



# TRAILBLAZERS

"Full of wisdom. . .  
I wholeheartedly  
recommend this book."

**CARLOS WHITTAKER**  
author of *How to Human*

MICAH E. DAVIS

A journey  
to discover  
God's purpose  
for your life

# Praise for *Trailblazers*

Micah lives what he has written, and to me, those authors are the most trustworthy narrators. Choosing to be a Trailblazer will shape your life with adventure beyond your dreams. . . . Follow the path that Micah has created for you through this book to find your own unique opportunities to lead others.

**ANNIE F. DOWNS**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *That Sounds Fun*

I've watched Micah walk this book out since he was a little kid. To see how he has turned from a kid with a huge heart to a man with an even bigger one is a gift many haven't gotten to see. So with that view, I wholeheartedly recommend this book as one that can get you back on the path God has designed for you to journey. Learn from Micah's experience and wisdom, and your life will be richer.

**CARLOS WHITTAKER**, Author of *How to Human*

As a more "seasoned" minister, I find it refreshing and energizing when God raises up younger leaders who instill passion for Jesus in the next generation. Micah Davis, who grew up in our community in Nashville, has emerged as such a leader. For younger and older Christ-followers alike, *Trailblazers* is a fresh shot in the arm for a renewed faith.

**SCOTT SAULS**, Senior pastor of Christ Presbyterian Church and author of *Jesus Outside the Lines* and *Beautiful People Don't Just Happen*

*Trailblazers* ushers the reader into the intricate ways our gracious God continues to call his creation, his beloved—the Church—into his Kingdom work. Micah Davis writes to remind us that our failures, fears, and doubts do not determine whether we are capable of the work to which we were created and called. So read this book—and see where your story leads you!

**JENNI WONG CLAYVILLE**, Pastor, speaker, and second chancer

As parents, we are very proud of Micah for being a Trailblazer and following God's call on his life! We've seen him live out each of the principles he teaches in this book. As pastors and authors, we know the message of this book will challenge and inspire you to pursue God's best as you blaze a trail in your faith.

**JUSTIN AND TRISHA DAVIS**, Authors of *Beyond Ordinary* and Micah's mom and dad

Too many of us are languishing. Lethargy has befallen large segments of the American church. But it doesn't have to be this way. In *Trailblazers*, Micah Davis shows us a way forward. He's winsome, he's wise, and he's awake. Which is just what the church needs. Take this book and let it wake you up.

**DANIEL GROTHE**, Pastor and author of *The Power of Place*

For every young leader searching for purpose and significance, Micah Davis has written the road map. Hopeful, honest, wise . . . *Trailblazers* offers insightful perspective into our elusive desire for significance and what it really means to achieve it. The question isn't whether we're supposed to blaze trails, it's more about *how*. Micah guides the way.

**JENNI CATRON**, Author, speaker, and founder of The 4Sight Group

In an age of microwave discipleship, Micah's words apprentice us toward the lasting beauty of character formation, soul depth, and faithful mentorship in the way of Jesus. This book will inspire you to reimagine your purpose and empower you with practical tools to say yes to God's next for your life.

**DOMINIC DONE**, Author of *Your Longing Has a Name* and *When Faith Fails*

With so much coming at us each day and uncertainty surrounding us, it can feel nearly impossible to discover what the next right step is. In *Trailblazers*, Micah E. Davis thoughtfully guides you deeper into the way of Jesus and helps you discover what is required to pave the new. Such an important read!

**STEVE CARTER**, Author of *The Thing Beneath the Thing*

This is a radiant light in a dark world. What a practical book, written by a winsome and transparent man. *Trailblazers* is an adventure in Christian character development and the foundational values that make us attractive to the world that is watching. If we can become transformed as we journey together as Trailblazers, others just may want to join us on the trail and see that there is hope for all of us. Additionally, the greatest joy I have is to declare to all listening, "My student Micah has now become my teacher."

**REV. DR. DAVID SMITH**, Associate professor emeritus of New Testament and biblical languages, Indiana Wesleyan University

# **TRAILBLAZERS**

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MICAH E. DAVIS

A journey  
to discover  
God's purpose  
for your life

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

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN 978-1-4964-7572-5

Printed in the United States of America

29	28	27	26	25	24	23
7	6	5	4	3	2	1

*To Rylei.*

*May we forever blaze trails together  
this side of heaven.*





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*Prologue*

## WHAT IS A TRAILBLAZER?

### **LIMINAL SPACE.**

The space in-between.

At least, that's what I was told liminal space is.<sup>1</sup> Theodora Blanchfield defined liminal space as, "Be[ing] on the precipice of something new but not quite there yet."<sup>2</sup>

Brilliant.

My mentor used the imagery of an acrobat jumping from one bar to another: "The point between the release of one bar and the grasping of the next bar? That's liminal space."

The book you're about to read is a guide for living a life like no one else. In a cultural moment where we're "languishing"<sup>3</sup> (as *New York Times* writer Adam Grant put it), we must ask ourselves if we're doing what God requires of us to truly discover our God-given purpose.

Because *you* have a purpose.

God has uniquely equipped you, the one-of-a-kind you, to blaze a trail, to live a life that exemplifies Jesus, the ultimate Trailblazer, who himself is one of a kind.

But here's the question: Are you willing to persevere through the journey it takes to get there?

The character trek about to unfold typically progresses in liminal space. We see that thread all throughout Scripture, from Moses, to Rahab, and even to Jesus. We often remember the moment they embraced their identity as the Trailblazers God had called them to be, even as we tend to forget the many dark nights, lonely times, and seasons of desert obscurity they endured to get to that point. In fact, the journey of liminal space usually plays out in a cycle.

## **The Five Phases of Liminal Space**

Liminal space often plays out in five key phases.

### ***Phase 1: Obscurity***

The Israelites spent *forty years* in the desert before inheriting the Promised Land.

Jesus spent *forty days* in the wilderness before stepping into the spotlight of public ministry.

After reading this, you might feel tempted to grasp immediately for your God-given dream. My advice?

Take a breath.

Know that God calls you to a “long obedience in the same direction,”<sup>4</sup> not a cheap climb to celebrity.

YouTube has numerous examples<sup>5</sup> of ordinary people who pretend to be war heroes to attain the acclaim, respect, and praise actual defenders of our country deserve. We call this “stolen valor.”

Those of us who attempt to blaze trails of significance without doing real, significant work in the shadows risk falling into that trap.

Embrace obscurity.

### ***Phase 2: Wrestling***

Real wrestling with Jesus takes place in the desert or wilderness, where the existential questions of liminal space arise:

Who am I?

Why am I here?

What is my purpose?

When will I know?

How will I get there?

I wish I could offer you potent wisdom for answering those questions (perhaps another book for another day), but for right now, know that wrestling is a *good* thing. In the wrestling we gain a clear purpose from God.

### ***Phase 3: Clarity***

As we wrestle with God, we gain clarity. When we dig deep to the roots of difficult questions, God often meets us in our curiosity.

In the desert God told Moses to lead an exodus.

In the desert Jesus received vocational clarity on who he was and who he was *not*.

In the desert God shaped and formed Paul for his ministry.

### ***Phase 4: Consecration***

As we clarify our calling, consecration often becomes the next phase.

How do we set ourselves apart? How do we cleanse and purify our hearts and souls so that we may become all of whoever God has called us to be?

We meet our pursuer, Jesus, more quickly when we pursue him instead of being content only to have him chase after us.

### ***Phase 5: Breakthrough***

After consecrating ourselves, we position ourselves to see breakthrough.

On holy ground Moses received an invitation to lead people from slavery to freedom.

Out of holy water Jesus received confirmation of his God-given identity.

Holy hands touched Saul's face and healed his blindness.

In the holy spaces of life, where cleansing occurs, we often get clearance to blaze the trail.

### **Becoming a True Trailblazer**

Do you want your life to mean something? Do you long for a life of substance, impact, and transformation? Do you desire to make a difference—with everything in you—to have an impact, to blaze a trail?

Me, too.

But that means embracing the cycle of liminal space. Ordinary people become true Trailblazers in the very ordinary, mundane, day-to-day moments.

Before you can blaze the trail, understand that you must form and develop the traits we're going to unpack in this book. When you step fully into your calling and find yourself trailblazing for Jesus, you will need to lean on these foundational qualities as pillars for your journey. Don't try to learn character on the fly!

If you already hold a position of influence, I hope and pray that this work enhances the already strong character you possess. Influence without character is a dangerous game.

I suspect, however, that you, like me, find yourself in a place of obscurity. If so, this journey has the potential to change your life. Why?

Because a Trailblazer gets formed and shaped *in the field*. Even there, you must willingly put in the required work. Then, when the time comes to step into your God-given dream, you'll be ready.

The obstacles you face today may only hint at what's to come. If you can't defeat and overcome those obstacles now, then you won't stand a chance when the lights turn bright and your platform rises. An elevated position of influence requires an elevated level of integrity.

I believe God has called you to great things. He may already have put a specific dream on your heart. If so, seize it! Embrace it! But recognize that if you lack the necessary character qualities, you'll find yourself fighting fire with gasoline. You will feel an overpowering temptation to stroke your ego, raise your status, and magnify your importance.

How much better to endure the slow, steady path of growth—to receive God's invitation to truly live—than to try to cheat your way to the top and end up cut down and tossed into the fire.<sup>6</sup> We build the path to significance through many steps of small obedience.

## **Walking Out the Five Phases**

God calls *every* Trailblazer to a lifetime of service, to holiness, and to submission. And I do mean “every.”

Would it surprise you to hear that the Lord has asked me (although “asked” may be too soft a word) to walk out these five phases of liminal space in real time through the process of writing this book?

I originally thought the pages ahead would have a reflective focus. But over the past many months, God has deepened and sharpened each of the character attributes that I intended to highlight. And I discovered that some of these character attributes are mere inches deep in my own heart and soul. You will quickly see that I do not have it all together or have everything figured out!

But God, in his kindness, has decided to take me on a journey that has forced me to lean on these very words I'm going to offer. I've



learned that it's a lot easier to cheer others on in the journey toward trailblazing than to walk it out myself.

Now, this shouldn't have surprised me. Why *wouldn't* the Lord ask me to go first before writing a book about my conviction that Trailblazers are people who go first?

Over the course of the last year, the Lord has made it clear that he's calling my wife, Rylei, and me into the unknown. And so, together, we are stepping out. As I write these words, I still don't know the full story or see the whole picture regarding the trail he's asked us to blaze. But here's what I do know:

God calls us to faithfulness.

God calls us to obedience.

God calls us to trust him.

God asks for our primary allegiance.

And so, Rylei and I are blazing a trail right alongside you.

Do you long to accept such a divine call, tailored by God to fit your own makeup, interests, and context? Do you want to be a Trailblazer? If so, know that it will set you apart—but not for *your* glory. Only Christ gets the credit in this lifestyle!

And the best part?

That's exactly how it's supposed to be.

I'll see you on the trail.

# 1

## BUILD A FOUNDATION OF INTEGRITY

*Character*

### I LIKE ORDER.

Whether that comes from my type A extremism or a compulsive necessity for organization, “order” keeps the world going ‘round for me.

Everything on my desk—both in my study at the church and at home—has a place. I’ve color-coded the articles in my closet. My shoes sit in rows based on type. Even my junk drawer, the space where all random objects go to their unashamed grave, is, well . . . *ordered*.

So, imagine how hard I find it to begin a book *out* of order. While my story of discovering what it means to be a Trailblazer begins in Genesis, it doesn’t start at the beginning.

Let me explain.

## An Unexpected Key

Years ago, six months into my first full-time ministry stint, I found myself floundering. I had used up all the knowledge I had gained in Bible school, exhausted all the quick tips and techniques I had gathered from studying my parents (both pastors), and began running toward an uncomfortable reality:

I have no idea what I'm doing.

It haunted me. I didn't know what to do or where to go next. So, I sat down with my pastor to discuss options. He'd served in youth ministry for more than twenty years prior to his current role. Surely, he'd know what to do!

My mind grew excited at the prospect of our meeting. I started to imagine how great our time together would be. I began gathering materials for the greatest strategy meeting since Steve Jobs and Jony Ive conceived the iPhone.

I brought an outrageously expensive planner that could predict the next ten years of my life (not really, but it should have for the price); a massive, full-year wall calendar; six colored Expo markers (color-coding for the win); and my laptop—because, let's be honest, when all is said and done, it all goes in the iCal, anyway.

I sat down in his office, excited and anxious to get started. He would tell me *everything* I needed to do to shepherd our community well! And I felt ready to conceptualize it all, to the last detail, for the next calendar year.

Instead, he issued me a challenge that altered the course of my life.

“Micah, have you ever heard of a vision day?”

“Is that like, a staff retreat? The start of a capital campaign?”

“No, a vision day is a day to retreat and get alone with God and to ask him for fresh vision in your life and ministry. It's a day to be quiet and still. To spend unhurried time with him to allow him to infuse inspiration and innovation into your soul.”

Huh?

I had never thought of that. I slowly began rolling up my massive Expo calendar. A day—alone—with God? Sounded wholly unnecessary and unproductive. But I was willing to give it a try.

So, on a random Friday in November, I cleared my schedule and reserved a room at an off-site business. I had nothing on the table but a journal, a Bible, and a pen. I prayed and asked God for fresh vision of the type of life he wanted me to live (and to call our community to live). I said amen and opened his Word and began reading. A few hours later, I came across Joseph's story and this verse in particular: "And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you."<sup>1</sup>

Something about this line stopped me in my tracks. In the quiet and in the stillness of that holy space, God impressed a word upon my heart which began a journey that brought us here:

*Trailblazers.*

That's who God is calling our community to be. That's who God is calling me to be. A Trailblazer.

But first, I needed to find out more about this Joseph guy. Why had God sent him ahead to blaze a trail and to save the lives of others?

## **A Story of Cycles**

Joseph's story comes on the heels of three patriarchal biographies of Israel, God's chosen nation. Abraham, Isaac (Abraham's son), and Jacob (Isaac's son) became the forefathers of God's nation. With these three men and their families, God set in motion the redemptive story of his people.

Joseph was the second youngest of Jacob's twelve sons. And you think you have it rough in your family? Imagine having ten highly competitive older brothers!

Joseph was a miracle baby, of sorts. Dad had him long after he thought he'd finished having children. Also, Joseph was the son of Rachel, Jacob's favorite wife, who until that point could not have children. (Yes, Jacob had a favorite wife; reason #36 why having multiple wives is so wrong.)

The birth of Joseph elated Jacob. He transferred his favoritism of Rachel to their son, as the Bible explains: "Now [Jacob] loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made an ornate robe for him."<sup>2</sup>

Jacob showered Joseph with favor, even giving his young son a swaggy<sup>3</sup> (Gen Z translation for "ornate," meaning elaborate or decorated)<sup>4</sup> robe to wear while taking care of Dad's sheep. As you might imagine, Joseph's brothers did not appreciate the swaggy gift.

Joseph didn't help his cause when he followed up the robe ceremony by enthusiastically overdetailing two dreams he'd had,<sup>5</sup> which featured the sun, moon, and stars bowing down to him (as did some sheaves of grain, whatever those are).

Both dreams painted a picture of Joseph's family *bowing down* to him. Joseph's angry brothers did not receive his dreams any better than they did his coat. Between the robe and the dreams, Joseph's brothers' hatred toward him reached a boiling point. While in the field shepherding one day, Joseph's brothers devised a plan to kill Joseph.

(Again: You think you have it rough in your family?)

Thankfully, one brother spoke up and persuaded his siblings to reexamine their options.<sup>6</sup> They decided to throw Joseph into a dry well and leave him there for dead. Thank goodness! (My first run at sarcasm, okay?)

During a casual sit-down for lunch after abandoning their brother to die, they saw some merchants in the distance. And then another brother came up with a brilliant idea: "What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let's sell him to

the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.”<sup>7</sup>

All the brothers present agreed.

So. Much. Better (continuing the sarcasm trend).

They sold Joseph for pennies on the dollar and the slave traders whisked him away to Egypt, where he faced a myriad of bad circumstances, poor luck, and divine favor. The odd cycle continued in Joseph’s life for almost ten years.

When a powerful Egyptian official named Potiphar bought Joseph, the young Hebrew slave found such favor with him that Potiphar eventually put Joseph in charge of his entire household. With Joseph at the helm, Potiphar’s house flourished.

Then one day, Potiphar’s wife made a sexual advance toward Joseph, which he quickly rejected. Humiliated, Potiphar’s wife accused Joseph of attempted rape, which forced Potiphar to throw Joseph in prison.<sup>8</sup>

So ended *Cycle One*. Joseph had gone from beloved and favored slave to outcast and forgotten prisoner.

While in prison, Joseph befriended the king’s ex-cupbearer and baker, who both had been thrown in prison for offending the king (called Pharaoh). Joseph saw their distress, asked them about it, and heard they’d both had strange, unsettling dreams the night before. He offered to interpret those dreams. He had good news for the cupbearer, not so much for the baker.<sup>9</sup>

Joseph, sensing his fortune turning, asked the cupbearer to remember him when he came before Pharaoh as a free man.

Joseph’s interpretation of the dream came true, and the cupbearer appeared before Pharaoh. Only, the cupbearer forgot all about Joseph. And Joseph’s unjustified stay in prison continued. *Cycle Two*.

Languishing in prison for roughly another two years, Joseph remained a man of integrity and eventually got promoted to overseeing all the prisoners. At that point, Pharaoh himself started having dreams. When searching for interpreters, Pharaoh jogged the memory of the cupbearer, who recommended Joseph as a possible seer. Pharaoh agreed.

And here the cycle broke down.

Joseph came before Pharaoh, interpreted his dreams, and devised a plan for how to take advantage of the mixed future he foresaw. Pharaoh loved it so much that he made Joseph second-in-command over the entire nation.<sup>10</sup>

That's what we call a comeback, folks.

Joseph quickly got Egypt rolling. For seven years, God blessed the nation, which Joseph took full advantage of by creating storehouses for the excess grain produced. Joseph knew that a seven-year famine was coming. When that famine eventually hit, surrounding nations began to starve—but not Egypt, because of Joseph's insight. Egypt kept rolling along and even had enough to aid the surrounding starving nations . . . including people from the land of Canaan (aka Joseph's family).

One day Joseph's brothers strolled into town, looking for food, and came face to face with Joseph. Joseph immediately clubbed one brother on the jaw and uppercut the youngest on the chin . . . Okay, maybe the story doesn't go exactly like that.

The brothers didn't recognize Joseph, due to his massive change in appearance (he looked like an Egyptian) and older age. It'd been more than twenty years, remember?

Through some playful deception and innocent payback, Joseph worked his brothers through an up-and-down emotional roller coaster, making them *really* work to receive their share of food. Consider it Joseph's way of processing his hurt and pain.

Eventually, Joseph came clean before his brothers, revealing that

he was their long-forgotten brother. And then, the craziest thing happened . . .

Joseph's brothers *bowed down* to Joseph.<sup>11</sup>

Remember that long-ago dream that made Joseph's brothers angry enough to kill him, and then led them to sell him into slavery? Yeah, it comes true. So much for being cast away as "that dreamer." Joseph was a prophet.

The story ends with family reunions, happy tears, and a restored relationship between Joseph and his father, Jacob. All is well with the world, and Joseph perfectly sums up the journey in Genesis 45: "Do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you."<sup>12</sup>

Joseph then reassures his brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."<sup>13</sup>

In this story we discover the true essence of a Trailblazer, as well as why our story must begin with Joseph. Throughout all of Joseph's life—amidst bad circumstances, in seasons of divine favor, and in instances of horrendous fortune—one thing remains steady and intact: his *character*.

## **The Core of a Trailblazer**

Character lies at the very core of a Trailblazer.

Without character, all other commendable traits falter and wither. Character creates an environment ripe for God to work in us and through us.

From a young age, the idea of character has captivated me. Perhaps it has fascinated you too. Character is why we love going to the movies, reading books, or watching TV. The entertainment industry bases almost all its stories around heroes or heroines who find themselves: A) in difficult circumstances; B) facing adversity; or



C) on a mission to fulfill (something like Joseph). The *character* of these heroes and heroines determines whether they succeed.

Perhaps more than most, heroes riveted me. / wanted to be the hero.

At three years of age, I swung (jumped) from tree to tree (couch to chair) in my Fruit of the Loom underwear, roaring like an ape and doing my best impersonation of Tarzan.

At age eight, my brother Elijah and I got swept up in the craze of *Spy Kids* and dressed as agents for three straight trick or treat outings.

Even through high school and college, the allure and appeal of the Marvel Universe overwhelmed me as I saw *myself* in many of those heroes.

Why?

Character attracts us. Difficult circumstances either reveal the very best or expose the very worst of who we are. Character polarizes and captivates. *Merriam-Webster* defines character as “moral excellence and firmness.”<sup>14</sup>

James Merritt, in his illuminating work on character, says it this way: “Character is the impression your life leaves on others.”<sup>15</sup> Makes sense, doesn’t it?

There’s a reason I watch Captain America maintain his composure when chaos breaks out around him. I leave the theater wanting to become more composed.

It’s why I read Joseph’s story and want to be a man of integrity in the face of temptation.

It’s why we all grow up with “heroes” or “role models” whom we strive to mirror in our words, actions, and habits.

Character is the core element in the life of a Trailblazer. It encompasses all the other wonderful traits we’ll talk about. It breeds an essence or a disposition of quiet strength that attracts others and pulls them in.

While a life of character is worth building, however, few seem willing to blaze that path. The jungle of life can feel intense, scary, treacherous, and downright demoralizing. But a Trailblazer has such a solid character that the dangers of the jungle don't stand a chance. To blaze trails previously untraveled, one must possess a strength of character that will stand up to and overcome all the dangers of the wilderness.

Character provides the foundation of every Trailblazer.

## **Put to the Test**

My own character got put to the test when I was eleven years old. A new movie titled *Benchwarmers* had just released on DVD, starring one of my favorite actors of all time: Jon Heder, more famously known as Napoleon Dynamite.

Earlier that year, as a new student from a different town, I had been chosen as student body president by my fifth-grade class, after attending school there for only three weeks. You might think, *Wow, you must've been an incredible kid of character whom your peers respected and looked up to!*

I wish I could nod my head, but in fact, I had won over (bribed) my classmates with an ingenious marketing campaign spearheaded by my ruthless campaign manager and primary investor (my dad) and inspired by the heroes of my life at the time: Napoleon and Pedro (Efren Ramirez). We called my campaign, "Vote for Micah."

I had shirts printed, buttons made, and I even gave my entire fifth-grade class free tater tots if they voted for me (no rules prohibited this, okay? Don't judge me). It worked and my love for Napoleon Dynamite became forever etched in my heart and soul.

But back to my character.

When *Benchwarmers* released, I knew that I *had* to see it.

"Dad," I said, "it has *Napoleon Dynamite* in it!"

I didn't know that *Benchwarmers* was no *Napoleon Dynamite*. My

parents didn't see it as an appropriate movie for an eleven-year-old to watch.

I fumed and fussed for weeks. But then, it released on DVD. My friend, Dustin, aided by his hedonistic parents (I'm kidding!), obtained *Benchwarmers* . . . and it just so happened that I planned to attend a sleepover at Dustin's house that Friday night.

On the docket for the night? *Benchwarmers*.

I'll never forget how nervous I felt when they pressed play on the main menu. While the other boys in the room could hardly contain their excitement, I felt terrified. I wouldn't eat or drink anything. My mouth went dry. I kept looking over my shoulder, just waiting for the ghost of my parents to snatch my soul right out of my chair. I tried to laugh at the funny parts and sweat profusely during the inappropriate scenes. I had blatantly disobeyed my parents . . . and my guilt felt overpowering.

When I returned home the next day, I felt shell-shocked. I knew I needed to tell my dad, but I couldn't face him. So, I pretended like nothing bothered me. A few hours later, though, I'd had enough. I needed to confess.

I remember walking into my dad's bedroom as he watched TV and asking if I could talk to him. As soon as he turned off the set, my tears flooded. I confessed how I'd disobeyed his command to not watch that movie, how I'd lied about watching another movie, and how guilty I felt for exposing myself to something I never should have seen.

He responded with tenderness and warmth. Without anger, he said, "Don't you see now that we weren't saying you couldn't watch it because we're mean, but because we wanted to protect your eyes, ears, and heart from things that were inappropriate for your age?"

I told him I understood (but did NOT tell him how good a dad he was).

Why is character so important?

When we disregard or disobey the commandments of our heavenly Father, we hurt no one more than we hurt ourselves. The guilt and shame that pummels us can feel unbearable. The lies and insecurities that Satan can implant in our heads both stunts our growth and even prevents us from producing the character we need to step back safely into the wilderness of the world. Merritt puts it this way: “Low character comes at a high cost.”<sup>16</sup>

So, while I really like order, I love character more. Which is why the life of a Trailblazer must begin with building a foundation of character—and that requires time, temperance, and commitment. We must willingly make the right decisions, do the right things, say the right words at the right times, and then *do that* over and over and over again. Building character isn’t sexy or glamorous. But when character fails, spectacular collapses often follow. The world feasts on those downfalls, made even worse by all the glitz and glamor.

How does the quote go? “Trust is built in drops and lost in buckets.” The same goes for character. We build it in drops and lose it in buckets.

Character matters.

As I forge ahead in life and ministry, I’ve begun to recognize the crucial place of character with respect to my specific vocation. I’m a pastor. I would hope (especially if you know me personally) that this might warm your heart. Maybe you’ve prayed over me, prayed with me, or received prayer from me. In a sense, our words over one another have helped to shape and form our character. What a gift to be invited into the most intimate spaces of people’s lives!

But I also know that you might see that “pastor” line and cringe.

*Oh, here we go. Another hotshot young preacher who thinks he’s the stuff. Another guy with big names backing him and smooth words covering him. A charismatic communicator now writing books? Yeah, like we’ve never seen that before.*

To you, I say: you’re right. I totally get it. The role I’ve accepted doesn’t have a great recent track record and the latest headlines

only make it worse. My pastoral legacy as a tattooed, nose-pierced, young, relatively fit white guy conjures up images of scandal, coercion, and abuse.

Believe me, I'm aware of it.

I'm ashamed to say that some men after whom I modeled my ministry probably come to mind when you think of "wolves in sheep's clothing." But please hear me: that is *not* the trail I long to blaze. In fact, my ambition has shifted from becoming the hero to becoming the guide, the highest calling I can imagine for any pastor.

God never meant for his church to put pastors on a pedestal. Pastors don't need always to be front and center, and certainly we must not worship or idolize them. That you are reading this book is an honor and privilege I do not deserve. No one owes it to me as my "right."

Did you know that the word *pastor* doesn't even appear in the New Testament? The translators of the Geneva Bible back in 1560 (fifty-one years before the King James version appeared) had to translate the Greek word *poimenas* from Ephesians 4:11 into English, and they had two options: *pastor* (Latin) and *shepherd* (Middle English). They chose the Latin term and set a precedent that remains even today . . . but probably not without some cost. The word *shepherd* instead recalls Davidic language, don't you think?

God has called me to be in the field with you, to help you on the journey toward becoming the Trailblazer God has called you to be. That, in essence, is what I hope this book is: a tool from a guide who longs to see you flourish.

While this book highlights some things God has done in me, please know, it's not about me. Also, I need you to know that this work is not a pastime. These are not, "the things I've learned and am now ready to pass on to others." While God planted certain character attributes in me decades ago, all of them still are and always will be *in process* in my life.

Just as they will be in yours.

That is the life of apprenticeship to Jesus.

## Does the Trail Beckon?

If you believe God has placed a calling on your life, or if you feel as though you're destined to change the world, or if you have a dream to impact society unlike anyone's dream before you, then please hear me: YOU CAN! I believe in you.

More importantly, so does God. Whatever he's called you to do, he will see you through.<sup>17</sup>

But while the journey toward reaching whatever goal, dream, or aspiration you have is simple—love God and others—it is *not* easy.

You will face trials and troubles, temptations of all kinds, unjust and unfair rulings, bad breaks, terrible luck, a bad draw, kicks to the face and side, stabs in the back. It all lies ahead. The wilderness is not for the faint of heart!

The wilderness is calling, however, even beckoning to those with a trail to blaze. And with God, that trail is worth blazing. On the other side of your fear, you'll find your future. On the other side of your pain, you'll discover the promise that God has etched onto your heart.

Thank goodness that we have a Shepherd who epitomized what real character looks like!

Now, with a foundation of character established, we have what it takes to enter the wild life of a Trailblazer.

