

FOREWORD BY DR. CLINT ARCHER



OVERFLOWING

MINISTRY AND MISSIONS THAT FLOW FROM THE HEART

KYLE FARRAN

ENDORSEMENTS

Do you ever wonder how to glorify God with your life? At the end of your life, do you want to hear Jesus say, “Well done, good and faithful servant”? Do you want less stress and more joy in your life? Then this book is for you! Saturated with Scripture and engaging stories from his life on the mission field, Kyle shares practical wisdom that is rooted in deep, biblical theology. This is a book I heartily recommend to youth who want to know how they can be used of God in life and ministry, as well as to seasoned veteran pastors and missionaries who desire to finish well.

-JEFF DEMERLY, *ABWE Executive Director for Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa*

The Apostle Peter was clear in his writings of the importance of being reminded of sound Biblical truths. Thank you, Kyle, for following Peter’s model in reminding your readers of the supreme importance of pursuing our walk with Jesus Christ as priority one. Any book that both challenges and convicts you regarding your walk with Christ is a worthy read. You are holding such a book in your hand. After 41 years of pastoral ministry it was a welcomed and needful reminder of cherishing and nourishing a God-centric life.

-JERRY PELFREY, *Lead Pastor in Mason, Ohio*
(1985-present)

Once the initial excitement and the perceived glamour of ministry has past, those ministering need to be reminded of their source and their purpose. Kyle wonderfully establishes a basis for ministry, a basis that is centered on God and His Word. God is at work in us more than we are at work for Him. Missionaries need

Him more than God needs missionaries, and this truth will keep them effective in their chosen field of ministry. Kyle does a great job in reminding us all of these truths. This book is a much needed tool for all those seeking serve Him through sharing Christ with a lost and increasingly desperate world.

-DR. DESMOND VENTER, *Grace Baptist Church,
Amanzimtoti, South Africa*

Human hearts are tricky things. Knowing them and understanding them is a perpetual mystery to us. I find this to be true even of my own heart. In this book my friend Kyle Farran lays bare a portion of his heart so that we might be encouraged to examine the real source of the activity we call “service to God.” The thesis of this book as expressed in its preface is that effective “ministry is not characterized by a busy schedule or an overflow of the will, but rather an overflow of the heart.” Kyle has written from his heart’s understanding of God’s Word to help us examine our hearts closely. He gives us wisdom that flows from the experience of pursuing the development of a full and clean heart before God as the mainspring of life. I have watched him do this in the midst of the tension of ministry in multiple cultural settings. If you struggle to cooperate fully with God’s molding ministry in your heart, read this book! It will help you! I know it helped me.

-DR. STEVE STAIRS, *Pastoral Training Consultant for
Africa, ABWE and fellow-wanderer in Hluhluwe Game
Park*

Kyle has chosen a topic that is much needed and can be of great help to all Christian workers. Since he has had many contacts with missionaries, pastors, and others serving Christ, he is well qualified to understand the importance of spiritual health in serving the Savior. He has given many thoughts to encourage and challenge the reader. I have known Kyle since his call into

the ministry, followed him in his missionary endeavors, and believe he fully understands the necessity of a long and fruitful ministry. He is not only an example but wants others to follow that example.

-ROBERT FARISON, *Pastor and Bible teacher*

Overflowing captures the essence of what it means for the Christian to want more of who God is and what He has to offer us. Not only does Kyle present a beautiful illustration of what living water looks like, he gives helpful and very practical tools for the Christian who is desiring to go deeper with God. Kyle uses the whole of Scripture to showcase the glory of God and how He wants to fully engage us in His incredible story. Really appreciate Kyle's heart as he shares his journey of ministry life and what God has done in and through him.

-RYAN CHRISTIAN, *Founder/President, Hideout Ministries*

Most books have a “must read” section. It may be a key sentence or paragraph that reveals the heart of the author or the main thrust of the work. I was looking for that as I started reading *Overflowing*. What surprised me was that as I read, I found paragraph after paragraph of helpful biblical material. This book supports those serving in ministry with material to assess and diagnose their soul, to reflect on where their strength for ministry comes from, and to examine inner thoughts and intentions. With the gentle honesty of someone who has been there, Kyle walks us through a thoroughly biblical examination of pride and humility, sin and holiness, joy and discouragement. Make no mistake: this is not a theological treatise on missions or ministry; it is a heart book designed for you and your ministry success.

-PAUL L. DAVIS, *President, ABWE International*

God has graciously captured Kyle's heart with the transforming realization that God's ultimate goal is to display his amazing glory for all to see. He also touches the longing in us all to experience God's approval of our life and ministry at the end of our lives by hearing the Lord say "Well done". He joins these together by showing how we can receive the approval of God and bring much glory to him. Perhaps as valuable as anything is Kyle's incessant, repeating of God's great promise to always be searching for a heart that is fully given over to him (2 Chronicles 16:9) just so he can show himself strong through such a one!

-DREW WOODS, *pastor at Cement City Baptist Church, in Cement City, MI*

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MINISTRY AND MISSIONS THAT
FLOW FROM THE HEART

KYLE FARRAN



Carpenter's Son Publishing

Overflowing: Ministry and Missions That Flow from the Heart

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*To Heather,
my precious wife and best friend*

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*“Keep your heart with all vigilance,
for from it flow the springs of life.”*

PROVERBS 4:23

Foreword

“What we do in life echoes in eternity!” This line from the lips of the Roman General Maximus in the epic historical film, *Gladiator*, was meant to inspire a legion of soldiers preparing for battle. It was intended to stir up courage and willingness to pour out their lives for the glory of Rome. There are many such causes people are willing to live and die for. But there is only one cause that truly does affect eternity—the cause of Christ. As Christians throughout the ages have known, our lives are not lived in vain. We will one day meet our dear Master and receive from him the reward for our service. This is what energizes us as servants of a worthy King.

The Apostle Paul told us, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.” The Greek word for “evil” that Paul uses is *phaulon*, a term that means “useless,” and the opposite of “weighty.” This is the motivation Christians draw on to fuel our service. We want our lives to be useful to Christ, to be weighty for him, and to leave an impression on eternity. We want to live lives of value and significance. We want to run the race in pursuit of pleasing our Lord. But with this holy pursuit comes the potential for unholy pitfalls. Are our motives pure? Do we employ means and methods that are glorifying to God? Do we attempt our tasks in our own strength for our own aggrandizement? Does our desire

to be busy with kingdom work sometimes cause us to neglect other responsibilities God would have us attend to? These are the types of self-doubt that plague many missionaries, ministers, and church members. Is God more concerned by what we do... or who we are? Rather than seek the secret of success, we need to pause and ask, "What is the definition of success?"

In this helpful book Kyle Farran brings to bear on this topic his substantial experience on the mission field, his theological training, and his personal walk with the Lord. He guides us through the barren Savannah of self-doubt and burn-out to the lush oasis of usefulness and fulfillment in Christ. He will redirect our ambitions from output for the kingdom to realizing our dependence on input from our King. I found this book nourishing to my soul and a source of kindling for my motivation as a pastor and a Christian. I trust it will work wonders for you as you strive for the tender reassurance of the Master who says, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

-DR. CLINT ARCHER, *Senior Pastor, Christ Fellowship Baptist Church in Mobile, Alabama; weekly contributor for theCripplegate.com. Author of books on theology, missions, family, and Christian living*

Preface

The great weight of this work doesn't come from the human author, but from the "author of life" (Acts 3:15). For this reason, I would like to challenge you to intentionally read the verses listed in this book. Don't merely skim them. Be as the Bereans who "were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so" (Acts 17:11). Set your heart to not merely understand my uninspired words, but to grasp the *inspired* Word of God. Be noble in your pursuit of understanding.

God is gracious to those who "set [their] heart to understand" (Daniel 10:12) His Word, which is a revelation of Himself. God promised Israel that "you will seek the Lord your God and you will find him *if* you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deuteronomy 4:29). The promise that we will find is only *if* we search in the prescribed way. And that is with all your heart and all your soul.

Pursue God by understanding His Word, keeping in mind this precious promise: "If you seek him, he will be found by you" (2 Chronicles 15:2).

Introduction

Years ago I discovered a tension in my life and ministry. Not a tension between other people, but a tension inside of me, the tension between being *still* and *busy*. Maybe you have felt it also. Because of my desire to hear God’s “well done,” I found myself busy *doing* for God. I desired to see God glorified through me, so I did and did and did.

I was addicted to busyness.

I would like to say I was trusting God for the results (because I felt I was), but my actions told a different story. One indication was I felt guilty whenever I stopped working. If I wasn’t doing something, I felt I was being lazy, unproductive, and unfruitful. This caused me to fill every empty spot with something. You know the drill.

My life revealed what I really believed: that doing was the most important thing. I depended more on my actions for results than on *God’s power*. If I was truly dependent on God for the results, I would have spent more time alone with Jesus, more time in prayer, and less time worrying about all the details while trying to “look busy.”

I also desired a productive ministry. I *felt* productive when I was extremely busy—like I was so important to the ministry that I couldn’t slow down. Since I was always doing something, surely all that activity was productive!

Unfortunately, busyness and productivity are not the same. I can finish my “to-do list” (and even reply to all my emails) yet accomplish nothing of spiritual worth! Yes, I am to be diligent in my labor like Paul. He “worked harder than any of them” (1 Corinthians 15:10), but there is a difference between being diligent and being addicted to busyness. I was the latter.

The other reason for my busyness was buried deep inside of me, and it took a lot of soul-searching to discover. The reason: pride. I was addicted to busyness because I wanted others to see me as significant. Significant people are busy people, right? Their work seems to be important. I felt that if I wasn’t bouncing from task to task—like a six-year-old wired on coffee—I wasn’t significant.

In our culture, “busy” has become synonymous with “significant.” How do people describe an important person? “Oh, you know Bill. He is so busy!” In other words, if you are busy, everyone assumes your work is productive and you are significant. If you are busy for Jesus, then you must be super spiritual and doing important work—even if nothing supernatural is happening.

We all have a desire for significance and importance. When people ask us how we are doing, how do we reply? “Busy!” To which the other person gives an understanding, smug nod and says, “Yeah, me too.” And we both walk away proud that we are doing something for God. Why? Because we are “busy for God.”

But what if God is not impressed?

What if He wants something more?

As I was preparing for missions, God used a few books to shape my theology and heart. I learned through *Experiencing God*, by Henry Blackaby, that ministry wasn’t about *me doing something for God*, it was about God doing something through me. I was joining God at work, not working for God.

The book *God’s Passion for His Glory*, by John Piper and Jonathan Edwards, ignited my desire to glorify God in the great-

est possible way. The desire to maximize the display of His glory has served as my compass ever since. It helped propel our family to minister to dying AIDS patients in South Africa. Just as a jeweler places a diamond on a black cloth to highlight its brilliance, God sends us to dark corners of the globe to put the brilliance of His glory on display. It was a joy to shine His light in such a dark place.

However, in the beginning I missed an important truth: Before God worked *through* me, He wanted to work *in* me. It took years to learn that ministry is not characterized by a busy schedule or an overflow of the will, but rather an overflow of the heart. You cannot minister from an empty cup.

I wrote this book for Christians actively involved in (or preparing for) ministry and missions. However, it's not just for those in full-time ministry, but also for those who have chosen to sacrificially serve the Lord with their time and resources. I invite you to join me in evaluating your life that you may "not run aimlessly" but instead hear "well done!" ringing in your ears for all eternity!

Get your free study guide here:
kylefarran.com/studyguide

Chapter 1

GOD'S HEART SEARCH

Why does God use some people more than others?

“For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him” (2 CHRONICLES 16:9).

MY SEARCH FOR USEFULNESS

What do you long for in life and ministry?

My heart longs to bear spiritual fruit for the glory of God. I desire my life and ministry to be useful to God and count for eternity! My heart cries out with Moses when he says, “Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands!” (Psalm 90:17)

I don't want a wasted life. At the end of this age, with my life behind me and eternity before me, someone awaits. My Master. Entering His presence will be a moment I remember forever. His first words will ring in my ears for all eternity.

I long to hear: “Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your master” (Matthew 25:21).

What do you desire to hear? Do you long to hear your Creator speak “well done” over your life? If so, how important is that to you?

For me, hearing “well done” is the pursuit of my life. Running well and pleasing my Master will be a source of unending joy. But this thought perplexed me: *What if I fail?* What if the life I thought was pleasing isn’t actually pleasing to my Master? What if God says: “I had so much more I wanted to use you for. If only you had trusted me more.” I don’t want to get to Heaven and be surprised.

When first starting out in ministry, I didn’t have a way to evaluate myself, so I tried the *run harder* approach. I felt being useful meant doing more by running harder. At first this approach seemed helpful because I could run harder. When we arrived in South Africa my wife and I spent the first three years learning Zulu and building relationships in the HIV/AIDS communities. Following this we spent ten months raising funds for the HIV/AIDS Care Home (and had our third child in the middle of this furlough). I then oversaw the building process and the hiring of workers, pushing as hard as I could to make the ministry work. Even if my body wasn’t moving, my mind was. I was either going over Zulu words in my head or making ministry plans. Even when I was playing with my kids I was trying to learn Zulu words: *Ngiyagijima: I am running. Ngiyahamba: I am walking.* My mind and body were constantly going as hard as possible. The only time I was truly at rest was when we went to the game park or I was riding my motorcycle.

The week we opened the care home I began having debilitating migraines, which I later discovered were caused by stress. The same week, my wife came down with mononucleosis. This

extreme fatigue forced us to temporarily close the care home soon after it opened.

I thought I was pleasing and being useful to God because I was running hard, but I was running too hard. I couldn't sustain the pace. Trying to run harder was impossible when I was already maxed out.

Striving to become useful to God by running harder and doing more led to two things. It led to uncertainty because I didn't know how much activity was enough. It also led to exhaustion because I didn't know how to set a manageable pace. It was impossible to slow down without feeling lazy or guilty that I wasn't doing more.

I still desire to run hard and minister to the best of my ability, but I don't want to burn out. Marathon runners don't sprint the whole race. Sprinting would cause them to collapse from exhaustion, and they would be unable to finish. At the same time, they don't go as slow as possible. Casually walking the race would be a failure. Finishing is not their only goal; they want to run well. They don't sprint, and they don't walk; they set a pace that is hard, but not too hard. One of the ways they do this is by checking their time at mile markers to ensure they're on pace to finish well. If they are falling behind, they adjust their pace.

That is what I want to do. Because of the potential to fail, I want a way to evaluate myself to see if I'm on course to be a servant who receives a "well done." If I'm off course, I would rather know now while adjustments can be made. With only one life to live, we need to adjust mid-race. There are no do-overs.

We don't need to simply run harder and hope for the best. Paul shows us a better way. It's true that we should work diligently because Paul tells us to "run that [we] may obtain" the prize (1 Corinthians 9:24). However, we should do more than just run hard. Paul also said that he did "not run aimlessly" (1 Corinthians 9:26). He was careful to run in the right direction.

Consider what would happen if a marathon runner ran his fastest 26.2 miles ever—but in the wrong direction! He would lose the race. Without clarity in our direction we run aimlessly without making progress toward our goal.

To find that direction, I asked myself a question:

Who will receive the “well done”?

Answer: *servants who are pleasing to God*. At the end of their lives, God will speak the words “Well done, good and faithful servant” over them (Matthew 25:21). God is only going to give a “well done” to useful servants. As God’s children, we are pleasing to Him as His *child*. We become His children through salvation which is by grace alone, through faith alone without any works, and because of the merits of Christ alone. Paul writes: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8, 9). After we become God’s children through salvation, we have a responsibility to do the work He prepared for us. Paul continues: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). So the “well done” we are looking at here is for the “good and faithful servant.” We are focusing on how we please God as His *servant*.

I then asked a follow-up question.

What kind of servant is pleasing to God?

Answer: *servants who are useful to accomplish His plan*. Masters want useful servants. No master is pleased with a useless servant. Paul highlights God’s desire for useful servants when he says, “Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, *useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work*” (2 Timothy 2:21). (Author’s note: italicized uses in Scripture in this book are my emphasis and not part of the copyrighted text.) Think of God’s servants in the past. They were useful to God in

bringing about His plan which pleased God. If we can become like those useful servants, then we too can be pleasing to God.

This led me to the question that launched this book: *Why does God use some people more than others?*

Not every servant is equally useful to God. If I could understand what sets some people apart for God's use, I could know what areas of my life need the greatest growth. It could be like a mile marker to evaluate my life.

This book is born out of ten years meditating on this question. It is meant to help you evaluate your life that you may "not run aimlessly" but hear "well done" ringing in your ears for all eternity.

THE HEART

Throughout this book I talk a lot about my heart. When I do, I am not merely referring to the physical heart in my body. God's Word tells me that my heart is the core immaterial essence of who I am—my entire inner being that governs me. This includes my desires, intentions, emotions, will, and the source of my thoughts.¹ It touches everything I do, every decision I make, and every emotion I feel. It is "the entire internal dispositional complex that governs us."²

GOD'S SEARCH FOR USEFUL SERVANTS

My search led me to God's search for useful servants. For all the millions of people God could have used through history, He chose to use certain individuals instead of others. Why? Did the individuals have something in common that better prepared them to be used by God?

There were some who God chose to use in mighty ways. What did people like Enoch, Noah, Joseph, Moses, David, Daniel, and Isaiah have in common that set them apart? Was it their abilities,

actions, or heart? Or was it simply God's sovereign choice, which had nothing to do with the individuals?

The answers to these questions have changed my life and ministry and are a continual guide to me. What at first seemed to be random character traits in biblical figures now fit seamlessly together. These traits are not just a list of more things to do; they form a picture of the person God wants us to be, the kind of man or woman best prepared to be used by God.

The answer to why God uses some people more than others is like a coin with two sides. On one side is God's sovereignty. On the flip side is man's responsibility.

SOVEREIGNTY

The first side of the coin is God's sovereignty. God chooses who He will bless and strengthen. "He chose David his servant and took him from the sheepfolds; from following the nursing ewes he brought him to shepherd Jacob his people, Israel his inheritance" (Psalm 78:70, 71). God has the right to choose *who* He uses and *how* He uses them.

God doesn't owe me anything. He is under no obligation to use me in accomplishing His plan. Because of this, my attitude should be one of humility. Like Isaiah, my heart should say, "O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand" (Isaiah 64:8). Unless God chooses to have His power work through me, I can do nothing. I have the same remarkable ability as a lump of clay . . . none.

Everything I have comes from God. "What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?" (1 Corinthians 4:7). This truth is both uplifting and humbling. It lifts me up to know that God gives me everything I need to be useful in life and ministry. It's also humbling to know I have no reason to be proud or rely on myself. At

the end of the age, God will receive all the glory and praise because everything we have is a gift from Him. Even our crowns are symbols of the work God has done through us and will result in more praise for Him. “They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, ‘Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created’” (Revelation 4:10, 11).

RESPONSIBILITY

The second side of the coin is my responsibility to submit to God and respond to His commands. Like the servant who was given five talents and then made five more, I am responsible to use what God gives me. I must “work out [my] own salvation with fear and trembling,” but “it is God who works in [me], both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12, 13). I am unable to do or become anything in my own strength, but “I can do all things” through God’s power (Philippians 4:13). The more open and receptive I am to His power at work in me, the more God will accomplish through me.

Because of this responsibility, God is looking for people who are responsive to Him.

These words changed my life: “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him” (2 Chronicles 16:9).

There are three truths about God in this passage that have changed how I seek to please God: God is conducting a search, God gives strong support, and God supports those whose heart is completely His.

1. God is conducting a search.

“For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth” (2 Chronicles 16:9).

Back and forth, back and forth. God is searching the world for a certain kind of person. In the description of God's search, it seems as though this kind of person is, sadly, not very common. When God was searching for someone to shepherd His people, He found David. There wasn't a list of people who would all prove a good fit—just David. Even more startling is how God spoke about Job. God said of Job that there was no one else like him on earth (Job 1:8). God saw something different in David and Job, something that set them apart from everyone else.

If the only factor in who God chooses to use is His sovereignty, He wouldn't need to search. He wouldn't need to test hearts. He could simply choose without regard to the person and then infuse them with everything they need. There is an important distinction between God's choice of who He uses in ministry and God's choice in election unto salvation. In election "he chose us in him before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4), before we were "born and had done nothing either good or bad" (Romans 9:10). So, we are not looking at that choice. God's choice in election was before we were alive. *This* search, and choice, is while we are alive.

Even though God is looking at our hearts, He doesn't choose us because of our personal greatness. If that were true, we would have reason to be proud. He is looking for something different. The next chapters in this book will unpack this in more detail.

Because God's plan on earth is not complete, His search is not over. God is looking. The idea may strike you as simple, but let it really sink in. *God is looking*. The Creator of the universe is searching the world for people to use for His glory.

As we consider God's search, I believe it is important to clarify what is not being said. The fact that God is searching does not mean that He is passively waiting for us to become the right kind of person in our own strength. Rather, while God is searching our hearts moment by moment He is also working to conform

us to His image. God is actively at work in our heart, enabling all growth in Christlikeness and holiness. In this book I have chosen to focus more on God's search of our hearts, but these truths exist side by side: God is searching and God is working.

The fact that God is searching also does not mean that He lacks knowledge or that He doesn't know what He will find. When I search for something, it is because I don't know where to find it. God is all-knowing and everywhere present. He knows all that is and will be. Not only does He know all that will be, He is sovereignly in control of all that comes to pass. When God finds what He is searching for, He is finding a work of His own hand. He is searching for hearts that are ready for His purpose.

Like an orchard farmer nourishes and prunes the trees to help them produce, God works in us to make us grow. Just as an orchard farmer searches his own trees to see if the fruit is ripe, God is searching us. He is not wandering through random fields hoping to find fruit. He is searching His field. He is searching us, inspecting us, and waiting for us to mature so we can be ready for His purpose.

This makes the impact of God's search even more powerful. God is searching, working, all-knowing, and all-powerful. He is at work in us, around us and through us. As He works, He is looking for people to bring about His perfect plan. And He is not just looking for willing people. There is a certain kind of person "to whom [he] will look" (Isaiah 66:2).

What excited me was this thought: *I could become the kind of person to whom God looks.*

This became my consuming desire: to become one to whom God looks. Not that my behavior would guarantee that God would use me as I planned, but that I would be ready for whatever task He chose to set before this lump of clay.

If God is truly searching for people to use for His glory, then surely this would be scattered through His Word. As I looked,

that is just what I found! God is conducting a search. As you read these verses, picture God speaking these words about you.

GOD'S HEART SEARCH

(Author's note; once more as a reminder: italics are mine and added for emphasis.)

"The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14).

"But the LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. *For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart*'" (1 Samuel 16:7).

"And you, Solomon my son, know the God of your father and *serve him with a whole heart and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches all hearts* and understands every plan and thought. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will cast you off forever" (1 Chronicles 28:9).

"Behold, *the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love*" (Psalm 33:18).

"For though the LORD is high, *he regards the lowly*, but the haughty he knows from afar" (Psalm 138:6).

"All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. *But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word*" (Isaiah 66:2).

"The LORD searches the heart and tests the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds" (Jeremiah 17:10).

“O great and mighty God, whose name is the LORD of hosts, great in counsel and mighty in deed, whose eyes are open to all the ways of the children of man, rewarding each one according to his ways and according to the fruit of his deeds” (Jeremiah 32:18, 19).

“So it was until the days of David, *who found favor in the sight of God* and asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob” (Acts 7:45, 46).

“[H]e raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, *I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will*” (Acts 13:22).

“By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now *before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God*. And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Hebrews 11:5, 6).

“*For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer*. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil” (1 Peter 3:12).

The God who holds the universe in His hands is searching the world for men and women pleasing to Him. He is searching my heart and your heart. The reason this is so important is because of what God does with those He finds. When God finds the kind of heart that pleases Him, He pours out His strong support on their life.

It's amazing that we can become people who are pleasing to God!

God is looking. Right now. Today. Will you be found by God as pleasing to Him?

2. God gives strong support (strength) to those He finds.

“ . . . to give strong support” (2 Chronicles 16:9).

The God who is “able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us” is searching for people He can empower and use to bring about His plan (Ephesians 3:20).

He is waiting with power!

I don't know about you, but I need strong support! Christ revealed how weak I am when He said, “Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Without His support, all my efforts, all my labors for the spread of the gospel, will never make a difference. I long to have a life that is used by God and bears much fruit, but I can't do it in my own strength. I desperately need His power. Apart from Him, I can do nothing.

When we look at the descriptions of when God used His people, success was always contingent on His power. God's special favor on individuals is described in a few different ways. In these verses, notice the reason *why* these people succeeded.

The Lord was with them:

“But *the Lord was with Joseph* and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison” (Genesis 39:21).

“And David had success in all his undertakings, *for the Lord was with him*” (1 Samuel 18:14).

“And David became greater and greater, *for the Lord, the God of hosts, was with him*” (2 Samuel 5:10).

The Lord gave victory:

“And *the Lord gave victory* to David wherever he went” (2 Samuel 8:6).

The eye of God was on them:

“But *the eye of their God was on the elders of the Jews*, and they did not stop them until the report should reach Darius and then an answer be returned by letter concerning it” (Ezra 5:5).

The hand of God was on them:

“For on the first day of the first month he began to go up from Babylonia, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, *for the good hand of his God was on him*. For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel” (Ezra 7:9, 10).

“I took courage, *for the hand of the Lord my God was on me*, and I gathered leading men from Israel to go up with me” (Ezra 7:28).

“*The hand of our God was on us*, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambushes by the way” (Ezra 8:31).

“And I told them of *the hand of my God that had been upon me for good*” (Nehemiah 2:18).

The Lord made them prosper:

“Then I replied to them, *The God of heaven will make us prosper*, and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem” (Nehemiah 2:20).

The Lord gave favor and compassion:

“*And God gave Daniel favor and compassion* in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs” (Daniel 1:9).

The Lord was with them:

“No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so *I will be with you*” (Joshua 1:5).

“*The Lord is with you* while you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you” (2 Chronicles 15:2).

They succeeded because God gave them strong support!

God’s power accompanies His presence. When Moses spoke to God, notice the relationship between God’s favor and His presence:

“And he said to him, ‘If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?’ And the Lord said to Moses, ‘This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name’” (Exodus 33:15-17).

When our life and ministry find favor with God, He gives us more of His presence. The sign of God’s favor is not the absence of problems, but rather more of His presence as He goes with us. As New Testament Christians, we never lose the presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Christ told us: “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). However, just as water can be present as a trickle or a torrent, we can have more or less of God’s presence in our life.

God’s strong support allows us to succeed in the work He calls us to do. But ministry “success” does not always mean that our personal ministry plans are accomplished. Our ministry plans might even fail! True ministry success means that *God’s will* is accomplished and, by trusting in God, we glorify Him. Even while sitting in prison Paul was a recipient of God’s strong support. God was blessing the spread of the gospel in His time; Satan had not defeated Paul.

However, God doesn't give this strong support to everyone. He reserves it for certain individuals.

3. God supports those whose heart is completely his.

“ . . . to those whose heart is blameless toward him” (2 Chronicles 16:9).

The English Standard Version also notes that the word “blameless” can be translated as “whole.” This is someone whose heart is whole toward God, one with an undivided heart. The New American Standard Bible translates this verse as “those whose heart is completely His.”

When God searches, He is looking for a servant after His own heart.

God is looking at hearts. He is searching for men and women who are pleasing to Him. He is not looking at our accomplishments, appearance, eloquence, or abilities. He is looking at the heart.

God is interested in who we are, not what we can do for Him. This is because it is God who does all the work through us.

Here is a thrilling thought: no one is more qualified to be used by God than anyone else.

There are no unfair advantages. What set David apart was his heart. The qualification for being pleasing to God is not an ability but a state of the heart. All of God's children can become pleasing to Him. We can be a person to whom God looks, not because of great things we do, but because of a heart that pleases God.

Because of this, my daily goal is no longer to accomplish great things for God. It is to become the kind of person He wants me to be. As I do, He will fill me with more of His power to accomplish the work He desires!

God tells us that He is looking for a certain kind of person on whom to pour out His strength. Let's make it our aim to become that person!

Contrary to popular opinion, doing more for God isn't what God notices. God looks first at your *being*, not your *doing*.

He is looking at your heart.

Chapter 2

OVERFLOWING HEARTS

What kind of heart are my actions flowing from?

*“Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it
flow the springs of life” (PROVERBS 4:23).*

WHO YOU ARE: YOUR HEART

Our heart is the most important part about us because that is where God is looking. The reason God looks at our heart: actions flow from that center of our being. To say it a different way, our doing flows from our being. Who you are (your heart) is more important than what you do (your actions), because what you do flows out of who you are. This is the central theme of this book.

If you remember nothing else from this book, remember this: *Who you are is more important than what you do, because what you do flows out of who you are.*

To ensure clarity, let's consider what is not being said. I am not saying that what you do is insignificant. What you do is very important, but who you are is *more* important. The reason is be-

cause your actions (what you do) must flow from a right heart (who you are).

If the well is sweet, so is the water that is drawn from it. The opposite is also true: if the well is bitter, so is the water drawn from it. For this reason, Solomon's proverb from the start of this chapter reminds us that our primary focus must be our heart: "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life."

My passion is to see your service to God in ministry become an overflow of the heart, not an overflow of a busy schedule. For this to happen, your heart must be the central focus of your life and ministry. God must fill your heart to the point that His life and power overflow into all you do.

God doesn't just want my actions; He also wants my heart. He wants all of me.

USEFUL VESSELS

God is looking for useful servants. But just because I am a willing servant doesn't mean I'm useful. God is not merely looking for willing people who work hard. As servants of God, there are degrees of usefulness. Some servants' hearts are more useful than others. Consider the apostle Paul's words to Timothy.

"Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. Therefore, *if* anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work" (2 Timothy 2:20, 21).

Did you notice the "if" I chose to highlight? Usefulness is contingent. My heart influences my usefulness to God. This is not to say that God is somehow limited in how He uses me. God uses me every day despite my sinfulness and brokenness. I will

never be a perfect vessel on this side of eternity, but, at the same time, this passage is very clear: the state of my heart influences *how* the Master will use me.

God uses all of His children, but He uses us in different ways. The NIV translation says it like this: "some are for special purposes and some for common use" (2 Timothy 2:20). This doesn't mean that the common tasks are unimportant! Daily faithfulness in common tasks prepares me for the uncommon. I must be faithful in little tasks before God will entrust me with big ones. As God refines me, I will become more useful for "honorable" and "special" purposes.

What kind of service do you want to be used for? Do you want to be a vessel of "wood and clay" or one of "gold and silver"?

These verses have awakened in me a deep longing to be both pleasing and "useful to the master" (2 Timothy 2:20). However, to be the first, I must be the second. No master is pleased with a useless servant. Therefore, I need to know how to live in a way that is "useful to the master." Being useful to the master is the mile marker I use to evaluate my life. If I am growing in usefulness to God, my life will be pleasing to Him.

It's important to note that being used by God is not a fast and easy road. Consider some of the great biblical heroes mentioned already: Noah, Joseph, Moses, David, Daniel. They didn't take the fast road to being used by God, nor the easy one. They didn't "name it and claim it." They endured many trials and setbacks. God's plan took years to unfold. At many points in their life it probably didn't look like they were a chosen instrument of God. Things were not going well. However, God was first at work in them and around them before He worked through them.

God works on His eternal timetable, not ours. Being used by God is usually a hard road, but it leads to a great destination. As missionary Jim Elliot said: "He is no fool who gives what he

cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”³ Being used by God is worth the wait and the cost.

If you want to be someone to whom God looks—one who receives God’s “strong support,” His “well done,” and is “useful to the Master”—it comes down to your heart.

OVERFLOWING HEARTS

We had the privilege of living one hour from the Hluhluwe Imfolozi Game Park in South Africa, the oldest proclaimed nature reserve in Africa. Living so close allowed us to regularly visit the park on weekends. One day, just before sunrise, we began driving through the park. It was still too dark to distinguish trees from elephants or rocks from lions. Many vehicles were driving slowly in the pre-dawn hours, straining to see animals through the shadows. Not us. We didn’t waste time with shadows. I drove at a steady pace because I wanted to be somewhere at daybreak. The river. We had learned this is the best place to see animals. The animals need the river’s water to survive, and every morning at first light they come from miles around to quench their thirst. This morning was no different. We rolled to a stop at the river as the sun peeked over the horizon, turning the landscape golden. As the water shimmered in the early morning sunbeams, animals of all kinds came to drink. We spent the next hour sipping our coffee while watching rhinos, zebras, impala, giraffes, lions, and elephants all come to drink their fill. One thing is true of all game parks: water is needed for life. Without it, the animals will die.

Another incredibly unique African game park is in the Okavango Delta. Located above South Africa in the country of Botswana, the Moremi Game Reserve in the Okavango Delta is unlike any other. What makes the Okavango unique is its location. It is created by a river that literally ends in the desert, never reaching the ocean or sea. Each year the river floods and

creates an amazing, lush grassland where animals migrate to find food and refreshment. But this isn't just a nice watering hole in the desert. Each year the water spreads up to 5,800 square miles (15,000 square kilometers), roughly the size of Connecticut.⁴ Elephants, buffaloes, giraffes, hippos, antelope, leopards, hyenas, zebras, crocodiles, and 482 species of birds make the delta their home.⁵ Like an oasis in the desert, the Okavango's overflow gives life to all the animals. Life exists because of this river.

What do water and rivers have to do with us?

The reason a river is useful is because it allows water to flow to far places. That is the river's purpose. A dry river or streambed is not useful. In the Okavango Delta, the river overflows its banks spreading life-giving water to all it touches.

God's purpose is to use us like an overflowing stream. It is what makes us useful. For us to be useful, God wants to fill our heart and overflow to others.

In the remaining chapters we'll take an in-depth look at the kind of heart that is useful and pleasing to God, the kind He loves to fill to overflowing. Comparing our life to an overflowing stream, we will examine the different aspects of our heart that please God. My prayer is that your heart will be filled to overflowing and become a heart that catches God's eye.

The illustration of an overflowing stream has four parts. I will use these to provide the structure for the rest of this book: the spring, the stream, the barriers, and the oasis. In each part, the chapters will unpack the truths you can apply to your heart to become more useful to God. An overflowing life and ministry only happen when we faithfully apply the truths from each part.

1. The Spring

A spring is where water that has been flowing underground emerges aboveground. Some springs are fed by an underground

river or stream. Day after day a spring pours out clean, unpolluted water.

For us, life is all about the spring which is the fountain of life. God is that eternal spring and the “fountain of living waters” (Jeremiah 2:13). He is the source of our temporal physical life and eternal spiritual life.

He alone is the source of all good, and He alone deserves the glory. Because of this, we exist to magnify Him.

2. The Stream

The stream will become a dry bed of rocks unless it stays connected to the spring. We are like the streambed. By ourselves, we are empty and have nothing to offer. As Jesus said: “Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

When our life is connected to the spring, His life-giving water flows through us. This is where our strength to minister to others comes from. Only when we connect with God and depend on His power will our ministry result in true spiritual change. We must stay connected to the spring, our source of life.

3. The Barriers

What happens when barriers block the entrance to the stream? The water is dammed up and stops flowing. When we allow sin in our life, the net result is something like throwing rocks and trash into the mouth of a stream. They hinder water from flowing. Spiritually, this sin hinders us and we either become a dry streambed or one with only a small trickle of water.

Are we allowing—or hindering—God to flow through us? If we’re allowing sin to remain in our life, even small sins, we’re hindering God’s power from flowing through us.

If God is not flowing through us, it may be because we’ve allowed barriers of sin to get in the way. Like water, God is searching for hearts that have the barriers of sin removed and are open

to Him. “For the eyes of the Lord roam throughout the earth, so that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His” (2 Chronicles 16:9, NASB).

God is searching. Does He find openness or barriers in your heart? My heart?

4. The Oasis

The Okavango Delta is an oasis in the desert, an area that provides water for countless animals in the middle of barrenness. That is what our life is like when we are filled to overflowing. This world is like a desert for people’s souls. We can become like a desert oasis that shares life-giving water. Others seek us to find refreshment and life for their weary souls because they see something different in us. They see an overflow of joy in God. When people are hurting and broken, we can be there to point them to the spring of living water.

When we are filled to overflowing we will become like an oasis in the desert.

An overflowing life is possible because the “fountain of living waters” is waiting to flow through us!

To start our in-depth look at our heart, we must travel with the spring’s current.

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