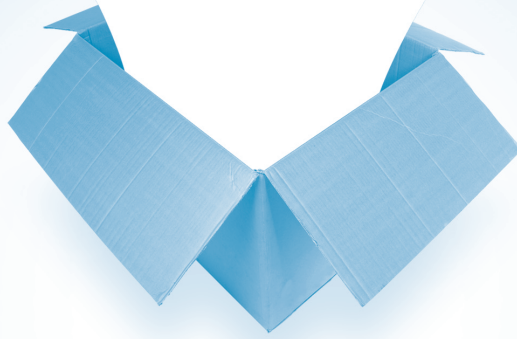


# A QUEST FOR MORE



Living for something  
bigger than you

PAUL DAVID TRIPP



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Prolific author and international conference speaker, Paul David Tripp, is president of Paul Tripp Ministries, whose mission is to educate and equip today's Christian by combining the in-depth study of God's Word with practical life application. Tripp, also a pastor with over 15 years of pastoral ministry, is an adjunct professor at Westminster Theological Seminary and adjunct faculty member at the Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation in Glenside, Pennsylvania. He is the author of such best-selling titles as *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, *War of Words*, *Age of Opportunity*, *Lost in the Middle*, *How People Change*, and *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making*. Tripp has been married for 35 years and has four grown children.

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None of what this book represents would be possible without the many people who over the years have been my teachers, mentors, examples, helpers, and friends.

I thank God for you and your contribution  
to what God has called me to do.



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# PREFACE

Some books are a concentrated examination of a topic. Other books lay out a set of skills or techniques for a certain aspect of life. Some books record a person's experience or journey. Others are funny or sad.

The book you are about to read doesn't fit into any of these categories.

Here is my best attempt to tell you what you are about to read: This entire book is meant to stimulate you to think about one central biblical concept, the kingdom of God. But this book is not a theology of kingdom, nor an exposition of the kingdom passages in the Bible. No, it is simply a meditation on what Jesus meant when he called us to "seek first his kingdom." What does it really look like to expand everything our lives contain to touch the size of his kingdom?

Now, the problem with biblical terms like "kingdom" is that they are familiar-but-unfamiliar terms. It is quite possible for us to have heard them many times and even used them in our own conversations, yet not to really understand what they mean. Or we may know technically what they mean, but not how they set the agenda for the way we live every day.

The discussion of kingdom living in this book will not take place in the seminary hallway. I am going to take you to the street where the rubber meets the road in daily life. I want to help you consider Christ's call from the street level. And my hope is that, as we do this together, you will first become uncomfortable, but then soon become encouraged, excited, and motivated with hope.

God has given you the gift of his Son, not to make your little kingdom successful, but to welcome you to a much better kingdom. Now what in the world does that mean?

PAUL DAVID TRIPP

## INTRODUCTION

### A WORD ABOUT THE JOURNEY

Reading is much like a long journey. You are excited in the beginning, simply because you are getting started. Anticipation is a motivating thing. But it isn't long before the journey begins to feel longer than you thought it would. Midway through your trip, you just can't wait for indications that the end is near. You begin to celebrate when you see the sign that tells you that you have only a few miles to go.

This book is like a journey, but a particular kind of journey. I want to warn you that reading *A Quest for More* will at times feel like driving from Kansas to the Pacific coast. It's a great journey, but you no more than get settled in for the trip and you hit the Rocky Mountains. It's easy to get discouraged as you're climbing peak after peak!

What is that mountainous passage that I am talking about? Well, most of the early chapters of this book expose the many, many ways we all tend to forsake the big kingdom for the little kingdom. This part of your journey through the book will be painful at times. You will feel as if you have successfully scaled one peak only to have another in front of you. But



don't give up! Once you have the bitter peaks of humble self-examination behind you and have accepted that you have a problem, the sights and sounds of God's solution that are at the end of the journey will look all the more beautiful to you.

As you begin this little journey, remember: It is a sweet thing that we serve a dissatisfied God who has destinations in mind for us that we would never choose for ourselves. It really is a good thing that he will not be satisfied until he has gotten us exactly where he created us and re-created us to be. Most of us would have been satisfied to stay at home, and many of us would have quit the journey long before it was completed. But our heavenly Father won't give up until each one of his children has completed the journey.

So, journey with me, and be aware that there are mountains up ahead. But don't be discouraged. The ocean will soon be in view, and the ardor of the mountains will make your arrival at the destination all the sweeter.

WOULD YOU LIKE YOUR LIFE TO MAKE  
A DIFFERENCE?

## CHAPTER ONE

# A QUEST FOR MORE

*tran·scen·dence: the state of being beyond and outside of the ordinary range of human experience*

THE BOTTOM LINE: YOU WERE CREATED TO  
BE PART OF SOMETHING BIG.

Have you ever wanted to invest yourself in something worthwhile? Have you ever wondered why your life seems to lack meaning or purpose? Have you ever been disappointed when a position, achievement, possession, or relationship failed to fulfill you? Have you ever dreamed that somehow, some way you would be part of something truly great? If so, this book is for you. This book is about having a life that counts for something. It is about living to make a difference.

Now I know that there are many books written about success, achievement, and influence, but this book is different. I want to take you on a journey—a journey through the greatest story ever told, found in the

greatest book ever written, the Bible. It is here and here alone that you will begin to discover not only who you are, but what you were meant to be. God has placed you just where he wants you—to be part of something big, right where you are. Yes, you were made to make a difference, so start this journey of discovery with me.

## BEAUTY QUEENS AND WORLD PEACE

It is a classic scene in western culture. She stands before the microphone, beautiful and poised, a finalist in the Miss America contest. The host asks her what she would like to accomplish during her reign and she says, “I would like to create world peace, solve world hunger, and liberate all the caged parakeets in the entire world.” We’ve all heard it a hundred times. It has been the fodder for many late-night, stand-up comedy routines. Yet, for all of our cynical smiles and sarcastic comments in the face of the contestant’s grandiosity, there is something deeply and uniquely human about what she has said. **There is woven inside each of us a desire for something more—a craving to be part of something bigger, greater, and more profound than our relatively meaningless day-by-day existence.** Maybe that’s why a human being would ever want to climb Everest, traverse the oceans in an all-too-small sailboat, or attempt any feat not yet accomplished by a fellow human. Perhaps that’s why we get hooked on politics, sports, or a myriad of causes that give us something to fight for.

We simply weren’t constructed to live only for ourselves. We were placed on earth to be part of something bigger than the narrow borders of our own survival and our own little definition of happiness. The desire resides in each of us, and it is called *transcendence*. To transcend is to be part of something greater. We were created to be part of something so big, so glorious, so far beyond the ordinary that it would totally change the way

we approach every ordinary thing in our lives. And in all of sin's blindness, brokenness, and rebellion, that desire to transcend has now been crushed.

Being a fan in the stands with 65,000 other fans at the Super Bowl with everyone screaming at the top of their lungs as the kicker launches that last-second field goal gives us a feeling of transcendence. You hear it in the voice of the fan who says, "It's our year! Our time has come! We're going to win this one!" He sounds like he is a paid member of the team, yet he is not. The "we" language is transcendence. He has become part of something greater than his mundane workaday world. His connection to his local team has helped him, if just for a moment, to transcend the small boundaries of his average-guy world. The local worker in the presidential campaign has much the same experience. No, he will probably never meet the candidate face to face; and yes, he is only running folding machines and stuffing boxes full of literature. But he is part of something transcendent. He has been told that this campaign could forever change the face of American politics. His campaign involvement has helped him escape the little world of his small college life to become an integral part of something bigger. If only for a moment, he has transcended.

The mountain climber facing the dizzying heights, the unforgiving inclines, and the biting wind has touched a bit of transcendence. He is about to join a small society of people who have escaped the everyday concerns and demands of life to accomplish something great. He stands on that oxygen-poor summit and he has transcended if for just one day. The mountain isn't the only summit he has ascended.

The marcher in the protest, the career soldier in the combat unit, and the little boy who is pretending he is the king of the world experience the same rush. It is that feeling of being part of something significant, of your place and your part mattering. For a moment your life seems bigger than your life. This bigger thing yanks you out of bed in the morning, and sometimes the excitement of it all makes it hard to sleep. It makes all of the little things that you have to do every day seem more satisfying and more

important because they are now connected to something more than self-survival. You have experienced a bit of transcendence.

**This desire for transcendence is in all of us because God placed it there. He constructed us to live for more than ourselves.** He designed us to want meaning, purpose, and consequence. We were not wired to be fully satisfied with self-survival and self-pleasure. God purposed that the borders of our vision would be much, much larger than the boundaries of our lives. We were meant to see more than our physical eyes can see, and it is that greater vision that was meant to engage, excite, connect, and satisfy us.

Maybe the beauty contestant isn't being so silly after all. Maybe in that moment she has gotten something right. Perhaps her desire for transcendence is a more beautiful part of her humanity than her physical beauty will ever be.

## AND NOW FOR THE BEGINNING

There is definitely an “above and more” positioning of human beings in the creation accounts of Genesis 1 and 2. Adam and Eve were not the highest of the animals. The whole account presents them as being unique, different, and above the rest of the things that God made. It is just as clear, too, that these two people were made for more than their own existence. They weren't placed in the garden for self-survival and self-satisfaction. They were immediately given a vision and commission that would take them far beyond the borders of their own needs and concerns. Transcendence was a part of their humanity. They were given amazing capacities to do what no other creature could do. Anything less would be a subhuman existence.

Think about what this means for all of us who are the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve. You and I were created for more than filling up our schedules with the self-satisfying pursuits of personal pleasure. We were meant to do more than make sure that all of our needs are fulfilled

and all our desires are satisfied. **We were never meant to be self-focused little kings ruling miniscule little kingdoms with a population of one.** Sure, it's right for you to care about your health, your job, your house, your investments, your family, and your friends. It would be irresponsible to act as if none of those things mattered. Yet it is a functional human tragedy to live *only* for those things. It is a fundamental denial of your humanity to narrow the size of your life to the size of your own existence, because you were created to be an "above and more" being. You were made to be transcendent.

Jim sat before me, his slumped body a testament to the depression that gripped him. He said he had awakened a few months earlier and realized that there was no one who cared if he woke up that morning. No one cared if he was healthy or sick. No one cared if he was happy or sad. He said, "I get up in the morning and put on great looking clothes, leave my beautiful, modern condominium, get in my luxury car and drive to my high-paying job, only to go back to my beautiful condominium at the end of the day to start it all over again. I could die today and no one would even notice. I have it all; why can't I be happy?" Jim *did* have it all, yet in getting it all he had denied his own humanity. In his quest for everything, Jim had missed the one thing that separated him from everything else that God made. Jim had constructed his own kingdom, indulged his every dream, and met his every need. He had ruled his kingdom with discipline and success, but he discovered that it was an empty kingdom, and he was an empty king. It was not that Jim had attempted too much. The tragedy was that he had settled for way too little, and that is exactly what he got.

How about you? What is the big vision that you're working toward? What is the big dream you are investing in? What is your definition of the "good life"? When will you know that you have been successful? If you had it all, what would "all" look like? I am afraid there are many people of faith who attend church each week, give regularly to God's work, know their Bible pretty well, and don't live overtly evil lives; but they have settled for

“below and less” when they were created for “above and more.”

The mistake that they have made is that they have shrunk their Christianity to the size of their own lives. They have taken God’s grace and wisdom as an invitation to a better marriage, a better relationship with their children, a better extended family life, better success at work, etc. And there is a way that God’s grace *does* invite me to all of these things. But here is the point of this little book: God invites you to *so much more!* God’s grace invites you to be part of something that is far greater than your boldest and most expansive dream. **His grace cuts a hole in your self-built prison and invites you to step into something so huge, so significant that only one word in the Bible can adequately capture it. That word is *glory*.**

## HARDWIRED FOR GLORY

Admit it. You’re a glory junkie. That’s why you like the 360°, between-the-legs, slam dunk, or that amazing hand-beaded formal gown, or the seven-layer triple-chocolate mousse cake. It’s why you’re attracted to the hugeness of the mountain range or the multihued splendor of the sunset. You were hardwired by your Creator for a glory orientation. It is inescapable. It’s in your genes. The groundhogs don’t compete for who has made the most glorious underground den. Or, as my brother Tedd says, the penguins don’t score one another as they dive off the ice into the frigid sea. There is no penguin announcer who says, “That was a 9.3, had high technical merit, but lacked artistic creativity.” But we’re different. We’ll flock to a museum to see the Salvador Dali masterworks. We’ll wait in a ninety-minute line for a ride on the ultimate roller coaster. We’ll dream for days about the glory of the upcoming Thanksgiving feast. And we’ll work like crazy to achieve one glory moment in some area of our lives. We were simply made for glory, but not just the shadow glories of the created world. We were



made for the one glory that is transcendent—the *glory of God*. When you grasp this, your life begins to make a difference.

## THE GLORY THAT TRANSCENDS

Now, let me talk for a minute about purpose. There is a way in which this book is about living with purpose. Yet it is about so much more than that. There are many people who have lived lives of purpose that didn't really make much of a difference. Every person's life is purposeful because every human being lives in pursuit of something. So, it is not enough to determine to have purpose. Let me state it this way: **It is a good thing to have purpose, but if your purpose isn't tied to glory, you have still denied your humanity.**

Let's consider the glory-focus of Genesis 1 and 2. There are four transcendent glories that were created to be the life-shaping focus of every human being. The first is the glory for which every human is to live, and the following three are glories that flow from the first. Each of these calls us out of the tight confines of a self-oriented existence to something fundamentally above and beyond. We will introduce them here and expand on each throughout the book.

**God glory.** We were made to be more connected to what is above us than to what is below us. To put it another way, our lives were designed to be shaped more by our attachment to the Creator than by the creation. We were made to experience, to be part of, to be consumed by, and to live in pursuit of the one glory that is truly glorious—the glory of God. A ravenous and not easily satisfied pursuit of this glory is meant to be the compass of our living. In Genesis 1, God comes on scene the minute Adam and Eve take their first breath. He is there to command their allegiance. He is there to be the central focus of everything they ever think, desire, say, and do—and when he is, their lives have transcendent meaning and

purpose. Here's what this means. **The transcendent glory that every human being quests for, whether he knows it or not, is not a thing; it is a person, and his name is *God*.** People are transcendent because people were made for him. It is only in communion with him and in submitting all other forms of glory to his glory that I will ever find the “above and more” that my heart seeks. God's immediate presence in the lives of Adam and Eve is a call to the ultimate in transcendence. They are to live for the One who *is* glory. And they must never shrink the size of their glory focus to the narrow glories of their own little lives.

***Stewardship glory.*** It is amazing as you read the story of creation to see that God carefully constructed his world and then placed it in the hands of people. God gave Adam and Eve the responsibility for being good and faithful stewards of everything he had made. In effect, they were designed to be God's “resident managers.” Their vision of personal purpose was meant to be as wide as the universe that God had created. They were constructed to do more than take care of themselves; they were called to care for the wide variety of amazing things God had purposefully crafted to be reflectors of his glory. The transcendence of human beings is expressed as people reflect God's glory by their rulership and stewardship over the surrounding created world. This call to manage the created order was a divine call to transcendence. It was a call for Adam and Eve to never shrink the size of their care to care for themselves.

***Community glory.*** You and I were made for relationships. Adam wasn't meant to live alone. Adam wasn't meant to be Adam's best friend. The community that Adam and Eve were meant to live in with one another was designed to be the beginning of a huge web of interdependent human relationships that would define much of the focus and energy of peoples' lives. Human beings' lives were meant to transcend the narrow glories of independence, autonomy, and self-sufficiency. **We were created to have lives shaped by a constant pursuit of the glory of humble, dependent community.** We were made to need one another, and this community was

meant to exist in a variety of forms, including neighbor, family, friend, church, city, state, nation, brother, sister, parent, and spouse. This web of ongoing relationships daily calls us out of our insulation and isolation to experience a community glory that selfish, personal focus can never deliver. God makes Adam and Eve and immediately calls them to the transcendent glory of a world-reaching, generation-spanning, and history-encompassing community. This commitment to community was meant to be a major shaping focus of their day-by-day living. This act of God to immediately tie Adam and Eve into community with one another was a call to transcendence. It was a call to never shrink the size of their community to a functional community of one.

***Truth glory.*** Immediately upon creating Adam and Eve, God did something that he had not done with anything else he made. He spoke to them. This mundane moment was a moment of transcendence! The Lord, King, and Creator of the universe was speaking the secrets of his divine wisdom into the ears of the people he had made. In this act God was calling Adam and Eve to transcend the boundaries of their own thoughts, interpretations, and experiences. They were to form their lives by the origin-to-destiny perspective that only the Creator could have. God had hardwired Adam and Eve with the communicative abilities that they would need in order to receive his revelation, because the glorious truths that God would progressively unfold to them were meant to shape everything they thought, desired, decided, and did. Their lives were set apart from all of the rest of creation because God had opened his truth glory to them and them alone. By themselves they never could have discovered the things he told them. These treasures of wisdom would only be known by Adam and Eve because God decided to reveal them. God's words contained knowledge of him, the meaning and purpose of life, a moral structure for living, the nature of human identity, a fundamental human job description, a call to human community, and a call to divine worship. Never were Adam and Eve built to exist on conclusions drawn from their experience, or concepts

resulting from autonomous interpretations. Every thought was meant to be shaped by the truth glory that he would patiently and progressively impart to them. God's seemingly mundane act of communication in the garden was in fact a call to transcendence. It was a call to an "above and more" way of living. It was a call to Adam and Eve to never shrink the size of their thought down to the size of their thoughts.

## BUT WAIT A MINUTE! WHAT ABOUT TUESDAY?

Maybe as you've been reading, you've been thinking, "Okay, Paul, what you have been talking about is all very interesting, but I'm living real life here! For example, on Tuesday I have to go to school with my teenage son to talk about his rapidly failing grades. In the afternoon I have to meet with a friend to deal with a misunderstanding between us, and in the evening I have to talk with my husband about our finances. I'm facing a whole lot of real-life issues that I don't really want to face, and I don't think I have time for transcendence!"

But, hang in here with me. This *is* the point of this book. **In a fallen world there is a powerful pressure to constrict your life to the shape and size of your life.** There is a compelling tendency to forget who you are and what you were made for. There is a tendency to be shortsighted, myopic, and easily distracted. There is a tendency to settle for less when you have been created for more. There is something expansive, glorious, and eternal that is meant to give direction to everything you do. And when you lose sight of it, you have effectively denied your own humanity.

You see, all of those things you will do on Tuesday are necessary and important. This book is not a call to forget them and do something else. No, it is about a whole new way of approaching these things. It is about a way of living where God has placed me that embraces the transcendent glories for which I was created. It is about living for a greater kingdom than the

kingdom of my life, my family, and my job. And where do I live for this greater kingdom? In my life, in my family, and in my job! This book was not written to call to you to stop doing everything you have been doing or to start doing a bunch of new things. Rather, it is a call to do what God has called you to do with a vision that is as broad and deep as the glory of God.

This book is a call to plan large and live big. It is an encouragement to let God glory, community glory, stewardship glory, and truth glory alter the way you deal with everything that is on your plate. It is an encouragement to remember and affirm that your humanity only really lives when it is connected to the transcendent glory that can only be found in God.

Are you not sure what all of this means? Are you unsure of what it would practically look like? Do you want to live a life that really counts for something and that makes a difference? Take time to read on.

**THE FINAL QUESTION: WHAT IS THE BIG THING THAT  
YOU ARE LIVING FOR RIGHT NOW?**

HAVE YOU BEEN WILLING TO  
SETTLE FOR LESS?

## CHAPTER TWO

# MORE OR LESS?

*pre·tense: a false appearance or action intended to deceive*

THE BOTTOM LINE: SIN CAUSES US TO TALK ABOUT MORE,  
BUT TO SETTLE FOR LESS.

It was one of those moments, small and unimportant in one way, but a sign of something very significant when looked at from another perspective. We were on our way somewhere. Because of my eye problems, Luella often drives in the evening. As she headed off toward our location, I said, “Don’t you want to turn there?”—just when we passed the street where I would’ve turned.

She replied, “That way will take too long.”

“The shortest distance between two points is a straight line,” I reminded her.

“That’s exactly why I didn’t turn!”

“But you’re taking us way out of the way,” I insisted.

“Why don’t you just relax and let me drive?”

“Because I don’t trust your sense of direction!”

Luella offered, “Let’s make a deal. When you’re driving, you get to decide the route, and when I’m driving I’ll decide the route.”

“But what if you’re going the wrong way?”

“It’s not a matter of right and wrong; it’s simply a matter of preference.”

And I thought (without saying it), *But my preference is right!* Instead I said, “I wish we were in a helicopter so I could show you the whole route. Then you would understand what I’m trying to tell you.”

Luella replied, “I don’t think a helicopter is what you need right now!”

It was a moment of minor irritation, never exploding into full-blown anger, yet a moment that is worth unpacking. What this conversation reveals is how hard it is for fallen human beings to keep focused on what is really important. In a heated moment all of us are quite capable of treating a minor detail of life as if it were a major thing. **We are all capable of fighting for what has little value while forgetting things of transcendent value.**

In a flash of irritation, a mom will treat the condition of her son’s bedroom as being more valuable than the community she is to have with her son, which is so essential to what God wants to do for this boy through her. After months of frustration, a believer will get into a heated argument over garden boundaries with his neighbor, forgetting how much more important it is to be salt and light in the man’s life than how many flowers were planted over the property line. For a moment, a man will get more of a sense of well-being from the look and smell of his brand-new car than he does from the condition of his heart. For a season, the affection and appreciation of another human being will become more functionally important to us than the gracious, forgiving, and adopting love of our heavenly Father. For a moment, a succulent steak becomes more important to us than a soul that has been satisfied by the Living Bread. In the flash of one look, the beauty and shape of a woman’s body can become more important than long-term marital community and a heart that is pure.



And in a car on a given night, being right in the eyes of your spouse can become more important than living right before your Lord.

It is so hard for us to get glory right. It is so hard for us to see through all the near “glories” of creation to see the transcendent glory of God. It is so difficult for us to remember and be motivated by what is truly important. It is so tempting to be committed to our little kingdoms that the transcendent kingdom of God is of little functional influence. We are in fact in a great war, the daily melodrama of the heart. This is exactly what was happening to me that night in the car. It happens to each of us every day. We again and again deny our humanity as we settle for something less than the transcendent glories for which we were created. **It is so hard for us to make the truly important things functionally important to us. And it didn't take long for Adam and Eve to fall into this trouble as well.**

## TROUBLE IN THE GARDEN

Have you ever thought about what exactly the Serpent offered Eve in that fateful conversation in the garden? What he offered Eve was “more.” What he offered Eve was transcendence, but it had a fatal flaw. It wasn't connected to God! Here was an offer of an “above and beyond” glory, but it was a replacement for the transcendent glory that can only be found in God. Notice the thundering implication of these five simple words, “You will be like God.” The Serpent was saying, *You know, Eve, there is a greater, more satisfying glory than anything you have yet experienced. Your life can be much, much more than it has already been. Why, Eve, you can have it all. If you would just be willing to step outside of God's narrow boundaries, you wouldn't need to be connected to him, because you would be like him.*

These manipulative words of the enemy appear to offer greater transcendence but are really shrinking it dramatically. The glory that the Serpent holds out is no glory at all. Let me state it this way: When I opt

for a me-centered “more,” what I actually get is always much, much less. Essentially Satan is saying, *Eve, you can live for a greater and more satisfying kingdom than the kingdom of God. If you do this one thing, you can have a kingdom where you are central and where you rule unchallenged.* It is the same evil sales pitch that Satan offered to Christ at the beginning of his ministry on earth. (See Matthew 4:8–11.) Here we have recorded the very first time in human history when a person was willing to restrict her living to the size of her life. We have been paying the price ever since.

## USED CAR SALES

I like to listen to used-car salesmen. Not all of them are like what I am about to describe, but I think the word craft they employ is instructive. Deceptive sales craft is all about embellishment of the positive, shrinking the negative, and a careful sprinkling of pretenses (plausible lies). You walk up to what is designed to be a mode of transportation, and the salesman immediately says to you, “This baby has the finest sound system you’ll ever find in a car. And sit in those seats. They’re capable of over fifty different positions.” Now that he has so overstated a couple of the car’s positives so that you are not thinking about the engine and transmission, he seeks to shrink the negatives in your thinking. He says, “It’s a great car for driving around the city.” This actually means it is very small and doesn’t have much pick-up. He adds, “It is a perfect car for a young family.” He actually means that the back seat is so small that no normal-sized human being could ever sit there comfortably. Then he ends with plausible lies. He says, “We will have no trouble making it affordable for you.” This probably means, “You cannot afford this car, but we can manipulate the finances in such a way as to make you think you can.”

Such is the craft of the enemy. It is all about embellishment, negation, and plausible lies. It is the craft of temptation. It is the craft of pseudo-glory and false transcendence. It is a wicked craft, but it gets us again and again.

You see, the enemy of our souls knows that we were created for transcendence. He knows that we were created to be constantly connected to something more glorious than the small glories of our own survival and pleasure. He knows that we all hunger for more, so his craft is to present us with less in a way that makes it appear to be more. **The “you can be like God” offer in the garden was not an honest invitation to more; it was a deceitful trick that would only lead to less.** It was not an invitation to be more gloriously human, but a pitch to get Adam and Eve to deny the fundamental basis of their true humanity. Yet their humanity was connected to the glory of God, and to disobey him would never ever lead to greater glory.

## IT'S ALWAYS THE SAME OLD SET OF TRICKS

Every day, in many ways, we give in to the same old set of tricks. We forget the transcendence for which we were made and we look at much lesser things as if they were more. The cost to us is just as huge as it was to Adam and Eve. Naked, guilty, and embarrassed, they hid from their God in the bushes of the garden.

A man will forget that, as a father, he has been welcomed to the transcendent glory of being part of God's work of forming human souls. Instead he will buy into the replacement glory of career success. More and more, his life will be eaten up and defined by his work. Less and less will his sense of purpose have to do with the formative community that only he can offer his children. Sadly, his children cease to be one of the joyful focuses of his living and become an obligation in an already-too-busy schedule. Less and less do his children know him, respect him, trust him, or feel his love.

A young person will forget the transcendent glory of an identity that is rooted in the presence, power, and grace of the Redeemer. Instead she will live for the pseudo-glory of the approval of peers. She'll pick up on and

parrot her friends' vocabulary, she'll take on their sense of style, she'll laugh obviously at their jokes, and she'll even participate in activities that prick her conscience—all because she has convinced herself that she “needs” their approval. There will be moments when she will feel transcendent. She will feel as if her life has real meaning and purpose because she is connected to something bigger than herself. The sad fact is that she has opted for less. The community of her peers has actually become a replacement community for the transcendent glory of loving, worshipful, daily community with the Lord. And the things that she hopes she will find in the acceptance of her peers, no human being is ever able to give to her. She will only ever find it in the accepting grace of God.

It may be that we settle for less in moments that are much less consequential than these. Being right can replace being kind, being served can replace the joy of serving, power can trump character, possessions can become more attractive than spiritual blessings, and a moment of independence can become more compelling than long-term interdependent community. Even getting the last cookie can become more important than the love we are meant to mutually share.

Here it is. **When the enemy somehow tricks you into squeezing the size of your life to the size of your personal dreams, wants, and needs, he has got you right where he wants you.** He has won a victory every time he successfully tempts you to exchange the God-centered more for which you were created, replacing it with one of the endless catalog of me-centered “mores” that dangle before us in this fallen world. His lie is this: “Transcendence is really found when you live at the center of your world.” Or, “Ultimate joy and satisfaction is found when you live for you.”

Now you may be saying, “Come on, Paul, I’m biblically smart enough to know that that isn’t true!” You probably do, but the struggle I am describing very often takes place inside the borders of good theology and regular participation in the scheduled programs of the church. It is possible, and maybe even quite regular, to participate in these things and

still be settling, in the little moments of our daily existence, for much, much less than the transcendence for which we were created. Things as mundane as wardrobe, menu, schedule, workload, location, traffic, weather, being right, getting affirmed, money, housing, employment, gardens, family rooms, sex, leisure, who's in the bathroom first, who did what with my newspaper, who ate the last of the cereal, etc.—all of which are important in some way—rise to a spiritually dangerous level of importance in the heat of the moment. These are the moments we live in every day. The normal day is a 24-hour collection of little moments. Day after day, week after week, and year after year, these little moments set the character of a person's life.

When little things become the big thing for which I consistently fight, I have forsaken transcendence for the temporary shadow glories of creation. The temporary satisfaction and pleasure that I get will not last. These things are like spiritual crack; they will give me a quick emotional or spiritual rush, while leaving me unfilled and hungering for the next rush.

This has always been the struggle of God's people. Think of Israel in the wilderness. What causes them to actually consider going back to Egypt? Menu! (See Numbers 11.) They were tired of this quasi-tasteless substance called manna. Think about it for a moment. The flavor of a God-provided food rose to such a level of importance that they were actually able to look at Egypt as a place with a better menu, rather than the place of slavery and death that it actually was.

Think about what initiated the heinous idolatry of Israel at the base of Mt Sinai. Was it not a matter of schedule? (See Exodus 32:1.) Moses had been too long on the mountain. The children of Israel were impatient, so they said, "Moses has been gone so long we don't know what's happened to him, so let's make gods who will go before us." Is schedule important? Is there legitimacy to wondering what has happened to your leader if he has been absent for awhile? Of course there is! But this legitimate concern becomes fundamentally more important than it ever should be, and when

it does, it completely distorts the perspective of the people and sets them up for spiritual danger.

Or consider the disciples in the upper room in the final hours before Christ's capture. He sits with them as Messiah, Priest, and Lamb. He, in this moment and in the sacrificial moments to come, is instituting the New Covenant. There could be no more significant moment of redemptive importance. Yet, Luke tells us that in the middle of this moment of high and holy drama, the disciples are arguing about who of them is greatest! (See Luke 22:24–30.) Are position, power, and affirmation of no consequence whatsoever? Of course not! But when they rise to the level of overwhelming the crashing significance of being welcomed into the kingdom of God, of eating at the table with the Lord of the universe, and of sitting on thrones built by him, then something has gone drastically wrong. In this moment the disciples are forsaking the transcendent glories of the kingdom of God for the pseudo-glory of personal power and position.

Take a moment to consider Peter in Galatia, who has let his fear of a certain set of Jews rise to a level of greater importance than the transcendent freedom glories of the gospel for which he had been chosen to be a spokesman. (See Galatians 2:11–14.) Something as normal as a concern over what others think of me, or what will happen to me if others oppose me, rises to a level of such immediate importance that my actions are more shaped by that concern than they are about the huge and transcendent glories of the life-altering grace of the gospel.

So, how are you doing with transcendence? What is the “more” for which you are questing? Examine the last few weeks. What is rising to a level of decision-making, behavior-shaping importance in your life? Inside your correct theology and your faithful participation in the gatherings and ministries of the body of Christ, is your life a picture of the transcendence atrophy? Have you exchanged “more” for “less”? While affirming what is right, have you functionally settled for what is really a subtle, but significant, rejection of the true humanity for which you were created? **True humanity**

**is always connected to glory, and true glory can only be found in the One who is glory, the Lord.**

In how many mundane ways each week are you tempted to compress the size of your living to the concerns of your life? You can even shrink the glory-call and the glory-promises of the gospel down to excitement with a little bit better marriage, slightly more responsive children, and some principles that will help you be more successful at your job. Does God offer me these things? Sure he does! But he calls me to so much more. He calls me to find personal glory in his glory, and in so doing, to be committed to community, stewardship, and truth glory as well.

If Genesis 1 is a welcome to transcendence, then Genesis 3 is about the tragedy of the shrinking of transcendence. Adam and Eve were created so that their lives would reach as wide as the kingdom and glory of God. In that one disastrous moment they did not expand their boundaries; they dramatically narrowed them. The vertical “more” for which transcendent human beings were created was replaced by a horizontal “more” that was never to be a human being’s life motivation. **In that one tragic moment, Adam and Eve migrated to the center of their world, the one place where glory-wired human beings must never live.** They did not just opt for independence; they opted for God’s position, and in doing so they forsook any chance of a personal participation in the transcendent glory of a relationship with God.

This is why God sent his Redeemer Son to earth. He came to rescue us from ourselves and return to us participation in his transcendence. In his adoption we are restored to the *God glory* which is to be central to everything we do. In his church we are restored to the *community glory* in which we were built to participate. In freeing us from idolatry, rather than being ruled by the creation, we are restored to the *stewardship glory* over creation to which we were called. In the ministry of his indwelling Spirit, through Scripture, we are restored to the *truth glory* that was meant to be the interpretive lens of every human being since Adam took his first breath. His is a gorgeous work of rescue!

Yet, learning to live with the transcendent glories of the created and re-created children of God is a process, not an event. You and I are still in the middle of the process. Sometimes we get it, but often we forget. Sometimes we do act with faith, hope, and courage. Sometimes we really do hold out for “more” and refuse to be manipulated into settling for “less.” Sometimes we will not settle for any condition less than being truly human. But sometimes we take the bait and go after less as if it were more. **Sometimes, even though grace has expanded our borders until they touch glory, we still reduce the borders of our living to the boundaries of our lives.**

If you will stop for a moment and look at yourself, you will recognize evidences of the struggle. The evidences are in your family and friendships. They are there at work and in times of leisure. They are visible in your relationship to your position, possessions, and power. Yes, they are even there in your participation in the body of Christ. So, this book is offered as help in the struggle. It is meant to help you more clearly grasp what it means to live for more. It is meant as a welcome to a life that really makes a difference. You and I were wired for transcendent glory. The big question of life is: What glory will you live for each and every day?



THE FINAL QUESTION: WHAT IS THE “LESS” THAT TENDS  
TO CAPTURE YOUR ATTENTION?

HAVE YOU EVER  
WANTED TO BE . . . GOD?

## CHAPTER THREE

# A TOTAL DISASTER

*au·ton·o·my: the quality or state of being  
independent, free, and self-directed*

THE BOTTOM LINE: SINCE SIN  
HAS DAMAGED EVERYTHING, GOD CALLS US  
TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT EVERYTHING.

It was always a moment of panic for us. We would hear her feet on the steps, and we knew what her mission was. She was coming up to inspect the neatness and cleanliness of our bedroom. We would immediately go into rapid-bedroom-restoration mode, but it was always to no avail. There was no way we could ever get it right before her feet touched the last step. The mess was too great and the time too little. She would always hit that last step just as my brother Mark and I were stuffing huge piles of personal belongings under our bed, vainly hoping that this time Mom would be fooled. But she never was. In her anger at the sorry condition of our room

and her irritation at our stuff-it-under-the-bed game, she would say the words we hated to hear, “This room is a total disaster!” And we knew that this meant we wouldn’t be leaving it until it had been fully restored to its rightful condition.

When Adam and Eve forsook God-centered transcendence for the false-hope, me-centered transcendence that the Serpent offered, the result really was a total disaster. You and I still experience the effects of that disaster every day of our lives. What happened in the garden is truly the central catastrophe of human history. It is almost impossible to overstate the hugeness of its significance. Here is how big this disaster was (and is). **When Adam and Eve fell, the entire cosmos fell with them!** There is no place to run. There is no refuge in which to hide. There is no situation untouched by its power, no location unharmed by its destruction. In a flash of disobedience and stolen glory, sin wrecked the cosmos. It was a total disaster.

## A THING OF STUNNING BEAUTY

God’s creative artistry, shown in the world he made and everything he placed in it, was a thing of gorgeous and stunning beauty. The hills were awash in multihued flowers, with no weevil to consume their leaves and no mites to infect their blossoms. The soil was packed with life-giving nutrients, and there were no thorns, thistles, or weeds to be found. Trees were laden with the lushest, sweetest, most succulent fruit. There were no plagues or pollutants. Nature grew, bloomed, and produced without struggle or toil. There was untainted natural beauty as far as the eye could see. It literally covered the earth.

Animals frolicked, fed, mated, and produced without fear of predators or a fight with disease. The animal kingdom was a place of an amazing variegated beauty, all existing in an atmosphere of peace.

People lived in joyful, unafraid, and unashamed community with

one another. There was no stealing, lying, cheating, harsh words, abusive actions, strategies of vengeance, sexual immorality, broken families, or corrupt government. No one struggled with depression, anxiety, issues of identity, paralyzing regret, anger, envy, compulsion, addiction, fear, guilt, aloneness, hopelessness, or doubt. People didn't suffer from injury, disease, or old age. There were no hospital vigils and no viewings of the deceased. No one needed to ask for forgiveness and no one struggled to forgive. There was no marital disappointment and no employment gone bad.

People lived in heartfelt, loving, obedient worship of God. They worshipped the Creator and managed creation; they didn't give in to worshipping creation and trying to manage the Creator. There was no doubt of his goodness, no fear of his anger. There was no overt rebellion or subtle disobedience. They obeyed his words and listened to his wisdom. There were no corrupting idols or competing systems of faith. No one was ever angry at God, and God had no cause for anger with the people he had made. People loved God's glory and in no way lived for their own.

**In every way you could think or imagine, the world, as God created it, was a place of unparalleled peace and beauty.** It was a sight and surround-sound glory display, reflecting the transcendent glory of the One who had made it out of nothing. His creative majesty was on untainted and uninterrupted display: the piercing red of the rose, the fluorescent scales of the fish, the sweet song of the bird, the gray grandeur of the rock, the earth-shaking roar of the lion, the endless gurgling of the stream, and the lacy delicacy of the leaf. Each part pointed to him. Each thing existed as a hymn to his glory.

## HOW DO YOU MEASURE A CATASTROPHE?

How do you wrap words around the worse thing that ever happened? Maybe the apostle Paul did it best with this powerful statement in Romans 8:21:

“The whole creation groans.” Lilies now fought with weeds that would choke out their lives. Pollutants floated as shadows in the sky and unseen toxins in the stream. Fruit and flower were blighted with disease. Pain, suffering, toil, disease, and death became the regular experience of everything in the creation. What was once very easy was easy no longer. What was simple became terribly complicated. Everything that was once free now was only obtained at great cost. What seemed once unthinkable wrong and out of character for the world that God had made now became a daily experience. Words like falsehood, enemy, danger, sin, destruction, war, murder, sickness, fear, and hatred became regular parts of the fallen-world vocabulary.

For the first time, the harmony between people was broken. Shame, fear, guilt, blame, greed, envy, conflict, and hurt made relationships a minefield they were never intended to be. People looked at other people as obstacles to getting what they wanted or as dangers to be avoided. Even families were unable to coexist in any kind of lasting and peaceful union. Violence became a common response to problems that had never before existed. Conflict existed in the human community as an experience more regular than peace. Marriage became a battle for control, and children’s rebellion became a more natural response than willing submission. Things became more valuable than people, and they willingly competed with others in order to acquire more. The human community was more divided by love for self than united by love of neighbor. The words of people, meant to express truth and love, became weapons of anger and instruments of deceit. In an instant, the sweet music of human harmony had become the mournful dirge of human war.

## THE SADDEST THING ON EARTH

Yet, with all of the havoc that sin wreaked on the physical world and on the human community, there was another horrible result. It was something

so unthinkable, so horrific, so hard to grasp, that it easily stands as the saddest thing that has ever happened on earth. This tragedy is portrayed in a seemingly mundane conversation captured in Genesis 3:8–10.

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?”

He answered, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

What a sad, sad moment! Here is a man, created to have the boundaries of his life reach to the furthest boundaries of the glory of God. Here is one who was created to get his identity, meaning, and purpose from an intimate relationship with God. Here is a person whose every word, thought, desire, and deed was meant to be shaped by a heartfelt submission to and worship of his Creator. What do we find him doing? He hides in fear when the One who is meant to *be* his life comes near!

The sadness of this scene penetrates far deeper than formal religion and spirituality. It is about a crushing loss of transcendence, meaning, and purpose! **To hide from his Creator is to hide from his true identity.** He has done the one thing that he never, ever was supposed to do. In a moment of conscious rebellion, he has treated his life as being no bigger than his life. As a result, his response to God’s presence is not delight and love, but guilt and fear. He knows what he has done. He has forsaken the transcendent glory for which he was created and chosen a replacement glory: to take for himself the glory that only God was to have. He has compressed the borders of his life to his own wants, needs, and desires. It is the small world of autonomy, too small for real life to ever exist there. This self-centered world lacks the oxygen of relationship with God. It is not a place of life. It is a place of death.

How sad! Created for more, Adam and Eve chose less instead. Forgetting who they were, they attempted to find life outside of God, but what they found instead was death.

## AUTONOMY AND TRANSCENDENCE

What did the Serpent hold out to Adam and Eve that was attractive enough for them to consider stepping away from the one central thing for which they were made? He offered them an *independent* glory. If they would just step out on their own, they could be transcendent beings like God. The word for this is *autonomy*. Here was the lie (and one that is still being whispered in the ears of people every day): “The key to true transcendence *is* autonomy.” But it was a wicked and cruel life. **The quest for autonomy will always crush transcendence.** Rather than the huge glories of living for the glory of God, I end up with little shadow glories filling the dim cubicle of my own glory. As 2 Corinthians 5:15 makes clear, human beings were never meant to “live for themselves.” So, when Jesus touches me with his rescuing grace, he is freeing me from my bondage to me!

Since that horrible moment in the garden, every human being has tended to confuse autonomy with transcendence. The inertia of sin is always away from the Creator and toward ourselves. And let it be known that this is not only the struggle of the unbeliever; it is the struggle of the believer as well. As long as sin still dwells in our hearts, autonomy will war with transcendence. We are quite able to shrink the transcendent promises, glories, and hopes of the gospel to the size of our own lives, forgetting that, by God’s grace, we have been rescued from our self-constructed cubicle and welcomed to the vast expansiveness of the kingdom of God. **One day the war between independence and transcendence will end, and we will live in glory, with glory, forever.**



## UNTIL THEN

I once had a friend who hired a contractor to build a new house for his family. Their budget was very limited, so they could only afford to have the contractor get them under a roof and do all the rough carpentry work. They had to complete all the interior finish work after they had already moved into their “new” home. I can remember him saying to me, “We are very thankful for our new house, but we have to keep reminding ourselves that the job isn’t done yet, and we have to stay focused and working until it is. In the same way, each of us should be deeply grateful for our inclusion in God’s family of grace. We should be very excited about the way that grace has radically changed our lives. But we must also be aware that God has not yet completed his work in us. Yes, every day in some way you and I demonstrate that there is more work to be done. Maybe it is a word of irritation. Perhaps it is shown in a moment of selfishness or greed. Maybe it is a refusal to admit wrong or a willingness to shift blame. It may be revealed in a thought of lust or a compromise of biblical conviction. Maybe it is in the all too frequent conflicts in my marriage or with my children. Maybe it is in my unwillingness to accept my job or my financial state. The point is that the evidence is there that the work of God’s grace in each of our lives is not done yet.

Because of this there are two things that I must always keep in view.

***The ongoing tendency to treat my life as if it were no bigger than my life.*** We all need to be examining the places where we still tend to “live for ourselves.” Maybe this comes out as being more personally excited by the acquisition of a material thing than by growing in my relationship with the Lord. Maybe it comes out as being in conflict with another person because they are in the way of something I am convinced that I need. Maybe it is eating or spending more than I should. Maybe it is exhibited by a stronger desire to “win” a conversation than a desire for loving unity. Maybe it is that my involvement in my local church has been whittled down to a Sunday

slot in an already too busy schedule. There is a great temptation in all of us to reduce all that God has taught us and done in us down to the size of the personal concerns of our lives. Yes, it is right to be excited. The work of Christ *will* help you enjoy a better marriage, be a better friend, enjoy better relationships with your children, and do better at work. It *is* true that if you deal with your heart issues you will make progress in all of these areas. But God has called you to a greater circle of concern than your own life. **You see, when God enters our lives by his grace, he isn't working to make our kingdom work so much as he is calling us to an excitement with, and dedication to, a much greater kingdom.**

Most of us have learned how to celebrate our inclusion in God's great and glorious work, while functionally caring for little that does not directly address us. In doing this we have Christianized our autonomy. Essentially, we are asking God to give his endorsement to our attempt to shrink the transcendent glories of his kingdom to the size of our circle of personal concern. And even though we are trying to live inside of God's boundaries, we have still manufactured a life where self is at the center. It is quite possible for our Christianity to be quite narrow and selfish and to not be aware of the shrinkage.

***We must keep in mind that the fall was a total disaster.*** Again, it is hard to find words that do justice to the unimaginable devastation that sin wreaked on everything that God created. Its effect was total and complete. You may be wondering why it is so important to keep the comprehensive nature of the fall of the world in your mind. This is necessary because **it is only when you remember how big the effects of sin are that you will live the way God calls you to live.** Here is the logic of living in light of the purposes of God: If sin's devastation is as wide as creation, then the scope of redemption must be just as big. Therefore, we are called to live with the total restoration of creation in view.

What is the kingdom of God all about? What is the new life to which God has called me? What new meaning and purpose is to become the

focus of my life as a child of God? What in the world are we Christians supposed to be doing anyway?

God has called us away from our autonomous, self-focused living to live transcendently once again. This means to live with restoration in view in every situation, location, and relationship in which God places me. And what is God's redemptive purpose? It is captured in the second to last chapter in the Bible, when God, seated on the throne says, "I am making everything new!" (Revelation 21:5). It is summarized in Romans 8:18–24, which pictures the whole of creation groaning, waiting for redemption. **If the glory of God is reflected in all of creation, if the effects of sin reach to all of creation, and if the goal of redemption is to restore all of creation, then what should you and I care about? EVERYTHING!**

Your sadness with sin should be bigger than the fact that it complicates your life. Your sadness should extend as far as sin reaches. Your celebration of God's restoring grace should be bigger than the fact that it brings blessing to your private world. No, your celebration should reach as far as restoration is needed. God's grace really does welcome you to *think big* and *live large*. God invites you to be an active and daily part of the "more" of redemption. His restoring grace gives you reason to extend the boundaries of your concern way beyond the borders of your own life. He calls you out of your little kingdom to give your talents, gifts, resources, and time to the glorious concerns of his big sky kingdom.

As his child, when you get up in the morning you awake to a huge kingdom. It courses back through history and extends to before the foundations of the world were set in place. It extends forward in time to endless eternity. It encompasses every location known and unknown, every situation of every kind, every person and every created thing. The goal of this kingdom is the complete restoration of every last thing that was damaged by the fall. You must no longer live for yourself. Grace has led you through the door to something more and better. Grace calls you to shape your living to the contours of this amazing work of restoration. As

the great old Christmas carol proclaims, “He comes to make his blessings known, far as the curse is found.” (“Joy to the World”)

But this is precisely where our problem takes place. **We get so excited about the personal benefits of redemption that we lose sight of redemption’s greater goal.** Yes, the personal benefits of redemption are an amazing thing, worthy of eternal celebration. But redemption’s agenda is not to make our kingdoms successful, but to welcome us to a much bigger, much better kingdom.

Jim Collins makes this stunning observation in his best-selling book on corporate management, *Good to Great*.

Good is the enemy of great. And that is one of the key reasons why we have so little that becomes great. We don’t have great schools, principally because we have good schools. We don’t have great government, principally because we have good government. Few people attain great lives, in large part because it is just so easy to settle for a good life.<sup>1</sup>

Collins’s observation is so important! Many of you have done just what he is talking about with your walk with the Lord. You have settled into a self-focused enjoyment of the good life. You are enjoying what grace has done to your marriage, your parenting, your friendships, and your work life. It has been all too easy for you to miss the point that you were rescued from what was very bad—not just to be part of something good, but amazingly, to be part of something very great.

You have been chosen to *transcend*—to transcend the boundaries of your own hopes and dreams, to transcend the boundaries of your own plans and purposes, and to transcend the borders of your own family and friends. You have been chosen to transcend the furthest reach of your own definition of glory to be part of a greater glory, the glory of God and his work of making all things new.

Have you settled for living too small? In the midst of the total disaster of sin, have you settled for something good when you have been chosen for something great?

THE FINAL QUESTION: HAVE YOU TREATED THE SIZE OF  
GOD'S GRACE AS IF IT WERE NO BIGGER THAN THE SIZE  
OF YOUR PERSONAL CONCERNS?