



FULLY ALIVE

An invitation to rediscover the beauty and
power of being a disciple of Jesus.

B R I A N P H I P P S

FULLY ALIVE

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Disciples Made

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JESUS IS MORE

I was only nineteen years old, but I had developed a solid trend of making foolish decisions. Even I could recognize that I was beginning to spiral out of control. I needed to make a life-saving u-turn, but every attempt to make that turn failed.

One spring day near the end of my freshman year of college, a reckoning took place. It was an act of grace initiated by a few of my college professors. They had watched me begin to spiral and they called in my parents. Someone was praying for Jesus to join as well.

At the very beginning of this impromptu meeting, I had a moment that changed my life forever. My father greeted me with a hug, which I did not deserve. While he was hugging me, I could see Jesus behind him, hanging on the cross in pain with a face that was pleading to me. I heard, "Brian, I want to come down from this cross and hug you like your father is doing, but I can't until you want me."

I grew up in the church. My dad was a pastor, and my mom was a Sunday School teacher. Our house connected to the church where my dad served! I prayed a lot as a kid, but most of my prayers were asking for forgiveness. I did not have a helpful understanding of the role of Jesus in a person's life. Jesus was "out there."

That spring afternoon, Jesus went from being "out there" to being "right here," offering me hope. My response to Him was, "If you are willing to take the mess I have made of my life and do something with it, I am ALL yours."

Jesus forgave me and I felt it.

The weight of regret lifted. The momentum of failure halted. I was able to share my sorrow over past decisions with family and friends. My life, through a series of small miracles, started trending in a new direction. It took many years to win the trust and joy back with my family, but it happened.

It happened because **Jesus is more.**

Early in my recovery I chose to serve teenagers through my church. I wanted to

help these teens avoid making the painful decisions I had made. During this season a pastor named Jimmy invested some intentional time into my life. He would meet with me every other week to disciple me as I joined him in serving the youth of our church. We would work through books, create personal transformation goals, and share challenges.

I was also on Jimmy's youth volunteer team that met every week for bible study and planning. It was an amazing season of growth. At some point along the way, Jimmy invited me to teach Sunday School. That was a privilege on that team, as there were several gifted and mature individuals on it. Teaching wasn't entrusted to anyone. That experience was another game-changer for me.

The following week, Jimmy had a hard time containing his joy and excitement. He told me I had the gifts and talents that Jesus could use in full-time ministry and encouraged me to go to seminary. I was blown away. Me? Really?

Jimmy's comments excited me, but I had a problem. I did not have the money to finish college, much less to go to seminary. Jimmy was already ahead of me. He connected me to the church's scholarship team and coached me through the process. That church committed to paying for my tuition and books in college and seminary. My life now had direction and purpose. A few years later I had the degrees necessary to make a living with that purpose.

Jesus is more.

I was ordained as a minister in 1996. I learned a lot that I did not expect to learn in my first thirteen years of ministry. The lessons were difficult, challenging, and disheartening. Had Jesus not done such amazing things earlier in my life, the lessons could have led me to give up.

In short, I kept realizing that my ministry dreams did not fit inside the roles I played in the churches I served. I would dream of helping dozens of people experience the kind of life change that I did. Those people would help dozens of others do the same. Over time, thousands of people would experience the transforming love of Jesus. The dreams were awesome, but I didn't know how to make them a reality. Managing the church's programs consumed my time.

I ended up accepting that I didn't have what it takes to turn those dreams into a re-

ality. I let the dreams begin to fade away, and made the most of the roles I was in. This leak of vision started to take my joy in serving others away. Disillusionment threatened my joy for long-term ministry, and I was not sure what to do.

Jesus had been more before. Would He be more again?

In 2009 I was invited to be the small group pastor at a large church in Kansas City. I was scared to accept the role and move my family from the East Coast, but Jesus made it easy to see that He wanted us there. My wife, Carol, and I made the decision to accept the position. I became a student of successful small group leaders and became successful in the role. Jesus appeared to have led me to another level of “more” after all!

That was true until Jesus turned the responsibility for providing the next level of “more” unto me. Jesus, the consistent and proven provider of more, asked me for a “more” I did not know how to provide.

I felt Jesus’ presence in my truck one Sunday evening while driving home from a small group meeting. The message He conveyed was so strong I had to pull over to the side of the road to process it before going home. In simple terms, Jesus said He expected me to fulfill the dreams that I had almost abandoned. He had brought me to this specific church and particular role for that very purpose!

That message was inspiring, but it was far more challenging. There was a problem, and it was a big problem. The ministry skills I had developed over the years were inadequate for those dreams. I could teach and preach. I could counsel. I could build small group systems. But I did not know how to turn disciples into disciple-makers.

That was a huge crisis moment for me.

My college degree was in religious studies. I had two master’s degrees from seminary. I had thirteen years of innovative continued education in church leadership. More of the same was not going to help me take strides toward that dream. Time and effort had proven that. A new way was needed.

I did the only thing I knew how to do. I got brutally honest with myself and Jesus. I told Him that I didn’t know how to do what He was inviting me to do.

Jesus's response was generous and encouraging.

He invited me to make the following commitments:

- shelve everything I had learned about disciple-making up until that point
- pray for my next step but don't act until I receive it
- take that next step without questioning it
- take notes about what happened as I took that next step
- share everything I learn with others so they can take similar steps

It seemed crazy for me to need to start over, but if Jesus was once again offering me "more," I wanted it. I made those commitments in September of 2010. By January of 2011 I was no longer simply making disciples. I was making disciple-makers. Now, there are generations and generations of disciple-makers in the Disciples Made family. Thousands of lives have been changed. God makes dreams become reality.

I believe God has given you a dream.

That dream may involve influencing thousands of lives. That dream may only involve a few lives. God is the dream giver, not us. We are to steward our days on earth to live into the dreams He gives us.

More than this, God has a dream for your life.

God wants you to thrive in your relationships.

God wants you to thrive with purpose and meaning. He wants you to wake up every day with a drive and passion for making the world a better place in a way that only you can.

The bible says these things. As you will see in the following pages, Jesus came to make a way for you to thrive.

This is the nature of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. God has done far more than build a growing family of disciple-makers over the last twelve years. He has also provided a new language and a new framework for understanding

what it means to grow in faith. In short, **growing in Christ is becoming a Fully Alive human.**

This little book is an introduction to that language and framework. It is what I have learned about the “more” Jesus has for anyone willing to follow Him. As you journey through this book, please keep the following verse in mind.

If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.

Jesus, in Matthew 16:25

Jesus is much, much more. I trust you will find Him and the more He is.

Brian Phipps

Founder of Disciples Made

DISCIPLE:

A Fully Alive follower of Jesus.

FULLY ALIVE:

- **Intimacy:**

Building better relationships as you become more like Jesus.

- **Influence:**

Building a better world as you partner with Jesus.

THE FULLY ALIVE COMMUNITY:

A family of disciples and disciple-makers committed to living Fully Alive.

ONE ASSUMPTION

I have made one assumption about you.

I assume you believe there is **more** to life.

- You may know very little about Jesus.
- You may have experienced Jesus' forgiveness, but not developed your life in Him.
- You may have spent a significant part of your life honoring Jesus.
- You may have helped many others experience a life with Jesus.

Regardless of your starting point, you believe there is **more**.

If this one assumption is true about you, then **Fully Alive** is for you.

If this one assumption is true about you, here is some good news.

- You do not need to "get your life right" to begin living more Fully Alive.
Living Fully Alive is the process of allowing Jesus to make your life right as you follow Him.
- You do not need to be a bible expert to begin living more Fully Alive.
The bible is the expert on you. Learning the biblical story will create a hunger to learn more.
- You do not need an elaborate strategy to share the Fully Alive life with others.
The Fully Alive life is by nature the most compelling invitation ever. Simply live it and share it.

But, to understand how to live Fully Alive today, you must look back to the very beginning of time.

GOD CREATED YOU TO LIVE FULLY ALIVE

God created human beings in his own image. Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it.

From Genesis 1:27-28

Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!

Genesis 1:31

You Were Created in God's Image

God is a relational God. You, a person created in God's image, were created to thrive in loving relationships.

God is a creative and influential God. You, a person created in God's image, were created to thrive as you creatively influence the world around you.

God's first directive to humanity was to live the way we were created.

You Were Created for Intimacy

"Be fruitful and multiply."

What does it mean to "be fruitful and multiply?"

For Adam and Eve, it most meant to join together to produce offspring. This level of intimacy requires the most vulnerable and transparent intimacy of all. The bible says that Adam and Eve experienced intimacy at the highest level possible. There was no shame. No insecurity. No awkwardness. No embarrassment. No selfishness. No manipulation.

The man and his wife were both naked, but they felt no shame.

Genesis 2:25

Adam and Eve experienced intimacy the way it was intended, physically and emotionally. They were living Fully Alive.

God created you to experience this level of intimacy. You were created for physical, emotional, and spiritual intimacy with a spouse if you have one. You were created for emotional and spiritual intimacy with others.

God created you to enjoy selfless intimacy. God created you to live Fully Alive.

You Were Created for Influence

“Fill the earth and govern it.”

What does it mean to “fill the earth and govern it?”

God appointed Adam and Eve as His trusted representatives on the earth. God gave them His authority to carry out His purposes. They were God’s chosen vessels for exerting His **influence** on His creation. One example of this influence was Adam naming the animals.

Adam and Eve experienced the thrill of **influencing** on God’s behalf at the highest level possible. There was no competition. There were no battles to fight. There was no need to prepare a defense or protect against a takeover. Adam and Eve could work at the speed of unbridled trust.

God created you to partner with Him and others to bear His life-giving influence on the world. You were created with that purpose. You were created with a role to play. You matter to God. Your participation as God’s influence-bearer is to bring value to others!

God created you to thrive as you exert selfless influence. God created you to live Fully Alive.

YOUR ABILITY TO LIVE FULLY ALIVE WAS DEEPLY DAMAGED

God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it. But the Lord God warned him, "You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden— except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die."

Genesis 2:15-17

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.

John 10:10a NIV

Adam and Eve had everything they could want. They were living Fully Alive with every resource they would ever need. But their satisfaction with the Fully Alive life was compromised when they were told that God was holding something back from them.

One day (the serpent) asked the woman, "Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?" "Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden," the woman replied. "It's only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, 'You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.'" "You won't die!" the serpent replied to the woman. "God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil."

Genesis 3:1-5

Adam and Eve, for the first time ever, had a choice. They could trust God and dismiss the serpent. Or, they could doubt God, ignore His warning about the one restricted tree, and see what happened. More simply put, they could trust God's wisdom and obey, or trust they knew better than God and disobey.

This decision was not as simple as it seems. This masterfully crafted temptation reached down into the very core of their identity. They were created to be full. They were created to be satisfied. The serpent introduced the one spiritual virus that had a chance of succeeding. He planted the idea that there was more satisfaction available than God provided.

Adam and Eve made their decision. They gambled with their lives, trusting their discernment over taking God at His word. They relied on their competence and rejected the path of obedience.

That decision was a game-changer for Adam and Eve. They were lured into thinking they could get more. They ended up with much, much less.

At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.

Genesis 3:7

God said Adam and Eve would die if they ate of the forbidden tree, but Adam and Eve kept breathing. Their hearts kept beating. What changed? What died?

What died was their capacity to live Fully Alive. They no longer experienced intimacy and influence the way they once did with God and each other. The change must have been alarming.

Their lungs were still breathing. But their breathing became labored as they experienced embarrassment for the first time. Their hearts were still beating. But their once-steady heartbeats were now racing as they scrambled for cover. Intimacy with God and others had become a threat. Hiding became our default self-preservation strategy in relationships. They hid from God. They hid from each other.

Our capacity for godly influence was destroyed as well. Instead of accepting responsibility for what happened, Adam and Eve blamed each other. The following is the first conversation recorded between God, Adam, and Eve after they ate the forbidden fruit.

The Lord asked the man, "Have you eaten from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat?" The man replied, "It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it." Then the Lord God asked the woman, "What have you done?" "The serpent deceived me," she replied. "That's why I ate it."

Genesis 3:11-13

The very people created to maintain God's beauty and order became the source of chaos. They used their power for self-protection and self-promotion. They

used relationships more than nurturing them. Cain murdered Abel. Jacob stole from Esau. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery. Moses killed the Egyptian. The Old Testament is filled with stories of intimacy and influence gone bad.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.

John 10:10

How Could the People, Created to Maintain God's Beauty, Create Such Madness?

YOUR LONGINGS FOR THE FULLY ALIVE LIFE ARE VERY MUCH ALIVE

When we lost our capacity to live Fully Alive, two haunting questions were etched into our souls. These two questions, more than any other, drive our behaviors.

The questions are:

- Am I lovable?
- Am I valuable?

Adam and Eve never wondered if they were lovable or valuable when they were Fully Alive. They knew they were lovable. They experienced the fullness of love in their unbroken intimacy with God and each other. They knew they were valuable. Their lives had meaning because they were doing the work God designed them to do, and the work was good.

There was no uncertainty.

There was no hunger to appease those questions because the questions did not exist. But...

Once the intimacy was shattered, the uncertainty crashed in. We, who share that uncertainty are haunted by questions like, "Will I ever be loved if people know who I am? Will I ever be able to love others unconditionally? Am I lovable?"

The great separation also creates a deep uncertainty about our worth. With our capacity for influence shattered, questions like the following haunt us. "Is there a purpose for my life? Does my life matter? Am I valuable?"

You may be conscious of these questions.

It is possible that you have felt the power of these questions before but didn't have the words to describe them.

It is also possible you have needed counseling to deal with the pain these questions pose.

The power of these uncertainties is almost impossible to overestimate. They drive us. They compel us.

Unfortunately, they also have the power to deeply harm us.

YOUR LONGINGS FOR THE FULLY ALIVE LIFE CAN LEAD TO DEATH

The Two Cisterns

“My people have done two evil things: They have abandoned me—the fountain of living water. And they have dug for themselves cracked cisterns that can hold no water at all!

Jeremiah 2:13

Jeremiah was a prophet who lived 600 years before Jesus’ earthly ministry. Jeremiah was writing to the people of his day, but his words were relevant to God’s people in every era up to that point.

Timeless truths that are relevant for over two millennia deserve our most attention.

God brought two formal charges against His people in this one verse. The first charge was abandonment. God’s people had abandoned Him. The second charge was idolatry. They had broken the first of the ten commandments and “had other gods before them.” These indictments remind us of a fascinating aspect of God’s character.

God gets jealous.

God is not ashamed to admit that He is jealous for us. God barely gets started in revealing the Ten Commandments for the first time when we read,

I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods.

Exodus 20:5

God created us to treasure us. He created us to treasure Him. God did not need us, but He wanted us. Like any good parent, God gets jealous when we turn away from Him and fulfill our longings elsewhere.

God's indictment comes from a heart that longed for His people to return to Him.

God's indictments are different than the indictments we see in a contemporary trial. Contemporary indictments are intended to lead to a conviction and appropriate consequence.

God's indictment through Jeremiah serves more like a **diagnosis**.

God's people were traumatized. They were recently conquered by Babylon (modern day Iraq) and were living as refugees. Much like the refugees of Syria and Myanmar of our day, God's people were stripped of their homes and forced to start over. They were crying out to God for help, and God was answering them through Jeremiah.

At the end of God's response, He promises to bring them home. God fulfilled that promise in time. But God had some important work to do before revealing that plan.

God wanted them to know exactly how they ended up in the mess they were in so they would never end up there again.

God's jealousy is the best version of jealousy there is.

God's people found their way into the empty life the same way Adam and Eve did. They ignored God's plan for finding satisfaction and meaning in their lives and chose their own way. They chose their own competence to know what was best for them over trusting God's way. Their chronic indifference toward God weakened them and their enemies preyed on it.

God chose to use an absurd picture to describe His people's rejection of Him. The picture is of a person refusing fresh spring water and drinking contaminated water instead. A cistern is a large hole dug in the ground in which rainwater is captured.

A fountain provides pure water. A cistern is laden with harmful impurities that have collected over time.

A fountain is an ever-flowing source. Cisterns crack and cannot hold the periodic water they receive.

It would be absurd to reject the fountain and drink from the cistern. Who would do that?

The answer is, "Anyone the thief can convince to do it."

The Timelessness and Power of the Cisterns

What is the nature of these two cisterns? Do these two cisterns still draw people away from God? Do they keep us from living Fully Alive the way they have done for centuries before us?

The answer to these questions is "yes."

The power of any longing is demonstrated by the lengths people will go to satisfy it. The power is strong when it causes people to compromise genuine intimacy and influence to pursue them. We can give definition to these lengths, or "cisterns," and these cisterns can become very dark indeed.

The cistern we have dug to satisfy our longings for intimacy could be labeled "**a need for approval.**"

The cistern we have dug to satisfy our longings for influence could be labeled "**a need for control.**"

Approval is a perceived need for people to validate you.

Control is a perceived need to manage the people and circumstances around you.

The Power of the Approval Cistern

Living your life in a way that fosters the approval of God and others is healthy.

A need for approval that causes you to sacrifice intimacy leads to spiritual sickness. The severity of your need for approval can be measured by the concessions you will make to get it.

When I was an elementary age student, I remember wanting to be approved by

the “cool kids.” I had friends, but none of us had that “cool kid” status. I recall a time when one of the cool kids made fun of my closest friend. My need for approval was so strong that I failed to defend my friend... and instead joined in mocking him to fit in. My need for approval was so strong I sacrificed genuine trust and intimacy to get it.

When I was in middle school I sacrificed academic success for approval. As I entered high school I started to consume illegal substances to do the same. I wish I could have realized that making concessions for approval was paying to have friends. Paying for friends is not friendship at all. There is no trust. There is no mutuality. There is no intimacy.

Unfortunately, the approval cistern only gets more harmful in our adult years. Since our desire for approval is rooted in our need for intimacy, it will help to describe it more fully.

Biblical intimacy has three components: spiritual, emotional, and biological. When God told Adam and Eve to “be fruitful and multiply,” all three components were present. The spiritual element of intimacy is having God as the head, or the leader, of the relationship. The emotional component is the sense of security and fulfillment that comes from a committed relationship with God at the head. The biological (or sexual) element of intimacy is required to reproduce new life. Living Fully Alive with Intimacy is experiencing all three components in tandem. Life-long monogamy is prescribed in the bible to accomplish this.

The thief, in typical fashion, works to convince us that God’s best is lacking. He has been successful. Biblical monogamy is considered “old school” in our day. It is dismissed as irrelevant and restrictive. Proponents of this thinking promote the biological element of intimacy and dismiss the power of the spiritual and emotional. Intimacy without the emotional and spiritual elements is not intimacy at all. It is sensuality. The Oxford Dictionary defines sensuality as “the enjoyment, expression, or pursuit of physical, especially sexual, pleasure.” This book’s use of sensuality is sexuality without biblical intimacy.

Sensuality, defined this way, is toxic. It is a cistern. It is not God’s design. There is no real and lasting security in sensuality. Even so, sensuality is one of humanity’s most heightened “approval” experiences. The financial data below supports this assumption.

Sensuality: The Approval Cistern's Devastating Potential

Mind-boggling amounts of money are spent annually on sensuality.

Sensuality is a primary tool in the marketing industry. Sensual pictures and video are used to market products that are not sensual in nature at all. Cars, hamburgers, water, chewing gum, and bath soap are but a few examples.

Sensuality is most explicitly used by the pornography industry. Billions of dollars are spent every year on pornography. The use of pornography by both men and women in 2020 spiked with the onset of the COVID pandemic.

The power of sensuality gets much darker. One of the most lucrative money-making schemes in the world is sex-trafficking. Trafficking is the nefarious practice of abducting people to sell them into the sex trade. Business Insider India in 2019 claimed human trafficking is a \$150 billion industry. \$8 billion of that revenue is generated from child pornography.

How far will people go to experience a measure of approval?

People are exploiting people, even children, to sell that experience, and the demand of millions of people keeps it going.

What can we conclude from this?

We were created for intimacy.

The thief has been successful in having us settle for approval... which never satisfies.

Approval's biggest concession is separating sensuality from emotional and spiritual intimacy. And, sensuality's cravings are powerful enough to tolerate the exploitation of others.

The Power of the Control Cistern

Influence is using the gifts and abilities God gave you to make earth more like heaven. Control is using the strengths and abilities God gave you to make your

life the way you want it. Influence trusts God for security and comfort. Control works to make your world as safe and comfortable as possible, even if it costs others in the process.

The need for control, like the need for approval, has varying levels of severity. Control can be as harmless as a kid using their charm to get out of trouble with a parent. Sales personnel develop persuasion skills to best control the outcome of a deal. Magicians use sleight of hand to misdirect the attention of their audience. Control, in many circumstances, is not harmful.

Control starts to become toxic when used in a way that takes life from others. Passive-aggressive behavior, such as the silent treatment, is a toxic form of control. Controlling behaviors squeeze the life out of relationships over time. More aggressive forms of control are open criticism and withholding appropriate praise. These can cause emotional scarring that can take years to overcome. You can likely name the most controlling people in your family, workplace, and church.

Control is also toxic when your personal plans and desires get prioritized over God's plans. God invites us to sacrifice our plans and dreams to serve Him and others. Control dismisses God's prompts and works to guarantee a secure personal outcome. At the core of a controlling person's heart is a broken belief that God's plans are not trustworthy.

Unfortunately, the need for control can also become much more harmful. The need for control, like the need for approval, is insatiable. Success with control generally creates a desire for more control. The level of control that begins to steal life from others is coercion.

Coercion: The Control Cistern's Devastating Potential

Coercion is controlling others for personal gain. An example of coercion is a boss threatening the loss of a job to gain a personal favor from an employee. The more power one has, the more one can coerce.

Money is a means of maintaining control and can drive many coercive behaviors. In 2001, executives of Enron stole \$74 billion of assets from their shareholders.

They coerced their accountants to build up a fraudulent value of the company. They sold their portions at the highest value right before the company collapsed. 30,000 people lost their jobs with their pensions tied to them.

Because the longing for control is so strong, coercion often becomes violent. Cartels destroy anyone who threatens their flow of drugs. Nations war against nations to gain natural resources and strategic positions. World Wars 1 and 2 resulted in 75 million deaths alone.

What is the cost of drinking from the control cistern? In short, with every winner, there is usually a loser.

Why is our need for control so powerful that it can lead to the exploitation of others?

The answer should now be obvious.

We were created for influence.

Our capacity to experience the “fully alive” level of influence was lost.

Our longing for the “fully alive” level of influence has not gone away, and...

That craving is so strong we are willing to control others to fulfill it.

GOD WANTS TO FULFILL YOUR LONGINGS FOR THE FULLY ALIVE LIFE

Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it with good things. "But no, my people wouldn't listen. Israel did not want me around. So I let them follow their own stubborn desires, living according to their own ideas. Oh, that my people would listen to me! Oh, that Israel would follow me, walking in my paths!"

From Psalm 81:10-13

God will not force us to accept Him. He created us with the capacity to choose.

We can satisfy our desires through Him or satisfy them in things other than Him. Choosing God leads to life. Choosing any other way leads to sickness and death.

Our desires are not the problem.

Our desires for intimacy and influence are God-given. How else could they be so strong?

Our problem is us.

We, like Adam and Eve, are tempted to settle for far less than what God has to offer. God offered us life fully alive through intimacy and influence. We choose to settle for far less.

Consider this quote from C.S. Lewis, author of the Chronicles of Narnia.

It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

C.S. Lewis

God created us for Intimacy and Influence.

We have settled for approval and control.

I have a question for you...

How true are these things for you?

Are these longings for intimacy and influence significant in your life? Do they cause you to feel empty when they are not met?

Or are these longings among the deepest longings your soul has ever known? Have they caused you to satisfy them in ways that are not helpful in the end? Perhaps you have attempted to satisfy these longings in many, many ways that you regret.

If this describes your life, I have some incredible news.

God knows.

Even more, God knows, and He still loves you.

God wants you to recover the fully alive life, and He made an extraordinary sacrifice for you to have it.

Before sharing the nature of that sacrifice, let's look at the first sacrifice ever made. Right after Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, God saw them trying to hide their nakedness. They were covering their shame with fig leaves that tear, dry out, and crumble. The leaves were inadequate to protect them.

God wanted more for them.

To serve them, God offered the first of many ugly but necessary sacrifices. He killed part of His creation to comfort those who were created to rule over creation.

And the Lord God made clothing from animal skins for Adam and his wife.

Genesis 3:21

God offered the first olive branch. God reached out to offer His help even before Adam and Eve asked for it.

This is our God. He is a God of more.

THE PROMISED RETURN OF FULLY ALIVE

Jeremiah provided much more than a diagnosis of our problem. Jeremiah was God's mouthpiece to proclaim the coming solution for that problem.

"The day is coming," says the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. This covenant will not be like the one I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant, though I loved them as a husband loves his wife," says the Lord. "But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel after those days," says the Lord. "I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. "I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins."

From Jeremiah 31: 31-34

The Old Testament books cover at least two thousand years of history. That history is laden with stories of intimacy and influence gone bad.

But there is a thread of hope that is woven all the way through those years of brokenness. There is a promise of restoration that builds up to this promise from Jeremiah. It is powerful to do a quick review of these promises, or what the bible calls "covenants."

God promised Noah that He would never again destroy life on earth with a flood.

God promised Abraham that his descendants would be a blessing to the world.

God gave Moses written laws that increased civility on the earth.

God promised King David that an eternal King would one day come from his family. This King would rule with peace and justice.

Jeremiah, in the passage above, hints that God's next promise would be a game changer. It would be altogether "new."

Jesus, born in the lineage and city of King David, said these words the night before He was crucified...

After supper he took another cup of wine and said, "This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you."

Luke 22:20

What is this new covenant?

What does this new covenant have to do with living Fully Alive?

JESUS LIVED, AND DIED, FULLY ALIVE

Jesus lived the Fully Alive life that we are not able to live.

Jesus is the ultimate hero.

The bible says Jesus was untainted by sin. He was born Fully Alive. His capacity for intimacy and influence was boundless. Jesus, unlike Adam and Eve, resisted every opportunity to drink from a cistern. He remained faithful to His Father, the fountain of life.

Jesus' capacity for intimacy was demonstrated in His consistent service to people. He was filled with compassion for the broken. He tirelessly taught and healed masses of people. He was patient with His disciples. Jesus introduced a level of intimacy with God that was revolutionary for those in His day. Jesus used the term "Abba," which can be translated as "Papa." This term of endearment revealed that God is very tender and present with us. He is more than a holy and transcendent God that only a few can approach. Jesus was Fully Alive with intimacy.

Jesus' capacity for influence was demonstrated on many occasions as well. Jesus calmed a raging storm, fed 5000 people with one boy's lunch, and raised Lazarus from the dead. Jesus turned water into wine. He drove evil spirits out of people. Jesus walked on water, helped fishermen catch record numbers of fish, and withered a fig tree with His words. Jesus was Fully Alive with His capacity to influence.

Jesus never lost His capacity to live Fully Alive. Jesus used His longings for intimacy and influence to serve others. Jesus began His ministry with a forty-day fast in the desert. Satan made several attempts to lure Jesus toward a cistern so He would experience the same fate of Adam and Eve. Satan failed. Satan was able to turn Adam and Eve in the Garden, but He failed with Jesus in the desert.

Jesus came to fulfill His mission. He came to live the Fully Alive life so He could share it with those who would receive it.

Jesus Died Fully Alive

Jesus' ultimate demonstration of intimacy and influence was His death and resurrection.

Jesus subjected Himself to rejection, torture, and death from the people He came to love. As Jesus was nearing His death, His primary concern was offering love to the ones who were killing Him. "Father, forgive them... for they don't know what they are doing" was one of the last statements He uttered. His capacity for intimacy remained intact until the end.

While Jesus was dying, one of the onlookers chided Him. The man said, "If you are the Son of God, save yourself and come down from the cross!" Jesus, the man who leveraged His influence to save many, refused to use that influence to save Himself. Jesus' life was a reflection of His teaching... "If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it." His capacity for influence remained intact until the end.

Jesus came to do more than live Fully Alive. He came to give that Fully Alive life away so we could find it.

JESUS' RESURRECTION PAVED THE WAY FOR YOUR SPIRITUAL RESURRECTION

Death is never the end for those who are Fully Alive.

Jesus was raised from the dead. He was seen by several hundred people after it happened. But Jesus' resurrection was far more than one man's victory over the grave. Jesus, through His death and resurrection, blazed a path from death to life.

Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died. Just as death came into the world through a man, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man. Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life.

1 Corinthians 15: 20-22

The night before Jesus blazed this path, He shared His long-term plan with His disciples. He told them of the one who would come after Him.

It is best for you that I go away, because if I don't, the Advocate (Holy Spirit) won't come. If I do go away, then I will send Him to you. When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will bring me glory by telling you whatever He receives from me.

From John 16:7-14

Jesus gave His followers this instruction before He ascended into heaven.

"Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift He promised, as I told you before. John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

Acts 1:4-5

It wasn't long before Jesus' words came true.

Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty

windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:2-4

It was at that moment that everything changed for Jesus' followers.

These people were no longer separated from Jesus. They were eternally connected with Him through the Spirit. They were no longer simply humans acting on human strength. They were resurrected humans, baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus. They had Jesus' presence and power abiding in them, waiting to be unleashed. The influence that was previously limited to the frame of one man was now available to many.

These early followers traded their lives for the thrill of joining Jesus in His mission. What a thrill it was! The stories of Jesus' influence through them are still being told today. It cost them everything to live for Jesus, but in the process, they gained infinitely more.

THE KEY TO LIVING FULLY ALIVE: OBEDIENCE > COMPETENCE

Since we believe that Christ died for all, we also believe that we have all died to our old life. He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

It was not the competence of the disciples that led them to make such a dramatic impact.

Their competence levels, which were not impressive, were demonstrated while they were with Jesus. The disciples argued over which one of them was the greatest. They failed to cast out demons. They wanted to sit in places of honor. They persisted in believing that the kingdom of God was synonymous with the military dominance of Israel.

In short, the disciples' lives before receiving the Holy Spirit were ineffective. They were a visible demonstration of an inability to live Fully Alive.

It was the presence of the Spirit in the disciples that changed everything. It was the Spirit who changed these early followers from the inside out. It was the Spirit who led them to make a significant impact in the world.

It was the Spirit that emboldened Peter to speak on Pentecost and see 3000 people be converted and baptized. It was the Spirit that led Philip toward the Ethiopian eunuch. It was the Spirit that freed Peter from prison in the middle of the night. It was the Spirit that led Ananias to the recently blinded Saul to restore his sight. It was the Spirit who did the many miracles through Paul and guided him on his many journeys.

What can you learn from the lives of these early disciples?

You do not need to "level up" your competencies to make an Impact. You need only to obey.

As you obey, your capacity for Impact will grow.

Through the Spirit's influence, Jesus can **re-create** the capacity for you to live a life of Impact.

- What was stolen by the thief can be returned.
- What was killed by the thief can be resurrected.
- What was destroyed by the thief can be restored!

The key to living Fully Alive is **Obedience > Competence.**

PARTNERING WITH JESUS' SPIRIT TO REBUILD OUR LIVES

Much of the work of the Holy Spirit is mysterious and unpredictable.

Most of the work of the Holy Spirit, however, has been plainly revealed. It is even specific. The Bible lists two types of evidence that will grow in you as you partner with the Spirit: the fruit of the Spirit and gifts that the Spirit provides.

The Fruit of the Spirit

The fruit of the Spirit are descriptors of what your **character** can become over time as you abide in Jesus and obey Him. These descriptors are the very picture we see of Jesus in the gospels. The apostle Paul provides a succinct list of them in Galatians 5.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Galatians 5: 22-23 NIV

This work of the Holy Spirit, cultivating spiritual fruit, is clear. It is specific. It is even expected. As Paul points out in Romans 8, becoming like Jesus has been the plan from the beginning!

God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

Romans 8:29

Partnering with the Spirit changes you from the inside out.

Partnering with the Spirit develops **Christ-Like Character**.

Spiritual Gifts

God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another.

1 Peter 4:10

Spiritual gifts are powers, given to followers of Jesus by the Holy Spirit, to serve others and fulfill Jesus' mission. As a follower of Jesus, you have been given at least one. Your role is to discover the spiritual gifts you have been given and use them to serve Jesus and others.

Spiritual gifts are specific and definable. Here are a few examples...

God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.

Romans 12:6-8

The Spiritual gifts you have been given are the primary tools you will use as you join Jesus in His mission to multiply disciples. The gifts are evidence that you have been called into that mission, and the calling is personal.

Partnering with the Spirit equips you to serve others. Partnering with the Spirit develops your **Spirit-given Calling**.

Partnering with the Spirit provides tangible and measurable spiritual growth.

This growth is meaningful and inspires more growth. A series of growth steps in character and calling get noticed by others, especially the ones closest to you. These people will encourage that growth because the growth is making you better. A better you opens the door to a better us in your relationships.

Developing character and calling sparks momentum toward living Fully Alive.

PARTNERING WITH JESUS' SPIRIT TO LIVE FULLY ALIVE!

Partnering with the Spirit produces Character.

Partnering with the Spirit develops Calling.

Partnering with the Spirit to develop Character and Calling multiplies the Impact of both.

The renewed joy in relationships that comes as you develop spiritual fruit will begin to satisfy your longing for intimacy. People tend to respond to love with love! People tend to respond to joy with joy! As your longing for intimacy is satisfied through this "fountain," the temptation to satisfy this longing in a toxic cistern goes down.

The renewed sense of purpose that comes from developing your calling will satisfy your longing for influence. As your longing for influence is satisfied through this "fountain," the temptation to satisfy this longing in a toxic cistern goes down.

The less you drink of a toxic cistern, the more alive you feel. The more you drink from the real source of intimacy and influence, the more Fully Alive you are!

As your relationships move from requiring lots of energy to providing you with energy, your ability to grow in your calling increases.

As you can already start to see, as your capacity for influence grows through your Calling, your joy grows. As your joy grows your Character grows. As your Character grows your influence grows. Character and Calling propel each other forward as you partner with Jesus' Spirit.

Can you imagine it?

Love overcoming hate and indifference. Joy overriding sadness. Peace diffusing anxiety. Patience replacing agitation and the need to control others. Harshness giving way to kindness. Self-control minimizing painful decisions. Goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness become the things you are known for.

Is this the kind of life you want to live?

It is the “more” that Jesus is ready to begin developing in you. And the impact is just getting started!

As your character develops, your ability to partner with others increases. Your spiritual gifts are powerful to use on your own, but the impact of your gifts increases as you partner with others with complementing gifts. We are better together! The joy of partnering with others to make the world a better place stimulates the growth of both Character and Calling.

In the parable of the talents, Jesus says that faithfulness with a little is rewarded with “more.” When we use what Jesus has given us to serve His purposes, we receive more from Him. The gift from heaven is the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. The Spirit in you developing character. The Spirit in you developing calling. The Spirit making an Impact in you. The Spirit making an Impact through you.

This compounding effect is captured in this simple equation:

Character X Calling = Impact.

*For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness **reign in life** through the one man, Jesus Christ!*

Romans 5:17

I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

John 10:10 NIV

SHARING THE FULLY ALIVE LIFE WITH OTHERS

"I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Matthew 28:18-20

These are the words Jesus spoke to the people that became Fully Alive through Him. He helped them live Fully Alive so they could share the Fully Alive life with others.

Can you imagine yourself with Jesus and the other disciples up on the mountain in Galilee and hearing these words spoken to you? I hope you can, because this calling, or what many have called a "commissioning," comes with two amazing gifts.

The choice to share Jesus' Fully Alive life with others comes with Jesus' authority. You do not need any credentials to share. Jesus has given you His authority, and your growth is your credibility.

The second gift is the promise of Jesus' eternal **presence**. "Be sure of this..." Jesus says. "I am with you always." Jesus is with you now. Jesus will never leave you. You will never be alone. Jesus is committed to those who are committed to Him and the restoration work He came to accomplish.

Knowing you have Jesus' authority and presence with you, how can you share the Fully Alive life with others?

The answer to that question is simple.

Keep growing in Character & Calling.

Commit to a life-long journey of letting Jesus shape your heart and character

to be more like Him. This will help ensure that any successes you experience along the way will not cause you to drink from the “power cistern.” Godly character allows every success to be credited to the fountain of blessing, God Himself. Gratitude for God’s provision can override any temptation to harness your successes for personal gain.

Commit to a life-long journey of honing and sharpening your spiritual gifts and using them in an area of passion God has made a priority for you. It is very likely that you will discover gifts along the way that you did not know you had. It is also likely that your capacity for influence will grow over time as you are faithful with what you have in the present. Remember, obedience is greater than competence.

My favorite strategy for growing in Character and Calling is summarized by the following statement...

Pray big! But Obey Small.

Pray Big...

Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.

Ephesians 3:20

Pray regularly for God to accomplish incredible things in you and through you.

Pray for breakthroughs in your Character. Jesus wants to overcome your hurts and hang ups and free you to truly live. Pray Big!

Pray for breakthroughs in your Calling. Pray for God to give you dreams of influence that would be impossible to accomplish without His miraculous provision. Jesus is more, so beg Him to be that “more” through you to others.

There is no need to filter your prayer through your perceived ability to accomplish those prayers. God is bigger than your abilities, so pray with abandon! Refuse to fall into the trap of being afraid to pray big prayers.

Praying big prayers usually does not require a big step of obedience to deliver the outcomes of those prayers. In the few instances where God does ask for a big

step of obedience, even the big steps do not seem insurmountable. They end up feeling like the next right thing.

Jesus invites you to Pray Big.

Pray Big... But Obey Small

Obedience is greater than competence, and most of our obedience steps are quite small.

God is known for doing His best work through people who love Him and who obey His daily prompts of obedience. Do little things like asking for forgiveness when you offend someone. Allow your schedule to be interrupted to comfort someone. These may not feel like they matter much, but in Jesus' economy these are among the most important things.

Many people overestimate what God can do through them over the course of a year or two. But, they also under-estimate what God can accomplish through them over the long haul.

Our world needs hope. Our world needs to see that people can change. Our world needs to see more people of God that are known for their acts of kindness, healing, and restoration. That hope can begin again in you. It must begin with you.

Pray Big! Obey Small!

GROW FULLY ALIVE WITH OTHERS

Jesus, in His famous prayer that many call The Lord's Prayer, summarizes what it means to live Fully Alive in one phrase.

"May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."

Matthew 6:10

We get to bring heaven down to earth until the earth gets swallowed up into heaven.

That is our role until Jesus comes back.

The bible declares that Jesus will come back some day and complete what He started. Jesus' first visit to earth was to make the Fully Alive life available to us. Jesus, in His second visit, will completely restore the Fully Alive life in those that embraced Him.

Jesus is more.

When Jesus restores the Fully Alive life in heaven, there will be no more need for "more." We will lack nothing.

As you read the following words, be comforted. This is your future. This is your hope. Let's live Fully Alive until it comes.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever."

Revelation 21:1-4

The Fully Alive Digital Community is a family of disciples and disciple-makers committed to living Fully Alive. With many free discipleship courses and other resources, the Fully Alive Community is a great place for you to grow and to help others do the same. A great first step is our Live Fully Alive Course.

The vision of the Fully Alive Community is to equip 70,000 people, just like you, to share Jesus' Fully Alive life with 2,000,000 of their friends. 2,000,000 people growing in Character and Calling will make earth a lot more like heaven.

A space is waiting for you. Join us as we partner with Jesus to make our world much more like heaven.

Amen.