

Foreword by BILL HYBELS

# AWAKENING TO GOD

Discovering his power and your purpose

**GERARD LONG**  
Executive Director of Alpha USA



*Awakening to God* provides some wonderful keys for every Christ follower to be empowered, envisioned, and equipped to reach family and friends with the wonderful news of Jesus Christ. Following Jesus' instructions, Gerard Long shows that evangelism should start and continue with God's love and power being poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. He points out that the first 120 Christ followers turned the world upside down, and there is still great hope for America to have another awakening!

**MARK BATTERSON**

*New York Times* bestselling author of *The Circle Maker* and lead pastor of National Community Church in Washington, DC

My life's mission is to be a loving teacher and example of simple truths, helping myself and others to awaken to the presence of God in our lives. That was not my life's mission until my early fifties, when my wonderful Christian friends awakened me to the presence of God in my life. Read Gerard Long's book, *Awakening to God*, so you can become more awake yourself and become that kind of friend to others.

**KEN BLANCHARD**

coauthor of *The One Minute Manager* and *Lead Like Jesus*

*Awakening to God* is truly a wake-up call for us all to be on mission, wherever we are living life, and to discover the ultimate and true plan God has for each of us. Gerard's experience in the corporate world, along with his years of leadership with Alpha, gives him major street cred to write this book. I highly recommend it!

**BRAD LOMENICK**

author of *The Catalyst Leader*, former president and key visionary of Catalyst

Gerard Long has experienced hard battles in life, but his faith in Jesus Christ stands undiminished. It is inspiring that his desire to share his faith is stronger than ever.

**NICKY GUMBEL**

pioneer of Alpha and senior pastor of HTB London

An inspiring book for anyone exploring the adventure of faith!

**BEAR GRYLLS**

adventurer, author, TV presenter

*Awakening to God* is a great read for anyone interested in knowing God and joining with him in his rescue mission for men and women across the globe.

**ROMA DOWNEY**

actor, author, producer of the major motion picture *Son of God*

*Awakening to God* is a must-read for pastors and church leaders. It will not only awaken you to God's call and power in your own life, but it will also help your church awaken to its full purpose and potential.

**SCOTT EVANS**

president of Outreach Inc.

What a story! What reality! What relief and joy and peace to be reminded of the never-ending love of God, even in the midst of excruciating pain—pain that Gerard Long and his family know all too well. In this wonderful book, Gerard shares the power and importance of spiritual awakening—that moment when a person comes alive to God through faith in his Son,

Jesus Christ. Whether you are already a follower of Jesus or still searching for spiritual reality, *Awakening to God* will arouse you out of your spiritual slumber and get you going on a life of spiritual relevance that will have eternal consequences.

**LUIS PALAU**  
world evangelist

Gerard Long personifies the hope embedded in a classic psalm: “Sorrow may last for a night, but joy comes in the morning.” His personal tragedies expose in him a faith that enables him to both move mountains and to “be still” and know that Christ is God. In his new book, *Awakening to God*, Gerard shines the light of Jesus and empowers the reader to engage in a journey of faith, love, truth, and life.

**SAMUEL RODRIGUEZ**  
president of NHCLC, the Hispanic Evangelical Association

With gentleness, grace, and a sense of urgency, Gerard Long calls us to a great awakening that will affect us personally and in community. He focuses on our coming alive to God’s love and purpose; to the Holy Spirit; to God’s calling to go and make disciples; to brokenness; to eternity; and to the opportunity God gives us, and the provision he provides, to seize that opportunity. He invites us to invite others to “come and see.” This is not a dry how-to book on evangelism and discipleship. Instead, it’s simply one changed person sharing with the rest of us what God has done in his life and what God has in mind for ours.

**DENNY RYDBERG**  
president of Young Life

*Awakening to God* is a breath of fresh air, a rejuvenating invitation to the fundamentals of Christian life and witness. If your spiritual life is in a rut and you're longing to get back to your first love, this book is for you. If you're wondering whether God has a deeper purpose for your life, this book is for you. If you've ever found yourself unsure of how to share the gospel in a world that questions the gospel's continued relevance, this book is for you.

**JIM LISKE**

president and CEO of Prison Fellowship Ministries

Gerard Long is a sincere, passionate man with street credibility in both the business domain and the church. In *Awakening to God*, I appreciate Gerard's straightforward way of sharing about his brokenness and the beauty of Christ in the midst of his journey. This is a practical guide for those who want to share about their relationship with Jesus in a way that is more real, supernatural, organic, and clear.

**DAVE GIBBONS**

founder of Newsong Church and XEALOTS

Gerard Long has written a vital and vibrant book that will both encourage and challenge you. He is a man of deep experience who knows of what he speaks. Definitely a worthy read.

**GREGORY W. SLAYTON**

author of the national bestseller *Be a Better Dad Today: Ten Tools Every Father Needs*

*Awakening to God* shows us how God's love can enter any situation and bring true transformation. From the lessons of

a life filled with joys and sorrows, Long beautifully shows how God loves us, equips us, and sustains us as we go and make disciples.

**KERRY KNOTT**

president of the C. S. Lewis Institute

The early church grew exponentially because people were drawn by their passion for Jesus. Today, we have the same opportunity—and the same responsibility. *Awakening to God* will renew your spirit and inspire you to be more intentional about building relationships with people who don't know God.

**MAC MCQUISTON**

CEO/president of the CEO Forum, Inc.

*Awakening to God* not only tells the surprising, moving story of how God changed one man's life forever, it is a practical, gentle wake-up call to sleeping people everywhere. If you're stuck in a rut, underwhelmed by life, and not sure your life could ever be much different, this is the book for you!

**DON EVERTS**

author of *Go and Do: Becoming a Missional Christian*



# AWAKENING TO GOD

Discovering his power  
and your purpose

GERARD LONG



**TYNDALE™  
MOMENTUM**

*An Imprint of  
Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.*



Visit Tyndale online at [www.tyndale.com](http://www.tyndale.com).

Visit Tyndale Momentum online at [www.tyndalemomentum.com](http://www.tyndalemomentum.com).

*TYNDALE* is a registered trademark of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. *Tyndale Momentum* and the Tyndale Momentum logo are trademarks of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. Tyndale Momentum is an imprint of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

*Awakening to God: Discovering His Power and Your Purpose*

Copyright © 2014 by Gerard B. Long. All rights reserved.

Designed by Mark Anthony Lane II

Published in association with the literary agency of Wolgemuth and Associates, Inc., 8600 Crestgate Circle, Orlando, FL 32819.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from Holy Bible, *New International Version*,<sup>®</sup> *NIV*.<sup>®</sup> Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.<sup>®</sup> Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. [www.zondervan.com](http://www.zondervan.com).

Scripture quotations marked AMP are taken from the *Amplified Bible*,<sup>®</sup> copyright © 1954, 1958, 1962, 1964, 1965, 1987 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked ESV are taken from *The Holy Bible*, English Standard Version<sup>®</sup> (ESV<sup>®</sup>), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked KJV are taken from the *Holy Bible*, King James Version.

Scripture quotations marked MSG are taken from *The Message* by Eugene H. Peterson, copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version.<sup>®</sup> Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007, 2013 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked TLB are taken from *The Living Bible*, copyright © 1971 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

---

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Long, Gerard

Awakening to God : discovering his power and your purpose / Gerard Long.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-4143-9628-6 (sc)

1. Religious awakening—Christianity. I. Title.

BV4509.5.L65 2014

269—dc23

2014019827

---

Printed in the United States of America

20	19	18	17	16	15	14
7	6	5	4	3	2	1

# Contents

Foreword by Bill Hybels *xiii*

Introduction *xv*

1. Awakening to God's Love and Purpose *1*
2. Awakening to the Holy Spirit: Power for Living *13*
3. Awakening to Our Calling: Go and Make Disciples *25*
4. Awakening to Brokenness *45*
5. Awakening to Eternity *59*
6. Awakening to Opportunity: A Bigger Vision *67*
7. Awakening to God's Provision: How to Become Fishers  
of Men *81*
8. Awakening to the Nets: How to Draw In the Fish *105*
9. Awakening to the Catch: How to Land the Fish *119*

Epilogue *137*

Notes *141*

Acknowledgments *151*

About the Author *155*



# Foreword

LET ME BEGIN by saying I love Alpha, the outreach organization whose US division Gerard Long has led since 2006. At Willow Creek, Alpha is the primary tool we use to help people discover satisfying answers to their questions about faith, God, and Christianity. And we are not alone. Through the Alpha course, millions of people around the world have awakened to God, understood for the first time the basics of following Christ, and found meaning and purpose for their lives.

The work Gerard and others are doing through Alpha is the most important in the world. In this book, Gerard invites you on a journey of awakening to what matters most in this life. Through the story of his own series of awakenings—some of them resulting from great personal tragedy—he challenges you to embrace the awakenings God desires for each of us:

- Awakening to his love, purpose, and power for living
- Awakening to the brokenness of life on this earth and the promise of a different life in the next reality
- Awakening to our ultimate callings
- Awakening to his strategy for making disciples.

The pages of this book hold the capacity to stir a Spirit-prodded appetite for God's awakenings in your life as a Christ follower. As you read, may you invite God to awaken in you a greater awareness of his presence and activity in your life—and in the lives of those you impact in his name.

*Bill Hybels*

# Introduction

*How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those  
who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who  
bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation.*

ISAIAH 52:7

IN MY WORK for Alpha, a not-for-profit ministry that invites people to learn the basics of Christianity in a relaxed, welcoming, and engaging atmosphere, I travel extensively throughout the United States. People I meet who are aware of my background in finance will often ask me why and how I left the corporate world to work for a nonprofit organization—and especially to work for Alpha, whose low-key, informal approach to evangelism seems incompatible with their image of a buttoned-down banker.

Over time, I've come to realize that the answer to their question involves one of several awakenings I've had—times when God has either roused me from a spiritual slumber or has otherwise redirected my steps to be more in line with his purpose for my life. Further, I've found that these awakenings are “common to mankind”—that is, they're awakenings that God desires for every person to have; in fact, they're essential to God's work in our lives and in our world.

I've noticed over the past few years that many Christians

I meet feel beaten down in their faith. They are disappointed and frustrated by the lack of power and impact they've had for the Kingdom of God. They've been followers of Christ for years, and yet they feel as if they haven't effectively lived out the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations. Instead, they're stuck with a mixture of fear and concern that they don't know enough to be able to share their faith with others.

Many of these Christians are passionate about their faith, but they're looking for practical guidance that will enable them to share God's love with their family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers. Does that sound familiar?

I have no doubt that you, too, are concerned for the souls of the people around you, and yet the thought of another "evangelism program" can seem daunting—even a plan designed by Jesus himself. But every evangelistic effort at its core is simply an invitation to "come and see."<sup>1</sup> We have utilized this simple model to great effect within the Alpha Course, and I'd like to show you how to apply it even more generally in your life.

Jesus told his disciples to "go into all the world," and he promised he would make them "fishers of men."<sup>2</sup> They promptly went out and turned the world upside down. That same promise and prospect is available to us today.

My aim in these pages is to give you hope that a fresh experience of God is possible, and to inspire you to "go and tell" your friends and neighbors, so that they will "come and see" and be captivated by the good news of God's love and his

Kingdom. Yet, even as I seek to present my case with gentleness and grace, I can only hope to adequately convey the urgency of God's calling: "*Wake up!* Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished."<sup>3</sup>

It's time for a fresh awakening of our hearts to God. Let's go turn the world upside down again.





## AWAKENING TO GOD'S LOVE AND PURPOSE

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”*

JEREMIAH 29:11

I STILL REMEMBER the day my eyes were opened—Valentine’s Day 1980. I was in my dormitory room at Loughborough University, in England, and had received a letter from my brother Will the day before. He wrote about many things, but one line in particular fairly leapt off the page at me: *God has got a plan for your life made out of perfect love.*

Until that day, I had been going my own way for several years. Though raised by Christian parents in a loving home, I had, like many young people, decided to walk away from the church. I had been a Christian since I was five or six years old, but I seemed to have little desire to truly live for Jesus—that is, to conform my will and my ways to his. I was

frustrated and disappointed with myself, and more than a little embarrassed about my faith. I can remember dreading the thought of having my friends come by for tea, because my mum would say grace beforehand and I was afraid of what my friends would think. And I recall riding to church on Sundays, desperately hoping I wouldn't be spotted by anyone I knew.

I knew I was a hypocrite, *saying* one thing but *living* something else entirely, but I had reached a point where I really didn't care. My head was in it, but my heart was far removed. When I was sixteen, I decided to stop trying to be a good Christian. I'd had enough of the dual lifestyle. I was done. The last thing I wanted to do was discourage my friends from following Jesus just because I couldn't do it.

Though I did my fair share of wayward living over the next several years—hurting many people in the process and damaging myself, as well—my real motivation was to throw myself into middle-distance running, and track soon became a replacement god for me. I ate it, slept it, and drank it—and it consumed me. I loved the adrenaline rush before a race, the simplicity and pureness of pitching my utmost against my fellow competitors over a set distance, and, of course, the triumph of breaking the tape as the front-runner.

The focus and discipline needed to accomplish my goal—to train day in and day out, whether I felt strong or weak, and whatever the weather—appealed to my character. I was proud, and my ego was boosted as I won championships and achieved recognition.<sup>1</sup> I reached a high level of success

on the track and was elected captain of my college team, which included double Olympic champion and world-record holder Sebastian Coe. Aside from running and studying, I had little time or attention for anything else.

By my final year of college, I had a game plan of total dedication to pass my exams and to be selected to run in the Olympic Trials for Great Britain. I moved off-campus to get away from the partying, and I doubled down on my studies and training. Things started well, but then disaster struck as I incurred a serious Achilles injury, which interrupted my training for several months. Although I managed to regain some fitness to run for my college team, it wasn't enough to qualify me to compete in the Trials.

Around this same time, my future wife, Jeannie, whom I had met a couple of years earlier, went back overseas to pursue her ballet career. We had kept in touch while she was dancing with a corps de ballet in Austria, and when she'd returned to the UK, she had begun talking about our getting married. But that was definitely not a part of my egocentric plan at the time, and in my selfishness, I turned her away. Now she was back on the Continent with her troupe, and in her absence, God finally had me in a place where I could hear his voice.

On the morning of February 14, I sat alone at my desk—no music, no friends, no noise, no distractions. Just me and God. And I couldn't get Will's words out of my mind.

As I contemplated God's perfect love for me, and the thought that he had a purpose for me that I had pushed to

the margins of my life, I felt the truth awaken my heart in a way I had never before experienced. Believing, as I did, that God created the universe and everything in it, it struck home with astonishing clarity that his plan for my life had to be wiser and more purposeful than my own self-absorbed ideas. This seems quite obvious in retrospect, but at the time it was a revelation.

I sat and reflected on this reality for a long time. Eventually, it seemed the only smart decision was to fully surrender my life to God. As I was drawn to prayer, I sensed the Lord saying that if he had the proper place in my life—namely, *his* will ahead of *my* will—I might not get everything I had planned on the outside, but inside I would have abundance—a life full of love, joy, peace, contentment, and purpose.

For the first time in my life, I truly understood what this meant: God created me for an intimate relationship with him. Apart from him, I am incomplete. I had been trying to fill this God-shaped void with many other things, but only he can complete me.

Scripture verses I had long since memorized and forgotten suddenly came alive for me in a new way. “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”<sup>22</sup> These words, which for me had been purely theoretical up to this point, now seemed as if they’d been penned just for me. What would I gain if I got everything I ever wanted—every experience and every achievement—but inside I was empty and dissatisfied? Where was the value in that?

I finally recognized that God could give me contentment

on the inside, even if I had nothing on the outside. In him alone I would have everything my soul could ever need.

When I was younger, I'd heard an analogy of salvation that compared inviting Christ into my heart to inviting him into my house. I realized that, in my earlier conversion, I had asked Jesus in the front door but had left him standing in the hallway. I hadn't wanted him to come into the other rooms—into my relationships, my work and career, my money, my future—because I wanted to control those aspects of my life. I had been a fool, thinking I knew better than the Creator of the universe what was best for my life! I had received Jesus as my Savior but not as my Lord. But now I was saying, “Jesus, I trust you and give you full permission to be Lord over every area of my life, and I believe that you know better than I do what is best for me. I not only belong to you, but I fully surrender my life to you.”

As I made this decision in my mind and spoke it out loud to the empty room, it was as if God showed up in my apartment. As best I can describe it, it felt as if liquid love were being poured into my heart. It was just me and God, and his Spirit filled my life. I started to weep as I felt his loving embrace. I'd been living on my own, but now I felt as if I'd come home. I hadn't cried in seven or eight years, but I wept from the bottom of my heart as God's love filled me.

At the time, I didn't know what was going on, but now I know from Scripture that the Holy Spirit was filling my heart with love.<sup>3</sup> I suddenly understood the purpose for my life—to love and serve God. To no longer live for myself, but

instead to live for *him*. The tears of love now turned into tears of utter joy as, for the first time in my life, I felt totally complete. None of the things on which I had previously hung my hat mattered to me as much anymore—athletics (which until then had consumed me), my relationship with Jeannie (which had been so beautiful), making money (through a successful small business I had founded on campus), and even my future. All these things I now felt free to leave in God's hands. If he wanted me to have them back to use for his service, fine; but if not, it didn't matter—I was utterly fulfilled in him.

That's not to say that every day since has been a spiritual high. But I can honestly say this was more than just a momentary, spiritual epiphany. It was a turning point, a true awakening that set my life on a different course. Instead of being self-centered, I became God-centered.

I've included this brief overview of my growing-up years because, as I've spoken to groups and individuals, I've found that people tend to relate to one part of my experience or another—whether it's walking away from God for a time, giving in to temptation and making sinful choices, going all-in on something that seems worthwhile but comes at the expense of an intimate relationship with God, or simply coming to a place where it seems there must be something more to the Christian life. Whatever it is in your life that has prompted you to pick up a book called *Awakening to God*, let me encourage you with this: *God truly does have a plan for your life made out of perfect love.* That doesn't mean your life

will be perfect. But God's love for you is perfect, and when you surrender to it and allow it to permeate every part of your being—to enter every room in your house—God will fill you to overflowing with the power of his Holy Spirit.

This is the first awakening we all need—awakening to God's calling us by name, firstly to himself, but also to a perfect design for our lives made out of unconditional love.

### AWAKENING TO GOD'S LORDSHIP

*You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.*

JEREMIAH 29:13

I encourage you to consider, and even wrestle with, the following thoughts and questions. Either God is King and Lord of your life, or someone else is—probably *you*. God created you for a relationship with him, and because he desperately loves you, he wants the very best for you: to bless you, fulfill you, and give you fullness of life, including love, joy, and peace. Also, he has given you a unique opportunity to participate with him in sharing his love with others. He has prepared, from the beginning of time, a unique plan for your life. Think of a parent who wants the best for his or her children. Despite having limited knowledge and power, the parent still knows more than the children do about what will bless them and what will harm them. Now consider that God has perfect knowledge and complete power. If you let him, he will guide you into a full and satisfying life.

Jesus showed us how to walk through life. On many



occasions, he made it clear that he was not living for his own will, but rather for God's will, to please him.<sup>4</sup> In doing this, he not only lived a fulfilled and complete life, but he also accomplished the eternal purpose of God, bringing forgiveness, reconciliation, and salvation to the world.

However good you may think your plan is for your life, God's plan is a lot better. His plan will give you the best possible life you can imagine. You will experience true contentment, love, joy, and peace—and God will use you to bless many other people. You will also store up for yourself “treasures in heaven”—eternal rewards.<sup>5</sup>

God's life will flow from within you, and it will not depend on what you have on the outside. The ways of God's Kingdom are different from the values of this world, which feed and motivate selfish desires. (What is it that causes so much trouble in the world? Is it not from people pursuing their selfish desires?) God's desire is that your inner *self* would be crucified with Christ, such that you no longer live for what *you* want but for what *he* wants.<sup>6</sup> If you abide in Jesus, his life flows within you.

Do you believe and trust in God enough to surrender every area of your life to him? Are you willing to say to him, “Your will be done in my relationships, my family, my possessions, my health, my career—in every choice I make”?

## AWAKENING TO GOD'S LOVE

*I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long*

*and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

EPHESIANS 3:17-19

Four things immediately changed in my life on the day I fully surrendered my life to Christ. First, I found I was head over heels in love with Jesus Christ. When you really love someone, you take great pleasure in pleasing that person. This was now all I wanted to do—to please God by doing his will.<sup>7</sup>

The second thing I noticed was that I had a love for God's Word. Now that my eyes were opened, God's truth was exciting and fresh to me. I found I could hardly put down my Bible and would read it into the early hours of the morning, making copious notes. As I encountered Scriptures that spoke to me, I began sharing them with family and friends who were also following Christ. I realize now that my parents were very patient during this time, as I often thought I had come across some great revelation that no one had ever seen before.

The third change was that I stopped swearing. Without my even trying or thinking about it, this nasty habit just slipped away. Also, because of my deep and passionate love for Jesus Christ, I wanted to rid my life of anything that would disappoint or grieve him. This desire to dedicate and separate my life to please God (i.e., to live a holy life) flowed out of a love from my heart, not from my head.

Finally, I developed a deep love and concern for other

people, including their current needs and their eternal destiny. In particular, I was desperate to tell them about Jesus Christ. Though the other changes were certainly remarkable, I believe this one was the most notable, in light of my past. It was as if I had discovered a gold mine with enough of the precious metal for everyone in the world. How could I keep it to myself? I had to share my discovery with other people. In particular, I wanted my friends to meet Jesus and experience the abundance of life I was now enjoying.

I remember being quite nervous as I approached the first friend with whom I planned to share the gospel. I prayed that God would help me and would open my friend's eyes to see Jesus. And then I simply stepped out, trusting God to guide me.

“Hey, Jim, I had an amazing experience the other day that has completely changed my life . . .”

I explained to him about my brother's letter and how I had reasoned that God's plan for my life had to be better than my own. I shared how I had sensed God speaking to me and how I had experienced what felt like liquid love flowing through me as I told God that I now wanted to live for him and not for myself. I don't think Jim knew quite what to say, but he didn't mock me (at least, not to my face). He simply heard me out.

With this first effort under my belt, I felt emboldened to speak to others, as well. Starting with one or two friends at a time, often over a meal or at tea, I began telling everyone I knew about my encounter with God and the new direction

for my life. I was completely captivated by God's love and simply *had* to share it.

Incredibly, I found that the more I shared my faith, the more joy seemed to course through me and the more I felt God's presence within me. My friends could see that something profound had happened to me, and their mouths may have dropped open in surprise. After all, the captain of the top college track team in the country and one of the "lads" around campus was now openly following Jesus Christ.

Later that year, an evangelist named Eric Delve led a crusade on our campus. He agreed to let me share my testimony, and I invited everybody I could to come along to the meeting. My parents and my brother Will drove up for the event. The place was packed, and as the time came for me to share my story, I was literally shaking with nerves. When I was called up to speak, I attempted to take the quickest route to the microphone by leaping onto the stage. However, I miscalculated my jump, tripped, and fell flat on my face, to a roar of applause and laughter from my friends. It was all in good humor, but as I picked myself up, I discovered that the nerves had been knocked completely out of me. I found I could think clearly, and I believe the testimony I gave was relatively lucid. Ever since then, God has enabled me, even with some nerves, to speak in public.

In the thirty-four years since my heart was awakened to God's love and his purpose for my life, my love for him, for his Word, and for people has grown deeper and deeper. That is not to say that life has been easy. On the contrary, as I'll

share later, I have experienced tremendous pain and suffering. But I've discovered that God is my source of love, joy, peace, strength, and wisdom. In fact, he supplies everything I need for whatever I come across on my journey. His grace really is sufficient!<sup>8</sup>

I've learned a wonderful secret for life: how to strengthen my soul in God.<sup>9</sup> This flows out of simply spending time in God's presence—first on my own but also with other Christians. I've discovered that God's Word nourishes my soul and lights my path.<sup>10</sup> I've experienced how the Holy Spirit strengthens, empowers, and equips me for every situation. Like anyone else, I often mess up, but I've learned to quickly repent so that I don't grieve God by being out of sync with him for very long. My prayer is that you, too, will awaken to God's love and purpose for your life.