

CHAPTER ONE

WOULD YOU LIKE YOUR LIFE TO MAKE
A DIFFERENCE?

A QUEST FOR MORE

*tran·scen·dence: the state of being beyond and
outside of the ordinary range of human experience*

THE BOTTOM LINE: YOU WERE CREATED TO
BE PART OF SOMETHING BIG.

Have you ever wanted to invest yourself in something worthwhile? Have you ever wondered why your life seems to lack meaning or purpose? Have you ever been disappointed when a position, achievement, possession, or relationship failed to fulfill you? Have you ever dreamed that somehow, some way you would be part of something truly great? If so, this book is for you. This book is about having a life that counts for something. It is about living to make a difference.

Now I know that there are many books written about success, achievement, and influence, but this book is different. I want to take you on a journey—a journey through the greatest story ever told, found in the

greatest book ever written, the Bible. It is here and here alone that you will begin to discover not only who you are, but what you were meant to be. God has placed you just where he wants you to be part of something big, right where you are. Yes, you were made to make a difference, so start this journey of discovery with me.

BEAUTY QUEENS AND WORLD PEACE

It is a classic scene in western culture. She stands before the microphone, beautiful and poised, a finalist in the Miss America contest. The host asks her what she would like to accomplish during her reign and she says, "I would like to create world peace, solve world hunger, and liberate all the caged parakeets in the entire world." We've all heard it a hundred times. It has been the fodder for many late-night, stand-up comedy routines. Yet, for all of our cynical smiles and sarcastic comments in the face of the contestant's grandiosity, there is something deeply and uniquely human about what she has said. **There is woven inside each of us a desire for something more—a craving to be part of something bigger, greater, and more profound than our relatively meaningless day-by-day existence.** Maybe that's why a human being would ever want to climb Everest, traverse the oceans in an all-too-small sailboat, or attempt any feat not yet accomplished by a fellow human. Perhaps that's why we get hooked on politics, sports, or a myriad of causes that give us something to fight for.

We simply weren't constructed to live only for ourselves. We were placed on earth to be part of something bigger than the narrow borders of our own survival and our own little definition of happiness. The desire resides in each of us, and it is called *transcendence*. To transcend is to be part of something greater. We were created to be part of something so big, so glorious, so far beyond the ordinary that it would totally change the way

we approach every ordinary thing in our lives. And in all of sin's blindness, brokenness, and rebellion, that desire to transcend has now been crushed.

Being a fan in the stands with 65,000 other fans at the Super Bowl with everyone screaming at the top of their lungs as the kicker launches that last-second field goal gives us a feeling of transcendence. You hear it in the voice of the fan who says, "It's our year! Our time has come! We're going to win this one!" He sounds like he is a paid member of the team, yet he is not. The "we" language is transcendence. He has become part of something greater than his mundane workaday world. His connection to his local team has helped him, if just for a moment, to transcend the small boundaries of his average-guy world. The local worker in the presidential campaign has much the same experience. No, he will probably never meet the candidate face to face; and yes, he is only running folding machines and stuffing boxes full of literature. But he is part of something transcendent. He has been told that this campaign could forever change the face of American politics. His campaign involvement has helped him escape the little world of his small college life to become an integral part of something bigger. If only for a moment, he has transcended.

The mountain climber facing the dizzying heights, the unforgiving inclines, and the biting wind, has touched a bit of transcendence. He is about to join a small society of people who have escaped the everyday concerns and demands of life to accomplish something great. He stands on that oxygen-poor summit and he has transcended if for just one day. The mountain isn't the only summit he has ascended.

The marcher in the protest, the career soldier in the combat unit, and the little boy who is pretending he is the king of the world experience the same rush. It is that feeling of being part of something significant, of your place and your part mattering. For a moment your life seems bigger than your life. This bigger thing yanks you out of bed in the morning, and sometimes the excitement of it all makes it hard to sleep. It makes all of the little things that you have to do every day seem more satisfying and more

important because they are now connected to something more than self-survival. You have experienced a bit of transcendence.

This desire for transcendence is in all of us because God placed it there. He constructed us to live for more than ourselves. He designed us to want meaning, purpose, and consequence. We were not wired to be fully satisfied with self-survival and self-pleasure. God purposed that the borders of our vision would be much, much larger than the boundaries of our lives. We were meant to see more than our physical eyes can see, and it is that greater vision that was meant to engage, excite, connect, and satisfy us.

Maybe the beauty contestant isn't being so silly after all. Maybe in that moment she has gotten something right. Perhaps her desire for transcendence is a more beautiful part of her humanity than her physical beauty will ever be.

AND NOW FOR THE BEGINNING

There is definitely an "above and more" positioning of human beings in the creation accounts of Genesis 1 and 2. Adam and Eve were not the highest of the animals. The whole account presents them as being unique, different, and above the rest of the things that God made. It is just as clear, too, that these two people were made for more than their own existence. They weren't placed in the garden for self-survival and self-satisfaction. They were immediately given a vision and commission that would take them far beyond the borders of their own needs and concerns. Transcendence was a part of their humanity. They were given amazing capacities to do what no other creature could do. Anything less would be a sub-human existence.

Think about what this means for all of us who are the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve. You and I were created for more than filling up our schedules with the self-satisfying pursuits of personal pleasure. We were meant to do more than make sure that all of our needs are fulfilled

and all our desires are satisfied. **We were never meant to be self-focused little kings ruling miniscule little kingdoms with a population of one.**

Sure, it's right for you to care about your health, your job, your house, your investments, your family, and your friends. It would be irresponsible to act as if none of those things mattered. Yet it is a functional human tragedy to live *only* for those things. It is a fundamental denial of your humanity to narrow the size of your life to the size of your own existence, because you were created to be an "above and more" being. You were made to be transcendent.

Jim sat before me, his slumped body a testament to the depression that gripped him. He said he had awakened a few months earlier and realized that there was no one who cared if he woke up that morning. No one cared if he was healthy or sick. No one cared if he was happy or sad. He said, "I get up in the morning and put on great looking clothes, leave my beautiful, modern condominium, get in my luxury car and drive to my high paying job, only to go back to my beautiful condominium at the end of the day to start it all over again. I could die today and no one would even notice. I have it all, why can't I be happy?" Jim *did* have it all, yet in getting it all he had denied his own humanity. In his quest for everything, Jim had missed the one thing that separated him from everything else that God made. Jim had constructed his own kingdom, indulged his every dream, and met his every need. He had ruled his kingdom with discipline and success, but he discovered that it was an empty kingdom, and he was an empty king. It was not that Jim had attempted too much. The tragedy was that he had settled for way too little, and that is exactly what he got.

How about you? What is the big vision that you're working toward? What is the big dream you are investing in? What is your definition of the "good life"? When will you know that you have been successful? If you had it all, what would "all" look like? I am afraid there are many people of faith who attend church each week, give regularly to God's work, know their Bible pretty well, and don't live overtly evil lives; but they have settled for

“below and less” when they were created for “above and more.”

The mistake that they have made is that they have shrunk their Christianity to the size of their own lives. They have taken God’s grace and wisdom as an invitation to a better marriage, a better relationship with their children, a better extended family life, better success at work, etc. And there is a way that God’s grace *does* invite me to all of these things. But here is the point of this little book: God invites you to *so much more!* God’s grace invites you to be part of something that is far greater than your boldest and most expansive dream. **His grace cuts a hole in your self-built prison and invites you to step into something so huge, so significant that only one word in the Bible can adequately capture it. That word is *glory*.**

HARDWIRED FOR GLORY

Admit it. You’re a glory junkie. That’s why you like the 360°, between-the-legs, slam dunk, or that amazing hand-beaded formal gown, or the seven-layer triple-chocolate mousse cake. It’s why you’re attracted to the hugeness of the mountain range or the multi-hued splendor of the sunset. You were hardwired by your Creator for a glory orientation. It is inescapable. It’s in your genes. The groundhogs don’t compete for who has made the most glorious underground den. Or, as my brother Tedd says, the penguins don’t score one another as they dive off the ice into the frigid sea. There is no penguin announcer who says, “That was a 9.3, had high technical merit, but lacked artistic creativity.” But we’re different. We’ll flock to a museum to see the Salvador Dali masterworks. We’ll wait in a ninety-minute line for a ride on the ultimate roller coaster. We’ll dream for days about the glory of the upcoming Thanksgiving feast. And we’ll work like crazy to achieve one glory moment in some area of our lives. We were simply made for glory, but not just the shadow glories of the created world. We were

made for the one glory that is transcendent—the *glory of God*. When you grasp this, your life begins to make a difference.

THE GLORY THAT TRANSCENDS

Now, let me talk for a minute about purpose. There is a way in which this book is about living with purpose. Yet it is about so much more than that. There are many people who have lived lives of purpose that didn’t really make much of a difference. Every person’s life is purposeful because every human being lives in pursuit of something. So, it is not enough to determine to have purpose. Let me state it this way: **it is a good thing to have purpose, but if your purpose isn’t tied to glory, you have still denied your humanity.**

Let’s consider the glory-focus of Genesis 1 and 2. There are four transcendent glories that were created to be the life-shaping focus of every human being. The first is the glory for which every human is to live, and the following three are glories that flow from the first. Each of these calls us out of the tight confines of a self-oriented existence to something fundamentally above and beyond. We will introduce them here and expand on each throughout the book.

God glory. We were made to be more connected to what is above us than to what is below us. To put it another way, our lives were designed to be shaped more by our attachment to the Creator than by the creation. We were made to experience, to be part of, to be consumed by, and to live in pursuit of the one glory that is truly glorious—the glory of God. A ravenous and not easily satisfied pursuit of this glory is meant to be the compass of our living. In Genesis 1, God comes on scene the minute Adam and Eve take their first breath. He is there to command their allegiance. He is there to be the central focus of everything they ever think, desire, say, and do—and when he is, their lives have transcendent meaning and

purpose. Here's what this means. **The transcendent glory that every human being quests for, whether he knows it or not, is not a thing; it is a person, and his name is God.** People are transcendent because people were made for him. It is only in communion with him and in submitting all other forms of glory to his glory that I will ever find the "above and more" that my heart seeks. God's immediate presence in the lives of Adam and Eve is a call to the ultimate in transcendence. They are to live for the One who *is* glory. And they must never shrink the size of their glory focus to the narrow glories of their own little lives.

Stewardship glory. It is amazing as you read the story of creation to see that God carefully constructed his world and then placed it in the hands of people. God gave Adam and Eve the responsibility for being good and faithful stewards of everything he had made. In effect, they were designed to be God's "resident managers." Their vision of personal purpose was meant to be as wide as the universe that God had created. They were constructed to do more than take care of themselves; they were called to care for the wide variety of amazing things God had purposefully crafted to be reflectors of his glory. The transcendence of human beings is expressed as people reflect God's glory by their rulership and stewardship over the surrounding created world. This call to manage the created order was a divine call to transcendence. It was a call for Adam and Eve to never shrink the size of their care to care for themselves.

Community glory. You and I were made for relationships. Adam wasn't meant to live alone. Adam wasn't meant to be Adam's best friend. The community that Adam and Eve were meant to live in with one another was designed to be the beginning of a huge web of interdependent human relationships that would define much of the focus and energy of peoples' lives. Human beings' lives were meant to transcend the narrow glories of independence, autonomy, and self-sufficiency. **We were created to have lives shaped by a constant pursuit of the glory of humble, dependent community.** We were made to need one another, and this community was

meant to exist in a variety of forms, including neighbor, family, friend, church, city, state, nation, brother, sister, parent, and spouse. This web of ongoing relationships daily calls us out of our insulation and isolation to experience a community glory that selfish, personal focus can never deliver. God makes Adam and Eve and immediately calls them to the transcendent glory of a world-reaching, generation-spanning, and history-encompassing community. This commitment to community was meant to be a major shaping focus of their day-by-day living. This act of God to immediately tie Adam and Eve into community with one another was a call to transcendence. It was a call to never shrink the size of their community to a functional community of one.

Truth glory. Immediately upon creating Adam and Eve, God did something that he had not done with anything else he made. He spoke to them. This mundane moment was a moment of transcendence! The Lord, King, and Creator of the universe was speaking the secrets of his divine wisdom into the ears of the people he had made. In this act God was calling Adam and Eve to transcend the boundaries of their own thoughts, interpretations, and experiences. They were to form their lives by the origin-to-destiny perspective that only the Creator could have. God had hardwired Adam and Eve with the communicative abilities that they would need in order to receive his revelation, because the glorious truths that God would progressively unfold to them were meant to shape everything they thought, desired, decided, and did. Their lives were set apart from all of the rest of creation because God had opened his truth glory to them and them alone. By themselves they could never have discovered the things he told them. These treasures of wisdom would only be known by Adam and Eve because God decided to reveal them. God's words contained knowledge of him, the meaning and purpose of life, a moral structure for living, the nature of human identity, a fundamental human job description, a call to human community, and a call to divine worship. Never were Adam and Eve built to exist on conclusions drawn from their experience, or concepts

resulting from autonomous interpretations. Every thought was meant to be shaped by the truth glory that he would patiently and progressively impart to them. God's seemingly mundane act of communication in the garden was in fact a call to transcendence. It was a call to an "above and more" way of living. It was a call to Adam and Eve to never shrink the size of their thought down to the size of their thoughts.

BUT WAIT A MINUTE! WHAT ABOUT TUESDAY?

Maybe as you've been reading, you've been thinking, "Okay, Paul, what you have been talking about is all very interesting, but I'm living real life here! For example, on Tuesday I have to go to school with my teenage son to talk about his rapidly-failing grades. In the afternoon I have to meet with a friend to deal with a misunderstanding between us, and in the evening I have to talk with my husband about our finances. I'm facing a whole lot of real-life issues that I don't really want to face, and I don't think I have time for transcendence!"

But, hang in here with me. This *is* the point of this book. **In a fallen world there is a powerful pressure to constrict your life to the shape and size of your life.** There is a compelling tendency to forget who you are and what you were made for. There is a tendency to be short-sighted, myopic, and easily distracted. There is a tendency to settle for less when you have been created for more. There is something expansive, glorious, and eternal that is meant to give direction to everything you do. And when you lose sight of it, you have effectively denied your own humanity.

You see, all of those things you will do on Tuesday are necessary and important. This book is not a call to forget them and do something else. No, it is about a whole new way of approaching these things. It is about a way of living where God has placed me that embraces the transcendent glories for which I was created. It is about living for a greater kingdom than the

kingdom of my life, my family, and my job. And where do I live for this greater kingdom? In my life, in my family, and in my job! This book was not written to call to you to stop doing everything you have been doing or to start doing a bunch of new things. Rather, it is a call to do what God has called you to do with a vision that is as broad and deep as the glory of God.

This book is a call to plan large and live big. It is an encouragement to let God glory, community glory, stewardship glory, and truth glory alter the way you deal with everything that is on your plate. It is an encouragement to remember and affirm that your humanity only really lives when it is connected to the transcendent glory that can only be found in God.

Are you not sure what all of this means? Are you unsure of what it would practically look like? Do you want to live a life that really counts for something and that makes a difference? Take time to read on.

THE FINAL QUESTION: WHAT IS THE BIG THING THAT YOU ARE LIVING FOR RIGHT NOW?