

# The Grass Isn't Always Greener ...

It seems that no matter what season of life we are in, we want to be in a different one. God wants us to appreciate where we are.

Perhaps you remember *The New Yorker* cartoon in which two monks in robes and shaved heads are sitting side by side, cross-legged on the floor. The younger one, with a quizzical look on his face, is facing the older, who is saying: "Nothing happens next. This is it."

That's exactly what it means to live in the here and now. We aren't waiting for something else to occur, we aren't distracted by anything around us, and we aren't trying to escape mentally to another time. We are "mindfully awake." Paying attention. Savoring the moment for all it's worth. We are fully alive!

I once heard Diane Sawyer say on television, "The most important thing in life is to pay attention"—and I would agree. But how often are we able to achieve that? Not often enough, unfortunately. Nevertheless, our richest times in life are those when we are completely present, consciously heightening our awareness because our journey has brought us here—and we choose not to miss it.

I feel this when I'm engaged in rich, meaningful conversation with an interesting person. Questions are enticing, listening is acute, and eye contact is direct. I love that; such focused attention makes me feel alive. I also experience this feeling when I'm alone in an art museum or lost in a good book.

When I'm all there—or rather, all here!—I never want the moment to end. It's wonderful. It's the "it" to which the wise old monk referred.

About a year after my mother died in 1971, my dad and I were invited to the wedding of a mutual friend. Daddy was living with my brother, Chuck, and his family, and I picked him up so we could go in my car. At 78 years old, Daddy wasn't driving anymore.

Since we had plenty of time, I suggested we stop off for coffee at a place along the way where we knew a couple of the waitresses. There we sat, dressed to the nines and sipping coffee in a little short-order restaurant.

After a while it began to rain, and we decided to let the weather clear up before traveling on. We settled back in our chairs and talked about childhood—Dad's and mine—and about Mother and his love for her through the 40 years they were married. I thanked him for being such a great dad to me and my two brothers.

When the rain became more intense, we gave up the idea of going to the wedding and nestled into one of the sweetest times my dad and I had ever had. We had always been close, but never more than that night. We were totally connected conversationally, not distracted by anything and absolutely in the moment.

Would that we were able to maintain that kind of connectedness all the time, with others as well as with ourselves. It's hard, almost impossible. So often we want to be somewhere else. We look at the "now" we are in and have this illusion that if we could just inch or leap forward on the journey, our lives would be richer or better or more "together." We don't want to be here.

Why is this? Why are we so rarely satisfied? Were we simply programmed to be this way, or is it that we just don't know ourselves or God well enough to recognize what truly satisfies?

**JOURNEY OF SELF-DISCOVERY** As I look back over my life, I see

that there are many times when I wasn't satisfied; I couldn't live fully in the moment. I was looking for the next thing to bring me fulfillment and, of course, I wanted that fulfillment to be permanent.

One of the hardest periods in my life was in the mid-1980s. It ultimately became one of the most transforming times because I was willing to attune myself fully to the here and now—even though it was painful. It turned out that my own discomfort contained critical information that formed a pathway to the next leg of my journey. But it was very hard to be as vulnerable as I needed to be to see the real roadblock.

In August of 1985 I experienced some heartbreaking misunderstandings with close friends. At the same time, I was trying to make a major decision—whether or not to take early retirement from Mobil Oil Corp. because of an impending collision between my “real” job and lots of speaking engagements.

I eventually decided to turn over all the turmoil to God. As days and weeks passed, it seemed as though I heard in my head, “Write things down.” So, I did.

The first thing I wrote was a letter to myself, in which I poured out all the feelings I had been dealing with for months or, perhaps unknowingly, for years. I cried out to God about the loneliness I felt and also about the anger, fear, regret, inadequacies, fault-finding, dread and despair.

When I finally stopped writing, it was as if the burden had started to lift. Everything that had been inside was now outside. I had dumped it all on the only One who could handle the whole truckload.

I soon saw positive things happening. For one thing, I came to the realization that my most annoying problem was me.

How could I be my own problem? Simple: I wanted control—of

everything—and I resented the fact that God wanted control, too. My desire for control outweighed my desire for connectedness, even with Him.

I felt lonely because I had attached all the desires of my heart to a tiny circle of friends and companions from whom I wanted all my needs met, and they just happened to have lives of their own! I had completely taken my eyes off the big picture of what God had in store for me.

I didn't want the life I was living; I wanted some pie-in-the-sky existence that wasn't possible. For some reason I was holding out for it before I would permit myself to be happy where I was.

The second thing I wrote, on September 1, 1985, was a list of goals: all the things I felt were important in life—for now and for later. My first objective was to determine if and when I could retire from Mobil Oil. Since the list was figured on a three-year plan, I aimed for a September 1, 1988, retirement date.

My list included other goals as well—large and small—each with its own objective to stretch me and enlarge my borders. Nothing was too “out there,” but all the goals required discipline—something I was lacking when I felt so frightened.

After the list was completed, I noticed it was entirely about things, not people. Hmmm, it seemed I was still disconnected from my deepest need.

The third thing I did was what rounded me toward home plate. I had been to a Mobil management meeting at which I came across a thought-provoking article on plotting your lifeline in a magazine called the Executive Female. It included instructions for charting one's life journey, including both personal and career experiences, on a graph, using plus signs for positive events and minus signs for negative or painful events.

I began plotting, and some interesting data quickly emerged.

What I saw was that for the most part, I had enjoyed a good life—happy childhood, meaningful relationships, professional singing, successful career, strong God-consciousness, writing books, travel and so on.

On the minus side, however, were three very difficult experiences that had indented my soul. One related to early problems with my mother and the hurt and sorrow that had been between us. The second was a traumatic move from Texas to California in the 1970s. The third was this current time of loneliness, brought on by insisting things go my way.

As I looked at the chart, I realized something that changed me deeply from that moment on: It was those three painful experiences that had given me my greatest strength and fiber—what I most needed to mature. Through them I was forced to rely on the Lord and deal with reality for what it was. In short, quit griping and grow up! The very things I hated had been the making of me. It was as if I took off a blindfold and walked into the light.

Though I had enjoyed all the good things in the plus category and had had lots of fun, there was no suffering or heartache there—nothing to build character or to provide the rich fodder needed for becoming a balanced adult. Nothing to extract from me the deepest, most revealing, and most transforming truths about myself. These painful experiences had actually helped me the most to become the person God wanted me to be.

When the exercise was finished, I felt I had hit a home run. I felt truly alive and had the guidance I needed to finally take constructive action in my life.

### **WILLING TO BE VULNERABLE**

The soul in each of us is imprisoned until set free by Jesus Christ. We all have shells around us, protecting us from being

eaten alive by the pain of life. And when those shells break, we believe we are at grave risk of being hurt, depressed or even dying on the spot.

To prevent this pain and loss, we guard ourselves by retreating deeper and deeper into the shell, being available only to what is pleasant, predictable and safe. But every person I've ever known who really had something to give has been burst open by the explosive force of God's soul-transforming lessons. Each has been willing to be vulnerable to the truth about himself, to admit behavior patterns that are destructive to his own soul.

If we aspire to pay complete attention to the present, we must get out of our own ways. Living fully in the here and now starts deep inside as we allow the self-protective shell to break open so the liberating grace of God can flow in to heal and renew and establish genuine meaning in our lives.

On September 1, 1987, I retired from Mobil Oil Corp.—one year earlier than planned. I also had achieved almost everything else on my goals list. Most important, some of the relationships I had agonized over were restored—and they weren't even on the list!

For a short time I worked as vice president of public relations at Insight for Living, the international radio Bible ministry of my brother, Chuck, but I soon found I spent more time traveling and speaking than I did working in the office. Once again I “retired” from an office job and began trusting God to meet my financial needs on His terms.

In 1995 I received an invitation to speak at several conferences the following year. The conference organization, now known as Women of Faith, was founded by author-entrepreneur Stephen Arterburn and was designed to be a source of encouragement to women across America. Steve wanted women to get away from their routines for a weekend to have fun,

sing and worship the Lord with other women.

Steve asked Patsy Clairmont, Marilyn Meberg, Barbara Johnson and me to be speakers. The next year, we were joined by Thelma Wells and Sheila Walsh.

Every time we spoke at another venue, we experienced fresh excitement. We could sense God was doing something. Thousands of women were discovering what it meant to be a “woman of faith,” to trust God with their desires, their families, their problems, their lives.

Over the last seven years we have spoken to 1.5 million women. Who could have imagined it? I, for one, never dreamed God would swing open this door.

We never know how things will turn out, do we? Feeling stuck or overwhelmed makes us despondent and causes us to stay put a lot longer than we need to.

For me, writing that letter to myself so many years ago taught me things I’ll never forget. Once I saw my effrontery and self-centeredness on paper, I could finally decipher the magnitude of my control problem. I knew change was necessary—and with Christ, possible.

God has shown me that wherever I am in life can be my very best place. I had no idea all the things God had in mind for me. That list I made in September 1985 was only a drop in the bucket to all He had in mind for my journey. And I’m still movin’—enjoying every minute of the here and now!

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**Luci Swindoll** retired from an executive position with Mobil Oil after 30 years of service and began speaking and writing. Her latest book is *Simple Secrets to a Happy Life*.

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# Alaska's Intercessor

# Prophetic

*Prayer leader Mary Glazier founded windwalkers International Ministries to teach other to soar upon the wind of the Spirit of God.*

Mary Glazier knows firsthand that the Spirit of God is moving all over the world. Mary, an Alaska native, is founder and president of Windwalkers International, a prayer network of more than 4,200 intercessors and prayer groups in 44 states, four Canadian provinces and five nations.

Her ministry, originally given the name Intercessors of Alaska, began in 1990. Aglow International called upon Mary to “seek a battle strategy for the state” in response to the desperate need for a spiritual awakening. Suicide, alcoholism, rape, child abuse and family disintegration were rampant statewide.

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# How to Connect with Jesus, The Man, The King, The

# Messiah

**Knowing the facts about Christ is not the same as loving him intimately.**

During the 19th century, liberal theologians began a search to rediscover the historical Jesus. They were intent on determining the true personality of a Jesus who existed 2,000 years earlier. Leading this pursuit was Dr. Albert Schweitzer, the Nobel Peace Prize-winning philosopher, theologian and medical missionary.

The fruit of his work was disclosed in his highly acclaimed book *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, which was released in 1906—the same year the Azusa Street Revival lit the world on fire.

After exhaustive research, Schweitzer concluded that Jesus was a mysterious, power-hungry ruler who arrogantly considered Himself the Son of Man. Titles such as Messiah, Son of Man and Son of God, Schweitzer said, were merely “historical parables,” and Jesus’ claims of divinity were not based on reality. Schweitzer wrote, “We can find no designation that expresses what He is for us.”

In Schweitzer’s opinion, Jesus had nothing in common with contemporary society, but He could be known through individual experience. For Schweitzer that meant running a hospital in Africa. Although he helped a great deal of people and was truly sincere—Schweitzer was sincerely wrong.

He sought the Jesus of 2,000 years ago rather than the Jesus of today. The tools of his research were human intellect, the scientific method and subjective experience rather than Scripture, prayer and meditation.

**You Can Know Jesus Through the Bible** How important is it to rediscover the **Jesus of the Bible**? I venture to say it means

everything. However, revelation—which doesn't come from human intellect or scientific method—is at the core of who Jesus is. Revelation is the process God uses to show the beauty and power of Jesus in your life through the Word of God.

When you know the Jesus of the Bible, you daily fall more and more in love with Him. Jesus doesn't want you following Him out of cold, rigid, legalistic obedience as if He were an impersonal taskmaster or an exacting judge. He wants you to obey Him because you love Him and delight in pleasing Him!

Yes, He is a monarch and righteous ruler, but He is foremost a loving Lord who laid down His life for you and continues to pray for you every day before the Father (see Heb. 7:25). In fact, He desires to relate to you as a Bridegroom with His bride. Jesus wants you captivated, fascinated and exhilarated by a true revelation of Him, by truly "knowing" Him.

To know Jesus, you must begin with the Bible. The Bible was written to introduce you to a Person—Jesus. By wholeheartedly believing in Him, you can share eternity with Him. In the closing words of his Gospel, John wrote, "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31, NIV).

For many Christians, believing in Jesus the Son of God is much easier than believing in Jesus the Son of Man—a real, live person. Without forfeiting any of His divinity, Jesus came to Earth and clothed Himself with human skin.

But after His resurrection, Jesus didn't stop being a man. Jesus did not temporarily become a man (the incarnation) for a season and then return to heaven, dissolve His humanity and "go back to being only God." The eternal, uncreated, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent second Person of the Trinity became a man and will remain a man forever!

Relating to a personal God who is a literal Person is so much

easier than relating to some “beatific vision” or “ethereal presence.” Unfortunately, a great deal of religious training not only distorts the personality of Jesus but also ignores His humanity in attempting to emphasize His divinity. We need both! By building a friendship with the man Christ Jesus, you build a relationship with Jesus, the Son of God.

**An Interesting Romance** During the 1870s two unbelievers sat on a railroad train discussing the life of Christ. Both were skeptical attorneys: one a writer, the other a famous agnostic. “I think an interesting romance could be written about Him,” the writer commented. His friend replied, “And you are just the man to write it. Tear down the prevailing sentiment about His divinity and paint Him as a man.”

The writer, former Civil War general Lewis Wallace, accepted his friend’s challenge. Yet the challenge didn’t come from an unknown agnostic attorney. It came from a noted opponent of Christianity, Robert Ingersoll, whose scurrilous attacks on biblical belief commanded up to \$3,500 for one lecture—a hefty sum in those days.

In the process of constructing the history of Christ, Wallace found himself facing the greatest life ever lived on Earth. The more he studied the Bible, the more he was convinced. He fell in love with the compassionate Savior.

His heart was so captivated that one day he felt compelled to cry, “Truly this was the Son of God.” He finished the book, and it eventually became the all-time classic Ben-Hur.

**Meet the Real Jesus!** God wants you to know the love of Christ. He wants you to drink deeply of His love and discover the beauty, the reality of His only begotten Son, who is “beautiful beyond description.”

The Bible says that God loves you and delights in you so much that in spite of your shortcomings and sins He bursts forth in

heartfelt song! If you are a Christian, the wrath of God is no longer upon you. He's not mad at you anymore—He's on your side!

In fact, Scripture says He not only saves you; He also sings over you! "On that day they will say to Jerusalem, 'Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. The Lord your God is with you, He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, He will quiet you with his love, He will rejoice over you with singing'" (Zeph. 3:16-17).

Believe it or not, God enjoys you. He not only loves you; He likes you too and wants to spend time with you. He wants you to follow Him out of sheer delight, captivated by the compelling personality and character of His one and only Son.

The real Jesus is full of life and joy, and He loves you extravagantly. In the deep recesses of every heart, Jesus whispers, "Come. Stop trying to fill the hole in your heart with things that cannot satisfy. Drink of My love and find true life." A love relationship with Jesus is the foundation of your very life.

Jesus is the Bridegroom who ravishes His bride, the church, with His love. This same Jesus ravishes you with His love. Jesus wants a full-time bride—not some part-time girlfriend!

To see yourself as part of a bridal party is not about gender but position. He longs to be with you as a bridegroom longs to be with His bride! It is this joyful Jesus who, as a bridegroom, beckons you to follow Him as His beloved bride.

Who is this person who calls you to Himself? It's the festive Jesus who enjoys celebrating a wedding feast; the servant Jesus who prepares a seaside breakfast for His men; the masculine Jesus whom brawny fishermen follow unashamedly. It is the pure Jesus whom hypocritical leaders despise and the joyful Jesus whose infectious smile melts the hearts of the multitudes.

**THE JESUS OF MY FIRST LOVE** The Jesus I am describing is the Jesus who won my heart when I was much younger. After 20 years of emptiness, which included 12 years of religious schooling, I discovered that true Christianity is not based on religious rules. It is based on a living, dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ.

Up to that point in my life I had searched everywhere for peace and purpose. Then someone introduced me to Jesus. Scales lifted from my eyes and I realized that Christianity was not about performance or production—it was about a Person!

I was overwhelmed by the real Jesus of the Bible, and I embraced a relationship with the One who created me and laid down His life for me so that I could experience His abundant life (see John 10:10).

Over time, however, I strayed from my love relationship with Jesus. The tendency after experiencing a true revelation of Him is to replace intimacy with ministry, passion for the Lord of the work with production for the work of the Lord. While Jesus was calling me back to emulating Mary, I was stuck mimicking Martha (see Luke 10:38-42).

I needed to discover Jesus again. I needed to leap off the treadmill of performance and pressure, back into the loving arms of the smiling Shepherd I once knew.

In the closing hours of her life, Eileen Wallis (wife of one of England's premier prophets and church leaders, Arthur Wallis) gave me this counsel: "Enjoy Jesus, Larry. Take time to simply enjoy being with Him."

How about you? Are you enjoying your relationship with Jesus Christ, or have you slipped from sheer delight in Him to drudgery, activity and more and more ministry?

If your hunger to spend time communing with Jesus has decreased, if your experiences of God's faithfulness are

limited to stories of the past, or if you continually struggle to win victory over battles that stand in your way, you may need to rediscover Jesus.

**Rekindling Your First Love** Jesus once spoke to a group of believers who had become settled in their relationship with Him: “‘I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false.

‘You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love’” (Rev. 2:2-4).

The Christians in Ephesus weren’t bad people. They opposed wickedness; they tested all teaching with the truth of God’s Word; and they refused to give up under persecution. From outward appearances these people would be considered solid Christians—and they were. Yet, Jesus said, “You have forsaken your first love.”

If you can identify with these solid believers, then this Scripture passage gives three simple keys that can help you rekindle your passion for Jesus.

- Remember. Think back to the former days when you enjoyed the sweetness of Jesus’ presence and favor.
- Repent. In prayer, confess that you have allowed yourself to stray from your first love. Ask for forgiveness, and choose to turn around and return to Jesus.
- Repeat. Do again those simple things you did to cultivate your relationship with Jesus. Read your Bible and spend consistent quality time with Him in worship, prayer and meditation. Remember He likes you, He longs for you—in spite of your shortcomings and sin.

Respond to Jesus. Be motivated not by guilt and pressure but by His deep-seated, passionate devotion to you! “We love [Him] because He first loved us,” John says (1 John 4:19). What a joy it is to rediscover Jesus and be rekindled in bridal affection for Him as the “Lover of our soul.”

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# Overcoming the Power of Prejudice

(PART 1)

Prejudice occurs when we prejudge a person because of race, gender, religion, profession and so on. Often we inherit prejudices from our forefathers. Far from innocuous, prejudice is sin in God’s eyes.

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# The Relational Nature of Prayer

- We really are the children of God, and the dynamics of our relationship with Him are more similar to the relationship

between earthly parents and their children than we might initially expect. We struggle with this because we all know that human parents don't have the same attributes and capacities as God. This, however, does not negate the similarities.

For instance, providing for the children is not a burdensome drain upon a loving and resourceful parent. Rather, it is a deeply satisfying pleasure and honor. So it is with God and His children (see Ps. 50:15).

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## Who Is This Jesus?

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