

DR. R. TIMOTHY JONES

THRIVE

TURNING PRINCIPLE INTO PRACTICE



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Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

HEBREWS 12:1-2

*My mission in life is not merely to survive,
but to thrive; and to do so with some passion,
some compassion, some humor, and some style.*

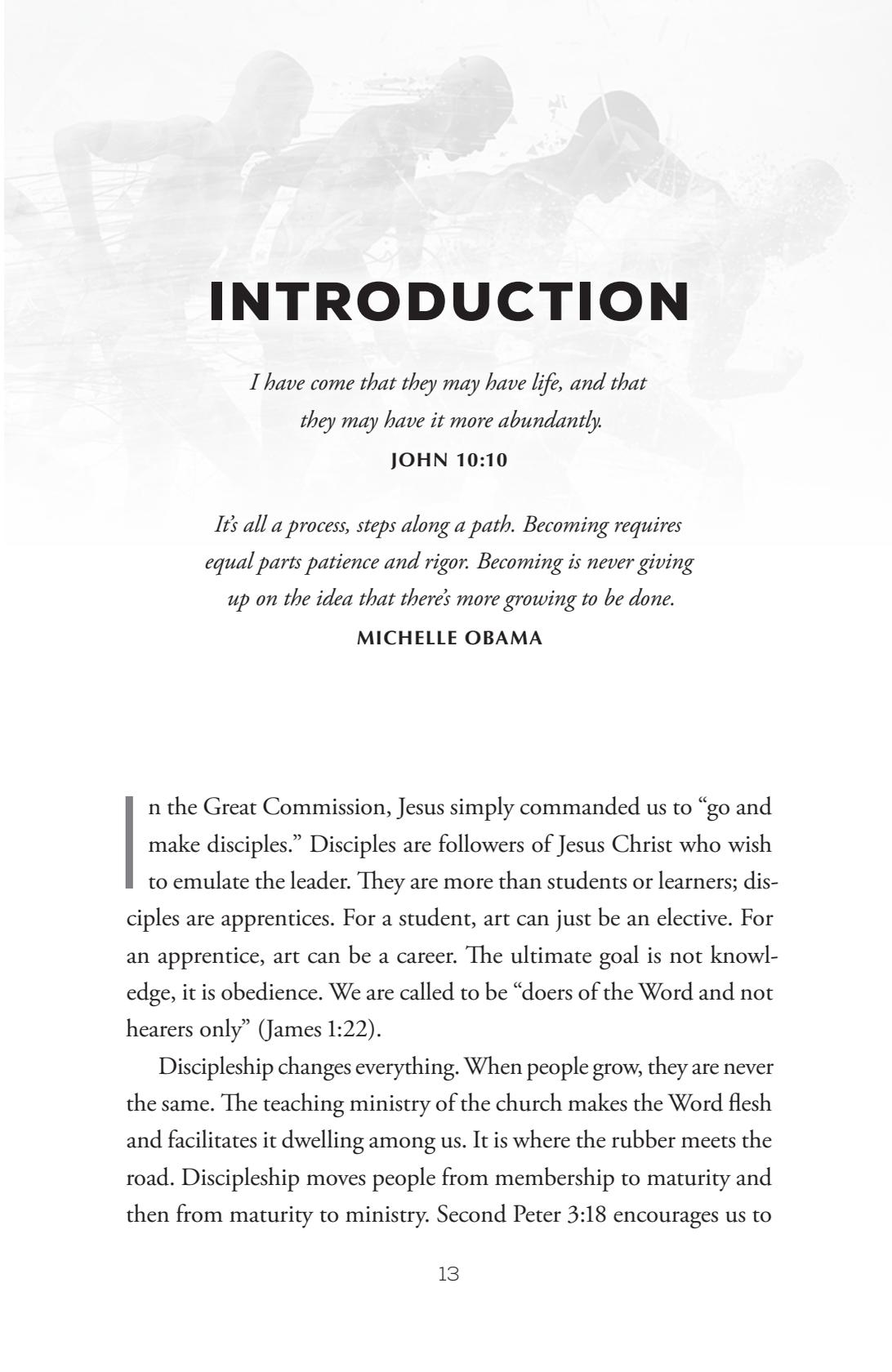
MAYA ANGELOU



*This book is dedicated to every disciple of the
Lord Jesus Christ who has a desire to thrive.*

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INTRODUCTION

I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

JOHN 10:10

It's all a process, steps along a path. Becoming requires equal parts patience and rigor. Becoming is never giving up on the idea that there's more growing to be done.

MICHELLE OBAMA

In the Great Commission, Jesus simply commanded us to “go and make disciples.” Disciples are followers of Jesus Christ who wish to emulate the leader. They are more than students or learners; disciples are apprentices. For a student, art can just be an elective. For an apprentice, art can be a career. The ultimate goal is not knowledge, it is obedience. We are called to be “doers of the Word and not hearers only” (James 1:22).

Discipleship changes everything. When people grow, they are never the same. The teaching ministry of the church makes the Word flesh and facilitates it dwelling among us. It is where the rubber meets the road. Discipleship moves people from membership to maturity and then from maturity to ministry. Second Peter 3:18 encourages us to

“grow in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Grace represents practice and knowledge represents principle.

This resource seeks to turn principle into practice in enlightening and engaging ways. Volume 1 has six lessons that command us to surrender completely, pray fervently, think differently, worship faithfully, live holy, and speak wisely. Volume 2 has an additional six lessons that challenge us to grow intentionally, love unconditionally, serve selflessly, give cheerfully, fight courageously, and witness boldly. These lessons demonstrate what it means to walk consistently with God and to flourish in the faith.

Hebrews 12 illustrates what it means to thrive. It infers that we can excel in the faith when we rid ourselves of sin and other distractions while focusing on Jesus Christ who is the author and finisher of our faith. We are not just called away from something (sin), we are called to someone (Jesus Christ).

While this book can be read individually, it is best used in small group settings over several weeks. It was designed to be both a study and a journey. A study becomes a journey when people grow together, serve together, and care for one another. We believe community is the best environment for discipleship. The objective is to connect people to God and to each other. Ecclesiastes 4:9 says, “Two are better than one.” Thus, we believe spiritual growth happens best in community. Small groups offer several benefits, such as accountability, connection, and encouragement.

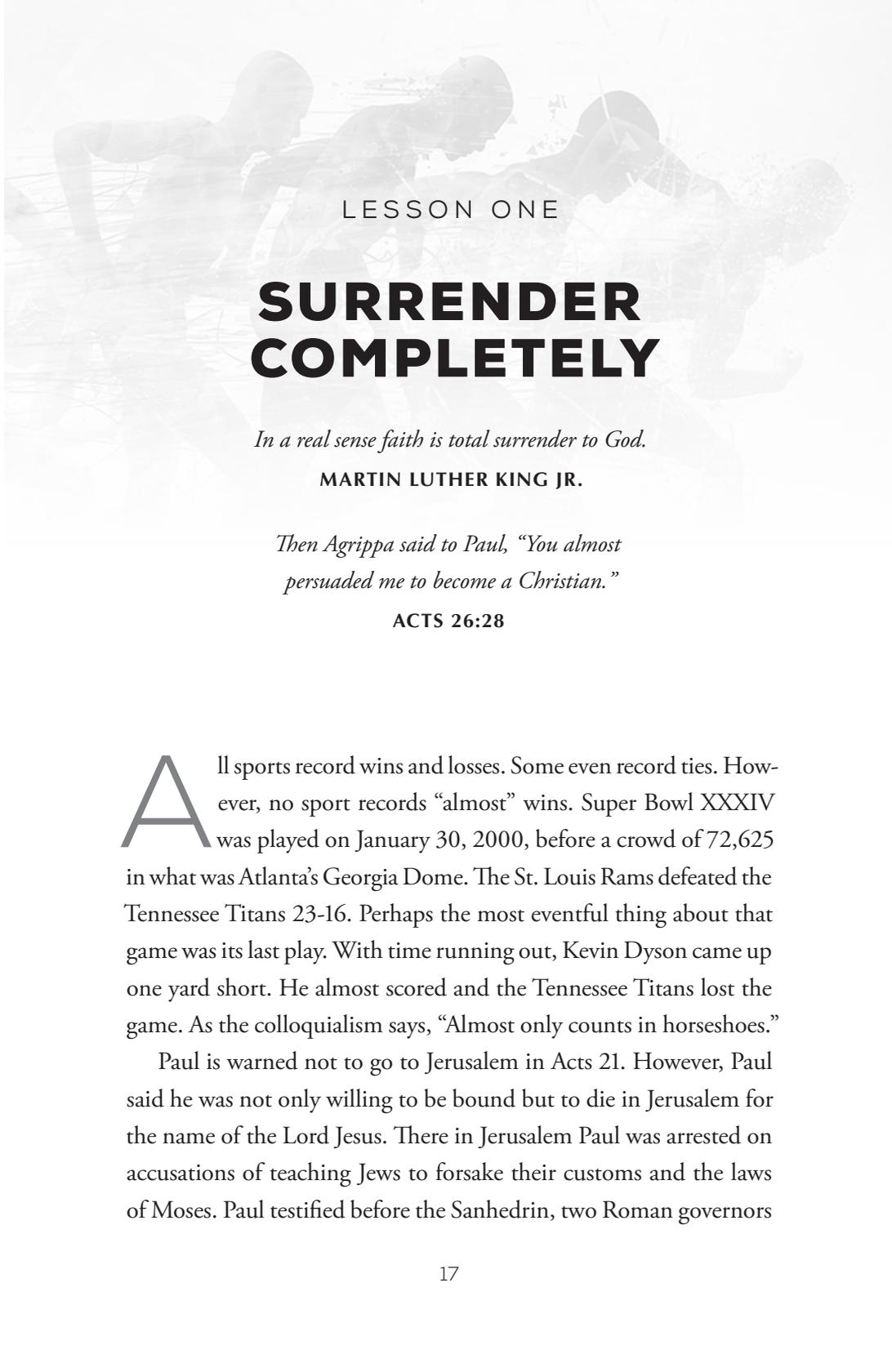
Community means that people come together around the table, not just to feed their bodies, but also to feed their minds and their relationships.

HENRI J. M. NOUWEN

Small groups provide opportunities for people to be heard as healing begins with hearing. Small groups open the door for the right questions which pave the way to the right answers. In small groups, rows are turned into circles wherein people can be visible and valued.

Let's grow!

Dr. R. Timothy Jones



LESSON ONE

SURRENDER COMPLETELY

In a real sense faith is total surrender to God.

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

Then Agrippa said to Paul, “You almost persuaded me to become a Christian.”

ACTS 26:28

All sports record wins and losses. Some even record ties. However, no sport records “almost” wins. Super Bowl XXXIV was played on January 30, 2000, before a crowd of 72,625 in what was Atlanta’s Georgia Dome. The St. Louis Rams defeated the Tennessee Titans 23-16. Perhaps the most eventful thing about that game was its last play. With time running out, Kevin Dyson came up one yard short. He almost scored and the Tennessee Titans lost the game. As the colloquialism says, “Almost only counts in horseshoes.”

Paul is warned not to go to Jerusalem in Acts 21. However, Paul said he was not only willing to be bound but to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. There in Jerusalem Paul was arrested on accusations of teaching Jews to forsake their customs and the laws of Moses. Paul testified before the Sanhedrin, two Roman governors

(Felix and Festus) and even King Agrippa. After hearing Paul's testimony, King Agrippa said, "You almost persuaded me to become a Christian."

Paul replied, "I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains" (Acts 26:29). King Agrippa was so close, yet so far. Romans 10:9 says, "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." For the average human the mouth is roughly fourteen inches from the heart. While the sinner is a heart-beat from hell, the sinner is also fourteen inches from heaven.

THE ALMOST CHRISTIAN

No one wants to hear their spouse say, "I almost love you." Vance Havner said, "A person who is 85 percent faithful to their spouse is not faithful at all." A little boy was overheard praying, "Lord, if you can't make me a better boy, don't worry about it. I'm having a real good time like I am." Unfortunately, there are people who are content with "almost." They are satisfied with a DIY (do it yourself) religion with a "god on demand"—a god who works on their terms and around their schedules. But is an "almost" Christian even a Christian?

*"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,'
shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who
does the will of My Father in heaven."*

MATTHEW 7:21

There are people who want Christ but not His Church. The problem with this idea is the head cannot be detached from the body.

Colossians 1:18 says that Jesus Christ is the head of the Church. Colossians 1:24 says the church is the body of Christ. How can Jesus Christ be the head of someone's life if that person is not a part of His body?

There are mistakes churches cannot afford to make. We cannot focus on membership at the expense of discipleship. It would be egregious to have full sanctuaries but empty people. Discipleship challenges people to "grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). We cannot compromise conviction for convenience. This typically produces casual Christians. These people don't just come as they are, they come and go as they please. The casual Christian believes in Christ; the committed Christian belongs to Christ.

We should not pursue happiness without holiness. Enjoying our lives should never break the heart of God. Hebrews 12:14 (NIV) says, "Without holiness no one will see the Lord." Thus, holiness should trump happiness. In *I Am a Church Member*, Thom Rainer cites an unproductive cycle of church membership. First, a person gets excited about a church. After discovering its imperfections, they become discouraged, leave that church, and the cycle starts over. The reality is every church is as imperfect as we are.

In Matthew 22, Jesus told a parable of a king who prepared a great wedding feast for his son. When the banquet was ready, he sent his servants to notify the invited guests. Unfortunately, the preferred guests refused two invitations. A third invitation was extended to anyone who wished to come. Finally, the banquet hall was filled with guests. Then a most unlikely thing happened: The king noticed a man who was not wearing the proper attire and had him removed from the feast. *But why?*

In that culture, invited guests were expected to wear formal garments to special occasions, as fine, white, clean linen was an emblem

of purity and righteousness. After extending the general invitation, the king knew that some people would show up who could not afford the attire. In that case, formal garments were provided by the king—at no charge! It was considered an insult to the king to refuse to wear the proper wedding garments, so the man in the parable was thrown out because he refused to change.

The man wanted to be in the palace enjoying the banquet. He wanted to eat, drink, and be merry but he did not want to change. The fate of those who wished to accept the invitation on their own terms is the same as that of those who declined the invitation altogether.

*Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature:
old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

THE ALTOGETHER CHRISTIAN

God is calling us to complete surrender—“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1). The irony of a living sacrifice is that its efficacy is in its death. Jesus further adds, “If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24 ESV). That is the cost of discipleship: EVERYTHING!

One day a woman rushed up to famed violinist Fritz Kreisler after a concert and cried, “I’d give my life to play as beautifully as you do.” Kreisler replied, “I did.”

Mary, the mother of Jesus, is a perfect portrait of what complete surrender looks like. She was a teenage virgin who was engaged

to Joseph when the angel Gabriel visited her announcing that she would bring forth a Son and call His name Jesus. Mary asked, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?” The angel declared that the child would be conceived of the Holy Spirit and be called the Son of God.

And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”

LUKE 1:38 ESV

The angel said she was “highly favored.” Elizabeth said she was “blessed among women.” Though Mary had very little, she was “blessed and highly favored.” In recent generations, to be blessed and highly favored has become synonymous with prominence and possessions. However, the favor of God on one’s life is so much more than health and wealth. For Mary, it was about purpose—“I am the Lord’s servant.” The question was asked, “How can you tell if you have a servant attitude?” Someone answered, “By the way you react when you are treated like one.”

“Is Your All on the Altar?”

*You have longed for sweet peace,
And for faith to increase,
And have earnestly, fervently prayed;
But you cannot have rest,
Or be perfectly blest,
Until all on the altar is laid.*

*Is your all on the altar of sacrifice laid?
Your heart does the Spirit control?*

*You can only be blest,
And have peace and sweet rest,
As you yield Him your body and soul.*

FANNY J. CROSBY

PRAYER

Father, thank You for loving us and sending Your Son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sins. Help us to love You with the totality of our hearts, minds, and souls as well as with all our strength. Amen.

SCRIPTURES (READ AND REFLECT)

Psalm 37:5

Luke 10:27

1 Corinthians 6:19

1 Thessalonians 5:16–18

THINK ABOUT IT

Christ is either Lord of all, or He is not Lord at all.

JAMES HUDSON TAYLOR

*Taking up my cross means
a life voluntarily surrendered to God.*

A. W. PINK

*My trust in God flows out of the experience
of His loving me, day in and day out.*

DESMOND TUTU

7. What does it mean to put your all on the altar?

