

PRAY 21



discovery
guide

Chapter Sampler—Uncorrected Proof

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with Brian Smith

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Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The Message* by Eugene Petersen. Other versions used:
NIV, NCV, NLT

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Another Word from Tim

A Word from Timothy Eldred

It was all I could do not to fail tenth-grade geometry. Tutors and teachers did their best. But I had some kind of mental block, maybe missed some basic concept somewhere in the past.

I got a D.

Minus.

But I got by.

Some questions in life never get answered. But not because they're never asked. Just because of some mental block. Some basic concept missing.

Everything else in my life seemed fine. Seemed. Tim had it together. Outgoing. Confident. Successful. Getting by in life. So no one bothered asking the hard questions.

Some questions never get answered because we don't see any reason to ask. If status quo is adequate, why challenge it?

And then there are the questions we're afraid to ask. Afraid of the answers.

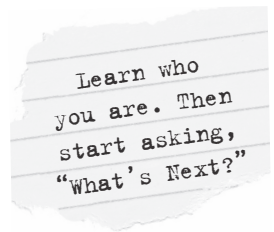
Growth begins with good questions. But if the questions never get asked or answered, growth stalls. A lot of people live and die without answers. Getting by.

It's a tragedy to settle for a D-minus in life.

I was thirty-four before someone asked me the question I'd never faced. My mentor asked, "Who are you?"

Silence. He might as easily have asked me to calculate the hypotenuse of a trapezoidal pentagon. He wasn't just requesting my name, title, or least favorite Disney character. And I knew it. I tried bluffing. He caught me. I only needed to answer the question. I had no idea.

When I eventually I figured it out, the answer involved some scary soul searching. The kind I'm inviting you to do. In accepting the Pray21 challenge, you're going to hit some hard questions. Maybe you're young. You need to face the Who are you? question now, before you waste years pretending. (By the way, I know who you are. We've never met, but I know.)



Learn who
you are. Then
start asking,
"What's Next?"

Or perhaps you're not so young. A long way down the road. Career established, family growing, and maybe still unaware of your identity or purpose. (I know who you are, too. Someone should have helped you figure it out long ago.)

We're all asking the same question. It's not too late to find the answer. And when you find yourself, you'll be able to do *all* God made you to do. And have the time of your life doing it.

You have been created for significance and service, called to mission and ministry. Getting by is not an option. Getting by is getting lost.

In this book you'll read about people like you. Asking questions. Avoiding questions. Oblivious to the questions. People in discovery. Getting beyond just getting by. When you wrestle with their stories, you'll open doors for *your* journey of discovery. Maybe you'll let God inside your heart, where he can birth His plan for you. Hopefully you'll begin to recognize and respond to His call.

Learn who you are. Then start asking, *What's next?*

Fifteen or fifty-five, you are God's answer to somebody's questions. Take 21 days to launch a life of change—change in yourself, changing your world.

The journey's about to begin.

Any questions?



PART 1:
BELIEVE

You believe in God? Good. Did you know that God believes in you?

God made you just the way he wanted you to be. Sure, maybe you've done things that have offended him, hurt others, and injured yourself. Not good. But that doesn't change the fact that God made you for Himself (He really likes you) and for a purpose, a mission in this life. And he believes you can do it...with his help...because he made you that way.

So when does your purpose for living kick in? When do you get to start doing something really important? Will it be when you "grow up"? When you get a degree? When you get married? When you make partner or manager?

None of the above. Your purpose takes effect NOW! It doesn't matter whether you're a teen or an octogenarian. You've already passed Go. You've already collected all the gifting and spiritual resources from God that you need for mission launch. What? You don't have everything you'll need for the whole journey? Don't worry. God will train and supply you on the job. That's part of that "daily bread" Jesus said to pray for.¹

But the whole venture starts by agreeing with God. He believes in the you that he made. You need to believe in that same you. Not with sinful pride, but with faith in your Creator and Provider as you step out and live for him.

So tell God, "You're right about me." And don't just tell him. Show him.

how many loaves do you have?

Scene 1

"Well done, Phil, my friend." The respect in Jesus' eyes and tone made Philip forget all about his tired muscles and sore feet.

Jesus moved on to the next disciple. Philip experienced total physical recall.

He collapsed against a nearby wall and slid to the ground. Jesus had sent the disciples out in pairs for weeks, preaching the kingdom and performing miracles village to village.

It was the most terrifying experience in Philip's life. He wouldn't have missed it for all the camels in Egypt.

"Okay, guys, listen up." Jesus waited until he had the exhausted men's attention. "You all deserve a break." He paused for effect. "How about a two-day retreat on the other side of Lake Galilee?"

Suddenly everyone scrambled like squirrels, searching for the nearest boat to rent. Philip had never seen Jesus laugh so hard.

They headed across the lake, thinking they had gotten away incognito. But as the supposedly isolated opposite shore came into view, the disciples groaned in unison. The beach was packed with people waiting for Jesus. The boat's occupants were very, very cognito.

"Sheep," Jesus muttered, scanning the crowd. "They're sheep. With no shepherd." Philip could almost feel the heartache waves emanating from Jesus. The day's work wasn't over.

Desperate people don't tend to think ahead. Several hours later, Philip pulled Jesus and a few of the disciples aside. "Lord, these people are starving. Why don't you send them away to find dinner?" *And to give us a break*, Philip didn't say.

Jesus seemed baffled. "What do you mean, Philip? You're an adult—a full fifteen years old. Why can't you feed them?"

It had to be the heat, finally getting to Jesus. Philip suppressed a scream and said with forced calm, "Well, we could do that...if one of us can just go work for eight months and earn enough to buy the bread!" He pictured returning months later with the grocery bags, thousands of skeletons littering the lake shore.

Jesus smiled patiently. "How many loaves do you have?"

That's when Andrew piped up. "Five, Lord. And two fish." He pointed to a boy holding a small parcel.

Jesus' eyes widened. "Good job, Andy!" Jesus slapped him on the shoulder. "Now have everyone sit down to eat."

When this was done, Jesus stood holding a few dinner rolls and a couple of mackerels. He thanked God for his provision. Then he added more quietly, "Thank you, too, Father, for men with the resourcefulness to bring everything they have to you."

An hour later five thousand men, plus women and children, lounged on the grass, fully satisfied, many napping. Philip helped load twelve baskets of leftovers into the boat.²

Scene 2 (four years later)

Philip had never felt so out of place. Alone in, of all places...

Samaria. Land of the traitorous half-breeds. Any Jewish blood that ran in their veins had centuries ago been contaminated with that of the idolatrous heathen.

Samaria...the cancer of Israel, festering between the Jewish regions of Galilee to the north and Judea to the south. The truly God-fearing traveled far around it.

And here was Philip, in downtown Depravity Central.

"I wish Jesus were here," he said to himself. Then, embarrassed, he glanced upward. "Oh, yeah, you are, Lord. Sorry. I keep forgetting."

Jesus had died, risen, and returned to heaven, leaving twelve men—mostly teenagers and twenty-somethings—in charge of God's world mission. But Jesus promised always to be with them.

Philip was nineteen now. "I'll never live to see twenty if those Jerusalem temple goons catch me."

That rabid Pharisee, Saul, had stirred up persecution against Jesus' followers. Thousands fled Jerusalem, and Philip ended up...here.

Time to get started, Philip. There was no mistaking the Lord's voice. *The mission continues here.*

Philip started to hyperventilate. He glanced frantically around at the people. No, the *animals*. He wanted to run to someplace clean.

"Lord, you can do anything. But with me? Are you saying that I have enough...loaves...for *this*?"

That's exactly what I'm saying. Just give me everything you have.

So, shaking in his sandals, Philip proceeded to preach the message of the Messiah. And his heart changed. He touched the sick and crippled; they were healed. He commanded demons; they fled. And, greatest of all miracles, the Samaritans believed in Jesus! By hundreds. By thousands.

Peter and John came from Jerusalem in person to see what their ears couldn't believe. They left convinced.

That's when God said, *Philip, time for your next assignment. Travel south.*

Scene 3 (three days later)

A long, hot road. Chariot approaching. A beauty! Two horsepower. Iron rims. Upholstered seats. Ethiopian make. Last year's model, no less! Someone with power. And money.

The chariot rolled past, a servant driving and a lavishly dressed, dark-skinned official sitting, reading a scroll.

Keep up with them.

Philip swallowed hard. "If you say so, Lord." He ran to catch up, then jogged alongside.

When Philip heard the official reading aloud the words of Scripture, he struck up a conversation. Soon he found himself sitting in the chariot beside—get this—the royal treasurer of Queen Candice of Ethiopia! The Jewish faith fascinated the man, but he wasn't getting the Scriptures' meaning. So, riding in style, Philip found confidence to explain God's Word and its fulfillment in Jesus.

When they came to a stream, the Ethiopian pointed and said, "I want to be baptized into the Messiah. Right now!" Philip obliged.

He was helping the dripping, laughing man rise from the water when... everything faded. The stream. The Ethiopian. Vanished! Five seconds later a different scene materialized around Philip—a seacoast town.

Teleportation! Just like he'd seen Jesus do after his resurrection! That day in the locked room, Jesus just popped into the middle of them and started talking.

Philip scanned his new surroundings. *It figures*, he thought. *No one here to see.*

Scene 4 (five days later)

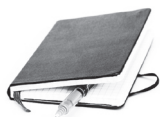
And so, starting in that town, Ashdod, Philip preached from village to village up the Mediterranean coast, spreading the good news of Jesus.

Now he was resting by the dusty road, hours away from his next stop. He squinted up at the glaring sun. In spite of his cracked lips and the sweat dripping off him, he smiled. "Lord, you're amazing. With each new challenge, I bring you everything I have—a weary body, a forgetful mind, a willing heart—and you always multiply my few loaves into a feast for thousands." He knew Jesus was smiling back.

Time to get going. He rose, stretched, and stood looking north.

"Hey, Lord, it's hot. I'm shot. Couldn't you just beam me to that next village?"

Nothing happened. Philip heaved a sigh. And started walking.³



BRIEF DEBRIEF

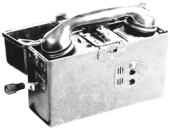
Think through these questions. They're for everyone who follows Christ. Whether fifteen or forty-five, we all frequently need to recommit ourselves and our resources to him.

Dig deep and journal about them in your journal. Connect with others. Help each other process and pray through the questions and challenges. After you've arrived at some conclusions, continue praying for and supporting each other.

- What tempts you to think you don't have what it takes to accomplish God's mission? What do you wish you could do

for God and others, but are afraid to do? What thoughts and emotions do you wrestle with?

- How many loaves *do* you have? (Be honest.) How might God honor your small-seeming gift?
- What is he asking you to do for him or others this week? Why will this be of value?
- What will you bring to him, for his use?
- What support or resources do you need from others this week? What do they need from you?



SECURE CHANNEL

Lord, when I let myself dream, I get really pumped about all the things I'd like to do for you, and for people. For example...[go ahead, dream with God]...

But I'm usually afraid I don't have what it takes. I hear what you want from me, and I give up before I start. To be honest, I'm afraid you're unrealistic—that you want me to give what I don't even have.

But you promise that's not true. You just want what I have...everything I have. And as small as that seems to me, here it is. Here I am. As an act of faith in you, this week I will...[commit to one simple, stretching act of obedience]...

I pray these things, too, for [name of your partner(s)], that they would courageously give you everything, and that you would provide confidence in your complete sufficiency through them.

Thanks for listening. Thanks for caring. Thanks for letting me serve you.



BACKGROUND FILES

To learn more about the true historic events described in this chapter, read John 6:1-17; Mark 6:7-13, 30-45; 8:1-10; Acts 8.

do you really
love me?

Sheri started praying for and with her son Jake from the time he was two. She prayed especially that Jake would see for himself the hand of God at work in his life. No second-hand faith for her son. Sure enough, Jake cultivated a personal passion for God and for prayer.

The family lives in a small town in Central Oregon. The nearest real mall is four hours away in Portland. When Jake was thirteen, he and his mom planned a rare shopping spree in Portland, to spend a year's savings. About this time, Sheri was praying for Jake to learn to see giving as a joy and a privilege. But buying nice things with honest money is good, too. So off they went.

As they drove, they made yet another request—that God would give them a divine appointment.

God wasted no time.

At the mall, Jake headed for the computer store. Sheri was following when she noticed a teenage girl curled up on an outdoor bench, shaking, coatless in the freezing weather. She was obviously in pain—physically and emotionally. Sheri couldn't help herself. She went up and said, "Please let me pray for you."

The girl scowled. "Whatever," was her sarcastic response.

Sheri was shocked, but stubborn. "I'm not leaving until I pray for you."

Angrily, the girl gave in. "Go ahead and get it over with."

Jake walked up just as Sheri began: "Dear God, I don't know what this girl has been through, but you do. Please let her know you love her and that you can and will help her. Please show her today, somehow, that you see her broken heart and you can restore all she has lost. In Jesus' name I pray, amen."

In that second, the ice dam broke, melted into tears. The girl started crying uncontrollably, telling her story between sobs. Kendra (we'll call her) had gotten pregnant. Her parents told her to abort the baby, but she wanted to

keep it and marry her boyfriend—the baby’s father. (Let’s call him Shawn.) So her parents kicked her out on the streets. Kendra and Shawn kept the baby, slept under a bridge, and still went to high school. But that was no life for a baby, so they gave it up for adoption.

While Kendra was talking, Shawn walked up. And when she had finished, Jake said, “Mom, it’s time to shop.”

Sheri looked at her son in surprise. “Jake, did you hear their situation?”

“Yes,” he said. “That’s why we need to spend our shopping money on them.”

That day Jake took Shawn and bought him clothes, a sleeping bag, shoes, and a backpack. Sheri did the same for Kendra. As they were about to part ways, God answered one more prayer. A prayer that the young couple prayed—the prayer for forgiveness and new life in Christ.

Later, the ministry of which Jake’s family was a part paid for an apartment for the couple.

That morning, Jake had envisioned riding home with shopping bags covering the back seat. The back seat stayed empty. But Jake was full to the brim. Spilling over.

“Mom,” he said, “that was the best day I’ve ever had!”

At first glance—even at fifth or sixth glance—Kendra and Shawn wouldn’t seem the type that good Christians would hang out with. Ragged, dirty, resentful. Their first reaction to kindness was spite. They came from a foreign life history. And besides, the couple’s problems weren’t Sheri’s or Jake’s fault. Most of us would understand if Sheri and Jake had simply passed by, asking God to send someone who could identify better with the girl, then feeling good about showing the love of God, as they did their shopping.

But they’d be demonstrating that they didn’t really love Jesus Christ.

Once a Jewish Old Testament expert approached Jesus. He was a good Jew who lived God’s law to a T (that’s a Hebrew T). The legal genius decided to embarrass Jesus. “Teacher,” he said with mock respect, “how do I get eternal life?”

Jesus smiled and invited the man to answer his own question, from the Scriptures.

Aha! His chance to shine. The scholar stood straight, cleared his throat, and quoted two passages: "Love the Lord your God with everything in you" and "Love your neighbor just the way you love yourself." (Notice the connection here between loving God and loving people. It'll be on the test later.)

The man was taken aback by Jesus' applause. "Bravo!" said the Messiah. "Perfect answer."

Then in a sober but caring tone, Jesus said, "Obey both of those, and you'll live forever."

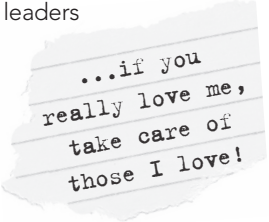
Suddenly the law expert started to remember one or two times he had behaved unlovingly toward others. He was worried. Then he thought of a loophole. "But, teacher, not everyone is my neighbor. Certainly not the Gentiles, or the sinners. Define 'neighbor.'"

"Happy to," answered Jesus. And he told a story. A Jewish man was traveling alone when he was robbed, stripped, horribly beaten, and left for dead. Along came a holy man—one of the righteous leaders of Israel, teacher of God's love. He saw the broken, bloody man, but kept as much distance as possible as he passed. A second holy man traveled by and did the same.

Then came the most repulsive kind of person in the Jewish imagination. A mixed-blood, idolatrous neighbor of Israel. A Samaritan. Not the type that good Jews would hang out with. Morally filthy, natural enemies. Foreign in the extreme. And besides, the poor man's problems weren't the Samaritan's fault. Any Jew would understand if the Samaritan had passed by, wished a pious blessing on the man, then continued his journey, feeling he'd done the best that could be expected.

Any Jew would be shocked. The Samaritan's heart broke. He used his meager supplies to treat and bandage the man's wounds. He put his arms around the man and helped him to his feet, then onto his donkey. He led the donkey to an inn, paid for a room, and cared for the unfortunate Jew throughout the night. The next morning he paid for several more days and instructed the innkeeper, "Spare no expense. Give him whatever he needs. I'll be back, and I'll cover the tab."

Jesus paused to make sure the law expert was following. Then he said,



...if you
really love me,
take care of
those I love!

"Now, I'd like you to define 'neighbor.' Which of the three travelers was a neighbor to the beaten man?"

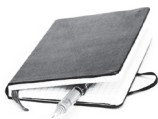
The scholar glanced around, swallowed, and said, "The Samar— Uh, the one who had mercy on him."

"Good answer," said Jesus. "You go and do the same."¹

Important point: The lawyer was right to connect loving God with loving people. In fact, Jesus made the same connection once with his young disciple, Peter. Three times, Jesus asked, "Peter, do you really love me?" Three times, Peter answered, "Absolutely, Lord." And three times, Jesus answered Peter's answer with "Then take care of my sheep."²

In other words, "Peter, if you really love me, take care of those I love—all of them. The beautiful and the ugly. The lost and the found. The nice and the hateful. Those you click with and those you don't. Love them all. And not just with a prayer and a smile, but with your life. That's how you really love me."

Outside a Portland, Oregon, mall, a thirteen-year-old named Jake knew how to love Jesus.³



BRIEF DEBRIEF

Try to let God's heart fill yours as you consider these questions and journal your responses. Pray for your own inner change, and for change in your partners. Help each other live out a genuine love. We all need help, no matter how old or how accomplished.

- What kind of people do you have the hardest time loving? Why do you think this is?
- Talk about God's attitude toward those same people. Try to get inside his heart and see through his eyes. Try to imagine how he honestly feels toward them. Does it help your attitude?
- What is one opportunity in your daily life to do something kind for an "unlovable" person?
- The mere doing is good and loving, but how can you cultivate a heart that honestly wants to?
- What's your first step?



SECURE CHANNEL

No, Lord, not him. Please don't ask me to love her.

Okay, I've been honest. That's how I feel. (Forgive me.) Now change me. I want to love everyone you love. I want to love the way you love, for the reasons you love. I want to love no matter what.

And I want to love with action. Show me how. Give me courage. Help me get over myself, my fears, and my pride. Help me do miracles in a life that needs you.

Please also help [name your partners] to love all kinds of people in their lives. Fill them with your heart, with your sight, with your touch of healing love.



BACKGROUND FILES

To learn more about loving Jesus by loving people, read Luke 6:27-38; 10:25-37; John 21:1-17.

(Endnotes)

¹ See Luke 10:25-37.

² See John 21:15-17.

³ Jake's and Sheri's story adapted from Sheri Rose Shepherd's book, *Preparing Him for the Other Woman, A Mother's Guide to Raising a Son to Love a Wife and Lead a Family*, Multnomah/Waterbrook 2006.