

finding the
EXTRA
in ORDIN-
ARY

includes inspiring
stories from Tim Tebow,
Kathie Lee Gifford,
Dolly Parton, Mike
Fisher, and others

EMBRACING THE BEAUTY
OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE
JEFF SIMMONS

Stop just getting through each day and start living the impactful life God has called you to! *Finding the Extra in Ordinary* walks us through how to shake off the mundane and step into the truly extraordinary life Jesus wants us to experience. Buckle up and prepare for change!

CHASE HEADLEY, former Major League Baseball player for the New York Yankees and San Diego Padres

One of my greatest blessings is having Jeff Simmons as my pastor and friend and personally serving around the world with him through Justice & Mercy International. Jeff's faith and love for Christ are contagious. To read *Finding the Extra in Ordinary* is to be inspired by what God wants to do with your life. If you're wondering if your life has purpose or if God deeply loves you, pick up this book and be encouraged!

KELLY MINTER, Bible teacher and author of *The Blessed Life: A 90-Day Devotional through the Teachings and Miracles of Jesus*

You'll want to reexamine your life and priorities after reading *Finding the Extra in Ordinary*. God wants to do something extra in your life as you grow deeper in your relationship with Jesus. Jeff Simmons is an amazingly gifted pastor and teacher, and this book is an extraordinary example of those gifts.

BRETT JAMES, Grammy Award-winning songwriter and producer

Finding the Extra in Ordinary is a must-read for everyone searching for meaning in this life. So often we settle for

an ordinary life when we know that God has more for us. This book offers the practical wisdom that leads to an extraordinary life. It calls us to a full and meaningful existence with a focus on what truly matters. Get ready to be challenged and inspired!

AMY ALEXANDER, marriage and family therapist and CEO and cofounder of The Refuge Center for Counseling

If you want to read about the power of a Spirit-led life written by someone who actually lives one, then this book, written by my dear friend Jeff Simmons, is for you. *Finding the Extra in Ordinary* is a reflection of how he lives what he preaches.

MIKE MINTER, founding pastor and pastor emeritus of Reston Bible Church

Everyday living can get to feeling downright ordinary. Ordinary breakfast with my ordinary coffee. Wearing my ordinary jeans to my ordinary job. Ordinary bills at the end of another ordinary day. Same old, same old. *Can God really use an ordinary person like me?* If you have forgotten what God loves to do with ordinary people, *Finding the Extra in Ordinary* offers just the inspiration you need. From the very first page, I was hooked by the amazing stories, biblical wisdom, and trademark joy of my friend Jeff Simmons. And by the end I realized, *God meant this book for me!*

ANGELA THOMAS PHARR, bestselling author and speaker

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FOCUS
ON THE FAMILY[®]

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*To God and to all those who long to pursue
Him as they experience the extra in the ordinary.*

contents

Introduction *1*

1 The Invitation *9*

2 Embrace God's Heart *25*

3 Listen *43*

4 Make the Most of Your Life *63*

5 Invest Wisely *83*

6 Choose Joy *107*

7 Every Day Matters *127*

8 Miracles Happen *145*

9 Discover Your Passion *161*

10 Faith over Fear *175*

11 The Best Is Still to Come *191*

CONCLUSION: Live *Your* Extraordinary Life *211*

Acknowledgments *231*

Notes *233*

About the Author *235*

introduction

MOST PEOPLE SETTLE FOR ORDINARY. While almost everyone knows deep down there could be more to their life, they either don't know how to find it or they simply conform to what others are doing. So much in this world makes us feel ordinary, like a number or a statistic. Maybe you feel that way sometimes. Maybe you feel like just another number—your social security number, your driver's license number, your student ID number—but you are so much more. You were born for a reason.

For so many of us, life becomes monotonous. We wake up in the same bed, brush the same teeth, go to the same job, eat the same lunch, come home with the same fatigue, watch the same shows, fall asleep in the same bed, then wake up and do it all over again. Deep down we long for more. We long to be fulfilled and to make a difference. This longing needs to be expressed, heard, and met. When we finally stop for a moment and evaluate our lives, we can be honest about how

we feel and what we really need. We can then determine to move beyond the ordinary.

What if, at this point in your life, everything could begin to make sense? What if you could understand and truly live life to the fullest? When you discover *why* you were created, it gives your life meaning. You move from living in the ordinary to embracing the *more* in life. It is powerful, freeing, and exhilarating. You immediately feel the difference, and it changes everything. No longer are you simply tired, worn out, and just trying to survive, but now you are energized, engaged, and fully alive. This is the life that only a few find. But for those who do find it, it changes everything. What if you could discover this way of living?

Let's be clear that we are not simply talking about behavior modification. Behavior modification is something we have all tried. Perhaps, for example, we want to lose weight. So we decide to try every weight loss plan out there. We modify our behavior to conform to some fad diet program. Sometimes we find success for a season, but for most of us, after a few months (or more likely days), we are right back where we were before. Life gets in the way and keeps us from our desired goal.

We need more than behavior modification to impact all areas of our lives. We need to dive into something deeper—something that impacts every area of life and is birthed from the inside out, not the outside in. Not simply behavior modification, but *life transformation*. This is where we truly come alive.

I met John several years ago. He was very successful by the world's standards. He had plenty of money, nice cars, and multiple homes. He had followed Christ for most of his life, but when he was in his midfifties, he experienced a defining moment. Everything changed when John embarked on a fishing trip in a remote location; that's when something new sparked in his heart. (I'll provide more details about John's trip later.)

It was like a light bulb came on inside him. From that moment forward, John completely embraced the life God had for him. He started to give back and invest in others. Joy filled his heart and life. Before this John had been very serious and intense, but afterward he became full of life, joy, and peace. One day he said, "I am in my fifties now. I just wish I had gotten it sooner. I feel so alive, but I wasted so many years."

At fifty-five, John finally began to live the life he was created to live. Maybe you, too, look back over your life and can see there were some "wasted years." You've most likely had some good years as well, but do you ever wonder if there is more to life? Something more that you were created to do or to be?

You are here for a reason. There is a reason you were born at this time in history. There is a reason you were born in the land of your origin. There is even a reason you were born into a particular family and community. There is a reason for your life, and finding that reason and the meaning behind it is crucial. It is worth your time, energy, and pursuit. It impacts everything.

An old quote sometimes attributed to Mark Twain says, “The two most important days in your life are the day you were born and the day you find out why.” Throughout this book we’ll explore *why* you were created and *how* to live it out. We’ll explore God’s plan for our lives and learn to see ourselves the way God sees us. I’ll share stories of others who’ve chosen to follow God and to live their own extraordinary lives. And I pray that a light bulb will come on for all of us so that we might live whatever time we have left with meaning, purpose, and joy.

Most people decide to play it safe. In fact, most people live life afraid. Afraid to step out. Afraid to be bold. Afraid to discover why they were created. Afraid to know their reason and purpose. But there is so much more available! Don’t we owe it to ourselves as well as to others to live the life God has planned for us? When we are willing to let go of what everyone else thinks and move past simply conforming to the world’s standards, then we can move forward in discovering the life He wants for us.

As I look around, I see many wonderful people stuck on a journey of the ordinary. Some of them believe the lie they have been told all their life—that this is all there is; there isn’t anything more. Others were told they wouldn’t amount to much. And still others are living the life that someone else—maybe a parent, a significant other, a teacher, or a coach—planned for them, but it is not the life they want. So many people are gridlocked by fear and stuck in the ordinary or, sadly, the less-than-ordinary. But it doesn’t have to be like this.

Many years ago, there was a group of ordinary guys. Some of them owned businesses, while others were working jobs just trying to make ends meet. Every day, they went to work to make enough money for their families to eat and have somewhere to live. Sounds like most of the world, doesn't it? They were good guys, even religious, but something was missing. Then one day, another man, who turned out to be God in human form, came along and invited them on a journey. He said, "Come, follow me" (Matthew 4:19, NIV). And their lives were forever changed.

They could have stuck it out with fishing or tax collecting, eventually dying in obscurity. But they traded the ordinary for following Jesus. And their lives, as well as our world, were never the same. For each of these disciples, there came a defining moment and then a daily commitment to the One who invited them to live beyond the ordinary.

I wrote this book because it is my desire to help people find their reason and purpose—to help them understand that they were designed by the Creator as unique, special, and in the image of God. I want others to understand that we were not born to be ordinary. Just like the men in the Bible whom Jesus called to be His disciples, for each of us there comes a defining moment and a daily commitment. The same call, the same invitation, that came to those guys back then still comes to us today.

Don't you desire more? I believe we all do. And this desire for more is part of our reason for being and our search for meaning. We were designed that way by God. We have been

given one opportunity to live this life. One opportunity. There is no rehearsal. We won't get a mulligan or a do-over. This is it.

Live the life you were created to live. You have been given this one as a gift, and God has an awesome plan for you. Yes, *you!* And you have certain gifts, talents, and abilities to help you reach your potential in this life. I want you to reach your full potential, but even more so, God does too! Settling in life is why so many people never feel fulfilled, confident, or satisfied.

Maybe you have been there. You might feel tired, run down, even lost. Yet you don't have to live this way. God has the best life for you. Reading this book could be your defining moment—the point where you get serious about this invitation you have been given.

I've had the privilege of meeting a lot of incredible people, from celebrities here in the United States to precious orphan children around the world. I've met people of all ages and from all backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses, and I have made some remarkable discoveries along the way.

You'll meet many of these people in the pages that follow. They don't all look alike. They don't all sound alike. They don't all think alike. And no surprise, they don't all think exactly like me. They come from different places and have different points of view, but they all love God and have made a remarkable—dare I say extraordinary—difference for His Kingdom. I have gained new insights about life from every one of them.

I want to share these insights with you in this book because I am convinced that you can truly live a greater life. Don't settle for the mediocre, the mundane, or especially the ordinary. You can become all you were intended and created to be!

As long as you are alive, God is not finished with you. There is still breath in your lungs for a purpose. Think about this: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31). Seriously, the God of the universe is for you! And nothing His hands touch is simple or ordinary. Rather, what He creates is special and complex—from butterflies to beasts in the fields, from morning dew to thunderstorms that light up the sky. He created you, and He is for you. You get one shot at life—one chance—so don't waste it. Don't live for things that do not matter. Invest in what matters. Some of your best days are still ahead.

Let's jump in together with both feet. After all, what do you have to lose compared with what you have to gain—for His glory? As another famous quote—this one attributed to Theodor Geisel (famous children's author Dr. Seuss)—says, "Why fit in when you were born to stand out?" So stop fitting into the *ordinary* and start embracing the *extraordinary* life God created just for you.

1

the INVITATION

*It is not the years in your life but
the life in your years that count.*

ADLAI STEVENSON

IT WAS A NORMAL DAY at the office when my cell phone rang. A guy named Steve (he has a child who attended our church) was calling and said, “Jeff, you may remember me; I work with Dolly Parton. Dolly and Carl are celebrating their fiftieth wedding anniversary next weekend by renewing their wedding vows. Would you be able to officiate the service?” I told him that my work calendar was clear but I needed to check with my wife. I asked if I could call him back the following day.

When I came home and mentioned the call to my wife, Lisa, she flipped. “Dolly Parton! You are helping Dolly Parton renew her wedding vows?” Now, obviously, I knew

who Dolly Parton was, but what I didn't know was just how much Dolly is loved worldwide. My wife was my first clue regarding the immense impact Dolly has had on so many people.

I learned quickly that almost everyone knows of Dolly Parton. She has a personality that draws people to her. Young and old, city people and country people, musicians and those who can't carry a tune—she has touched so many lives with her joy, her music, her humor, her love, and her generosity. She has captured the hearts of generations, especially here in Tennessee. As I look around my home state, I can see traces of Dolly everywhere. She's like the Tennessee rivers that help connect everything in the state.

Yet as famous as Dolly is, her family were “simple folk,” as she would say. The fourth of twelve children, Dolly was born and raised in the hills of Tennessee—one of the poorest parts of the United States. But Dolly never really knew how poor her family was. She never complained about her circumstances but kept her head up and her heart focused on her dreams. Overcoming enormous obstacles at a young age, Dolly made it to Nashville and ultimately became the music superstar the world knows and loves today.

I called Steve back, and he gave me the details for the event. He told me that it would be held the next Saturday at a private location in Nashville. It would be a small, intimate ceremony, but there would be lots of pictures taken. Then he told me their story (and here is where I began to love Dolly like the rest of the world does).

Carl told Dolly that she could have anything she wanted for their fiftieth wedding anniversary. “Dolly,” he said, “we can go anywhere in the world that you want. You say the word, and I will make it happen.” Anything. Anywhere. Yet Dolly simply replied, “Well, Carl, here’s what I want. I want a wedding dress, a wedding cake, a preacher, and us dressed up for lots of pictures. Then I want to sell the pictures and give all the money to the Imagination Library.”

Here’s a little background on all this. When Carl and Dolly were first married—fifty years earlier—Carl was twenty-three, and Dolly was twenty. Dolly already had a record deal in Nashville, and the record label did not want her getting married. So she and Carl slipped off to a little church in Ringgold, Georgia, for a small ceremony. Dolly wanted to get married in a church, and this little country church was the perfect place back then. Yet she always felt like she had missed out on a big, beautiful wedding.

Soon after they were married, Dolly won her first music award. Carl went with her to the elaborate awards ceremony, and after it was over, he told her, “Dolly, I don’t ever want to do that again. That’s you, but that’s not me. You go pursue your dream. I will support you 100 percent, but that is not the life for me.” From that point on, there have been no pictures of Carl at concerts or special events. None. How crazy is that! In a world filled with paparazzi, people have always wanted pictures of Carl. When Dolly was out on the road, Carl was busy doing work he loves back in Nashville. They are home and together often, and

Carl remains her biggest fan. They have been happily married all these years.

This brings us back to Dolly's wish for her vow-renewal celebration. She wanted them to dress up, say their vows before a preacher, take lots of pictures, and give all the money to the Imagination Library. If you aren't familiar with the Imagination Library program, Dolly's request will help you understand the heart behind the person.

Dolly knew that her home state was behind much of the country in terms of literacy, but instead of simply bemoaning the fact, she decided to do something about it. In honor of her daddy, Dolly created a book-gifting program that mails free, high-quality books to children from birth to age five, no matter their family's income. Books were initially distributed only to children in the county where she grew up, but the program became such a success that books were eventually distributed nationally and then internationally. Speaking from experience, I have three children, and our family received free books from the Imagination Library for all of them. Books are truly a life-impacting gift.

Dolly and her book-gifting organization have received honors and awards for their dedication to enriching the lives of children everywhere. It was another dream Dolly had that came to fruition and continues to grow. She's a small-town girl from one of the poorest areas in America, yet what a difference she is making!

When the day of their vow-renewal celebration arrived, my wife, Lisa, and I dressed up in nice clothes and drove to

the special location. I had never before met Dolly or Carl, so I wasn't sure what to expect. Would I recognize her? Would there be security there to let us in? These thoughts ran through my mind as I pulled into the parking lot. As I got out of the car, I heard a voice with the most distinctive Southern drawl:

“Preeachhha!”

Dolly was standing there in a beautiful wedding dress. She walked over and threw her arms around my neck. “I’m so glad you are here! Come on in!” She introduced me to Carl—a sharp, good-looking, confident gentleman. Lisa and I were then introduced to Dolly’s sisters and other family members. We also met her manager, the photography crew, and others. The multi-roomed venue was set up with a room for the ceremony, another room for the reception, which would feature a beautiful wedding cake, a room where the casual pictures would be taken, and a final room for the more formal photos.

Dolly was in top form. Her exuberance and beauty lit up the space. She was laughing and having the time of her life. As the photographers shot individual pictures of Dolly, Carl and I sat down to talk. He said, “Jeff, that is the most beautiful woman in the world right there.” He went on to tell me how they had met and about their life together. Carl told story after story with a twinkle in his eye as he talked about his wife of fifty years.

“Jeff, she is also the most generous woman ever,” he said. “She would give it all away if she could. She has put all her nieces and nephews through college. All that she does

for everyone in East Tennessee, and then the Imagination Library—her heart is as big as this building. Sometimes I have to say, ‘Hold on, Dolly! You can’t just give it all away!’”

Then it was Carl’s turn for individual pictures and Dolly’s turn for stories. She talked about how people always wanted to see Carl. Since that first awards show, however, he has avoided the spotlight. She told me what a great husband he is, camera-shy or not. She talked about how supportive he is. She talked about when they met, and how much she still loves him. We talked about her family, her friends, and her faith. Dolly is truly everything people say she is—kind and authentic, full of life and joy.

It was time for more preceremony pictures, and Dolly informed me, “I’m going to make you famous, Preacher.”

“I’m all good, Dolly,” I replied. “You are famous enough for all of us.” We laughed, posed, and simply had a great time together. Carl was engaged and willing to do whatever was asked of him. You could tell that he loved Dolly and that he was doing this for her.

We gathered on the platform for the renewal of the vows—only the preacher, bride, and groom, just like fifty years ago. It was a special moment. The love, the joy, and the commitment were all still evident.

Dolly Parton is anything but ordinary. She took what God gave her, didn’t let poverty or the world stop her, and didn’t settle for less. She dreams big. She loves generously. She is truly living her extraordinary life.

GOD USES REGULAR PEOPLE

God uses regular people. Sometimes we look at people in the world and think, *Well, they are just special* or *They have unique gifts and talents. They have something that I don't*. We look at many people in the Bible the same way. *They are supernatural. They have God-given gifts. They don't face the same struggles or have the same fears that I do*. Then we read stories of people who do incredible things and think, *They are sensational. They don't have my life*. Yet that is simply not true. Most of the figures in the Bible were just regular people, yet they didn't settle for the ordinary.

There are figures like Joshua, who was second-in-command to the great leader Moses. One day God told Joshua, "Moses my servant is dead" (Joshua 1:2). Maybe you have been there. The death of a parent. The death of a spouse or close friend. You are overwhelmed and wonder how in the world you will go on. Then God said to Joshua (just as He still says to us today), "Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9, NASB). Joshua, through the strength of the Lord, rose to the occasion and led God's people into the Promised Land.

Think of Mary, the mother of Jesus. When God was choosing an earthly mom for His Son, Jesus, you'd think He would have chosen someone well educated to teach His Son, someone wealthy to provide for Jesus, and someone well connected to help Jesus gain a following. Yet God chose a

simple teenage girl—one from a small village and with little education. What set Mary apart was that she was honest, humble, and willing to be used by God. She trusted in God’s sovereignty and accepted His call. God doesn’t need our special abilities, just our hearts’ availability.

Peter and John became leaders in the early church, and they impacted thousands for Jesus. Their influence continues today in churches throughout the world. One of my favorite verses in the Bible appears in Acts 4. In the previous chapter, Peter and John had healed a crippled man in the name of Jesus. In other words, a man who had been lame for more than forty years was now jumping around and praising God. The religious leaders arrested Peter and John because they were confused and couldn’t figure out how they had done it. In truth, Peter and John had simply said, “In the name of Jesus . . .” as they told the man to rise up and walk. There is power in the name of Jesus.

Then comes this statement from Acts 4:13 regarding the religious leaders: “When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.”

I love this! The religious leaders were dumbfounded! Peter and John were not seminary trained. They were not experts. They were unschooled, ordinary men. But they were bold, and the religious leaders realized that Peter and John had been with Jesus. When we are with Jesus, everything changes. We operate not in our own power but in the

power of God. We are simply conduits for what He wants to do through us.

Peter and John were living their ordinary lives when Jesus called them to come follow Him. They began to grow in their faith and live for a greater purpose. They pursued the things of God more than the things of this world. For three years, they followed Jesus. (Some of you reading this have been following Jesus for a lot longer.) During that time, they were changed. Their hearts, minds, and desires were transformed. Jesus even told His disciples, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13). When you have a personal relationship with God through the grace and forgiveness of Jesus, God fills you with His Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit fills every believer with God's comfort, wisdom, peace, and power.

Peter and John were ordinary until they were with Jesus, and then they were filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus can do the same for all of us. You may think of yourself as ordinary, but through Jesus and the filling of the Holy Spirit, you are so much more. Think about this: The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is alive in you! The power and name by which Peter and John did miracles are the same power and name available to you today!

Peter and John saw God do a miracle through them. And this same God is still working wonders through His people. Some wonders are big, but many are small, day-to-day wonders wherein God intervenes on behalf of His people. Many

people miss God working because they try to do it all on their own. They never stop to pray about a situation. They work to fix their problems first—to fix a relationship, to fix a struggle, to fix a fear—instead of praying and turning it all over to God.

This is where we move from ordinary to extraordinary: when we live a life of dependence on the Lord and invite Him into our everyday lives.

The world tells us to live for ourselves—to measure our lives by how much money we make, how much stuff we acquire, how many likes we rack up on social media. We look at others and think, *Wow, they are successful. They have a lot of money. They have a huge house or multiple houses. They have millions of followers on social media.* But God doesn't think like that. God is looking for people who are available to Him. It is not your ability but your *availability* that God is seeking.

Instead of making excuses, press into the Lord more. Truly love God, love others, and love yourself. Lean into the call He has on your life. No matter what stage of life you are in, you can still realize your God-given dreams and accomplish your God-given goals. All people are special and uniquely created and can be used by God—people in the Bible and people like you and me.

The Bible says, “For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb” (Psalm 139:13). Everyone in this world, everyone throughout history, has been created by God for a reason and a purpose. However, only a few ever figure that out. Only a few live the life that God

called and intended them to live. These are the people we remember. These are the people who make a difference.

If you look back through history, it's often been individual Christ-followers living for God's agenda and not their own who have most impacted the world. It's been men and women who, instead of living for making the most money or having the biggest house or gaining the most followers, began to invest in God and His Kingdom. People who loved God and loved others. These are the people who have truly changed the world. Aren't you glad that Peter and John didn't spend their lives pursuing more money or bigger houses? They didn't settle for the ordinary life of the world.

Christ-following men and women throughout the ages have invested their lives in the things of God and not simply the things of this world. They've traded the temporary for the eternal. These Jesus-loving men and women have moved from ordinary lives to lives that truly make a difference for Jesus. After all, it was Christ-followers who started the first hospitals, orphanages, soup kitchens, churches, and more.

These men and women chose not to live for themselves but instead invested everything in ministries that would make a difference in the lives of others. What an impact! Our world has been transformed by hospitals, orphanages, churches, and more. People have received God's grace through these organizations and ministries. Many have seen the courage of these ordinary men and women and realized that these people have been with Jesus.

Can others see your courage? Do they see you not simply

living for the ordinary? Can they tell that you have been with Jesus? Choosing the eternal over the temporary isn't easy, but it is awesome. This is how you truly come alive through joy, peace, purpose, and adventure. You never know what God is going to do through you.

So begin waking up every morning and asking, "God, what do You want to do through me today?" This is exciting, and this is where you will see God do wonders. (We'll take a closer look at how God works a little later.)

DON'T DISQUALIFY YOURSELF

Moldova is one of the smallest and poorest countries in the former Soviet Union. It sits between Ukraine and Romania in Eastern Europe. There are many state-run orphanages in Moldova, and I have spent many years working with the precious children in these orphanages through the ministry of Justice & Mercy International. On my first few trips to Moldova, I met a young boy named Ilie. When I first met Ilie, he was about eleven years old. Ilie grew up in an orphanage without a mom or a dad. He had no money and nobody who cared deeply for him. Yet by God's grace, we were able to meet. Ilie didn't talk very much that first year, but I was able to share with him that God had a plan for his life.

Ilie is now in his early twenties and working with Justice & Mercy International, helping hundreds of orphan children in his own country. I asked Ilie a few years ago what had

made the difference in his life. How did he overcome his obstacles and become such a great young man and a leader? Ilie replied, “You were the first person who ever told me that they believed in me. I realized I was loved and God did have a plan for my life.”

God sent me halfway around the world to share this truth with this incredible young man. When Ilie began to understand that he was created for a reason and a purpose, his entire life changed. Since then, he’s made a difference in many lives.

So many people disqualify themselves. They think, *I can’t live an extraordinary life because I am just ordinary*. Ilie faced enormous challenges in his life, and he could have easily concluded that the challenges were too big to overcome. Dolly Parton could have concluded that since she was from such a small town and grew up poor, there was no way she could ever impact the world. Peter and John could have concluded that since they were just simple fishermen in a small, remote town, they were destined for an ordinary life. But don’t ever forget about God’s role. When you add God to the equation, everything changes. That is why I’m writing this book—I want to share this truth about God with you.

Here’s what I have found about people who push beyond the ordinary: They focus on what they do have and not on what they don’t. Many people spend their time focusing on what they don’t have (*I don’t have a lot of money. I don’t have a lot of influence. I don’t have a college degree. I don’t have . . .*). They might spend hours scrolling through social

media, looking at what everyone else has and feeling sorry for themselves. They watch others live the lives that they want to live.

It's easy to fall into the trap of "when and then" thinking: *When I get married or remarried, then I'll get serious about life. When the kids get out of school, then I will start living my best life. When the kids get into school, then I will have the time to invest in me.*

When I get more education.

When I get a raise.

When I get out of debt.

The list goes on and on (and so do the excuses!). But all this time is wasted in fixating on what you *don't* have instead of what you *do* have. Focusing on the problems allows people to naturally disqualify themselves from living their best lives right now.

People who are living their best lives right now don't spend time complaining about what they don't have. They don't wallow in the misery of things that haven't gone like they'd planned in life. Nobody has a perfect life—*nobody*. No celebrity in the world has it all together. Everyone is dealing with something. There's an old saying that goes, "Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle." It's true that everyone is fighting a battle of some sort, whether it's physical, mental, relational, financial, or something else.

No one has it all together, yet some people choose to push past the ordinary in spite of the challenges they face. These are the people who refuse to let the past or their troubles

define who they are. They choose to find their hope and strength in Someone greater than themselves.

If you simply look to your own strength, then you will struggle. But there is Someone greater than all of us!

This world is not an accident, and neither are you. When you look at creation and see the intricacies of how everything fits together, are you filled with awe and wonder? Take a look around you—everything has a place and a purpose. The same is true of your life. You can spend your time focusing on what you don't have or on what has gone wrong, but when you realize there is a greater purpose to this life you are living, your entire perspective changes.

Everyone goes through struggles, but do you talk more about your struggles or more about your goals? Whether you were born with a lot or a little, you have enough to get started on this journey. You can't stay in the past. You can't let what you did *before* keep you from moving forward. Choose to see your past struggles as learning opportunities for the future.

I look back on my life and how wonderfully different it is from what I imagined it would be when I was a young boy or even a young man. How different it is from the script I had written for my life all those years ago. What's so different? The main thing is this—I let go and trusted God's plan for my life instead of my own. The more I sought God's greater purpose and His voice, the more He challenged me to step into the deep end of faith. The more I put my fear behind me, the more He was able to teach me and to use me. As I committed to Him daily, God reminded me that I was created to

live beyond the normal. I can do anything in Christ because I serve a God of the impossible (see Philippians 4:13). By His grace, none of us were created to be ordinary.

As we are reminded in Isaiah 55:9, God has plans far greater than our own: “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” So often we think that an exciting and fulfilling life is something reserved for others. But God invites each of us into His greater story.

Of course, we can say *no* to God (and many people do). We can continue to live as we always have and continue to see the same results. We can choose to settle for our own little dreams. *Or* we can accept God’s invitation and live the life that He has for us. It can all start today—right now. I challenge you to say *yes* and embark on this amazing journey. Move on from the ordinary and discover the extraordinary life God has for you.

It’s time to let go of the past, embrace the joy of the future, and see the best in others and in yourself.