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### **WHAT IF WE WERE LED BY KINDNESS?**

Hal Donaldson tells about the worst day of his life: “On August 25, 1969, at 7:35 PM, a persuasive knock catapulted my two brothers and me and our babysitter to the door. Two police officers had come to deliver a message: our parents’ car had been hit head-on by a drunken driver. Our 37-year-old Dad was dead and our Mom was fighting for her life. Instantly pain and fear converged into a typhoon of tears. My 5-year-old sister, Susan, fell into the babysitter’s arms and cried, ‘I want my Mommy and Daddy.’

Like a flash mob, friends and neighbors gathered in the front yard. One of the officers addressed the crowd: ‘Are there any family members or friends here who will take responsibility for the children tonight, or we’ll take them downtown to the station.’

A young couple, Bill and Louvada Davis, volunteered. But the one night sleepover lasted longer than anyone could imagine. For many months, while Mom recovered from fractures and internal injuries, we lived with the Davises and their children in a single-wide trailer. There weren’t enough beds for ten people, so we took turns sleeping on the floor. The Davises sacrificed their privacy and drained their savings account so four children could have a place to live. Louvada spent her days cooking, cleaning, and folding laundry. Bill worked extra hours at the rock quarry to feed his small army.

Slowly, our mother regained her health and learned to walk again. She took a job as a mail clerk so that we eventually could move into a place of our own. Our dad didn’t have life insurance. Neither did the man who hit them. So we learned about the shame of poverty. We lived on food stamps and arrived at school with holes in our shoes.

Occasionally bitterness reared its ugly head. But the Davises were always nearby to offer a helping hand and parental advice: ‘Don’t allow the tragedy of your childhood to become a lifelong excuse,’ Bill

said, ‘because where you start in life doesn’t have to dictate where you end.’

In time, my resentment began to subside, and I turned my attention to escaping from poverty. I graduated from college. My priority was success: earning money, raising a family, traveling the world. I told myself, *Someday, I’ll give back and help the less fortunate, but my career has to come first.*

But I wasn’t in complete control of my destiny. In my travels, I came face-to-face with people who were suffering and in need: an orphaned boy without shoes, a homeless mother clutching her lifeless child, a Vietnam War vet who had lost his legs, a desperate unemployed man. The Davises’ example spoke to me again and again. I knew that the path to true happiness and fulfillment doesn’t come by climbing the socioeconomic ladder. Something had to change.

One day in 1994, I made a decision that would change my life. It began with a couple of simple questions: *What if a person was led by kindness and took his eyes off himself and focused on the needs of others? What difference could he really make?*

The impact of my decision was immediate. Like a magnet, kindness pulled me towards spiritual transformation. With each passing day, “success” became more distasteful to me. I began seeing that what we call success is just a nice word for selfishness. I was far from perfect, but I found myself searching for ways to serve others and offer hope and encouragement. Along with my two brothers and several friends, we began loading pickup trucks and U-Haul trailers with groceries and supplies and distributing them to poor working families in California. We didn’t know it then, but that was the first step toward Convoy of Hope - a global humanitarian relief organization that has since served more than 80 million people.

My decision was inspired by the Davises’ decision. They could have said they didn’t have enough money or space to rescue four kids. They could have shed a tear and walked away. But they

made a very costly decision to rescue us. Their decision changed our lives and, years later, inspired the founding of Convoy of Hope.

What do you plan to do during the next 24 hours? I invite you to make a simple decision: *During the next 24 hours I am going to be kind to every person that crosses my path. I am going to leave self-centeredness behind and invest in the lives of others. I want this next 24 hours to become a lifestyle.* Along the journey, you will discover that each day is filled with new opportunities to make the world a little kinder: opening a door, flashing a smile, saying, ‘Thank you,’ letting others go first, apologizing for a mistake, paying for a meal, complimenting the waiter, greeting a stranger, giving a kid a high-five, and much more. On the surface, these actions appear insignificant, but collectively they have the power to make the world a different place. And it will definitely make your world a different place.

(From the book, Your Next 24 Hours, by Hal Donaldson.)

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### **THE SECRET HIDDEN IN BOREDOM**

Bobby Schuler is one of my favorite preachers (7:30 PM, Saturdays, on TBN) and seems to always come up with hidden gems. (I wish my Grampa had built the Crystal Cathedral.) He just came up with an insight about boredom that I think he said he got from Dallas Willard that we need to consider:

Boredom is a universal emotional/spiritual problem.

If Boredom is not controlled, it becomes Loneliness, which is a painful emotional condition. We in the West immediately deal with Boredom and Loneliness by leaping into Netflix, Facebook, Video Games, Sports venues, Carnival Cruises, etc.

If instead of escaping Boredom we lean into it and embrace it, eventually it will turn into Solitude. Solitude is different from Loneliness. There is a deep, quiet consciousness of God at work in Solitude.

Solitude, eventually, leads into Creativity. A writer gets an inspiration for a new book. A musician gets a new song. A businessman has a dream about an out-of-the-box solution to his problem. A seeker after God receives revelation.

Nothing is wasted in our lives. God can even use Boredom to lead us closer to Him.

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### **WHY DOES GOD WANT “GLORY”?**

For many years it bothered me when I read in the Bible that God wanted glory, that He wanted us to praise Him, to glorify Him, etc. I knew it wasn’t good to have bad thoughts about God, but I did. I thought, does God have a big ego, or what?

I would read, *God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. He is good, and His love endures forever. Taste and see that the Lord is good. You are forgiving and good, O Lord. You are good and what you do is good.* (Etc., for hundreds of times.) But then I would think, “But why does He need our glory, our praise, etc.?”

I have come to an understanding about this, but I am not sure it is Biblical, so would you please think about it and let me know your thoughts:

The word ego is defined: “A person’s sense of self-esteem or self-worth. Your ego can prevent your hearing critical but necessary feedback from others.” If I have been thinking that God needs a little corrective feedback from me, maybe I better not go outside in a lightning storm. And if my thoughts about God’s character are in the slightest sense accusatory, guess who “the accuser” is according to the Bible?

What I have concluded is that God doesn’t have an ego at all. The Bible declares that “God is love.” Love is focused on others, never on the self. Love loses itself, denies itself, sacrifices itself (the cross) for its care of others. Love humbles itself, washes the feet of others, forgets itself.

Then I have remembered how God has treated me over the years. It is impossible for me to summarize how kind, forgiving, compassionate, and patient God has been with me. Just like the Bible says He is. My big problem over the years has been my desire for glory. When God blessed me by calling me to be a preacher and pastor, I even attempted to steal God’s glory.

What I have concluded is that God doesn’t need our praise and glory, but He desires it because that is the only safe place for us. When I glorify and praise God, then I turn away from glorifying and praising myself. It’s either God’s Kingdom or my kingdom.

“Oh, God, *your Kingdom come, your will be done in earth* (in me, the one you made out of the dirt of earth) *as it is in heaven.*”

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## COWARDS GO TO HELL?

There is a verse almost at the end of the Bible that puzzled me for a long time. (Lots of things in the Bible puzzle me, but this one really raised questions.) It is in Revelation 21:8, and reads:

*But cowards, unbelievers, the corrupt, murderers, the immoral, those who practice witchcraft, idol worshipers, and all liars - their fate is in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.*

Every time I read that verse, I would think, “What? Cowards? God, why such a horrible fate for people who are overwhelmed and defeated by fear? They are just weak people. They can’t help it if they are fearful.”

I think I reacted that way because I had such a struggle with fear in growing up, and I felt myself to be a coward. I wanted to be like my Dad, who was an unusually strong, courageous man. But much to my distress I was more like my Mom. She had a terrible, abusive childhood with an evil father, and it wounded her so deeply that she never fully recovered. John Eldredge says that every boy grows up with a question in his mind, “Do I have what it takes to be a man?” I was afraid that I didn’t.

Over the years God started helping me overcome my fears. A big insight came when I learned that a person can be tormented by a “spirit of fear” that comes down through the generations. When I identified that spirit, renounced it, and cast it out, it was a huge breakthrough. Then I learned through Joyce Meyer and others that when God tells people in the Bible to “Fear not!” He is not commanding them not to feel fear. We can’t command our feelings. He is telling them not to yield to their feelings but to go on and do what they are supposed to do in spite of any feelings of fear. When we do that, the feelings go away and we start having respect for ourselves. Life kept putting me in fearful situations where I had to learn to ignore my feelings and obey and trust God.

Then I read Scott Peck’s book, People of the Lie, and his confrontation with one of his patients really opened my understanding. (Scott Peck is a Christian psychiatrist, which sounds like an oxymoron.) He was counseling a man who told him

that he had “made a pact with the devil.” He had promised the devil his soul and the soul of his son if the devil would take from him (the father) his obsessions and compulsions. Scott admitted that at that time he didn’t know if there was a literal devil, but he was sure that what this guy had done was dangerous. Scott really unloaded on the man, as follows:

“George, you have a defect, a weakness, in your character. It is the cause of all the difficulties we’ve been talking about. It is the cause of your bad marriage, of your obsessions and compulsions, and now it’s the cause of your pact with the devil. Basically, George, you’re a kind of a coward. Whenever the going gets a little bit rough, you sell out. When you’re faced with the realization that you’re going to die one of these days, you run away from it. You don’t think about it because it’s “morbid.” When you’re faced with the realization that your marriage is lousy, you run away from that too. Instead of facing it and doing something about it, you put it out of your mind and refuse to deal with it. Then because you always run away from things that are really inescapable, they come to haunt you in the form of your obsessions and compulsions. Instead of perceiving your symptoms as a message that things in your life need to be faced and dealt with, you run away by making a pact with the devil!

“Easy, that’s a key word for you, George. You like to think of yourself as easygoing. Joe Cool. I suppose you are easygoing, but I don’t know where you’re going easy except into hell. You’re always looking for the easy way out, George. Not the right way. When you’re faced with a choice between the right way and the easy way, you take the easy way every time. The painless way. You will do anything to find the easy way out, even if it means selling your soul to the devil and sacrificing your son.

“You said you are feeling guilty. Good! If you didn’t feel bad about taking the easy way out, no matter what, then I wouldn’t be able to help you. Psychotherapy is not the easy way out, it’s a way of facing things even if they are painful. If you’re willing to face the painful realities of your life - your terrorized childhood, your miserable marriage, your mortality, your own cowardice - I can be of some assistance. But if all you want is the easiest possible relief from pain, then I expect that you are the devil’s man.”

George recognized the truth in what Scott said, that he had been hiding from anything that would cause him pain. He said, “What you’re asking me to do is to voluntarily return to a state of torment, to

actually choose a state of pain. I'm not sure I can do it. I'm not sure I am willing to do it." But that evening was a turning point in George's therapy. He started facing his feelings of anger, frustration, anxiety, depression, sadness, grief, and his fears of the transience of existence. His marriage started getting better, and he started growing up."

I (Glenn) have been seeing for a long time that one of the basic things that draws people to addictions and the power that holds them there is fear of pain and refusal to face reality. We call it "a way of coping." It is simply escapism, denial.

Life is painful. Just run to your bottle, or to your pot or cocaine or meth or porn. Don't face it, don't think about it. Don't deal with it. The Bible says, ***For he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.*** (1 Peter 4:1)

My daughter, Jeannine, had the courage to obey God and stop her 30-year addiction to gambling. She always knew she was using gambling to escape and cope with the pain in her life situation. She finally listened to God when He told her to stop it and to trust Him. She went through withdrawal, depression, emotional and physical pain, nightmares, weeping, temptations to suicide. (Suicide is the coward's way out, whether it is the fast way with a gun or the slow way with a bottle, needle, or pills.) For many years now she has been one of the leaders on a big internet Gamblers Anonymous site and has helped many people around the world come to terms with their addictions.

After I accepted Christ, I can remember times when I was trying to bring my flesh and my addictions into line with my profession of faith. I can remember thinking, "This is so hard. I can't do it. I don't want to do it. Christianity is probably all in your mind anyway. It's a bunch of myths. It's probably not objectively true. And most of the church people are hypocrites." But something way down deep was saying to me, "It's so doggone difficult, it must be true." I knew in my heart that the easy way is the way to destruction. And I knew that no matter what other people were doing, this was between me and God and it was more important than I could possibly imagine.

What is this crazy religion telling us to do anyway? Well, it is demanding some outrageous things of us: "Don't lie. Don't steal. Don't murder people with your hands or your words. Be faithful to your wife. Be a good example to your kids and spend time with them. Don't criticize people behind their backs. Be kind to people. Forgive those who

offend you. Live a life of love. Seek to know God as your heavenly Father, as your Dad. Stop acting like some sort of God. Humble yourself. Stop giving in to your sexual urges. Live a life of purity. Don't be greedy, be a giver. Be loyal to your spouse, your employer, and your country. Don't allow some stupid addiction to control you and ruin your life."

Yes, these are the kinds of unreasonable things that Christ asks us to do. And they are so difficult to do, so contrary to our fallen nature, that we can't do them without His help. So He promises to give us grace and strength to enable us to do them. And He does! *For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases Him.* (Philippians 2:13, NLT)

Jesus constantly encourages us that we can do it with His help. But He is brutally honest about the difficulty of the Christian path:

*You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. (It's EASY!) But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is DIFFICULT, and only a few ever find it.* (Matthew 7:13-14)

Friends, life is a test. God tells us clearly and consistently all through the Bible that, *It is given unto man once to die, and then the judgment.* Let us read and meditate once again on the promise and the warning in Revelation 21:7-8:

*All who are victorious will inherit all these blessings, and I will be their God, and they will be my children. But cowards, unbelievers, the corrupt, murderers, the immoral, those who practice witchcraft, idol worshipers, and all liars - their fate is in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.*

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