



A FRESH  
APPROACH  
TO GETTING—  
AND STAYING—  
ON FIRE FOR  
GOD

# *ignited*

JONNI NICOLE  
PARSONS

Jonni truly leaves readers feeling refreshed and inspired to walk boldly in their faith. I can't recommend this book enough and think Jonni's story and words are relatable and inspiring. She does a beautiful job at pointing to Jesus through her words.

GRACE VALENTINE, author, podcaster on *Water into Wine*,  
and social media writer @thegracevalentine

I've known Christ for almost my entire life, but it can be easy to forget the basics to living a life set apart and on fire for God. Jonni's story is so relatable and the truths that she shares in *Ignited* do not come from earthly wisdom but directly from God's Word. It came at just the right time for me and set my heart on fire. Prepare to be encouraged and challenged by this book!

MEGAN DUKE, Christian music artist, worship leader, and songwriter

Jonni's voice is much needed for this younger generation. Her authentic words and powerful storytelling help women finally stop being lukewarm in their faith and pursue God with their whole hearts. I can't recommend this book enough!

ASHLEY HETHERINGTON, founder of The Honey Scoop

*Ignited* is the perfect book for those looking to burn a true fire for the Lord. Jonni highlights the problem of many Christians having their foundation with God based on emotional highs. She details how we can change this mindset and live a life truly surrendered to the Lord.

*Ignited* is filled with personal testimony, encouragement, and a vulnerability that inspires the reader to throw away their old habits and live a life faithfully walking with Jesus.

HAILEY JULIA, social media lead at Bold.org

Jonni has a voice that can shake a generation! *Ignited* is a visceral, timely wake-up call for a culture of complacent faith. In a world with rising levels of lackluster, indifferent, and unmotivated spiritual lives, this book is an invigorating Spirit-led war cry of urgency. You won't find fluff in these pages, but instead a fervent battle plan to take back your story—the broken and beautiful alike—and bring God all the glory. Buckle up and let Jonni be your experienced guide.

MICHAEL MIMS, Kingdom entrepreneur, coach, content creator, social impactor, and revivalist

For years I personally have struggled with finding a book that speaks on maintaining a steadfast passion for Jesus and actually encourages you in how to do that. In *Ignited*, Jonni reminds us that having a burning fire for God is much deeper than church-camp highs, emotional spiritual moments, and a constant need for Christian comfortability. This book challenges you to intentionally evaluate your walk with Jesus and boldly step into the type of faith that radically shifts the lives of those around you.

TESSAH WEST LUEBKE, host of the *She Just Got Real* podcast and online content creator

Jonni is a powerful woman of God, and this book is a real testament of her unwavering faith in Jesus—and how you too can be forever changed by the saving power of God. Her words are a breath of fresh air in the era of “self-help culture,” and she powerfully demonstrates how our identity comes from the One who made us and not from trying and mustering on our own. Her book really touched me and encouraged me in my faith.

NICOLE WEIDER, actress and producer

This is a *must-read*! Filled with wisdom, grace, and love for the Lord. If you need a power-packed guide to help light a fire under your faith, pick up this book now! Better yet, pick up two and give one to a friend.

LORENE HETHERINGTON, former TV news anchor and team lead of Hetherington Real Estate Group, Nashville, TN

Our emotions may ebb and flow, but God’s love for us does not. Through sharing her powerful testimony, Jonni beautifully lays out the building blocks of abiding in Jesus, which enable us to experience the fullness of His love and continually fan to flame our faith—so we may live *Ignited* for Him.

KACI NICOLE HARLOW, Christian YouTuber, blogger, and speaker

Jonni is such a beautifully vulnerable soul on fire for Christ. Her openness and authenticity in her own spiritual journey will keep you continually opening *Ignited* to reinvigorate yours, too. She so beautifully articulates what it means to be a Christian while inviting you to become a better one in today’s world.

ERICA GWYNN, author of *Caffeinate Your Soul*



**IGNITED**





# *ignited*

**A FRESH APPROACH TO GETTING—  
AND STAYING—ON FIRE FOR GOD**

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**JONNI NICOLE PARSONS**



*A Tyndale nonfiction imprint*



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*To the incredible intercessors who have gone before us.  
The ones who truly believed that Jesus was their everything.  
The ones who held on to the cross till their last breath.  
The ones who shaped their lives around His Word.  
Much like Lorraine Squibb and Don Reed.  
We stand on the shoulders of giants.*



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# *Introduction*

I have a black-and-white picture of myself on my camera roll. It's from a Christian conference I attended in 2012. The year I got saved. A wide-eyed, hands-raised, openhearted teenage girl, in complete surrender and ready to embark on whatever journey God wanted her to pursue. If you saw the photo, you'd probably wonder why I even still have it. It's not pretty in the slightest. With mascara running down my cheeks from crying through worship, my shirt half-untucked from jumping up and down, and my messy bun before it was a trend, I looked rough.

Most people would not have been impressed by what I looked like at that moment, but I knew I was beautiful to God. Without a doubt, He took pride in my mess because it meant that I wasn't preoccupied with anything other than Him. I wasn't wondering what those boys in the first row were thinking of me or hoping for the senior girl to find me cool. I wasn't even secretly worried about finding out who I was going to sit with on the four-hour bus ride back home. I just wanted God.

With bruised knees from kneeling in prayer and a raspy voice from shouting many roaring amens, I returned from that

three-day conference truly believing that the event had the power to fuel me up from then through eternity. Seriously. I was on a high that I never thought I would come down from. The Christian merchandise I'd purchased from the vendor booth outside the arena was worn proudly, and the CDs I'd bought from the Christian rapper roaming the parking lot were on a constant loop.

Until they weren't.

The conference and the weekend were over. I barely made it to the following Friday without beginning to experience doubt and temptation again. It wasn't long before I lost those T-shirts and those CDs made their way under my bed to collect dust. I slipped into old habits like hanging out with my same circle of unbelieving friends and compromising my convictions. Slowly, my time with God fell to the back burner. Again.

Through the years, I'd pull that black-and-white picture up and wonder what went wrong. Where was that trusting girl in that photo? How had I gotten so far from who she was? Who *I* was?

My hands were no longer stretched to receive but rather clenched into fists. Distractions, idols, and sin all made their way into my life again. I answered the question that I'd posed to God before: "Could You really be enough to satisfy me?" He could not truly satisfy all on His own, at least not in the everyday. Perhaps at church on Sunday mornings, a Christian concert, or maybe a conference—but He couldn't possibly be what filled my thoughts and time during normal life.

My rationale was as follows: If I felt lonely, I was going to text that random boy. If I felt like I didn't fit in, I was going to

## INTRODUCTION

that party. If I felt insecure, I was dropping hundreds of dollars at the mall in hopes that I would feel better.

And guess what?

I actually never did feel better.

I loved God but simply assumed that this was what a walk with Him looked like: waves of passion that would come and go, a little flame that would die out after a while, and just enough of His presence every so often that I would be motivated to keep occasionally reading my Bible and going to church.

Little did I know, that was just a very long-winded way of saying the simple yet scary word *lukewarm*.

Passionlessness is the worst possible state to be in. Comfort and apathy can slowly but steadily erode our spiritual health. Being a lukewarm Christian—an oxymoron if there ever was one—is akin to having high blood pressure. High blood pressure is characterized as a silent killer because many people who have it are unaware of it, despite the fact that their risk of heart failure is increasing over time. The person may eventually die without ever identifying the problem.

Over the years, lukewarm Christianity may have a contagious effect and can result in a devastating impact on God's Kingdom.

You may have heard the verse from the book of Revelation about being lukewarm . . .

I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other! But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth!

REVELATION 3:15-16, NLT



Now, I don't share these verses to condemn you in any way. I'm too busy figuring out my own feelings about the verses to judge you about yours—but when I read them, I just think over and over, *God, I don't want to make You sick when You look at me.*

The last thing I want to be compared to is a cooled cup of coffee that has lost its desirability. Think about it—Starbucks sells hot coffee and iced coffee, but lukewarm coffee is not on the menu. That's because no one enjoys drinking lukewarm beverages. Hot water is soothing. Cold water is refreshing. Lukewarm water is not appealing. In this passage from Revelation, Jesus was telling the Laodicean church that they were not useful to Him. They had become stagnant, lifeless, self-focused . . . and lukewarm.

So, if our faith has become lukewarm, how do we fix it? How can we keep the flames of devotion for God blazing in our hearts and minds?

When I first got saved at sixteen, I thought I had it all figured out.

I was the girl whose Bible pages were quite literally hanging by a thread because I read it so much. I was the girl who got up at 6 a.m. to have devotions on my knees. I was the girl who arrived at school an hour early to pray for revival over every locker. I was the girl who handed out gospel tracts to every person I encountered.

As time went on, I also became the girl whose relationship with God was really strained by responsibilities as I entered adulthood.

I had been “on fire” for God, as the Christian community

describes it. But the years that passed smothered it like a wet towel.

I lived under a cloud of doubting my salvation for way too long because of my lack of passionate spiritual emotions. *I don't jump up and down to worship songs anymore throughout church services, I realized. I don't cry every single time that I pray anymore. I don't put both hands up when someone prays over me. Where did my fire go? What's wrong with me?*

It wasn't until I started to really study what a fire for God was that I was hit with this truth: our definition of being “on fire” may be all wrong.

When individuals say they're on fire for God, they're usually referring to a spiritual fervor or zeal—an emotional high. The problem is, this emotional state isn't always based on the reality of our spiritual condition. While positive emotional experiences are wonderful, they aren't necessarily reliable signs of a genuine and deeply entrenched faith. Emotional highs may transform us into adrenaline junkies, but they don't provide the solid foundation our faith needs to thrive. When any form of “self” seeps into the fabric of our relationship with God, it leaves a foothold for the enemy to usher in the temptation of pride.

Many Christians today find the idea of reading the Bible to be tedious. They'd rather read a book from an up-and-coming pastor. They want to learn from someone who is fresh, young, and can hold their attention with an entertaining message. Because many Christians can't sit through in-depth explanations of Scripture, many pastors have changed their sermon approach to a series of stories with a few Bible verses thrown in.

I'm the first one to tell you that emotions can be fun. They

make me feel human. However, being on fire for God is not a trustworthy assessment of our spiritual development unless it is accompanied by daily prayer, compassion for others, regular Bible study, and a life that's consistently surrendered to Him. In fact, "on fire" emotions on their own could signal a superficial faith that is always hunting for the next spiritual high—or, even worse, a faith that is uninformed and doesn't truly know God.

Being lukewarm for God is a lot like coasting when you're riding a bike. You can't really coast your way to holiness. It takes a lot of pedaling. Some sweat, too. If you're coasting, you're more than likely moving away from a close relationship with Him.

If you've picked up this book, that means you don't want to coast any longer. You don't want to come to the end of your life and find out that you've lived all wrong. You don't want to be faced with that eternal whoops.

Whatever season you find yourself in, Jesus wants you. He is inviting you to follow Him wholeheartedly and join Him in His purpose on earth. He is inviting you to learn what it really means to live ignited for Him.



## *Six Flags or Jesus?*

*God, it's been two months since I've spent time with you. Sorry. I've just really had a lot going on lately.*

That's an exact journal entry from my sophomore year of college.

Over the years since I'd first come to Christ at age sixteen, my life had undergone immense change. I'd moved to a different state and begun college. I was trying to keep up with my new friend group and cradling a fragile romantic relationship that I had found myself in. Ever since I had graduated from high school, I'd let my intimacy with Christ slip away. Sometimes it would come back for a day or two if the chapel

service in college was really hype, but for the most part, I was just too busy.

At the time, the enemy wasn't making me fall into any grave sins, but he was successfully drawing me into every type of distraction.

I can't give the enemy all the credit either. To be honest, other things seemed more important. In many situations, it was my own worldly desires that led me astray.

*Realistically, what's a girl to do?* I thought. *It's not like I can just drop all of my responsibilities, build a tiny house in the woods, and spend all of my days praying.* So I assumed this was what life with God was like when you'd been a Christian for a while. A few spiritual highs here and there, and sporadic moments of catching up with Him.

I wasn't aware that I'd grown neither hot nor cold for God until a mentor and I met on our usual Tuesday lunch date. Don was a ninety-three-year-old gentleman and friend who had a weekly spot on my calendar. I enjoyed our time together very much. We would discuss faith and life and have friendly exchanges on various biblical topics.

God chose to use Don as a vessel that day almost before I sat down. He was led to ask me if my relationship with God was better than it had been the year before.

A chuckle escaped me when I answered that maybe it would have been better this year if I'd been able to go to Late Night more often. Late Night was a ministry at my college that played trending music and had homemade food. There was always a young speaker who delivered a convicting message.

My dear friend looked at me with concern and spoke with

years of knowledge when he said, “There is a problem if you are relying on other people to further your own walk with Christ.” He went on to tell me about the time he spent in Kuwait as a missionary. Don explained how people there sacrificed their lives to follow Christ. They didn’t have numerous resources available to them to help them grow. It was much more organic. They had the Bible, their community, and God. That’s it. Yet Kuwaiti Christians made more of an impact than most Americans did, even with all of our conveniences. Don shared more of his brilliance between slurps of his chicken noodle soup. “The real danger here is that a lot of people in this country pursue a self-centered view of the Christian life.”

We sat there talking in the cafeteria until the custodian signaled it was time to leave by dimming the lights. I was so intrigued. I had never realized that relying on others to further our own journey could be an issue. I thought I *had* to rely on others to stay a Christian in the first place—I sure didn’t know how to do it on my own. As he sat there telling me about his life as a Christian, and how each year had just gotten better than the last, I felt a particular holy envy (is that a thing?) stirring up inside my soul. I wanted to be that close with God. I wanted Him to answer my prayers specifically. I wanted that closeness consistently.

Don left me with a nugget of wisdom that changed how I saw everything: “Jonni, carnal Christianity isn’t Christianity at all.”

My friend Don was the first person I had ever known who had an ongoing passion for God. For years, we met in that cafeteria and he would giddily tell me about what God had

taught him in his quiet time the night before. My friendship with Don started me on a journey of exploring what a true passion for God looked like and how to stop being lukewarm once and for all. I no longer even wanted to be the girl in that old photo from the conference I had attended. That girl was only passionate because she was dependent on external circumstances to fire her up. I was determined to be better. A mature believer in Christ. I would be consistent in my walk with God if it truly mattered.

Back then, being “on fire” for Jesus meant that I always felt passionately for Him. I was led by my emotions rather than a genuine and unfailing commitment to Him. I had been so focused on what He was doing for me and my life that I forgot to keep my gaze on His character and His overwhelming goodness. Obviously there’s nothing wrong with feeling positive emotions for Christ. The problem was this: by living in this passion-filled season for a prolonged period, I had never built a foundation of my faith in who Jesus is. I had never developed a “come what may” faith in Him.

## **A FRESH ENCOUNTER**

In today’s world, it’s quite easy to fall into a rut. Maybe your past comes back to haunt you. Maybe your flesh overpowers your spirit and you fall into that old sin. Maybe you just aren’t amazed by God’s characteristics the way you used to be. For me personally, it was all of the above. Sometimes I’d lose my passion because of bitterness and unforgiveness that I was holding on to. Sometimes I’d lose my passion over something as simple as being too busy and having deadlines hanging over

my head. Sometimes I'd lose my passion because I was just straight-up bored.

As a living and breathing human, I'm sure you can relate: our minds are programmed to always look for something new. We don't want the same old thing. We want to get something different, something exciting, as often as possible.

It's kind of like when we walk the aisles of that big ol' grocery store that sells things in bulk, and salespeople keep trying to get our attention. The moment we see them, we try to avoid eye contact at all costs. And if by chance our eyes do meet theirs, we attempt to shut down the conversation as fast as possible so we can just go on with our day. We already bought something once when we felt pressured, and we don't want to get into that scenario again.

Do you know why that is? It's because it's predictable. We know exactly what is going to happen. But what would happen if the same salesperson in that aisle said, "Hey! I'm going to buy all your groceries today. No catch!" Wouldn't you begin to pay attention? I sure would!

That's because if we want to stir a desire in our hearts, we have to experience something different, something new. We will eventually get worn out of looking for something if we already know the outcome.

Have you ever wondered why there are so many professing Christians in America, yet so few cities that have been truly transformed for Christ? Something is missing. And it's not more books, sermons, or Christian dance parties. We need something new. A fresh encounter with the living God. But what does that look like?



Let's take a glimpse at the life of the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah 6 describes one of the most remarkable events in all of Scripture. It is noteworthy because of the magnificent glory that it depicts: the full cosmic weight of purity centered in the God of all creation.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying.

ISAIAH 6:1-2

King Uzziah in the Bible was one of the good kings of Judah. He was a wonderfully intelligent and innovative king, under whom the state of Judah prospered. This is speculation, but perhaps Isaiah had been placing so much confidence in a visible king that he felt only a small need to reach out to this invisible King. Much like us. We put so much emphasis on the pastor, author, speaker, or influencer that we often forget about God Himself. What Isaiah needed was a fresh encounter—and that's what we need too. Isaiah saw the Lord. It was from this experience that Isaiah realized how unworthy he really was. He was met with a piercing humility.

“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.”

ISAIAH 6:5

I imagine Isaiah falling onto his face, filled with awe and wonder. He was aware of his sin and his filth in the presence of God—and he knew there was only One who could ever be good. He was undone by what was before him. God is the God of the ages, the Ancient of Days, and He is beyond our full comprehension. After Isaiah confessed his sin to the Lord, God cleansed him by taking a lump of burning coal off the altar and placing it on his lips. Then he called Isaiah to be His mouthpiece to the world.

Having a fresh encounter with God does three things:

1. It reveals God's holiness.
2. It reveals our sinfulness.
3. We feel called to repent and turn to Him to supply our every need.

There are probably sparkling trinkets in your life that promise to fulfill all your desires of ambition, security, and success, but a fresh encounter with God shows that only our Creator can sufficiently meet those yearnings. What we are supposed to learn from those conferences, church conventions, and Sunday services is not simply the Word of God but, even more so, the God of the Word. While the Bible is essential, and learning the Word should be central, we often leave out the character of God. He desires to reveal His majesty to us. He wants us to see all of His holiness and glory like Isaiah did.

Here's the cool thing—God is *longing* to do something new in your life. He's big enough to keep fanning that flame

of passion for Him all day long for your decades of years on this earth. He doesn't need all of that extra worldly stuff—He is enough, and He *wants* to reveal more of Himself to you.

Do you believe that?

My husband, Ron, has a 2002 Ford F-150. For any of you who, like me, aren't car people, it's a really, really old car. We live in Boston, and as you can imagine, New England winters don't do this twentysomething-year-old vehicle any favors. Ron wound up naming his truck Champ because of how much it's been through. Poor thing. The car's brake lines are busted, the power steering is failing, the bottom of the truck is rusted out, the carburetor support is gone . . . It's no surprise that Ron has had to get many of the parts replaced over the years. The mechanic always gives him his *You again?* look as Ron strolls into the shop explaining what else has gone wrong. Surprisingly, the mechanic works his magic and continues to save Champ. The parts that couldn't function were keeping the car from its full potential. But once the mechanic got his hands on it, it would be way better.

The same can be said for our spiritual lives. Over the years, some things get worn out. Some things get old. We can become spiritually tired. But we have a great mechanic—Jesus Christ—who gives us the tune-up we need. God expects us to frequently present ourselves to Him for His divine inspection.

This is what you need: a trip to the Great Mechanic . . . or, as I said, a fresh new encounter with the living God.

And that's what you're going to get.

## REDEFINING OUR EXPECTATIONS

The gospel is supposed to be bread for daily consumption, not cake just for special occasions. Until I understood that, my daily life would never look any different than the one I had before I was converted. I couldn't pull out the Word and my prayer journal only when I was sad and needed a breakthrough—I had to recognize my need for Him every minute. That's why a fresh encounter with God is so important. It shows us how big He is, how small we are, and how insignificant everything is if it's not done for the glory of God.

I'm sure Isaiah was convinced that he wasn't going to ever lose this passion for our Creator after seeing Him in all of His majesty. Although that was an incredible and earth-shattering event for Isaiah, it didn't have to be a one-time thing. He had access to God. Just like we do. We have complete access to His presence, and we are also able to experience God in all of His glory.

Our fire for God was never meant to flame out. Our fire for God was meant to be sustained.

As much as we may hate to admit it, when we use the term “on fire,” we really just mean we're feeling a few heightened emotions. Our measuring stick to determine whether we are passionate for God often comes with questions like these: *Do I feel as if I'm in right standing with God? Did I get excited over the worship songs this morning at church? Do I feel inspired whenever I read the Bible?*

Are any of those questions necessarily bad? No.

Does our relationship with God often produce emotions in us? Yes. And I, for one, am grateful for it.

But does our relationship with God necessarily produce the same positive feelings in us all the time? Nope. It actually doesn't. If you're extremely driven by your emotions like I am, it's a real struggle to ever find a balance.

*Emotional.* That word has defined me for longer than I care to admit.

One word. One lifelong battle.

Being emotional is a bit different for everyone, but regardless of what it looks like, it can take a lot out of somebody. Jesus Himself experienced the heights and depths of extreme emotion. Before His crucifixion, He shared some of His feelings with the disciples.

He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee [John and James] along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

MATTHEW 26:37-38

Jesus, the Son of God, was overwhelmed and distressed. He understands what it's like to be emotional!

But here's the thing: the Bible does not tell us to use our feelings to measure the state of our spiritual lives. Jesus didn't do that, and we aren't meant to either. In reality, the Bible tells us that we will go through bouts of pain, loss, and failure, even when we're walking closely with God. As much as we want to live permanently on the mountaintop, we wouldn't have mountaintop experiences if it weren't for trips to the valley

from time to time. Emotions are normal and healthy—but they aren't everything.

Positive and negative emotions shouldn't have the power to control us . . . especially in our walk with Christ. Because truth be told, as Christians, our lives will rarely be exhilarating or newsworthy. Most of the time, the Christian life is actually plain vanilla. Just like Jesus' was.

Jesus' life on earth was ordinary for many years. He was born in a barn, grew up in a stereotypical poor town, and didn't start His public ministry until He was in His thirties. He was content with the mundane aspects of His daily life. He didn't fit the profile of a driven young church planter.

This type of faith provides a sense of freedom. The idea that we must live an extraordinary life and be full of positive emotions all the time is a serious burden.

But it's easy to wonder: Do we just need to pray more when we are sad? Is happiness always evidence of great faith? When it comes to emotions, people have a variety of views. The idea that emotions are essentially uncontrolled physical forces that must be suppressed is one extreme. On the other end of the spectrum—which is what we see much more often in the church these days—is the tendency to hold them in the highest regard and treat them as the foundation for everything.

So maybe, all this time, “on fire” has acted as a term of emotional legalism!

Jeremiah 17:9 states that our hearts are deceitful. Our hearts will be wrong sometimes. They do not have the final say for our lives—God and His Word do. Assurance of salvation

must come from what we *know*, not how we *feel*. We have to remember that those who trust in Christ stand totally justified before the Cross. When we struggle with sin or have a hard time in life, we can come back to Him again and again through repentance.

I'm not against being on fire for God. Quite the contrary. The whole purpose of even writing this book is to show that it's possible to *get* on fire for God and *stay* on fire for God. But here is what I am against: the modern-day definition of what it means to be "on fire." I'm against the way this generation has shifted the meaning to fit the culture. My whole mission is to show you what it looks like to truly get ignited for Jesus—but we have to start redefining what that feels and looks like.

Do you know what doesn't make you a true Christian? The emotional intensity of your faith. What does make you a true Christian is knowing deeply who God is and depending on the finished work of Jesus Christ.

We sustain this passion for God by constantly accessing His throne room, seeing Him, and basking in who He is. We aren't supposed to simply say a prayer, repent once, and then live life as normal. A lot of people, including myself, miss the fact that repentance and confession of our need for Him is a *daily* practice. We are meant to be going from glory to glory until we are face-to-face with our Creator.

Don't think it's possible? Yeah . . . I may have rolled my eyes at first too when confronted with this truth. But this verse was a dagger to my heart:

## SIX FLAGS OR JESUS?

We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

2 CORINTHIANS 3:18, NKJV

When Paul uses the words “from glory to glory,” he sums up the entire Christian life in a nutshell. That short verse covers our redemption, our sanctification, and our eternal welcome into heaven. We were never meant to reach a spiritual plateau on our walk with Jesus. His will is for us to keep growing, expanding our knowledge of Him, and getting closer to His heart.

But why do so many of us buy the lie that spiritual plateaus have become the standard? That nobody on earth could truly live a holy and set-apart life, filled with an ongoing passion for the Lord? I didn't think it could be done because I always figured that kind of life was dependent on my emotions. And I, for one, developed a love-hate affair with my emotions. I know I need emotions to be human and to experience reality, but it also drives me mad that I can't control them. My emotions are as unpredictable as Boston weather. How was I supposed to keep my emotions in check long enough to feel continually near God? I saw that task as impossible, so I resorted to what was easier: putting one foot in the Kingdom while keeping one foot in the world.

Now, don't get me wrong . . . spiritual plateaus shouldn't be the norm, but they *do* happen occasionally. From time to time, you'll find yourself on one. They are God's way of protecting



us and weaning us away from experience-oriented Christianity. If we are relying too much on external circumstances, He may need to gently guide us into truth. Just like He's doing right now. And sometimes that truth can feel like a wilderness season. Sometimes that truth can feel like a drought. Sometimes that truth can feel like the kind of spiritual plateau that we so desperately try to run away from when it's really just God intervening in our lives.

If you're anything like me, you're an adrenaline junkie, always rushing from one high to another. Those plateaus and droughts may feel like a waste of time, so you try to distract yourself and not dwell on your spiritual life. But when God leads us into a season of drought, we need to recognize that He's trying to get our attention so we can experience closeness with Him again. So many people miss this. Just because you don't always feel connected to Jesus does not mean He isn't doing something behind the scenes. A relationship with God extends beyond emotions.

Our culture encourages us to feel something at *all* times. I mean, think about it. In just one generation, we have gone from phone calls to emails to instant messages to voice memos to FaceTime to Twitter. Now life is just a series of 140 characters or less. Instant gratification is the name of our theme song. So it's no surprise that in a society where we spend so much time chasing after highs, we find ourselves wanting the same thing in our spiritual lives. We want to feel something in our souls for the Lord. We want the same rush that we get from strobe lights, a sound system, and a few performers every single day of the week.

Revolutionary. Impactful. Life-changing. Extreme. Innovative. Cutting-edge. Explosive. Those are just some of the ways that many of today's churches want to be described. We long for the next big thing, and congregations demand taking the church experience to a whole new level. Fly in popular speakers. Start a feel-good sermon series. Buy a new sound system.

Do we want Six Flags, or do we want Jesus?

Call me crazy—but a constant emotional high is not sustainable.

So are we then forced to choose between an occasionally on-fire relationship with Jesus or a constantly boring, obedience-fixated relationship with Him?

The good news? Those aren't our only choices.

The bad news? The other choice God has for us isn't as glamorous as most of us want.

The way God desires for us to live is beautifully illustrated in the Bible. So many of us glance over these words, but here they are:

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

ROMANS 12:2

This verse contains a very significant sequence. First we see that, as children of God, we must refuse to be conformed to the world and instead allow transformation by the Spirit.

Then, as our minds are renewed according to the things of God, we can finally know God's perfect will.

We have to redefine what a passionate life for God really looks like because, according to this verse, we don't become privy to God's will by attending cool Christian events or church services with charismatic speakers. God reveals His will to us when we remain steadfast in His Word, practice daily repentance, and seek His face. Then, and only then, will we see what His good, pleasing, and perfect will looks like.

So that means an ordinary life may actually *be* the extraordinary life we so desperately want God to call us to. Maybe when God tells us to go live radical lives, He really just means read our Bibles daily, love our neighbors well, and share the Good News with others.

The word *ordinary*, though, can be scary for most. Who wants to be that ordinary girl, who lives in that ordinary city, has ordinary friends, and works an ordinary nine-to-five cubicle job? Our lives have to count. We want so badly to leave our mark and make a difference. We want so badly for our lives to matter. We need to live up to our Instagram feed. Am I right?

Being the very best is basically imprinted on our metaphorical foreheads by society . . . and Satan knows it. He knows how to speak our language, and as we get older, he tempts us more and more, whispering, "Have it all." He tried the same thing with Jesus! In Matthew 4, Satan took Jesus up to a high point and had Him behold all of the kingdoms and their splendor. He tempted Jesus with all the world had to offer. Today, he is still offering that glitz and glam to us—and many

people, especially Christians, are falling for it. More than fear of failure, they are terrified of becoming regular.

And let me be clear—God isn't against a quality education, a successful job, or nice things. The problem is *not* that we hold our earthly possessions and experiences dear. The problem is our possessions and experiences hold *us*. And when we esteem those possessions and experiences higher than the Giver of them . . . that's simply a recipe for disaster. Or a recipe for that carnal Christianity my sweet friend Don mentioned.

Let's renew our respect for the ordinary, shall we?

Take a look at the people God used in the Bible. Paul was a tentmaker and a religious zealot when God chose him and softened his heart. David was helping tend sheep on his family's farm when God chose him as the next king of Israel. Peter, Andrew, John, and James were fishermen when Jesus called them. These people God used to change the course of history were common folks. They didn't have a big worship band on Sunday mornings. They didn't follow other famous Christians on social media. They didn't get wrapped up in rave-like youth group crowds. They knew that Christ wasn't asking them to build their entire lives on each spiritual experience they had—He was asking them to be radical in how they lived their ordinary lives. And they were sustained by continual fresh encounters with the King. He calls us to do the same. He simply wants us to live in a way that is radically different from the rest of this world.

Take Jesus as an example. Because Christ submitted Himself to an ordinary life, God was able to get even more glory from it. Christ loved and trusted God more than anybody else on this earth—not because of good podcasts or powerful songs,

but because He spent time alone with God and let His Father fill Him up with each fresh encounter.

It takes extraordinary restraint to live an ordinary life.

We sustain our fire for God in the everyday by living a radical life for Him. And that radical life is an ordinary life. It's a fresh encounter with God. It's getting alone with His Word. It's getting lost in prayer.

There is freedom in not needing any extra Christian fluff to sustain us. There is freedom in the kind of faith that solely looks to God. There is freedom in actually believing Christ plus nothing equals everything. It alleviates the pressure of needing crazy experiences and empowers us to see Christ in every situation. He redeems the mundane. Christ's ordinariness for much of His earthly life gives meaning to ours.

### **A MIRACLE IN MAINE**

I am not the kind of girl who goes camping. It's just not in my DNA. If you camp, you're awesome and I admire you—but for much of my life I refused to go. I'm not sure if it's the bug spray in exchange for perfume that turns me off or the fact that I have no access to electricity or running water . . . but the whole experience has never appealed to me. A few years back, I agreed to help the youth at my church on a weekend getaway, and I thought we'd be going to some retreat cabin. After driving several hours north in a van, we pulled up to a campsite and got out. My heart was in my stomach for hours as I wondered how I was going to survive this trip. Why hadn't I just read the pamphlet in depth before signing up for something like this? Sure, it had been last minute—but I was so ignorant

not to prepare for a whole weekend away in the Maine mountains. There was no cabin. There was no running water. We were *camping*. From the moment we unloaded the car, I had an ongoing countdown in my head to when I'd return home.

The first day went by slow, and I was so glad when it finally came to an end. As we sat in a circle around a fire that night, I closed my eyes and tried to pretend I was in the living room of my house. Thirty seconds later, I felt something crawling on my foot, and I realized that I was still very far from home. My frustration began to get the better of me again. Reluctantly, I asked God to teach me something through this experience and not to let me come home just grumbling and complaining. I focused on the fire while everyone sang some worship songs.

I kept watching Mike, one of the leaders, add more and more wood in order to keep that campfire alive. Every twenty minutes, another log would go in, and the flames would become stronger. He was adding power to the fire to keep it going.

And I realized something in that moment. Below the beautiful starry sky, listening to the youth group sing praises and having literally nothing around me of comfort, God performed a little miracle in Maine and changed my heart. He gave me exactly what I needed and filled up my spirit by speaking directly to me. I was taught that we can't rely on old logs to keep the fire burning. We also can't rely on the faith of yesterday to keep our relationship with God flourishing today. We can't inherit our parents' faith and testimony. If we want to keep our passion for God alive, we have to choose to

add logs daily. We have to intentionally keep adding them to the fire. We can't depend on others to keep feeding the flames for us. When we choose to act out of this truth instead of our ever-changing emotions, that's when we become healthy, mature Christians.

I don't write off any experiences anymore until I try them once. God uses the most unexpected things to change our lives and teach us valuable lessons. As ironic as it may be, the less I had out there in Maine while camping, the closer I felt to Jesus. I learned that God's presence is always available, but if we don't find ourselves going back for more of Him, our relationship with God will diminish to ashes.

And I refuse to let that happen.