

WAKING UP SLOWLY

*Spiritual lessons from my dog, my kids, critters,
and other unexpected places*



Dave Burchett

Author of the heartwarming book *Stay*



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Waking Up Slowly: Spiritual Lessons from My Dog, My Kids, Critters, and Other Unexpected Places

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Introduction



A NUMBER OF MY BOOK IDEAS end up in a Dumpster, but I never dreamed I would find a book idea standing next to one! The television trailers where I direct major-league baseball games are located well outside the beautifully manicured grass of the Texas Rangers' home field and near the containers that collect the daily garbage of forty thousand baseball fans. I live a glamorous life.

In that unlikely place I saw the unmistakable smile of my friend Mike as he walked toward me. "I am so glad to see you!" I said, giving him a hug. It was the first time I had seen Mike since his detox from prescription-pill addiction. We had been walking together through his life-and-death battle with these drugs. In fact, he read an early version of my previous book *Stay* during his detox agony and found some help in those stories.

"I went to my first Narcotics Anonymous meeting today," Mike said.

"What was that experience like?"

"It was one of the hardest but, at the same time, one of

the best days of my life,” he said solemnly. “I stood up and told a room full of strangers that I am an addict.”

I listened while he continued to describe the scene.

“When I admitted my addiction, the meeting stopped.”

“What do you mean, it stopped?” I asked.

“Every single person in the room walked over to my chair, hugged me, and told me that I was the most important person in the room today.”

I felt chills. All of us dream about that kind of community. Every person recognized the importance of Mike taking that painful first step of admitting that he had a problem and he needed help.

But my Dumpster devotion was not finished.

“I looked around the room after that moment of love and affirmation,” Mike recounted, “and I realized something sad. In the past, if I had seen many of these same people on the street, I would have made harsh judgments, jokes, or mean comments about their appearance.”

That hit my heart. I have been so judgmental of others without taking a moment of my precious time to hear their stories.

Later, I reflected on the remarkable experience my friend had shared. I asked God to open my heart to see how He could teach me through the people I would not normally seek out. God often uses the “least of these” more remarkably than the pretty and powerful. Mike had given me a profound and sacred moment by a Dumpster. I wondered how many times I had stumbled over other sacred moments because I was too self-absorbed to notice.

I am inviting you to my own gathering of need and confession, as I stand and haltingly admit some hard truths about myself.

Hi, my name is Dave, and I am proud, hypocritical, and judgmental. I am addicted to praise. I get distracted by the insignificant and stub my toe on the sacred every day without noticing. If you can stand, smile kindly, and shout out, “Hi, Dave,” then we may have some things to learn together on this journey. You are the most important person in the room right now. Let’s learn together how to enjoy God and one another more fully in the moment.

The Premise: Living More Fully

For the threescore years and some change that I have been on this planet, I have operated like the George Harrison lyric, “If you don’t know where you’re going, any road will take you there.” Of course, I have a daily to-do list. I make regular plans to advance my career and for my family’s activities. But every morning I wake up and basically let daily circumstances affect my mood, my productivity, and my happiness. I suspect I am not alone in that routine.

If only I took my cue from my rescued Labrador friend, Maggie, who can capture a playful moment at the drop of a hat—er, toy. Just now, Maggie walked through the room, spotted her red, oversize squeaky bone, leapt through the air to grab it, and started a game. *That* is living in the moment.

Maggie’s ability to live fully and joyfully in the moment amuses and even inspires me. The sad reality is that I dismiss my canine friend’s talent to enjoy each moment. I rationalize her skill as entirely due to a lack of a calendar, a smartphone, and a spouse or significant other. I write it off as a cute canine characteristic, but certainly not practical for her human living in this crazy world full of diversions and expectations.

But is that true? Is my slavish addiction to performance, attention, and (gasp) devices robbing me of the joy, smiles, kindness, and affirmation that my heavenly Father desires for

me—and for all of us—to enjoy each day? Is my frustration that I can't catch my breath long enough to enjoy this journey just another ugly lie from Satan, hoping to rob me of the very intimacy with God that I desperately need?

We live in the most connected culture in the history of the world, but it's arguably the most disconnected from God and one another. So today I embark on a journey to intentionally live more fully in the moment and to be more connected to God, others, and myself. It is a journey that I have started many times before, like a New Year's Day fitness program. After the death of a dear friend, I vowed to live more fully each day. When my wife, Joni, transitioned from cancer patient to survivor, I promised myself to take nothing for granted. Inevitably, I allow the hectic pace of life to blur my focus, and then I forget my resolve.

Is this goal even possible to achieve? Can a very old dog learn a pretty radical new trick to live more consistently in the moment?

If you have read more than a few words of my humble ramblings, you know that I am a Christian and that this worldview defines my writing. So my first step was to see if there is a biblical rationale for my little experiment.

I researched what God's Word has to say about living for this day. Reformer Martin Luther's favorite psalm provides one insight:

This is the day the LORD has made.

We will rejoice and be glad in it.

PSALM 118:24

That seems pretty straightforward. The Lord has given us today. What do we do with that gift?

Solomon offered this wisdom in Ecclesiastes:

It is good for people to eat, drink, and enjoy their work under the sun during the short life God has given them, and to accept their lot in life. And it is a good thing to receive wealth from God and the good health to enjoy it. To enjoy your work and accept your lot in life—this is indeed a gift from God. God keeps such people so busy enjoying life that they take no time to brood over the past.

ECCLESIASTES 5:18-20

Jesus weighed in on the mistake of allowing tomorrow's worries to rob you of joy today:

Don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today.

MATTHEW 6:34

The psalmist (likely David), Solomon, and Jesus endorsed the idea of living fully and intentionally present in each day. That is a pretty solid list of references, in my opinion.

Philosophically, the idea of living more fully in the moment is grand and noble. But practically, it seems impossible. Is God really there? Does He care about my mundane daily activities? Does He know me? Does He reveal Himself through creation and creatures?

Every time I begin thinking that way, I turn to Psalm 139, one of the most inspiring passages of Scripture written by David. We don't know when he wrote this stirring account of God's indescribable attributes. Some scholars believe David wrote it when he was a shepherd, composing it while gazing at the stars and the vastness of the heavens. Some think he

wrote it when he became king over Israel. As a more experienced human myself (that is PC for “old”), it certainly feels like David had to have lived a little more life in order to write such a majestic description of God. The words are intensely personal as David makes three observations about the greatness of God versus his own finiteness:

God knows everything about me.
 God is everywhere I am.
 God ordains everything about me.

If those statements about God are true, then it should change how I go about my daily business.

The psalmist writes that God knows my every move and thought. And I was concerned about the government snooping on me!

GOD, investigate my life;
 get all the facts firsthand.
I'm an open book to you;
 even from a distance, you know what
 I'm thinking.
 You know when I leave and when I get back;
 I'm never out of your sight.
 You know everything I'm going to say
 before I start the first sentence.
 I look behind me and you're there,
 then up ahead and you're there, too—
 your reassuring presence, coming and going.
 This is too much, too wonderful—
 I can't take it all in!

PSALM 139:1-6, MSG (EMPHASIS ADDED)

I don't know about you, but that is incredibly daunting to me. I think and do a lot of things that I would prefer to keep in Las Vegas mode. But David is saying the idea of a "secret sin" is a fool's concept. I am known by my Creator, and I am pursued by Him.

Is there anyplace I can go to avoid your Spirit?
 to be out of your sight?
 If I climb to the sky, you're there!
 If I go underground, you're there!
 If I flew on morning's wings
 to the far western horizon,
 You'd find me in a minute—
 you're already there waiting!

PSALM 139:7-10, MSG

There are no secrets from God. There is no hiding from God. My desire to keep those secrets and to hide from His presence comes from a false belief that God would love me less when I sin. The uniqueness of grace for a follower of Christ is that God already knows everything about me (and you), and He loves us exactly the same on our best or worst day.

Don't rush past that truth for Christians. Read it again.

God knows everything about you, and *He loves you exactly the same on your best or worst day.*

The psalmist goes on to clearly proclaim that none of us is an accident, even if your parents might have said exactly that!

You know me inside and out,
 you know every bone in my body;
 You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit,
 how I was sculpted from nothing into something.

Like an open book, you watched me grow from
 conception to birth;
 all the stages of my life were spread out before you,
The days of my life all prepared
 before I'd even lived one day.

PSALM 139:15-16, MSG (EMPHASIS ADDED)

That is a difficult idea to wrap my finite mind around. I am writing these words before Christmas, a time of year when I faithfully watch *It's a Wonderful Life*. That classic movie reminds me that I am here for a reason, despite falling short of the dreams I once had. I once envisioned I would direct a World Series and maybe even write a bestseller. Remember the exuberant dreams that George Bailey shared with his soon-to-be wife, Mary? He had his life planned out and knew exactly how it would look.

“Mary. I know what I’m gonna do tomorrow and the next day and next year and the year after that. I’m shaking the dust of this crummy little town off my feet and I’m gonna see the world! Italy, Greece, the Parthenon . . . the Colosseum. Then I’m coming back here and go to college to see what they know, and then I’m gonna build things. I’m gonna build airfields. I’m gonna build skyscrapers a hundred stories high. I’m gonna build bridges a mile long.”¹

None of that happened. George Bailey’s dreams had to be put aside to support his family. He lived a successful but humdrum life that fell apart when his uncle Billy lost a huge amount of money on his way to deposit it in the bank. The family business was about to go bankrupt, something that

would dramatically impact or even ruin the entire community. There seemed to be no hope, and George wished that he had never lived.

And then an awkward angel named Clarence (probably like the one I would get assigned) shows him what would have happened if that wish had come true. What if God had not put George Bailey in Bedford Falls? You likely know the rest of the story. George sees how many people and events his seemingly banal existence had changed for the good. His actions had even led to saving dozens of lives.

Clarence makes this simple but profound observation: “Strange, isn’t it? Each man’s life touches so many other lives. When he isn’t around, he leaves an awful hole, doesn’t he?”

Indeed.

The movie powerfully illustrates the truth of Psalm 139: I am known by God. I am watched over by God. I am ordained by God to fulfill a part of His plan. You are not an accident, and neither am I. The apostle Paul shares the amazing truth that we have a preordained reason to be here.

It’s in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone.

EPHESIANS 1:11-12, MSG

I am an important part of the redemptive plan of Christ, and so are you. Every day we have the potential to do something or learn something that will alter someone’s life and even eternity. What an amazing thought that God can use someone like me for His purpose. I find that to be a

remarkable example of His grace. Our goal is to make that more real in our daily experiences.

The Promise: Realizing God Is Here

God's sense of humor is evident in the timing of this introduction. The political season is now in full force, and writing about promises in this environment is the ultimate irony. Author Carolyn Warner said it well: "Years ago, fairy tales all began with 'Once upon a time . . . '—now we know they all begin with 'If I am elected.'" So many sincere folks passionately believe that their candidate will deliver on the promises conveniently tailored to whichever state he or she is currently visiting.

Not much has changed over the years. Humorist Will Rogers noted nearly a century ago that "if we got one-tenth of what was promised to us in these acceptance speeches there wouldn't be any inducement to go to heaven." Based on the post-election promise-fulfillment percentage in my lifetime, I still have a lot of inducement to hope for heaven.

And it's not just politicians. I roll my eyes at the exorbitant advertising promises for products. I learned the hard way that movies that promise two hours of nonstop laughs have included most of the funny material in the two-minute trailer. I deal with broken promises every day from service providers (looking at you, cable TV company) and salespeople. I have endured broken promises in relationships that left me with emotional scars and a wariness to trust anyone's word.

Some of us have been taught by preachers that God will be our personal ATM if we have the right amount of faith. But that faith works only if it is combined with a donation to said preacher's personal retirement or corporate jet fund. I don't think I am overstating the facts when I say this heresy has been devastating to millions.

Frankly, I suspect we have promise fatigue before we even consider the biblical promises of God. But His promises are different. God does not disappoint, fall short, forget, get tired, grumpy, or befuddled. For this journey we are about to begin, I think it is important to lay the foundation.

Recently, Joni and I had an engineer inspect our home's structural integrity. The extreme heat along with the expanding and contracting Texas clay can cause a home to shift and crack, resulting in repairs that can cost thousands and thousands of dollars and often are not permanent. When the engineer finished the inspection, we held our breath for the verdict.

"Your foundation is in great shape. The contractor built your home on piers that distribute the stress and are anchored in bedrock."

That sounded like a pretty good approach for this project. Is this pursuit of finding God more consistently anchored on the bedrock, foundational promises of His Word? And if I am going to invest intentional effort in finding God in everyday moments, I must feel confident that God's location setting is always on.

In the Old Testament book of Jeremiah there are a couple of often-overlooked verses that follow the familiar passage about God knowing and having good plans for us (see Jeremiah 29:11). Here is what God says next:

In those days when you pray, **I will listen**. If you look for me wholeheartedly, **you will find me**.

JEREMIAH 29:12-13 (EMPHASIS ADDED)

That is a pretty cool combo platter. God knows us. He has a plan for us. That plan offers hope for the future. He listens. And He is available.

God also tells us that His love will not fade like romantic love or other relational love sometimes does.

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good!
His faithful love endures forever.

1 CHRONICLES 16:34

God does not promise that everything will be perfect. Far from it. You and I are pretty much guaranteed to have some degree of suffering; none of us gets out of this life unscathed. Here is what God does promise:

He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us. For the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with his comfort through Christ.

2 CORINTHIANS 1:4-5

The idea of suffering for Christ does not get people to buy prayer cloths, miracle water, and books. However, God's promise to shower me with comfort should give me confidence that I can make it through trials. I have had the opportunity to test this supernatural comfort after the death of our daughter, Katie, from a terminal birth condition, and during the cancer battle Joni fought and won. I can attest that His comfort is real and remarkable.

God's greatest promise of all is salvation to all who believe in His Son.

I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ.
It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who

believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile. This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, “It is through faith that a righteous person has life.”

ROMANS 1:16-17

God promised that I am secure forever when I placed my trust in the finished work of Christ. This was a big one for a recovering legalist who had been taught otherwise early in my faith journey.

I give them eternal life, and **they will never perish**. No **one** can snatch them away from me.

JOHN 10:28 (EMPHASIS ADDED)

God promises to meet our needs. This is a tough one for us. We are culturally conditioned to pray for wants, bombarded by messages that tell us this car or that product or that promotion will make us happy. God promises only that He will give us all we need.

Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you **everything you need**.

MATTHEW 6:33 (EMPHASIS ADDED)

This may be one of the most common places where I stub my toe on something sacred without even knowing it, because I am looking for some glorious blessing. A common provision of grace is at my feet, and I walk right over it. Part of the challenge for me will be reorienting my thinking about what really matters.

After His resurrection, Jesus gave final instructions to His followers, telling them to make disciples and to baptize those new believers in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And then He says,

Be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

MATTHEW 28:20

We often talk about the importance of last words and the weight they carry. These last recorded words of Jesus are so encouraging. Christ wanted us to be sure that He was going to be present with us for every earthly breath we take.

I don't live as if I believe that promise. I feel alone so often, struggling with doubts. Part of this journey is to learn to trust the truth that He is always with me. I choose to plant my flag of belief on that hill as we start this adventure. And I choose to believe this truth that our Lord proclaimed in the Gospel of John:

I have loved you even as the Father has loved me.
Remain in my love.

JOHN 15:9

God is with us every moment. He knows our every thought. He listens to our prayers. And He has promised us that if we seek Him wholeheartedly we *will* find Him. That is the premise and the promise. Let's look at the process to become more connected to God and one another.

The Process: Removing the Distractions

A vital part of this process will be to disconnect from the devices that enslave me. I will need to examine the actions

and attitudes that cause me to be distracted and lose sight of what matters. To be perfectly honest, I feel ill equipped to be your tour guide on this journey.

But then I think about how God works. He works through the unexpected and the unlikely people. Big check mark there.

The truth is that if I can do this, I can almost guarantee you can. I have never felt more convicted about my specific weakness of distractedness than I do in approaching this project.

My brain was not wired to factory specs, and that has been a problem all my life. My educational background was, to be very kind, inconsistent. I had an attention deficit before it was “cool.” Instead of undergoing testing and receiving medication, I was called into the guidance counselor’s office and chastised for underachievement and laziness. Those are indeed great motivators.

Recently, a high school friend of mine sent me a message that made me chuckle. Jane wrote that she was enjoying my books and blog. “Your teachers at Chillicothe High School would have been very proud of you,” she kindly wrote. I hope they would be proud, but I can guarantee you they would first be surprised!

At any rate, I survived high school with good enough grades to pass, and I enrolled in Marietta College with a determination to show I could do well academically. I stayed interested for one semester and did well enough to make the desired dean’s list. After proving I could accomplish that goal, my interest promptly turned to Ping-Pong, pinball, and Strat-O-Matic baseball for the second semester. Not surprisingly, I dropped out after my freshman year to become a disc jockey. It was a well-thought-out strategy.

So here are my credentials put on the table:

College dropout

Marginal Ping-Pong player

1972 high game on the Play Ball pinball machine—

Student Center, Marietta College

Not exactly Algonquin Round Table material. I would have loved embellishing the old academic credentials. But it was like my grandpa used to say when he noted that you can't polish a—uhhh, well, never mind what my grandpa used to say.

I found my refuge in reading and research. I learned that you never stop learning. And something incredible happened in my life—I realized the miracle of how God can use anyone, even a slacker like me. Getting puffed up with pride is not an option for me when it comes to my academic credentials, so I lean fully on God's grace for this journey.

“My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.” So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

2 CORINTHIANS 12:9-10

I have seen how God is faithful when I trust Him. So if you can relate to a fumbling, bumbling mess who is still trying to figure all this out, then you might be in the right place. Together we can see how God can meet us in our personal weaknesses and impart His strength.

Ahead, you will find twenty-one chapters with stories and Scripture that address the actions and attitudes that keep us from connecting with God, each other, and even ourselves. At the end of each chapter, I have included a Scripture—“God’s Take”—and a suggested action—“A Dose of Grace”—for reflection. You may choose to write down the lessons and insights you glean from this adventure.

Whether or not you choose to implement the actions is entirely your call. There is no grading and no condemnation. This is about getting more connected to God and one another.

You can establish your own routine for this quest, but this is what I plan to do. I will not check my smartphone for the first hour after I wake up. Instead, I will spend that time reading Scripture or listening to messages or music that feed my soul. I will schedule my social media time for the day.

I have also crafted a prayer that I will recite first thing in the morning to get my mind focused. Since these words will be spoken before my first sip of coffee, I will print this on a card just in case my mind refuses to boot up properly without caffeine.

Good morning, God.

I believe that You know everything about me. I believe that You are everywhere that I am. I believe that You have a purpose for my life and for this day. I pray that You will show me Your presence today. I pray that I will slow down, quiet my mind, open my heart and eyes, and look for a postcard from You.

I am grateful that because of Jesus I can boldly ask You for tender mercies today, whether it is a day of great joy or profound sadness. I know that whatever

my circumstances, You are there. I believe You are all around me. I know because of Your grace that there is nothing I can do to lose Your approval. So would You show me Your kindness, Your beauty, Your power, Your comfort, and Your love today?

I pray this in Jesus' name.

Okay . . . I am not getting any younger. Let's try this!

CHAPTER I

THE CURSE OF CULTURE



*And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from e-mail.*

FIVE-YEAR-OLD STUDENT RECITING
THE LORD'S PRAYER





“AND LEAD US NOT into temptation, but deliver us from email.” I say amen to that prayer. And, Lord, deliver us from Facebook. Instagram. Twitter. LinkedIn. Snapchat. I remember my beloved looking at me when I announced my plan to limit my smartphone usage. “This is going to be harder than you think,” she said encouragingly. She was right.

Recently Joni and I took a trip to the mountains to unwind and regroup. Everything was set for a relaxing getaway. We pulled into an off-site airport parking lot and unloaded the luggage. When the shuttle van approached, I instinctively checked my pocket.

No phone.

“Where is my phone?” I asked reflexively.

“Did you have it earlier?” Joni asked.

“Yes, I know it was in the car.”

We started down the typical path that causes me to have to ask for forgiveness later in the day.

“When did you last see it?” Joni quizzed.

“If I remembered where I last saw it, I would go and get it,” I responded, with what might have been interpreted as a touch of sarcasm.

Joni rifled through the car and could not find it. I looked under the seat, under the mats, and between the cushions. Nothing. We were traveling with our friends Bob and Judy. Bob called my number, and my Fitbit Bluetooth watch showed that I was receiving a call. The phone was somewhere nearby.

The shuttle driver waited somewhat patiently.

“Go on,” we said. “We will get the next one.”

Bob called again. Again the Bluetooth watch showed an incoming call. Where was that doggone phone? We searched a bit more frantically now, as our time had dwindled to get to the terminal. Finally, I decided we had to head to the airport sans phone. I felt like I was leaving a man behind in my unit. That I was being a traitor to my trusty sidekick.

When we got through security, I booted up my computer and ran the lost phone app. Sure enough, the phone was located at the parking site. Joni flashed that mischievous smile that can be endearing on other occasions.

“You know this is a God thing,” she said.

“Too soon,” I replied.

Day one without the phone was awful. I had planned this calculated, me-in-control weaning from the glowing seduction of the device. Now I was cut off without any preparation. Like a person who doesn't think he or she is an alcoholic, until that person ends up in a dry county, I realized I was addicted to this phone and its relentless flirtations for my attention.

Day two was much better. I kind of liked not seeing all the rantings on social media.

By day three, I hardly missed it at all. And I began to notice more fully the impact these devices have on relationships. All around me, people stared at their devices. All I had to look at was the sky and the mountains. I began to watch how these inherently helpful and often good devices sabotage relationships. I would see a family at a table and every single person's eyes were glued to a screen. Couples sat silently, transfixed by their phones.

It took my inability to find my phone to reveal to me that I was way too often that person. By the end of day three I had to confess to Joni that it was indeed a God thing that my phone had played hide-and-seek at the airport. She smiled that smile that all husbands recognize when our brides are right and we are not. That was a very hard sentence to write.

Our culture has information-fatigue syndrome, and Christians are just as infected as the general populace. Three-quarters of adults now use a social-networking site of some kind. The average time spent on those sites is a staggering sixteen minutes per hour. The solution suggested by one publication is a digital detox. That is defined as (and I am not making this up) “a period of time during which a person refrains from using electronic devices so one can focus on social interaction in the physical world.”¹

Whatever happened to talking to people, aka, interacting with flesh-and-blood humans?

We are the most connected culture in history and yet, at the same time, the most disconnected from God and one another. I couldn't get through a dinner without furtively glancing at my smartphone, just in case some important message arrived. There is even a word for the behavior now. When

you snub someone because of your phone you are *phubbing*. The Hankamer School of Business at Baylor University did a study of how this phubbing behavior affected romantic relationships. The Baptists have come a long way since the no-dancing days at Baylor!

Researchers James A. Roberts and Meredith E. David have identified eight types of common phubbing:

1. During a typical mealtime that my partner and I spend together, my partner pulls out and checks his or her cell phone.
2. My partner places his or her cell phone where they can see it when we are together.
3. My partner keeps his or her cell phone in their hand when he or she is with me.
4. When my partner's cell phone rings or beeps, he or she pulls it out even if we are in the middle of a conversation.
5. My partner glances at his or her cell phone while talking to me.
6. During leisure time that my partner and I are able to spend together, my partner uses his or her cell phone.
7. My partner uses his or her cell phone when we are out together.
8. If there is a lull in our conversation, my partner will check his or her cell phone.²

I admit I try to be sneaky and place my phone in different spots, so I can glance at an important sports score or “vital” text. Joni is not fooled. Surprise. She will occasionally ask me why I keep looking at my crotch. Or I feverishly check my phone while my bride goes to the restroom. What is wrong with me?

And since I am busy making confessions, I will go ahead and own these, too: I have sometimes been distracted during a church service by my smartphone. I have checked my fantasy football lineup while the offering plate is being passed, somehow thinking this is more spiritually okay than checking it during the sermon. That must be covered in Leviticus somewhere.

After reading through the phubbing list, I realized I was guilty of a disturbing eight out of eight infractions. Not surprisingly, the study goes on to discover that phubbing causes conflict and a lower level of satisfaction in a relationship. Right now I am so grateful that God and Joni are both great forgivers.

I have no one to blame but myself, but I want to put some of the blame on our culture that has told me I must respond and respond NOW if I am texted or called. Talk about an anxiety inducer!

For many of us this is a real relational, emotional, and spiritual issue. So how do we reconnect with God and with one other? I believe it begins with a heart and mind transformation. Paul prescribed this to the church at Rome:

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by **changing the way you think**. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

ROMANS 12:2 (EMPHASIS ADDED)

I love the way *The Message* fleshes out the process of renewing our minds:

So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: **Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating,**

going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. **Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out.** Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

ROMANS 12:1-2, MSG (EMPHASIS ADDED)

I want that. Really I do. But for me, one obstacle to living this out is how I routinely take things for granted. Anytime I “use, accept, or treat in a careless or indifferent manner”³ something of value in my life, I am guilty. I don't intend to do that. I don't think that is intentional for most of us. But it will take intentional focus to notice those overlooked little blessings. The definition continues: “to accept without question or objection; assume.”⁴ Yes, when I take something for granted, which I do almost every day, I assume that thing will always be there.

The better response would be to take a moment to thank God for the little things I rarely think about. Things like clean water and abundant, safe food supplies. When was the last time I thought about that? How about hot water for my shower? I appreciated it only when the hot-water tank ran out.

G. K. Chesterton had the right idea when he penned these words:

You say grace before meals. All right. But I say grace before the concert and the opera, and grace

before the play and pantomime, and grace before I open a book, and grace before sketching, painting, swimming, fencing, boxing, walking, playing, dancing and grace before I dip the pen in the ink.

Thank God for every seemingly mundane, good thing that comes your way today. A hot cup of coffee or tea. A green light on your commute. A warm (or cool) car to get you to work or school. A favorite song playing. Laughter. A smile from a friend or stranger. A tasty treat. A cuddly dog. A beautiful tree or flower. A blue sky. What is your list of small and overlooked daily mercies?

Today I will remind myself of this simple truth: *The things I take for granted, countless others are longing to receive.* As you focus on that truth, I think you will be amazed at how much work you and I need to do.

GOD'S TAKE

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

ROMANS 12:2

A DOSE OF GRACE

This grace suggestion has two steps. The first is to mute and limit the devices you use. (I never said this would be easy.) Strive to be less obsessed with devices, texts, and messaging. Untethering from our

devices for at least a few minutes a day will give us the clarity for the next step—to be aware of every simple blessing that we generally overlook. When you disconnect from your device for a few minutes a day, you begin rewiring your brain. If you're like me and need to write ideas down to remember them, you might want to jot down your insights in a notebook.