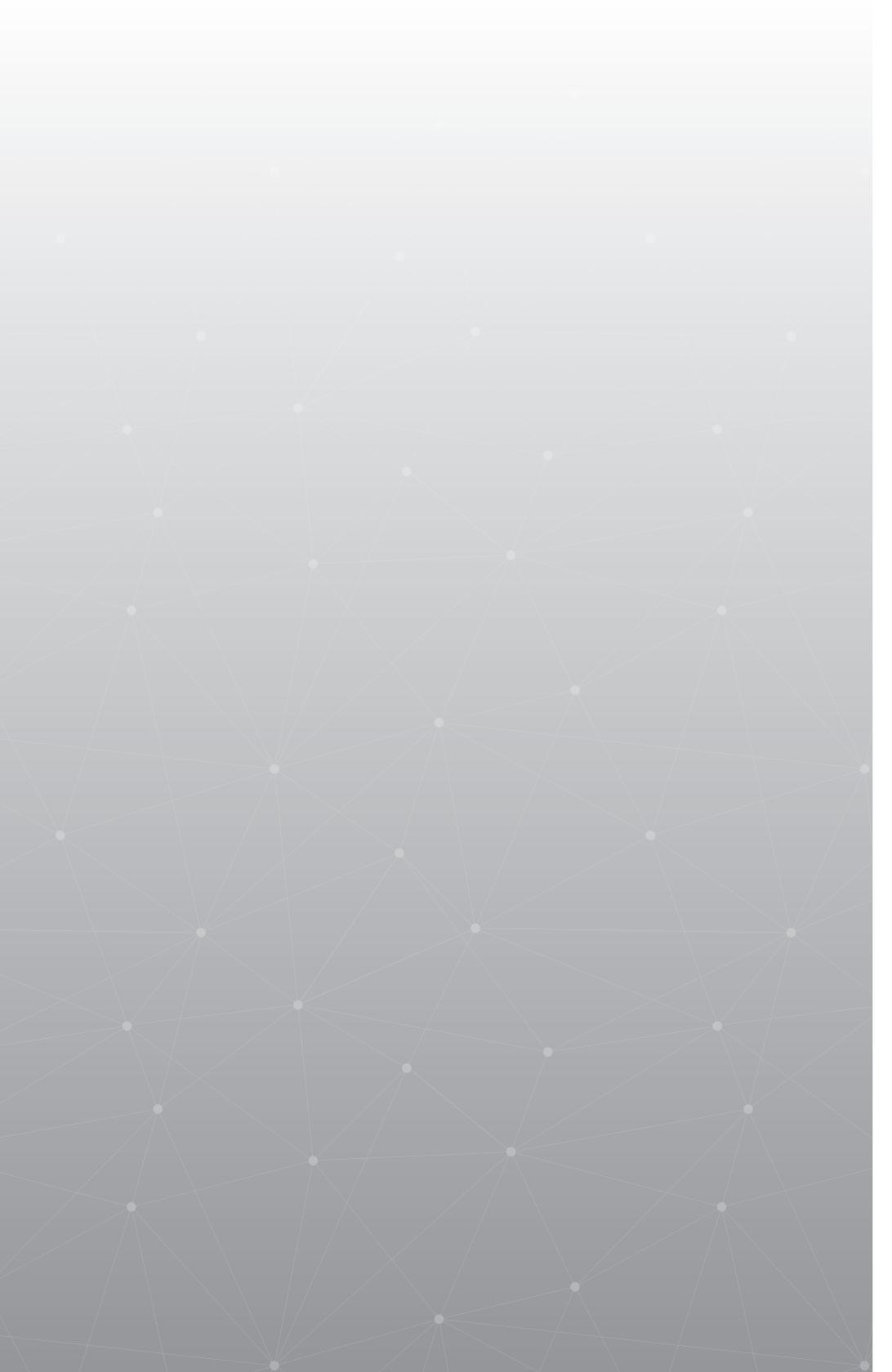
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life is either
a **daring adventure**
or nothing.
helen keller
the open door



preface

Call It an Opener

It was early one Saturday morning, way before dawn, and I heard, “Brock, wake up, lets go!” I wasn’t sure where we were going but I was always ready for an adventure. And if my friends had the crazy idea to get up this early, it would have to be for a good reason. They told me to pack a small backpack, a little food, and grab my jacket and boots. I was out the door within seconds. We drove for a few hours, and then finally we approached the base of a mountain. They told me that this hike would lead us to the most amazing summit view imaginable, but it would take all day. The goal was to get to the top by sunset and then camp overnight. So we started up through the valley along the river and toward the snowy summit.

If I were being honest, I’d tell you the hike wasn’t just full of

wonder and delight but also full of pain and despair.

If I were being honest I'd tell you that after about three or four hours, my legs felt like someone was hitting them with a hammer. My feet became like sandbags, terribly heavy, and crying out for a soak in a hot bath. If I were one hundred percent truthful, I'd tell you that I wanted to quit, started crying, and almost radioed in for a rescue plane to pick me up.

But I'm usually too tough to confess this.

I do love adventure, so I find myself on the trail like that more times than I'd like. Journeying up the trail—heck, even down the trail—is painful and difficult. You are very likely to be pushed to the brink. But the truth is, it's kind of like life. Life is a journey and there will be ups and downs along the way—some of them painful and difficult. It can be a tough hike to traverse.

But I've always loved stories of adventure, and it's actually why I started following Jesus. It's why I've kept following Jesus. Yet throughout my journey with God, people have kept trying to turn this expectant life with Jesus into something else altogether. Like a bait and switch. At the beginning they promised that following Jesus was the best life I could possibly have, only to then turn and list all the things I could no longer do. They've tried to make me a good boy, civil, a person who doesn't make too much noise.

But I want to warn you about something right here at the beginning of this book, just so that you know what you're about to read. I want you to know what you're getting into here, so here it is, here's the warning: **This book is not about helping you become a good civil person who doesn't make too much noise.**

Heck, it's not even about keeping your faith, although I think Jesus *has* made me into a better person and I *have* kept my faith.

But many times youth workers, parents, and mentors worry about graduates making mistakes and losing their faith, so they go out and buy the “right” books and pass them off as gifts to make sure these things don’t happen. This might even be the reason someone handed you this little book. (But if that’s the case, they didn’t read this page ... obviously.)

So let me just say, if you’re annoyed by the people around you worrying that you’ll lose your faith, I feel your pain. I remember my parents being worried about me. When I finally got baptized I was truly concerned that they just might hold me under the water until I really, *really* repented, just so that I wouldn’t eventually “lose my faith.” And to be honest, I actually did give my parents a lot to worry about. I was kind of ADD with my faith. Some days God felt closer to me than my own skin, but most of the time I felt utterly alone, completely isolated, like God was further from me than the most distant planet. And so as I got older I would hear people talk about young people “losing” their faith and how I needed to “keep” it, but that never made sense to me. That kind of talk never resonated with me.

For example, when I got married I fully intended to “keep” being married to my wife, and I’ve always considered what I had with Jesus to be kind of like that—a really close relationship. I mean, why would I lose a relationship that’s important to me?

Besides, that whole word choice wasn’t even appealing. “Keeping” something didn’t seem like a great adventure. But the reality is that if I want to keep my marriage or my relationship with God, intentional choices do have to be made and commitments need to be *kept* along the way.

Still I’ve always wanted adventure with God, transformational experiences, life-altering callings, daily struggles followed by amazing rescue plans. I’ve just wanted what pastors have always

told me Jesus offers: life to the fullest. How can I have that?

If that's what you are longing for, then keep reading.

And I've got a second warning about what this book is not: **It's not a book that will tell you what *not* to do.** I never liked anyone telling me what not to do, and honestly I still don't. In fact, I hate it, even if it's something I don't want to do anyway. (How crazy is that?)

I played college basketball, and over my years of playing I never liked it when a coach would say, "Just stop doing that!" Okay, I'd think, but what do you want me *to do*? Because telling me what *to do* is better. I can do something with that. And I've seen how over the centuries people have tried to turn this beautiful relationship with God into a sin management tool. Like faith is all about not doing things.

And I mean we all know what *not* to do, but what are we supposed *to do* on Saturday nights? What am I supposed *to do* with my time, my life?

Now there are times, of course, when we need to be told, "Hey, stop doing that!" Like when a kid puts her finger in a light socket. But you almost never overhear people telling little kids what *to do* with their fingers. (Maybe this is why so many little kids are walking around with their fingers in their noses, ears, and mouths!)

I remember my youth pastor saying things like, "Don't smoke, or drink, or chew, or go with girls who do." Well, all those things that he said I shouldn't do actually sounded kind of good to me—especially since he just told me not to do them.

See, when we turn faith into a rigorous rule-following religion,

we lose everything Jesus was trying to initiate. In fact, I believe the last thing he wanted to do was to start another “religion.” Jesus looked around and he saw people who were not living life to the fullest. He saw that many were living lives they never truly wanted. He wanted to set them free into the wide open spaces, where they could breathe and grow and become.



When I was in college, my friends and I started cliff-jumping. Just down the road from our college campus were these amazing cliffs along the Tennessee River. One night a large group of us headed off to do some night-jumping. When we arrived and looked over the fifty- and eighty-foot portions of the cliff, I remember having mixed feelings: like total fear with complete excitement. I was just so nervous to jump out into the night sky. I remember my friends doing the countdown—“Three! Two! One! Jump!”—and soaring through the air out into the blackness. But, man, I couldn’t even see the water. I had no idea as I was flying through the air, when I would even land.

But ...I remember the anticipation.

I remember the fear.

I remember the adrenaline rush.

I remember the excitement.

I remember feeling totally alive.

And I remember finally taking that leap and soaring.

I want to soar. I want to wake up with the expectation that God has something remarkable ahead. I don’t even need to know what it is, I just want to be awake, alive, and aware of what he’s doing, so that I can be a part of it.

So I’ve given you two warnings as to what this book is *not* about, but I also need to tell you what this book *is* about. So here you go: **It’s about life. It’s about truly living—living life without**

fear, worry, or anxiety. I know what those things are about. I know fear well. I've spent many days with anxiety. I have fallen into prisons of addiction and had many hang-ups along the way. I know where these things have gotten me, and I'm tired of them.

So in case my intention for this book wasn't clear the first time, let me reword it: **This book is about freedom, imagination, and wonder.**

It's about finding God in both the loud and in the quiet. And it's about breaking through the status quo, the one-direction current of our culture, and learning to live life with Jesus in the midst of all of the noise.

Hopefully in reading these pages you will discover who you really are and what you were actually made for. But at the same time, I realize that you are living life the way you are living it. I realize this is just a book and that books rarely transform us. So, my prayer isn't that this book changes you at all. My prayer is simply that you meet Jesus in the midst of reading it and that you discover the one who is always at work and offering you a life that requires your complete, crazy trust.

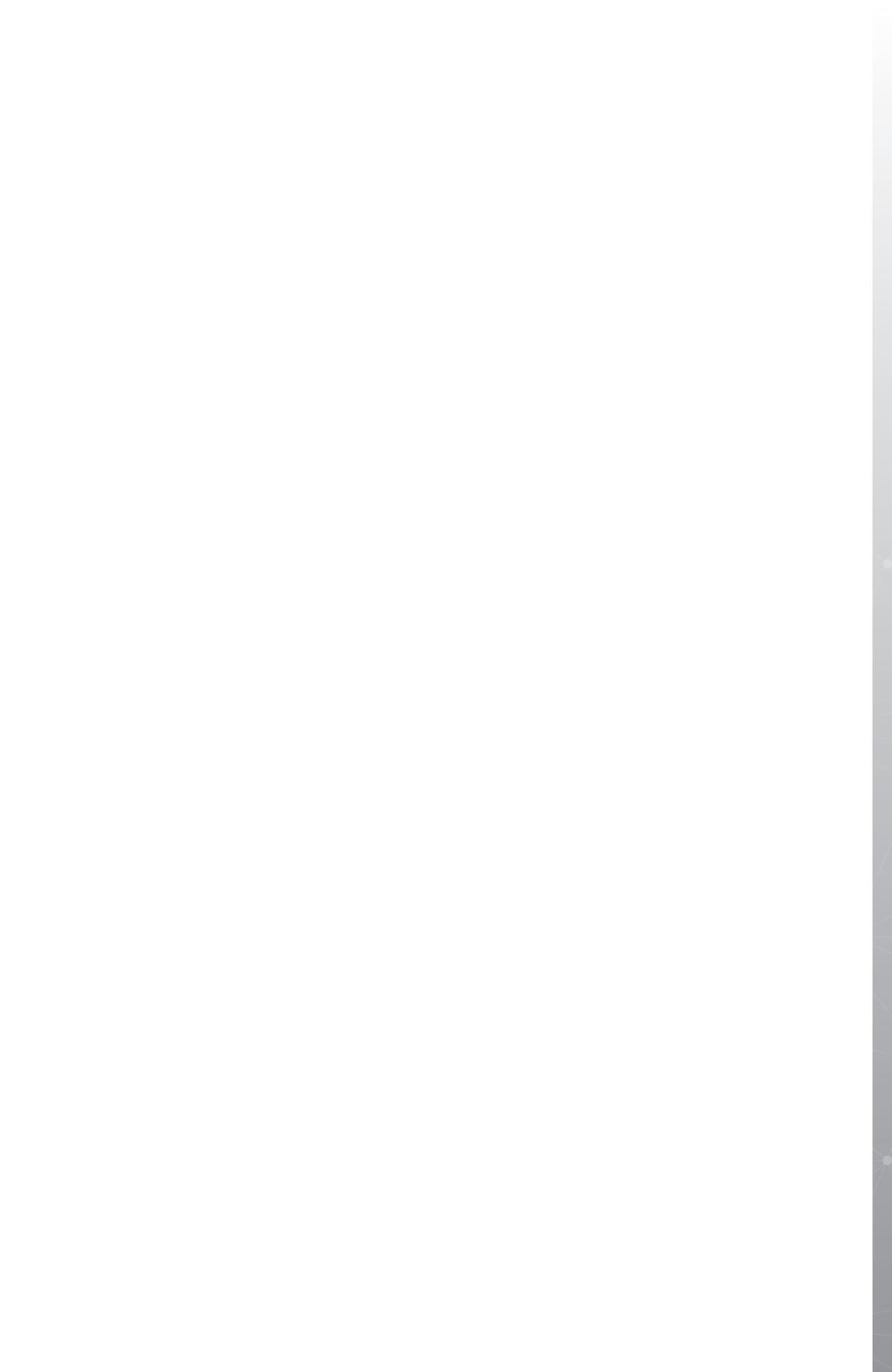


I was walking the other day with a high school student. It was chilly but very pleasant out; and as we strolled through the shopping district of my city, she told me that she just felt hopeless. She said she had a few good friends and that she does have a lot of fun on the weekends at parties and whatnot. But she told me that just below the surface, she feels like she's completely alone. Like winter is setting in and maybe there's not much of a future for her; like everything around is dying and slowly growing cold. Maybe that's why she doesn't allow herself to slow down, to be still. If she can just stay busy then she won't have to deal with

this winter of her life. And as we walked through the bustle of the streets I wondered what Jesus might be up to in this little conversation. Maybe he was lifting our heads, trying to make us aware of him. Trying to show us both that there really was a better way to live.

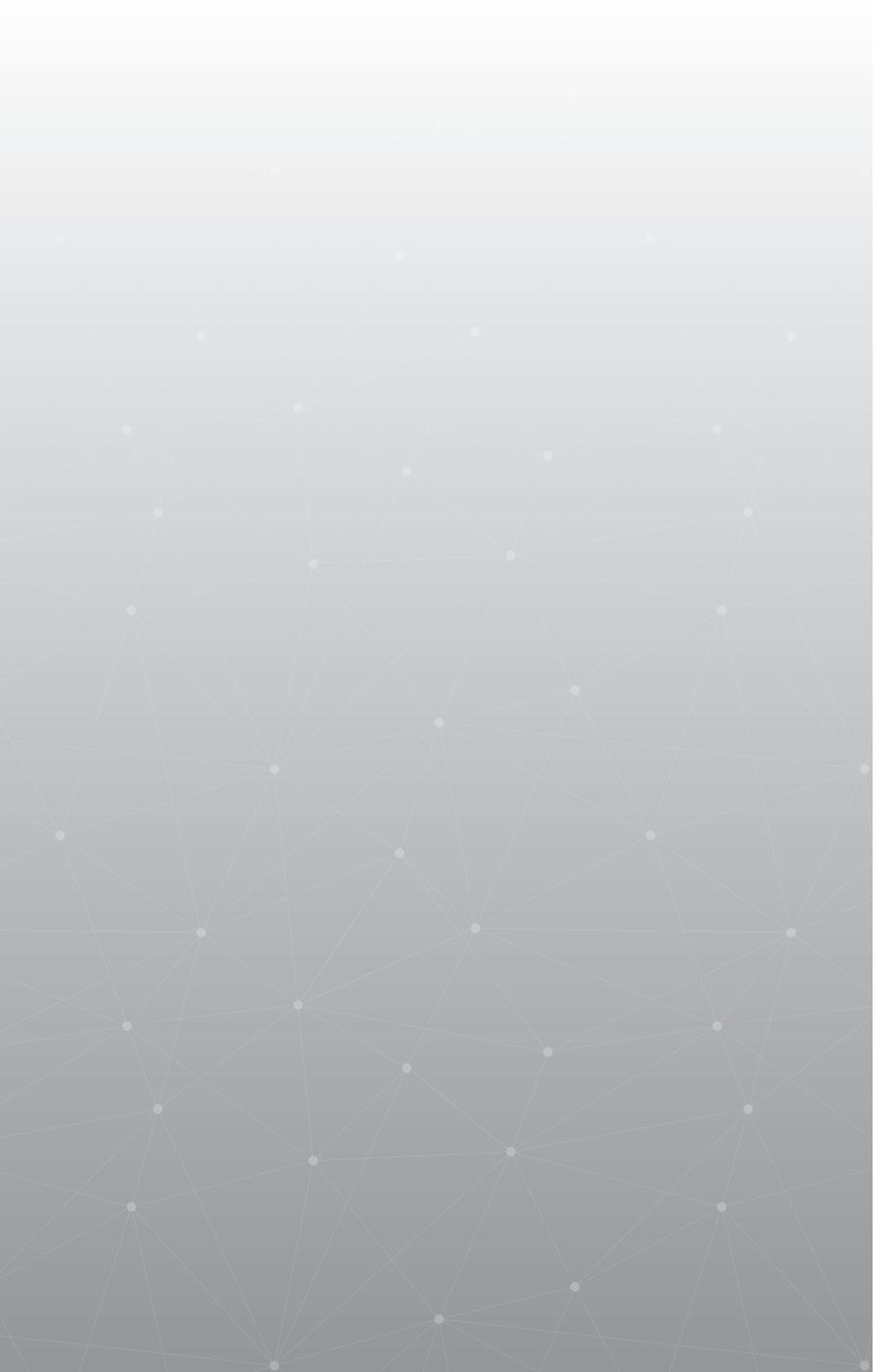
As I write this, I'm looking outside of my window. It's really cold outside, but I know spring is coming. The long winter will soon be gone and the built-up snow over these few months will eventually melt away into the water that will help usher in new life, turning everything vibrant with color. And I sense something new on the horizon, something unexpected. Deep down I feel an excitement brewing for what might be.

Great days are ahead and adventure awaits.





life is a blank canvas,
and you need to
throw all the paint on it you can.
danny kaye



chapter 1

So Now What?

So my band of brothers and I headed onward and upward toward the summit view. When we got to what I thought was the top it was underwhelming, to say the least. I thought, “This is what we spent all day climbing to see?” But then my friend told us we weren’t quite there yet. We had to cross a pipe from our side of the cliff across a vast chasm to reach the other side. We were up so high that when I looked over the edge it took my breath away. I could barely see the ground below.

“No way am I going to cross that pipe!” I said. But then my friends started making their way across one by one, holding onto a flimsy looking rope to maintain their balance. They all made it easily, every single one of them—talk about peer pressure. I had to do it now, my reputation as an adventurer was on the line.

So I stood with one foot on the pipe and the other foot firmly planted on the ground. A radical choice had to be made. I had to decide, and so I did. I lifted my foot up from the ground and placed it next to my other foot on the pipe. I could feel my heart beating through my shirt as I scooted across, doing my best not to look down into the sheer drop below me. Little by little I made my way across this fifteen-foot pipe and then finally leaped from the pipe to the ground on other side. (I felt totally relieved until I realized I'd have to cross back over it again on the way back.)

Together we made our way up a wooded incline and through the forest, which ended at the edge of the mountain. And finally there it was, the summit view. It was everything my friends had described to me and so much more. We just stood there in the silence, the wind blowing gently, the sky beautifully lit with reds, deep oranges, and soft yellows across a blue backdrop as the sun slowly descended behind the mountains.

It was like I could breathe for the first time in my life.

All of the world seemed to be perfect in that place.



I have always been drawn to people who see life as an adventure. I've rarely gone over to a friend's house to play X-Box for hours on end. Not that there's anything wrong with that, it's just that my friends have always seemed to live differently, and they've kind of dragged me along for the ride. I think that at the core of who we are there is this longing to truly live. Living life to the fullest is something we all desire. Every single one of us wants to live a life worthy of a movie script. It's just that many of us have not made the strategic and thoughtful choices necessary in order to make some of those moments happen.

Choices to step off of the edge, choices to jump from the cliff into

the river, choices to get out of bed and do something meaningful. Choices to live out a calling even when it is uncomfortable. Most of us just wake up and life kind of happens to us. Living fully aware and on purpose requires a certain kind of mindset for sure.

I also really like people with strong opinions. Honestly, indifference has always kind of annoyed me. You know, people who just don't seem to care. I've been drawn to people for most of my life who make choices and live life purposefully headed in that direction. They care deeply and passionately about where they are going and what they are doing. Their choices matter.

But most of us make hundreds of choices every day and we probably are completely unaware of them. We choose when to wake up, what to do with our mornings, who to hang out with, and what to eat—just name a few. (Speaking of what to eat, I just entered a contest with some of my friends to see who could lose weight and get into better shape the fastest. We began this contest this morning with a weigh-in. (I work with the other guys in this little contest, so I've been strategically placing sweets in their offices all day long. I'm hoping to sabotage their success and win this little contest. *Choices.*)

Like I was saying, there really are so many seemingly inconsequential choices that we make every moment of every day. So many of the “big” choices have been made by others in your life. But you, my friend, are moving from being the captive of other people's choices to the decider of your own fate. Bigger than when to wake up and whether or not you should brush your teeth. We are moving into a time when big, important life-altering choices are being made by YOU.

There is a college student I know who has decided to take a gap year starting this next semester. His goal is to join in the fight with the abolition movement. It makes him angry to think that

there are millions of people who are enslaved today. At this moment there is a little girl somewhere in the world who has been taken from her family. She is forced to do unspeakable things with her body for horrible men everyday. This makes my college friend angry. Angry enough to actually do something about it. He doesn't want to be a part of another generation who says they follow Jesus but never actually get off of the couch. He wants to rescue that little girl and other little ones just like her. He wants his life to count.

God says:

I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live!

Deuteronomy 30:19 (NLT)

I love this passage because it's right there in black and white, and it's actually extremely moving for me. Every one of us longs to make deep, thoughtful, and lasting impressions. We all want to make a difference. Every person wants to experience joy and love and avoid negativity and drama. This passage shows us that God, rich in compassion, has favored us, he has given us freedom to choose life or death. God looks at us and says, "You pick, you choose: What do you want in this moment?" If we choose to go with him, to do life with God, deeper meaning can be found.

But there's a whole other side to this power to choose. You can choose to dabble in death. In fact, sin really isn't these little individual things we do that are "naughty." It really is a choice to live in the land of death, to participate with what steals life from us and breaks our relationships with others. So that's the actual choice. Will I participate today with life or with death? Where

will I truly live today? Will I live in the land of fear, the region of anger, and the kingdom of insecurity and addiction? Will I participate in what is not bringing life to the world?

What's so cool about this verse is that God is actually pleading with us, begging us to choose life, to choose freedom. "Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live!" It reminds me of Jesus' words when he was asking people to follow him, and if they did they would find life, life to the fullest.

GOD is actually pleading with us,
begging us to **choose life**,
to choose freedom.

One of my favorite movies right now is a movie called, *Django Unchained*. It's a 2012 American epic written and directed by Quentin Tarantino. This brilliant, moving, and quite disturbing movie stars Jamie Foxx and Christoph Waltz. The story is set in the Deep South and the Old West in the 1800s when slavery was alive and well. The film follows a slave by the name of Django (Jamie Foxx) and an English speaking German bounty hunter named Shultz (Waltz) posing as a traveling dentist. The plot begins when Django is offered his freedom if he will help Shultz capture three outlaws. If Django agrees to help him, not only will it mean he gains his own freedom but it will also give his wife her freedom too. So Django has to make a decision, which seems like no decision at all. He, of course, chooses freedom.

Early in the film a conversation takes place between three slaves and this bounty hunter. The bounty hunter kills a slave trader and injures the other. He looks at the three slaves that were being held captive and says to them, "So as I see it, when it comes to the subject of what to do next, you gentlemen have two choices.

First, once I am gone you could lift the horse off of that slave trader and carry him to the next town to get help ... Or, second, you could unshackle your selves, take that rifle, put a bullet in his head and bury the two of them deep, and then head to a more enlightened area of the country. But the choice is yours.”

The choice really is theirs. Neither way is easy, even the choice that might mean their freedom is a difficult one. Every choice is a seed you sow, and those seeds produce fruit in your life—either for life or for death. And if we want to have the life Jesus died to give us—an abundant life full of peace and joy, even in times of grief; full of true meaning and purpose, even in the midst of suffering—we have some critical choices to make.

There have been days that I have chosen the way of death. I have made decisions that have led me into the dark places of life, places like C.S. Lewis created in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, where there was “winter but never Christmas.” We all know despair and hopelessness, we all know brokenness and sometimes we take ourselves there. We’ve all made choices that we regret.

A while back I was at a coffee shop with a college sophomore. I asked him if he had any regrets. Without hesitation he said, “No way. I’ve never regretted anything I’ve ever done.”

Now you have to know something: This kid really should have had some regrets. If I were him, I’d have a lot. He’d hurt many girls, including one teenager he’d left pregnant; he was on drugs and couldn’t get off of them; and to top it all off, his mother was the one who introduced him to drugs in the first place. There were certainly some things to regret. He was broken, hurting, and longing for a better way. That’s why he was sitting across from me with a chai tea in his hand. But for whatever reason, he couldn’t allow himself to experience regret. I think maybe it’s not a politically correct thing to have regrets these days, but I

sure have them.

Yes, I've learned from my mistakes, but my mistakes have done damage to the people around me and made my journey more difficult than it had to be. For that I have deep regret. And that really might be the point: Choose a life of death, of loss, of regret, of lost years OR choose life, purpose, mission, joy, and live today to the fullest.

So what if we chose life?

What if we choose life on this day, in this moment?

What if we made a choice for wholeness, for health, for friendship, for service, for love, for adventure?

What if you called someone and told that person how much he or she means to you?

What if you apologized to someone that you hurt at some point in the past?

What if you went for a hike?

What if you wrote a poem, a song, or created something beautiful?

What if you grabbed some friends and went to a concert and danced and enjoyed life together?

What if you texted someone younger than you and you encouraged him or her? You know what it's like growing up today, in this world.

What if we lived on purpose, conscious of our choices, today?

What if we did something that truly mattered?

What if?

