

# REDWOODS AND WHALES

**BECOMING WHO YOU ACTUALLY ARE**

**PHIL JOEL**



**EMANATE**  
BOOKS

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ISBN 978-0-7852-2948-3 (eBook)

ISBN 978-0-7852-2947-6 (TP)

**Library of Congress Control Number:**

ISBN 978-0-7852-2947-6

*Printed in the United States of America*

19 20 21 22 23 LSC 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



# ABOUT ME, PHIL

**H**i, I'm Phil.  
A pretty simple guy from a pretty simple country  
(New Zealand).

A husband and a dad trying to trick my kids into  
thinking I'm a grown-up.

I have four chickens, three dogs, two delicious kids,  
and one ridiculously incredible wife.

I like Marmite and toast that is burnt on the edges.

I like to kayak, paint, juice veggies, camp, and write  
songs. Not all at once.

I've been a touring musician most of my life.

**ABOUT ME, PHIL**

I've had the same haircut since I was seventeen (or rather, I haven't had a haircut since I was seventeen).

I'm a pretty simple guy trying to live a pretty simple life with God at the center.

And that's about it . . . I think that about sums me up.

Okay, so that's that.

. . . good?

Cool.

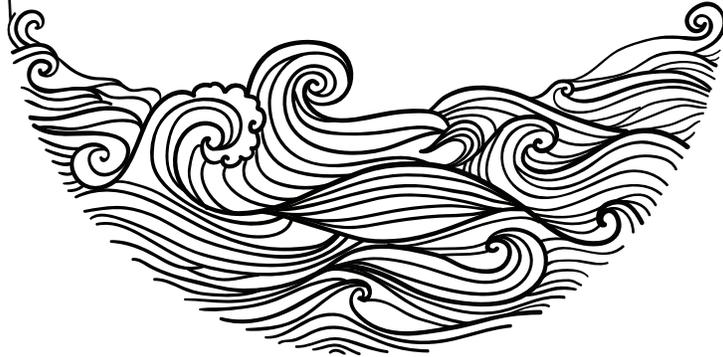
Happy reading.

**PJ**



PART ONE

**GET IN  
THE FLOW**





# 1

## **WEIRD THINGS HAPPEN TO WEIRD PEOPLE**

If I ever go missing, be sure to check Bodega Bay in Northern California. It's a little harbor town complete with sailboats, seals, and seafood. It's become one of my happy places here in the United States. It reminds me a lot of the area I'm from in New Zealand, and it makes me feel like I'm home. In some ways, it makes me feel

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like a kid again. The sound of waves crashing and seagulls squawking combined with the salty air and the smell of seaweed on the beach sends my soul to a blissfully happy place . . . ahhhh, I love it.

Not long ago, our band had a few concerts in Northern California. After the event in San Francisco, we had a couple of days off before our next concert in San Jose, so we decided to explore a little bit. I was pumped because it meant I could get my feet in the West Coast sand and breathe in deeply the air coming in from the Pacific Ocean.

We rented a couple of vans, crossed the Golden Gate Bridge, turned left, and began to weave our way up the famous, scenic Highway 1. We arrived in Bodega Bay just after dark and checked into the first hotel we found. We then went in search of dinner—fish and chips, of course! After eating, our guitarist, Ben, and I decided to drive a little farther up the coast and find a place to walk down to the beach. We drove for a few minutes, found a spot, and parked the car.

We headed down a narrow path between the rocks, sand dunes, and sea grass toward the beach. It was

**WEIRD THINGS HAPPEN TO WEIRD PEOPLE**

about ten o'clock at night and there was a thick cloud cover. Other than the phosphorescence of the crashing waves, there wasn't much light. After we got down to the water, we parted ways and headed in different directions up the beach.

I walked for a minute and then sat down on the sand with the waves crashing in front of me. I breathed in the scene. Despite having little light, I tried to study the big, black rocks, random sand formations, and driftwood piles that covered the beach—an unpredictable scene.

After a few minutes, I decided to get up and continue my stroll. I noticed I was coming up on a large, round rock in the middle of the beach jutting out into the waterline. I'd have to figure out how to walk around it. As I approached the obstacle, I could see I was going to have to climb over it to get to the other side.

As I got closer, I stopped, dead in my tracks. I wasn't standing in front of a large rock; rather, I was staring at a whale—a beached, lifeless whale!

Not normal.

As a kid growing up in New Zealand I'd roam the beach and find all kinds of cool stuff like dead stingrays

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discarded by fishermen or sea horses caught in rock pools at low tide, but this whale experience was different. This was a young gray whale about thirty feet long. These whales are meant to grow up to fifty feet long, larger than a tour bus! They migrate down the Pacific coast from Alaska to Mexico.

At times during the migration the young whales can get distracted and separated from their families. Something will catch their attention and they'll chase after it and get separated from the pod and lose their way. Once this happens they are susceptible to being chased and attacked by killer whales, struck by ships, or they simply get lost and head toward the beach not understanding the dangers of shallow water and they find themselves stranded on the beach or on a sandbar.

I found myself wondering what had captured the attention of this young whale, luring it away from the safety of its pod.

I sat down beside it—just me and the whale.

When I was a kid I'd seen news reports of beached whales on tv but never witnessed one firsthand. It was

**WEIRD THINGS HAPPEN TO WEIRD PEOPLE**

one of the strangest feelings I've ever had. Here I was sitting next to this majestic beast.

Whales are meant to rule the ocean, but this one got distracted, wandered off, and got lost, ending up stranded in the shallows of the beach, gasping for air—and now it was dead.

*Not cool.*

## 2

# WHALES AREN'T MEANT TO DIE ALONE ON BEACHES

I went back to the hotel and tried to get some sleep, but it was no use. The little sleep I did manage to get was interrupted by weird dreams, and I woke up early the next morning feeling restless and unsettled. I just couldn't get the image of the whale out of my mind.

The guys decided to head back to San Francisco to

## WHALES AREN'T MEANT TO DIE ALONE ON BEACHES

invade its record stores and thrift shops in search of rare vinyl and T-shirts, but I needed to get back to the whale. I wanted to be sure I'd seen what I thought I'd seen.

Sure enough, it was there, only now there were a bunch of people surrounding it and taking selfies with it. It felt wrong and uncool, so I got back in the van and began to drive farther up the coast.

After a few hours of winding along the coastal cliff tops, I reached the Navarro River. At that point I turned to follow the river inland and head east to catch the main highway back down toward San Fran. Almost instantly I was swallowed up by the shade of some of the most incredible trees on Earth: redwoods. Beautiful, enormous, strong redwoods growing beside the river with their roots intertwined. A city of trees, hundreds of years old, standing tall, drinking deep, and growing strong together.

It was the strangest thing. It kinda spun me out, so I pulled the car over to the side of the road to try to catch my breath and take it in. At this point I need you to know that although I may look like a 1970s flower

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child, and I guess in a few ways I am a bit of a hippie, still, you need to understand that it's not normal for me get all emotional about trees and dead animals.

I knew something bigger was going on here. I felt like God wanted to communicate something from His heart to my heart. He wanted me to deeply feel the contrast between the beauty of the redwood trees by the river compared to the ugly scene I'd been shown the night before on the beach.

That young whale was born to roam and rule the ocean alongside its family and friends, born to grow up to fifty feet long, weigh forty tons, and live for seventy years. Instead it got off course, became stranded, and died slowly—way before its time.

And that's why I felt the need to write this stuff down.

This scene made me mad because whales aren't meant to die alone on beaches, and it wasn't necessary. Sadly the whale's situation parallels a lot of people's lives today.

Too many of us are finding ourselves stuck. Stuck in cycles of fear, addiction, comparison, and self-loathing, which leads to shallow breathing, shame, and shadows.

We're here to live for a purpose beyond breathing,

## WHALES AREN'T MEANT TO DIE ALONE ON BEACHES

indulging our earthling appetites, and chasing pleasure, and we are definitely not meant to suffocate and take in short gasps of air, feeling hopeless.

Here's what I **know**: we are here on planet Earth for a lot more than that. A lot more than for just ourselves and the ideas the world throws at us and tells us it's all normal.

We are meant to be in the flow of who God made us to be and we're meant to enjoy Him and the plans and purposes He has for each of us. We're designed for vision and dreaming and for things larger than ourselves.

The whale scene reminded me of this quote by Mark Twain:

**“Most men die at twenty-seven, we just bury them at seventy-two.”**

Someone invited me to a 6:00 a.m. men's gathering, and I decided to go, which for me was really weird because I didn't like getting up early. Anyway, that morning I heard that quote and it shot me like an arrow through the chest.

## REDWOODS AND WHALES

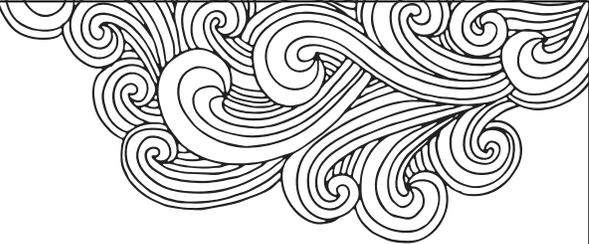
At the time I was in a band that traveled the world and sold millions of records. I was married to a beautiful woman (I still am) who was on TV, and I had a cute nine-month-old baby girl. I lived in a great house and drove a nice car. I was living the American Dream—a nobody kid from the other side of the world who traveled to the land of opportunity and made it. Success, at least in the eyes of the world. Hooray!

So why did that Mark Twain quote hit me so hard? It hit me because I knew that even though I had everything, I realized I had nothing if the most important thing in my life wasn't alive and thriving, my soul.

Somehow I knew things weren't right.

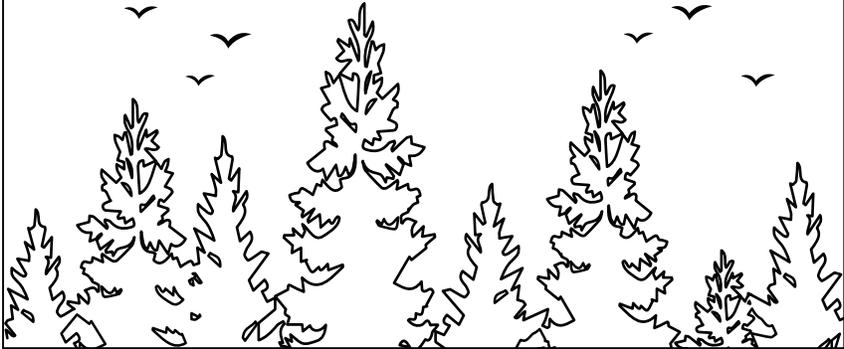
There I was, moving right along on my career path—a path that seemed wide and clear as far as I could see, but I was just drifting along. I was like a young whale dangerously drifting along without any real direction, and I didn't even know it.

Here's the thing: my life wasn't miserable, I was actually happy. I had everything I was supposed to have to be successful in the eyes of the world, but I had a sense



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**I realized I had  
nothing if the most  
important thing  
in my life wasn't  
alive and thriving,  
my soul.**



## REDWOODS AND WHALES

that I was being drawn to a new beginning, a restart or a rebirth, and I could choose to ignore it or pay attention.

Something was stirring in my heart, and I was aware of it but wasn't sure where it would lead. But I went with it, and I'm glad I did because it started a redirection in my life.

What Mark Twain was saying is that people lose their vision and their reason for living at twenty-seven, but trudge on without vision until they die later in life, usually in their seventies. I was twenty-eight when I heard that Twain quote and it challenged me to examine my life in a big way.

The crazy thing is that these days I feel like we could change the age from twenty-seven to seventeen, because way too many teenagers are feeling dead inside in so many areas. I hate that!

Too many people are drifting along with a numb feeling inside that makes them want to hurt themselves in order to feel something or maybe even think that maybe it would be better to put an end to their lives.

This is a massive, filthy, dirty lie, and it makes me so mad. But it also fires me up to speak the truth to get

**WHALES AREN'T MEANT TO DIE ALONE ON BEACHES**

people's hearts pumping again and to get their heads clear, because the truth will set people free. Lies jack up our heads and clog the arteries of our hearts, causing us to die inside, and I hate that.

Let's get honest with ourselves, get some truth flowing through our veins and into our heads, and see where it leads us.

It's time to get courageous.

It's time to breathe deep again and take life back.

Yes? Yes!

### 3

## I KNOW WHAT YOU WANT BECAUSE I WANT THE SAME THINGS

**Y**ou want to *really live*, and you know deep down that you were born for a significant, adventurous, and useful existence.

There is **life** inside of you that's waiting to be lived

**I KNOW WHAT YOU WANT BECAUSE I WANT THE SAME THINGS**

out! Somehow you know it—somehow you’ve always felt  
there’s more and *you want it!*

**YOU WERE BORN TO BE ALIVE . . . REALLY  
ALIVE!!**

**THIS IS WHAT YOU WANT . . . I KNOW THIS  
ABOUT YOU BECAUSE I WANT THE SAME  
THING! I WANT TO LIVE, REALLY LIVE!**

**I DON’T JUST WANT TO SURVIVE . . . I WANT TO  
THRIVE!**

**AND YOU DO TOO!**

**WE WANT TO HAVE BRIGHT EYES.**

**WE WANT TO BREATHE DEEP.**

**WE WANT TO BE HAND SHAKERS,  
NOT FIST WAVERS.**

**WE WANT TO BE GIVERS,  
NOT TAKERS.**

**WE WANT TO BE LOVERS,  
NOT LUSTERS.**

**WE WANT TO BE LISTENERS,  
NOT OPINION SPOUTERS.**

**WE WANT TO BE DOERS,**



**REDWOODS AND WHALES**

NOT JUST DAY DREAMERS.  
WE WANT TO SEE PEOPLE,  
NOT JUST LOOK AT OTHERS.  
WE WANT TO BE JOY GIVERS,  
NOT PLEASURE TAKERS.  
WE WANT TO STAND UP IN THE HURRICANE,  
NOT BE BLOWN OVER IN THE BREEZE.  
WE WANT TO BE LOVED TRUTHFULLY,  
WE WANT TO LOVE TRUTHFULLY.  
WE WANT THIS STUFF, RIGHT?

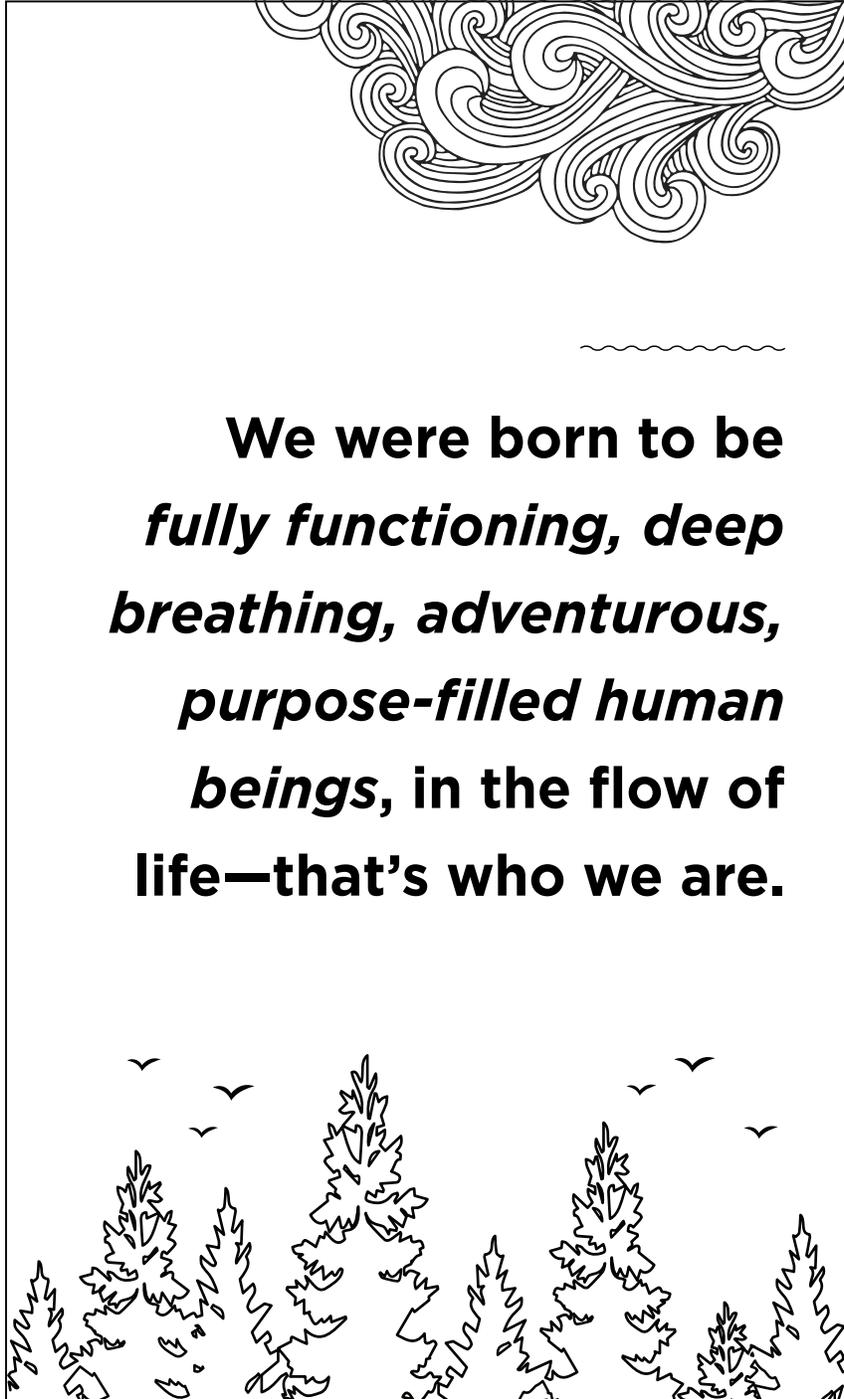
The answer is yes, we all do!

Like one of those beautiful redwoods, fearfully and wonderfully alive, we were born to have our roots run deep and to grow taller and stronger and more useful.

We're also like those gray whales, born to enjoy the flow and adventure of true life!

We were born to be *fully functioning, deep breathing, adventurous, purpose-filled human beings*, in the flow of life—that's who we are.

The actual me and **THE ACTUAL YOU!**



**We were born to be  
*fully functioning, deep  
breathing, adventurous,  
purpose-filled human  
beings, in the flow of  
life—that’s who we are.***



## » Questions:

Are you being and becoming you?

Are you feeling alive?

Are you feeling clearheaded?

Are you doing and creating the things you're born to do and create?

... Or are you relating a little more to the whale at the moment? Tired, a little dazed and confused, and unable to take in a deep breath and catch up with yourself and your surroundings?

Well, **don't panic** because you're just one crashing wave away from being swept back up into **the flow** of who you were born to be—and you were born to be **amazing** and live a wildly adventurous life as you experience and enjoy God and people the way you're meant to!

This isn't some kind of sales pitch. I'm not selling anything. I just want you to hear the truth and catch a new vision for your life—the one life you've been given. You owe it to yourself to go for it and get some clues, vision, and direction for your life.

**I KNOW WHAT YOU WANT BECAUSE I WANT THE SAME THINGS**

Right?

Right.

So the big question is *What's keeping you down?*

Okay. So you hear me so far?

Good, because I can hear you, too, and I think that what you might be saying is this: "*What's next?*"

# 4

## HERE'S WHAT'S NEXT: WE GO GREEN

**D***isclaimer:* Okay. I completely understand that there are all kinds of people in this world with all kinds of backgrounds, experiences, and life journeys who are not familiar with the Bible, and if this is you, I want to be sensitive to you. But I need you to hear my heart, keep an open mind, and trust me when I ask you to read on and go with it because this stuff is really, really good. It's about you and God, your life and

**HERE'S WHAT'S NEXT: WE GO GREEN**

your health, and there will be more of it throughout this book, so if you are not a “church person” I don’t want you to be surprised but rather to stay open.

Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord,  
whose hope is in Him. He will be like a tree  
planted by the river with his roots running deep  
and when the heat comes he will not wither but  
rather his leaves will get greener and he will not  
cease being fruitful. (Jeremiah 17:7–8)

I love these verses. When I first read them a bunch of years ago, I wanted to tear the page out and eat it so that I could get this truth into my veins! It’s a picture of how our lives are meant to roll.

We were born to live life with fresh hope, getting greener as we go. You are here on this planet for reasons you don’t even know about yet, to be fruitful in ways you don’t yet understand. It’s kinda like a jigsaw puzzle where we’re all meant to fit into the picture and live the lives and do the things we are each uniquely created for.

*But*, if you’re wasting your time, then you’re wasting



## HERE'S WHAT'S NEXT: WE GO GREEN

your life, and if you're wasting your life, then you're not bringing who you truly are to the party, and we're all missing out.

What a waste!

If you know me, you know that I hate waste. It was instilled in me by my wonderfully frugal parents who knew how to stretch dollars and recycle or repurpose almost anything. They're still like this and always will be. Waste to them just seems evil, and I agree, waste is evil, and it's especially true when it comes to wasting people's lives.

This is life—your life—and it's not meant to be wasted. You have things to do, things that only you can do, but they're not gonna get done if you're slowly dying and breathing shallow.

Some of you are artists and creatives who need to be in the flow of true life in order to create life-giving art.

Some of you are born to be revolutionaries, moviemakers, or businesspeople who will bring change to people groups or cultures.

Some of you are born to invent and dream up solutions for environmental issues or solve practical

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problems that will help others overcome challenges in their lives.

This life—your life—is designed to be lived trusting God. Just like those redwoods, you were born to drink deep from the flow of God’s goodness and grow strong and tall with your leaves becoming greener as you become fruitful and useful.

So, if you’re not getting greener, then you’re getting *ripped off*, and that stinks. Let’s figure this out. Let’s have a pretend conversation.

First you say, “Okay, so you’re showing me these verses because you think I’m meant to trust God, right?”

“Right,” I say.

Then you say, “Trust God? Trust God for what?”

I say, “Trust Him to give you what you need.”

You then ask, “*What* do I need?”

“Glad you asked,” I say. “Let me answer your question with some Shakespeare” (kinda).

5

**“TO BE OR NOT  
TO BE?”—THAT IS  
THE QUESTION**

**to be SEEN**  
**to be UNDERSTOOD**  
**to be LOVED**

~~~~~  
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**T**his is what we all want!  
This is what we all need!  
It's inside each of us to want these things, and it's  
*okay* because that's how God made us.  
We want

**to be SEEN** / recognized  
**to be UNDERSTOOD** / approved of  
**to be LOVED** / safe

**What you just read is kinda  
MASSIVE.**

If you missed it you should read it again and seri-  
ously think about it.  
We want

**to be SEEN** / recognized  
**to be UNDERSTOOD** / approved of  
**to be LOVED** / liked / safe

**“TO BE OR NOT TO BE?”—THAT IS THE QUESTION**

These three needs are totally legitimate and are meant to be met but just not in the ways most of us try to meet them.

Our culture tells us that if we want to be significant in this life we need to be either famous, beautiful, or rich, or preferably all three. It claims that these things will get us seen, understood, and loved, and then we'll be satisfied . . .

Hmmm?

Nope.

**“I think everybody should get rich  
and famous and do everything  
they ever dreamed of so they can  
see that it's not the answer.”**

—JIM CARREY

The thing is that it never works out to where any amount of fame, recognition, accolades, success, money, social-media attention, or an abundance of possessions will ever be enough. If these things come along in the course of our lives, then that's cool. But they can't be

## REDWOODS AND WHALES

what we chase, because we'll never get what we think they'll give us.

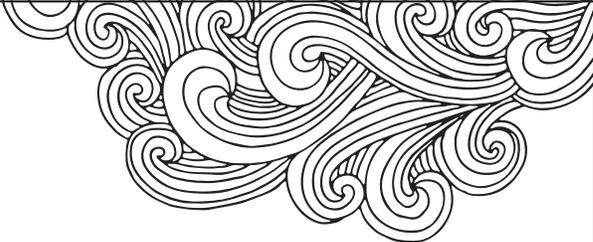
That beautiful whale got distracted and was chasing the wrong stuff, and he probably didn't even know what was happening before he became stranded and alone.

Simply put, sometimes we just chase the wrong things.

There will be a constant craving in our hearts until we figure out that the only way to become whole and complete human beings is to trust and embrace the God who designed us and created us. He designed us to receive all the things we're talking about—**from Him**. He can fill those needs if we let Him and if we trust Him to meet them.

I can hear some of you saying, "Why trust God if I think He's a jerk?"

That is such a good question. I think we need to start the next chapter with it.



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**He designed us  
to receive all  
the things we're  
talking about—  
FROM HIM.**

