

Excerpts from
FACING YOUR GIANTS
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WHEN YOU DON'T GET THE CALL

Other events of my sixth-grade year blur into fog. I don't remember my grades or family holiday plans. I can't tell you the name of the brown-haired girl I liked or the principal of the school. But that spring evening in 1967? Crystal clear.

I'm seated in my parents' bedroom. Dinner conversation floats down the hallway. We have guests, but I ask to leave the table. Mom has made pie, but I pass on dessert. Not sociable. No appetite. Who has time for chitchat or pastry at such a time?

I need to focus on the phone.

I'd expected the call before the meal. It hadn't come. I'd listened for the ring during the meal. It hadn't rung. Now I'm staring at the phone like a dog at a bone, hoping a Little League coach will tell me I've made his baseball team.

I'm sitting on the bed, my glove at my side. I can hear my buddies out playing in the street. I don't care. All that matters is the phone. I want it to ring.

It doesn't.

The guests leave. I help clean the dishes and finish my homework. Dad pats me on the back. Mom says kind words. Bedtime draws near. And the phone never rings. It sits in silence. Painful silence.

In the great scheme of things, not making a baseball team matters little. But twelve-year-olds can't see the great scheme of things, and it was a big deal, and all I could think about was what I would say when schoolmates would ask which team had picked me.

You know the feeling. The phone didn't ring for you either. In a much grander scheme of things, it didn't. When you applied for the job, for the club; tried to make up, or get help...the call never came. You know the pain of a no call. We all do. (11)

FORGIVING THE UNFORGIVABLE

Beverly chose to maximize Christ. Wasn't easy. How can you shift your focus away from the man who raped you? He entered Beverly's home under the guise of official business. She had every reason to trust him: personal acquaintance and professional associate. He worked for the state and requested an audience with Beverly. But he took more than her time.

He denied and successfully covered up the deed. As he continues to move up the political ladder, Beverly spots him on the evening news, encounters him at parties. While he feigns innocence, she churns within.

But not like she used to. Two years after the rape, she met her Jonathan. A friend told her about Christ—his protection, his provision, and his invitation. She accepted it. Memories of the rape still dog her, but they don't control her. She isn't left alone with her Saul anymore. She seeks Christ rather than revenge; she measures choices against His mercy, not her violator's cruelty. Beverly ponders and praises the living presence of Jesus. Doing so heals her soul.

Major in your Evil Emperor, if you choose. Paint horns on his picture. Throw darts at her portrait. Make and memorize a list of everything the Spam-brain took: your childhood, career, marriage, health. Live a Saul-saturated life. Wallow in the sludge of pain. You'll feel better, won't you?

Or will you?

GOD IS NOT FINISHED YET

Some years ago a Rottweiler attacked our golden retriever puppy at a kennel. The worthless animal climbed out of its run into Molly's and nearly killed her. He left her with dozens of gashes and a dangling ear. My feelings toward that mutt were less than Davidic. Leave the two of us in a cave, only one would have exited. I wrote a letter to the dog's owner, urging him to put the dog to sleep.

But when I showed the letter to the kennel owner, she begged me to reconsider. "What that dog did was horrible, but I'm still training him. I'm not finished with him yet."

God would say the same about the Rottweiler who attacked you. "What he did was unthinkable, unacceptable, inexcusable, but I'm not finished yet."

Your enemies still figures into God's plan. Their pulse is proof: God hasn't given up on them. They may be out of God's will, but not out of God's reach. You honor God when you see them, not as God's failures, but as God's projects.

THE BENEFIT OF HEALTHY COUNSEL

Hurting people hang with hurting people. We love those who commiserate and avoid those who correct. Yet correction and direction are what we need.

I discovered the importance of healthy counsel in a half-Ironman triathlon. After the 1.2 mile swim and the 56 mile bike ride, I didn't have much energy left for the 13.1 mile run. Neither did the fellow jogging next to me. I asked him how he was doing and soon regretted posing the question.

"This stinks. This race is the dumbest decision I've ever made." He had more complaints than a taxpayer at the IRS. My response to him? "Goodbye." I knew if I listened too long, I'd start agreeing with him.

I caught up with a sixty-six-year-old grandmother. Her tone was just the opposite. "You'll finish this," she encouraged. "It's hot, but at least it's not raining. One step at a time . . . Don't forget to hydrate. . . Stay in there." I ran next to her until my heart was lifted and legs were aching. I finally had to slow down. "No problem," she waved as she kept going.

Which of the two describes the counsel you seek? "Refuse good advice and watch your plans fail; take good counsel and watch them succeed" (Prov. 15:22 The Message).

Be quick to pray, seek healthy counsel, and don't give up.

LIFE'S GIANT-SIZED QUESTION

I can get lost anywhere. Seriously, anywhere. The simplest map confuses me; the clearest trail bewilders me. I couldn't track an elephant through four feet of snow. I can misread instructions to the bathroom down the hall. Indeed, once I did and embarrassed several women in a fast food restaurant in Fort Worth.

My list of mishaps reads like comedy ideas for the Pink Panther.

- I once got lost in my hotel. I told the receptionist my key wasn't working, only to realize I'd been on the wrong floor trying to open the wrong door.
- Several years ago I was convinced my car had been stolen from the airport parking garage. It hadn't, I was in the wrong garage.
- I once boarded the wrong flight and awoke in the wrong city.
- While driving from Houston to San Antonio, I exited the freeway to gas up. I re-entered the freeway and drove for thirty minutes before I realized I was heading back to Houston.
- While in Seattle, I left my hotel room in plenty of time for my speaking engagement, but when I saw highway signs advertising the Canadian border, I knew I'd be late.
- I once went for a morning jog, returned to the hotel and ate. I'd eaten two portions of the free buffet before I remembered; my hotel had no breakfast bar. I was in the wrong place.

If geese had my sense of direction, they'd spend winters in Alaska. I can relate to Columbus, who, as they say, didn't know where he was going when he left; didn't know where he was when he got there, he didn't know where he had been when he got back.

Can you relate? Of course you can. We've all scratched our heads a time or two; if not at highway intersections, at least at the crossroads of life. The best of navigators have wondered:

- Do I take the job or leave it?
- Accept the marriage proposal or pass?
- Leave home or remain home?
- Build or buy?

One of life's giant-sized questions is: *How can I know what God wants me to do?*

CONSULT YOUR MAKER

The God who guided David, guides you. You simply need to consult your Maker. I wish I'd sought counsel before I made a recent decision. I awoke early one morning for a meeting. When searching for some breakfast, I spotted a baggie of cookies in the kitchen.

Denalyn and Sara had just attended a school bake sale so I thought, *What great luck! Breakfast cookies. Denalyn must have set them out for me.*

I ate one and found it very chewy, almost gummy. *Interesting texture*, I thought, *reminds me of Pita bread*. I ate a second. The taste was a bit subtle for my preference, but when mixed with coffee, it made for an interesting option. I grabbed a third for the road. I would have grabbed the fourth, but only one remained, so I left it for Denalyn.

Later in the day, she phoned. "Looks like someone has been in the baggie."

"It was me," I admitted. "I've had better breakfast cookies, but those weren't bad."

"Those weren't breakfast cookies, Max."

"They weren't?"

"No."

"What were they?"

"Homemade dog biscuits."

"Oh ..." That explained a lot. That explained the gummy texture and the tasteless taste. That also explained why, all day, each time I scratched my belly my leg kicked. (Not to mention my sudden interest in fire hydrants.)

I should've consulted the maker. We need to consult ours. Discover his direction by marinating your mind in his writing...

You have a Bible? Read it.

IT SEEMED GOOD TO ME

Some years ago, Denalyn and I were a signature away from moving from one house to another. The structure was nice and price was fair...it seemed a wise move. But I didn't feel peaceful about it. The project stirred unease and restlessness. I finally drove to the builder's office and removed my name from his list. To this day, I can't pinpoint the source of the discomfort. I just didn't feel peaceful about it.

A few months ago I was asked to speak at a racial unity conference. I intended to decline, but couldn't bring myself to do so. The event kept surfacing in my mind like a cork in a lake. Finally, I agreed. Returning from the event, I still couldn't explain the impression to be there. But I felt peaceful about the decision and that was enough.

Sometimes a choice just “feels” right. When Luke justified the writing of his Gospel to Theophilus, he said: “Since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus” (1:3 NIV).

Did you note the phrase, “it seemed good to me”? These words reflect a person standing at the crossroads. Luke pondered his options and selected the path that “seems good.” (91)

GOD WANTS US TO DANCE

David-the-giant-killer becomes David-the-two-stepper. He’s the mayor of Dublin on St. Patrick’s Day, hopping and bopping at the head of the parade.

And, if that’s not enough, he strips down to the ephod, the linen prayer vest. It covers the same amount of territory as a long T-shirt. Right there in front of God and the altar and everyone else, David removes all but his holy skivvies. (Envision the President escaping the Oval Office and cartwheeling down Pennsylvania Avenue in his Fruit-of-the-Looms.)

David dances and we duck. We hold our breath. We know what’s coming. We read about Uzzah. We know what God does to the irreverent and cocky. Apparently, David wasn’t paying attention. For here he is, in the full presence of God and God’s children, doing a jig in his undergarment. Hold your breath and call the undertaker. So long, King David. Prepare to be fried, flambéed, and fricasseed.

But nothing happens. The sky is silent and David keeps twirling, and we are left wondering. Doesn’t the dance bother God? What does David have that Uzzah didn’t? Why isn’t the heavenly father angered?

For the same reason I wasn’t. They don’t do it now, but when my daughters were toddlers they would dance when I came home. My car in the driveway was their signal to strike up the band. “Daddy’s here!” they’d declare, bursting through the door. Right there in the front lawn they would dance. Flamboyantly. With chocolate on their faces and diapers on their bottoms, they would promenade about for all the neighbors to see.

Did it bother me? Was I angered? Was I concerned what people would think? Did I tell them to straighten up and act mature? Absolutely not.

Did God tell David to behave? No. He let him dance.

ILLUSTRATING GOD’S LOVE

Heaven knows you could use some inspiration. People can exhaust you. And there are times when all we can do is not enough. When a spouse chooses to leave, we cannot force him or her to stay. When a spouse abuses, we shouldn’t stay. The best of love can go unrequited. I don’t, for a moment, intend to minimize the challenges some of you face. You’re tired. You’re angry. You’re disappointed. This isn’t the marriage you expected or the life you wanted. But looming in your past is a promise you made.

May I urge you to do all you can to keep it? To give it one more try?

Why should you? So you can understand the depth of God’s love.

When you love the unloving, you get a glimpse of what God does for you. When you keep the porch light on for the prodigal child, when you do what is right even though you have been done wrong, when you love the weak and the sick, you do what God does every single moment. Covenant keeping enrolls you in the postgraduate school of God’s love.

Is this why God has given you this challenge? When you love liars, cheaters, and heartbreakers, are you not doing what God has done for us? Pay attention to and take notes on your struggles. God invites you to understand his love. He also wants you to illustrate it.

My mother did with my father. I remember watching her care for him in his final months. ALS had sucked life from every muscle in his body. She did for him what mothers do for infants. She bathed, fed, and dressed him. She placed a hospital bed in the den of our house and made him her mission. If she complained, I never heard it. If she frowned, I never saw it. What I heard and saw was a covenant keeper. "This is what love does," her actions announced as she powdered his body, shaved his face, and washed his sheets. She modeled the power of a promise kept. God calls on you to do the same. Illustrate stubborn love. Incarnate fidelity. God is giving you a Mephibosheth-sized chance to show your children and your neighbors what real love does.

Embrace it. Who knows? Someone may tell your story of loyalty to illustrate the loyalty of God.

HIGH AND MIGHTY

We can understand David's other struggles. His fear of Saul, long stretches hiding in the wilderness. We've been there. But David, high and mighty? David's balcony is one place we've never been.

Or have we?

I wasn't on a balcony, but I was on a flight. And I didn't watch a woman bathe, but I did watch an airline attendant fumble. She couldn't do anything right. Order soda and she'd bring juice. Ask for a pillow and she'd bring a blanket, if she brought anything at all.

And I started to grumble. Not out loud, but in my thoughts. *What's the matter with service these days?* I suppose I was feeling a bit smug. I'd just been a guest speaker at an event. People told me how lucky they were that I had come. I don't know what was loonier: the fact that they said it or that I believed it. So, I boarded the plane feeling cocky. I had to tilt my head to enter the doorway. I took my seat knowing the flight was safe, since heaven knows, I'm essential to the work of God.

Then I asked for the soda, the pillow . . . she blew the assignments and I growled. Do you see what I was doing? Placing myself higher than the airline attendant. In the pecking order of the plane, she was below me. Her job was to serve and my job was to be served.

Now, don't look at me like that. Haven't you felt a bit superior to someone? A parking lot attendant. The clerk at the grocery store. The peanut seller at the game. The employee at the coat check. You've done what I did. And we've done what David did. We've lost our sight and hearing.

When I looked at the airline attendant, I didn't see a human being; I saw a necessary commodity. But her question changed all that.

"Mr. Lucado?" Imagine my surprise when the airline attendant knelt beside my seat. "Are you the one who writes the Christian books?"

Christian books, yes. Christian thoughts, that's another matter, I said to myself, descending the balcony stairs. "May I talk to you?" she asked. Her eyes misted and her heart opened and she filled the next three or four minutes with her pain. Divorce papers had arrived that morning. Her husband wouldn't return her calls. She didn't know where she was going to live. She could hardly focus on work. Would I pray for her?

I did. But both God and I knew she was not the only one needing prayer.

Perhaps you could use a prayer too? How is your hearing? Do you hear the servants whom God sends? Do you hear the conscience that God stirs?

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