“In an age of platform building and fixation on building one’s own personal ‘brand,’ Thann has given us a refreshing, much needed perspective regarding whose fame we ought to amplify. For it is from, to, and through Jesus Christ alone that are all things. I hope this book gains an audience with leaders especially. May we become larger by becoming smaller in our own eyes, and may we know true exaltation as we humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord, for the advancement of His fame and not our own.”

—Scott Sauls, Senior Pastor of Christ Presbyterian Church, Nashville, Tennessee; author of Jesus Outside the Lines and A Gentle Answer

“We live in a culture obsessed with personal fame—an idol that kills our faith and quenches the potential for miracles in our midst. Jesus said so Himself: ‘No wonder you can’t believe. For you gladly honor each other, but you don’t care about the honor that comes from the One who alone is God’ (John 5:44). If we ever needed to see God’s intervention and to experience His miracle-working power, it’s now. My friend Thann Bennett has written a passionate, powerful appeal to God’s people. It’s time to wake up, consecrate your life, and call on the name of the Lord. This book made me want to stand up and shout, bow low and pray, and believe that God will make Himself known in our day. Don’t miss this timely word.”

—Susie Larson, national speaker, talk radio host, author of Fully Alive

“My Fame, His Fame is a wake-up call for Christians, to those of us seeking to know the face of Jesus. It is an invitation to look over into eternity and to call that vision into our here and now.”

—Casey Diaz, bestselling author of The Shot Caller
“Few people do I trust more to discern the Father’s voice than Thann Bennett. If your chief aim, like his, is to honor God with your life, this book shows you how—brilliantly and plainly explaining what gives our lives lasting, eternal significance: pursuing, partnering with, and pointing to God and His great fame!”

—John Jessup, CBN News

“In a time when platform or influence is an ever-beckoning temptation, this book is a timely reminder about the one name we are supposed to make great. Through Thann’s words, you will be inspired to proclaim the Lord in new and bold ways! What a privilege we have to make His name famous!”

—Joel and Nina Schmidgall, authors of Praying Circles Around Your Marriage

“In a world where making a name for yourself is a common practice and expectation, My Fame, His Fame is a reminder to the believer that our pursuit is not about making our names famous. Thann shows us, through the life of Habakkuk, that humility in spirit and boldness of faith allows God’s power and might to be on full display in our lives.”

—Joshua Symonette, Teaching Pastor at National Community Church; founder of Blu_Print, Baltimore, Maryland

“In a culture that seeks two minutes of fame, Thann calls us to something more noble and lasting: a lifetime of making the name of Jesus famous. With a mix of unique biblical study, practical theology, and engaging personal storytelling, My Fame, His Fame gives us permission to be drawn to fame and a blueprint for intertwining our everyday obedience with God’s eternal glory. Bonus: it will make you an expert in the Old Testament prophet Habakkuk.”

—Heather Zempel, Discipleship Pastor at National Community Church; author of Community Is Messy and Amazed and Confused
AIMING YOUR LIFE AND INFLUENCE TOWARD THE GLORY OF GOD

THANN BENNETT
May these pages channel the boundless Word of God, making their reach limitless and timeless, according to 2 Timothy 2:9.

For my brother Isaac, without whose encouragement I might never have written.

And for our parents: Dad and Mom Bennett, and Dad and Mom Gambrell, for giving us a heritage that speaks of His fame.
LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, LORD.
Repeat them in our day,
in our time make them known;
in wrath remember mercy.
—HABAKKUK 3:2
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So far, so God” and “The best is yet to come.”

These two statements are embedded in the DNA of our church, National Community Church in Washington, DC. For nearly twenty-five years, we have experienced countless moments where His divine plan and power has made a way for us. This firsthand experience with the fame of God has conditioned us to acknowledge that our past was only possible because of God, and to lean into our future with a holy expectation that He will continue to show up and show off.

Nine years ago, my son Parker and I visited Machu Picchu and went paragliding into the Inca Valley. Our only real orientation was an instruction to “run as fast as you can off the cliff and then lift your legs.” Given the element of uncertainty we felt, I did what any good father would do—I let Parker go first!

When it was my turn and I was running toward the cliff, I had one thought in my head, *This is crazy.* But after leaping off the cliff and getting swept up in an updraft, that thought became *This is awesome!* Granted, I lost my lunch seven times, so it was decidedly less awesome for my tandem partner behind me!
Even so, the memory of that day reminds me that if we aren’t willing to put ourselves in crazy situations, we will never experience crazy, awesome moments.

In Joshua 3, the Israelites experienced a crazy, awesome miracle when they crossed the Jordan River on dry ground. Most of us remember the miracle. But how many of us remember the crazy obedience that preceded the miracle?

In verse 3, after God instructed the Levites to move ahead with the ark of the covenant, the people were told, “You are to move out from your positions and follow it.”

We should always plan and work like it depends on us, but it is far more critical to recognize when it is time to step out from the familiar and follow a move of God.

In verse 4, the people are told, “You will not know which way to go, since you have never been this way before.”

The temptation to stay where it is familiar can be so strong. But charting a new path is often required in order to inherit the new thing God is doing.

In verse 5, Joshua gives the key instruction to the people, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you.”

This is the critical moment. It is God’s job to do crazy, awesome things, but it is our job to consecrate ourselves to Him. The consecration is what affords us the capacity to dream beyond our ability and our resources.

Do you know how God makes big people? He gives them big dreams. By definition, a God-sized dream is beyond your ability and beyond your resources. You can’t do it. But your God can! And when He does, He gets the glory. Show me your dream, and I will show you the size of your God.
In order for the people to experience the miracle of walking through the Jordan River, the people had to consecrate themselves, and the Levites leading them had to be willing to step into the river and get their shoes wet. They had to step out and follow a crazy instruction in order for the crazy, awesome miracle to occur.

God uses ordinary people who are consecrated to Him to do His most important work. He uses people who are willing to believe that if we do what God asks, He will reveal His fame of old in our day.

Like Thann, I believe God is preparing to do a crazy, awesome work in and through you. But I know from experience it will require you to step out and follow when He moves.

Would you be bold enough to believe with me that the best is yet to come?

Would you be audacious enough to get your shoes wet when He asks you to step into the river?

Our God is preparing to accomplish His will. He can do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine. But He is asking you and me to be the catalysts for His mighty move. He has called us for such as a time as this—and for the purpose of calling His fame into our day. The only ceiling on what He is about to do is our level of consecration to Him.

Are you ready to step forward and consecrate yourself for the purpose of His fame? If so, buckle in and read on, because for those who are consecrated, the best is yet to come!

Mark Batterson

New York Times bestselling author of The Circle Maker
Lead Pastor of National Community Church
 Look at the nations and watch—
and be utterly amazed.

For I am going to do something in your days
that you would not believe
even if you were told.

—HABAKKUK 1:5

I am terrified.

I am terrified I, despite having an intimate knowledge of the King of kings and the Creator of the universe, might never fully experience the awesome power of my God. I am terrified I might never yield fully to Him in a way that allows His intentions of glory revealed to occur through me. I am terrified the fame of
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my God might never be truly known in these times. In my time. And even if His fame and glory are revealed, I am terrified I might miss the role I am intended to play in bringing that dream into reality. I am troubled to think I might not get a chance to play the part He long ago created for me in making His fame known in my days.

So yes, I am terrified. And you should be similarly terrified. But those shivers of terror are nothing compared to the shivers of exhilaration at the thought that my God might indeed be made known in my time. Those shivers intensify when I consider His fame might be realized anew specifically because of what He wants to do through me—the way He wants to tell His story through my story. To be sure, it would be enough for His fame to simply be made known in my time, no matter the vessel. That alone is the goal. But to be invited into that revelation, and to be entrusted with helping usher it in, is something infinitely beyond anything I could ask or imagine.

And yet, that is precisely my mission. It is exactly and without mistake my calling because I know of His power and His fame. I have heard of His mighty deeds. And I have the overwhelming good fortune of being invited to make that fame known in these times. In my time.

So I shiver with anticipation in a way that completely overwhelms my shivers of terror. You should shiver too. Because this is not my call alone. It is yours, as well. We are called to rise together as one with a single and unified mission in mind—that of making the Famous One known in our time. You, also, have heard of His mighty works and know of His power and fame. You, too, are called to usher in that fame in our time.

There was another who was terrified by these thoughts.
Another who shivered with terror but also with excitement and anticipation at the prospect of ushering in the fame of his God in his day and time. Another who longed for a revelation of the almighty God’s fame but lost faith that it would occur on his watch. This one who shivered long before you and me was a prophet. This is his story.

THE PROPHET

The prophet had all but given up on God. He lived in times of great anguish and great oppression. The enemies of his people were terrorizing the land, and most around him were literally and figuratively on the run. It appeared God had abandoned them. It appeared their destruction was imminent and that God had turned His back. Time was running out, and the prophet’s patience was running thin.

His patience was thin, his frustrations were high, and his hope was nearly gone. So he did the unthinkable. He confronted his God and placed the blame for his people’s predicament squarely upon the almighty God.

The prophet told God he was tired of crying out for help, only to be ignored.

He accused God of not listening to his many pleas.

He blamed God for the violence the people were suffering, because God had not saved them.

He vented at God for tolerating what was happening and for forcing him to witness such atrocities.

He bemoaned that justice was yielding to injustice and that the law was being flouted with no consequence.
He informed God that the wicked were prevailing over the righteous, and he blamed his God for it.

Yes, the prophet was so desperate, times were so bad, and hope had run so thin, he turned on his God. He confronted his God with the brutal reality of the situation and asked why God had turned His back. It was not a prophet-like thing to do. Prophets are supposed to endure to the end. Prophets are supposed to weather the storms of life. When everyone else fades away and gives in to the troubles of the world around them, prophets are supposed to stand by their God.

Or are they?

What if a true prophet—a true follower of the King—is not designed to stand by while all around them falls but instead is created to be the one who walks into the storm to engage—and yes, even confront—the almighty God? What if the One who created us is not unaware of the storm that surrounds us but rather is desperately searching for someone who will finally run to Him with these many burdens and invite His mighty power to intervene in them? What if He is willing to be confronted by someone He created? What if the main purpose for the people He created is His interaction with them and through them in order to bring glory and fame to His name? What if a conduit for His glory and fame is what He has been seeking all along? What if He has stayed His hand simply because none of His creation has come to Him offering to be used by Him in this way?

What if we have had it all wrong? Because doesn’t the prophet’s situation feel a bit like today? Doesn’t it feel as though the wicked are winning? Doesn’t it feel as though the pleas of the righteous are being ignored? Doesn’t it feel as if millions are
suffering injustice and the justice of God is all too often absent? Doesn’t it feel like your cries for solutions are being shouted into the void?

That is how it feels to me. And for so long, I have believed it inappropriate for me to say so out loud. After all, how dare I question God’s timing or God’s presence! He is all-knowing and all-powerful (both certainly true), and I have waited for Him to intervene in the situations around me. I have waited because I know He is already aware. I have waited because I know His power is sufficient. I have waited, and I have grown frustrated by the silence.

But maybe, just maybe, it is time for you and for me to follow the example of the prophet. Maybe it is time to confront the almighty God. Maybe He is just waiting for us to finally turn to Him. And maybe the reason He is waiting is because all of creation was intended to proclaim His fame, and He has stayed His hand until such a time that His fame could be revealed through our request and engagement.

Listen to the almighty God’s response to the prophet’s accusations: “Look at the nations and watch—and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told” (Hab. 1:5).

I am ready for that. I am ready for the God of the universe to step in and do something beyond my wildest imagination. I am ready for His time of silence to end and for wrongs to be made right. I am ready for His fame to roll through the land. I am ready for these days—my days, our days—to be marked by a move of the almighty God so great it has to be seen in order to be believed. And I am willing to be the one who confronts the almighty God for that purpose. I want nothing more than to give
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my life as a vessel through which the fame of my Creator can be made known. It is my greatest desire.

What about you? Are you also willing and ready?

THE PROPHET RESPONDS

The prophet was willing, and he demonstrated that willingness by confronting God. But even when God promised to move in a mighty way, the prophet was not convinced. He had been through too much and had witnessed a magnitude of injustice so great, he was rendered incapable of total belief without sight. And so he again reminded the almighty God of the turmoil the people were enduring while God stayed His hand. He asked, “Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?” (Hab. 1:13).

I have been there. In fact, I think I am there now. I know the power of the almighty God dwarfs these injustices I see, but they still loom so large compared to my own humanity. They loom large when the hand of God is stayed—when His fame is absent. They are small to Him, but they are overwhelmingly large to me.

It is time for Him to move.
It is time for Him to act.

I am stunned by the prophet’s response. From this place of willingness riddled with doubt, the prophet tells the almighty God, “I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts. I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint” (Hab. 2:1).

“I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts.” Though the prophet was unconvinced and though he had
serious doubts, the prophet made a choice to take his place in the line of duty and stand watch in case the almighty God decided to move. The prophet was not yet convinced, but he moved into action. He was not sure when, or even if, God would meet him. But he vowed that if God did move, he would be found present on his watch and ready to join in that move.

Are you ready? Are you stationed at your watch? Are you guarding the ramparts? Or have you decided the almighty God is not true to His word and that He is not coming? Have you decided that if He is not showing up, neither will you?

It is time for all of us to step to our watch positions and eagerly expect a move of God. When the prophet made this move, God responded, “Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it” (Hab. 2:2).

God did in fact meet the prophet on the ramparts, but even then it was with a warning of more calamity to come. His instruction for the prophet was to make a proclamation of the looming destruction. A proclamation made from within the midst of the trial and storm. The prophet’s task was to act in faith yet again and speak the fame of his God before that fame was present or evident. The prophet’s proclamation would go before the fame and would actually usher in the fame. But in order for it to occur, the prophet had to be willing to utter it. He had to be willing to proclaim into the void.

Our task is the same. If we truly want to experience the mighty fame of our God in these times, we have to proclaim it. And we must do it into the void. We must do it before there is evidence of it. We must proclaim the fame of our God by faith and do it in the face of looming calamity. If we do not, His fame will remain veiled and His hand will remain stayed. But if we proclaim it, He
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has promised to do something in our time we would not believe even if we were told.

It is our move.

THE PROCLAMATION

Lord, I have heard of your fame.
—Habakkuk 3:2

The prophet’s proclamation—once he was finally convinced to make it—begins with a wistful recollection of the mighty acts of old. It is at once a statement of the almighty God’s majestic power and an admission that the prophet has only secondhand knowledge of it. The prophet has only heard of God’s great fame; He has never actually known it. The legends of God’s mighty acts that are so needed in his present time are familiar to him, but only as a result of hearsay and legend. They remain something the prophet has heard about rather than something he has experienced.

So when the prophet is called to help usher in the fame of the almighty God, he has to resort to a declaration of faith about what he has heard from generations past. When the prophet opens his mouth to speak, it is not because his mouth is full of words describing what he has seen God do. No, quite the contrary! Remember, the prophet believes his God has been absent during his time. So the prophet opens his mouth in faith and begins with the best articulation of God’s fame he knows. He begins with a recitation of the stories he has been told by those who have gone before him.
Maybe you feel as though you do not have your own stories of God’s fame to tell. Maybe you are frustrated because you desire to speak of God’s fame but have not felt His fame move on your behalf. That is how the prophet felt.

But I am willing to wager you have heard stories about God’s goodness. You have heard legends about His great power. You have been told of His mighty hand moving on behalf of His people. In short, you have heard of God’s fame.

Begin there. Tell those old stories of His power and might! I know it sounds extraordinarily simple—too simple in many ways—but our marching orders start with an instruction to simply proclaim that which we have been told about the fame of our God. The way we first step to our watch on the ramparts is by speaking in faith the fame of our God that is still secondhand to us. His desire is to reveal His fame firsthand—directly to us and for the benefit of our time. But that begins the same way it began for the prophet. It begins when we demonstrate faith in that which we have heard about the fame of our God.

“I have heard of your fame.”

Are you ready to proclaim it?

THE LEGEND

The prophet proclaimed the fame of his God because he had heard the stories of old. Though he had not personally experienced the mighty acts of God, he knew of the legend.

What if I do not know the legend? What if I have not been imparted the stories and the wonders of God’s power displayed to generations past? What if His majesty and greatness are not a
tradition for my family name? What if I lack both the presence of God’s fame and a personal knowledge of His legend? What then? Where do I turn to begin to understand how to walk in His power?

The journey to an answer for these questions begins when we muster the courage to venture into the unknown vastness of God. Our association with the legend grows as we acquire greater understanding that His power both fills the heavens and stoops to reach the lowly. It is more firmly grasped when we embrace the truth that our own understanding falls short, but His wisdom is fully sufficient and available to us. It is strengthened when we understand that our heritage—both the good and the bad—is part of our call. And it is more thoroughly realized when we recognize that we need His grace to cover our weakness.

The prophet knew the legend. But legends are not simply a birthright. They are not obtained only by inheritance. Legends can be learned. If you do not know God’s fame through experience or inheritance, it is time to learn the legend. If you know His fame but the memory of its richness and power is faint, it is time to revisit it.

**THE KNOWLEDGE**

“I stand in awe of your deeds, Lord.”

The prophet has not witnessed the fame of God, but he has heard of it, and now he has spoken of it. But it is one thing to speak with your mouth and another entirely to believe in your heart. We know from the holy Scriptures that both of these are required to receive the salvation of God (Rom. 10:9). We see from the prophet’s example that both are also required if we are
to experience a greater revelation of God’s fame. The prophet did not just hear and proclaim. The prophet believed! How do I know? Because we do not stand in awe of things we do not believe. We are not moved to action by things we think are mere figments of our imaginations. No, we are moved to awe and action by things of which we have become convinced. By things that have ceased to be stories and legends and instead are rooted in what we know to be true!

Are you convinced? Are you convinced in your heart about the great fame of your God? Are you convinced that nothing in the universe—including great calamity and adversity—can separate you from His great love (Rom. 8:38–39)? Are you so convinced that it causes you to stand in awe of the deeds of your God that you have not yet personally witnessed?

If you and I want to see God’s fame, we must move to a place of knowledge. We must stand in awe. If we want the impact of our lives and influence to be the furtherance of His name and fame, we must believe.

Do you believe?
Do you stand in awe?

THE REQUEST

“Repeat them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy.”

The prophet has stepped to his watch. He has proclaimed that which he has heard. And he has become convinced that the legend of his God is true. But now it is time to call on the almighty God to come through. Now it is time to beckon those mighty acts
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of old into the present day. Now it is time for the prophet to move from “I believe my God can do it” to “Do it again, God!”

My friends, I believe we stand at a similar moment in history—both individually and collectively. I believe we are at a juncture where we desperately need God’s fame to roll through the land. We desperately need our depravity and chaos to be met by the holiness, order, and power of our God. We need His fame and His glory to be repeated in our day, and in our time.

Do it again, God!

Are you courageous enough to ask it of Him? Are you bold enough to be the one who calls down His mighty power and lives a life dedicated to a greater revelation of His fame? Are you that convinced?

Candidly, while this is an exhilarating prospect, it is also an intimidating one. It is intimidating because the power of the almighty God is overwhelming, and many will greet it with skepticism and disbelief. If we dare place ourselves in association with His fame—and if, in fact, we are the ones who actually call that fame further into the open—it will cost us something. The price will vary, but each of us who makes this choice will pay a price. For some, it will be a reputational cost. For others, occupational. For others still, financial. And in truth, each of us must be prepared to give our very life for it.

The costs are many and at times high, but the payoff is something beyond our wildest imaginations. The payoff is God doing something we would not believe even if we had been told. The payoff is a repeat of the mighty acts of old. And it is a reorientation of our life’s purpose toward the fame of our God.

Are you living with the aim of increasing the fame of your God? Does that aim supplant every other aim, including your
own fame? Will you be satisfied if you hit the target and the result is that your fame is less but His is greater? If we can honestly answer yes, then I firmly believe it will usher in a mighty move of God, and we will begin to see His fame made known in our time.

Repeat your fame in our time, God. Do it again!

HABAKKUK

The prophet in this story is Habakkuk. But the call to him is now my call. It is now your call. The goal is for the fame of the almighty God to be revealed. The hope is to realize that dream in our time. The task is aiming the trajectory and influence of our lives in the direction of His glory. And the time is now.

Will you step to your watch? Will you station yourself on the ramparts in order to be ready when His fame rolls through the land? He is coming. He has said He is going to do something beyond anything we have ever experienced. Something beyond even those mighty acts of old. But whether or not we participate is up to us.

It is time to proclaim His fame. It is time to call down His mighty acts of old and see them repeated in our day. It is time to be a vessel for His mercy.

Are you in?
PART I

THE PROCLAMATION

Lord, I have heard of your fame.
—HABAKKUK 3:2
“I won’t be happy until I am famous like God.” Those are the words of the mega-superstar Madonna. They were not uttered at the beginning of her career or even as her fame was beginning to increase. They were spoken after she had accumulated about as much fame and adoration as is possible for a person. Madonna’s goal was fame, and she had achieved it so fully that she was quite possibly the most famous woman on the planet. Yet it was still not enough.

This perspective is far from rare among the famous. In fact, I think it is fair to call it the norm. Most who have achieved a large
dose of the fame they are pursuing will tell you it is not all it is cracked up to be. They will tell you it is not enough and that it is not a source of joy in the end. If that is true, then why are we still so drawn to fame? If those who have it tell us it does not satisfy, why do we still want it?

Would it shock you if I told you we are drawn to fame because we were created for it? It is true. We were created for fame, but somewhere along the way—somewhere right near the beginning—we lost sight of true fame. We confused the fame we were created for with the fame that can be gathered unto ourselves. We confused the fame our souls long for with the one our human flesh craves.

This human fame—rooted in a pursuit of “public estimation” or “popular acclaim”—is an idea that consumes many of us in one form or another. We are a society thoroughly absorbed in the idea of persona. Platforms, likes, and influence are accepted measures of success. We live for the sound of applause and the adoration of the crowd. We pursue many things, but dare I say nothing with as much vigor as the allure of personal fame. We hear the words of the famous telling us that this fame is not the answer, and yet it still draws us.

The truth is, we are all drawn to this fame on some level. I use inclusive terms like “we” and “us” to describe this attraction because I know its pull in a personal way. I, too, feel the need to convince the world of my own value. I feel the urge to build up an image of myself that will impress the masses. The attraction to fame lives in me.

This attraction to fame exists across all personality types and on all points of the extrovert/introvert spectrum. Many of us crave the spotlight. Others prefer to be behind the scenes. These
personality distinctions are not the point of contention. There
is nothing inherently wrong with the spotlight, and there is no
certain safety from the dangerous attraction of personal fame if
we stay behind the scenes. Our disposition to the spotlight may
differ, but the truth is, we are all drawn to this idea of fame.

Again, this may shock you, but I suggest the reason for the
universal pull toward fame is that it is born at the soul level. I
suggest we were actually made for fame, but it is a different kind
of fame than we know and have been taught. It is a different kind
of fame than the one that bombards us every day. It is a different
fame, and it is a much, much greater fame.

It is a fame so great that each of us was birthed with a God-
given desire for it. We were created to search out this fame, to
amass it, to amplify it, and to give our lives for it.

It is true: this fame for which we were created is different from
being famous. Some of our personalities are not inclined to become
famous, but each of us is bestowed with a desire for fame—even
if we do not yet realize it or possess an ability to articulate it.
Our very design is intended to be inclined toward fame. We were
created to pursue fame, to possess fame, and to channel fame. I
would go so far as to suggest that the pursuit of this great fame
should consume all the days of our lives.

We were made for fame.

But we so regularly confuse this fame we were created to
pursue and possess with the allure of actually being famous. We
confuse the two because the latter is the one we know and the
one we see on display in the world around us. It is the one those
around us are pursuing, and the one our world deems valuable.
We are drawn to fame by our very nature, but we have fleshly
tendencies that make us vulnerable to the fame our society holds
MY FAME, HIS FAME

in high regard. These two conceptions of fame are not only separate but are actually in conflict with each other.

If we are going to walk in the fame for which we were created, it will require that we learn to distinguish between His fame and the fame of this world.

CREATED FOR FAME

I am not famous and have no desire to become famous. But that is merely a personality preference. That is simply an indication of where I am naturally the most comfortable. It does not alter the fact that I, like Habakkuk, have heard of the almighty God’s fame and have some semblance of a realization that my purpose for walking this planet is to build that fame. I am charged with cultivating that fame. I am tasked with proclaiming that fame. I am commissioned to be a catalyst for that fame and to propel it throughout all the land.

So despite a personality preference for relative anonymity, I have come to realize that my life’s purpose is fame. But if I am to achieve my life’s purpose, I have to learn about true fame. I will need to unlearn the version of fame I know—the one that bombards me every day. I will need to unlearn it so that the proper version might take its place. You see, the version of fame I know will destroy me. But the kind I was created to pursue will lift me from my weakness, set my feet on the heights, and impact the world in ways I could not even imagine.

You, too, were created for fame. You were created to be a partner in greatness and a mouthpiece for power. You were given a deep longing for things that transcend this world and for a title
of royalty. Yes, you have been called to fame. But, like me, you are not called to this kind of fame by the world. It is not the fame that surrounds us. It is a fame with the power to right every wrong and heal every wound. It is a fame that causes the righteous to celebrate and the wicked to tremble. It is a fame that neither you nor I can fully fathom.

That is the fame for which we were created.

But before we give our lives in pursuit of it, we must unlearn the fame we know—the fame that pursues us with dangerous intent. We must reject a pursuit of the fame that will not satisfy until we are like God and take up a pursuit of the fame that actually belongs to God.

We were created for fame but not our own. We were created for so much more. We were created for the fame the prophet recalled. We were created for the fame of the almighty God.

**HIS FAME OVER MY PERSONALITY**

My personality prefers solitude over attention. Tranquility over fanfare. Backstage over center stage. I strongly dislike the idea of being an overly public figure. But if I am not careful, that personality preference can be a dangerous impediment to the main mission of my life: lifting high the Famous One. It can be an impediment because proclaiming the fame of our great God often requires visibility. It requires a public profession or even a loud proclamation. For Habakkuk, the proclamation “I have heard of your fame” was the turning point when a feeling of despondency and desperation became one of action and power. It was the moment in which Habakkuk moved from confronting God and
turned to face the world with a public proclamation of God’s awe-
some power. It was a moment when pretense and anonymity had
to be left behind in order to make a bold statement about his God.

For me, the preference for working behind the scenes as opposed
to in the limelight is not about a fear of the front lines. In fact, I
have never found the stereotypical pressure-packed moment to
be overwhelming, and to a certain extent I enjoy the adrenaline
rush of a high-stakes moment or encounter. But when I zoom
out and think about my preferred state of being, I definitely pre-
fer privacy, solitude, and serenity. I prefer helping someone else
make an impact while staying mostly hidden in the background.

For whatever reason, God has not always allowed this pref-
rence to prevail. I do serve in many supportive roles, and I
am certainly not famous. But it is far from rare for God to ask
something visible—something public—from me. You are right
now holding one such example. After all, if the idea of writing,
publishing, and promoting a book does not run contrary to a
preference for remaining behind the scenes, then nothing does.
But over time, my conviction for making known the fame of my
God has grown to overwhelm my preference for anonymity. I still
do not desire great amounts of attention or fanfare. But I would
give anything—including my personal preference for anonym-
ity—to amplify the fame of my God.

It is hard to say whether Habakkuk preferred fame or obscu-
ritvity, but either way, this proclamation of God’s fame is the decisive
moment when he realizes he has fully aired his grievances with
God and it is time to step forward in boldness. It is the moment
when he steps from behind the curtain and onto the main stage.
It is the moment when any preference for anonymity and any
shame of association with his God are left behind. It is a moment
of no turning back. Come what may, he is choosing to be visible and to publicly proclaim his belief that God’s word is true. Habakkuk is staking his reputation on the prospect that God will keep His promise and actually show up on the scene.

Maybe you desire to be famous. Maybe the bright lights of the stage or the screen or the athletic field appeal to you. There is nothing inherently wrong with that preference. In fact, it is pretty normal, and each of us has some iteration of that tendency. Believe me, if my baseball abilities had afforded me the opportunity to play shortstop or catcher for the Chicago Cubs, I would have happily set aside my preference for anonymity and embraced baseball stardom!

On the other hand, maybe you prefer to be behind the scenes. Maybe you dislike being the center of attention. Maybe you, like me, gather greater fulfillment from solving a problem in the background than you do performing in the limelight. Again, there is nothing inherently wrong with that disposition. In fact, God has designed us to fulfill His unique plans for us.

But to be honest, our personality preferences are somewhat beside the point and is too often used as an excuse for our failure to obey. The truth is that each of us is called to respond with essentially the same act of obedience. Whether we desire personal fame or prefer anonymity, we are each called to live for the glory of His name. We are called to a decision point when our personal fame will be set aside in exchange for a life devoted to proclaiming the fame of the Famous One.

“Lord, I have heard of your fame.” Habakkuk’s decision point came before He witnessed a move of God. In fact, God was waiting to move until Habakkuk would proclaim. He was waiting for Habakkuk to proclaim because He desired that Habakkuk
be the vessel for His fame. This is what makes our proclamation of faith so tricky. If we are going trade the fame we know for the fame we were designed to carry, it will require a proclamation of faith. It will require that we step proactively onto the ramparts and believe that God will meet us there.

A proclamation of God’s fame is the first step toward the goal of being a catalyst for His mighty works in our generation. In order to successfully navigate this transition, we must first grapple with this concept of personal fame. We must learn God’s design for earning a reputation in all the land and leading lives focused solely on His fame.

**A GREAT NAME**

“I will make your name great.”

Those six words were part of God’s promise to the patriarch of the Old Testament, Abram, in Genesis 12:2. The promise was a precursor to Abram’s name change to Abraham and to the emergence of a miraculous people through Abraham’s lineage. It was a foretelling of something that seemed impossible at the time. But it was not aimed at something so small as one man’s reputation or legacy. Rather, Abraham’s name was to be made great in order to lay a foundation for the coming of the King. Abraham’s greatness was merely a springboard for the true greatness that would follow.

This promise is similar in many ways to other foretelling promises in Scripture, particularly the promise made to the Israelites exiled in Babylon (Jeremiah 29). Just as many of us remember the “I will make your name great” part of Abram’s
promise, many of us know and hold to the beautiful promise in Jeremiah 29:11: “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future.” We remember and claim these portions of the promises because it is easy to desire a great name and a condition of prosperity. But I suggest that sometimes a focus on these aspects of the promises actually causes us to miss the most powerful promises in the passages.

In both promises—to Abram and the exiled Israelites—there are two principles that we can expect in our lives, as well.

First, it is God—not us—who will make our names great and prosper us, and He will do it if it serves the purpose of making His name famous. In each of these promises, while we are tempted to hear mainly what is being promised to us, God is speaking primarily about what He will do (“I will make—” and, “I know the plans I have—”) and how it will bring Him glory (“all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you,” and “I will be found by you”).

So first and foremost, this concept of fame is entirely for the purpose of amplifying God’s name. To the extent we are afforded any portion of a certain fleeting type of fame, it both comes from God and is intended for God and His glory. It is meant to flow through us, not rest upon us.

Second, the process of knowing God’s fame and walking in His promises can be a long and painful one. Abram and Sarai were already decades beyond childbearing years when this promise of a great family legacy was made to them. But even upon receipt of the promise, they were instructed to pack up their entire life and set out on a difficult journey to essentially start over (Gen. 12:1). The promise of God was not simply set in front
of them. Instead, they were called to step forward and act out in obedience. They were called to proclaim and obey before they had evidence that God’s promise was true.

In the case of the Israelites, the beautiful promise of prosperity is preceded by this often overlooked premise: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise” (Jer. 29:10). Seventy years! Seventy years of exile, no less. Practically speaking, that meant most of the people receiving this beautiful promise would not live to walk in it. At the very least, it would be only the young who realized it first-hand, and they would be old before they did.

We need to come to terms with the reality that a pursuit of God’s fame is not an overnight endeavor. It is not a scratch-off lottery ticket. Rather, it is a glimpse of the glory that God intends to do in and through us if we persevere. It is a merciful dose of what awaits us on the other side of our current suffering. Our God is telling us what He will do in order that we might muster the courage to do what is set before us.

Might I suggest that this reality makes the promises of God more attractive rather than less? It does so because it invites us to walk in a small portion of what He experienced for us on the cross. It enables us to know at least a sliver of how much He loves us—enough to pay everything in exchange for our redemption. Now, He offers us His shared glory. But if you are in a place of starting over, or if you have been exiled for a long time, take heart! Those are the places where we are emptied of ourselves in order to receive more of Him.

He has promised to give us each a great name. But we must grasp the reality that the world does not need our great names. We see a broken culture and we want to fix it. But we—and our
own personal fame—are not the answer. The world does not need us. The world needs the Famous One. But God, in His infinite wisdom and desire for interaction with us, has intertwined our call with His fame. He has created us to be the way in which He reaches the world.

So while the world may not need us, we are the way in which it gets the One it needs. We are the way in which the world gets Him. It is through us that the Famous One is made known. He has called us to live a life dedicated to His fame, and in return He has promised us a great name. He has given us His assurance not that we will be famous but rather that our names will be hidden within His great fame.

Our task is to aim every influence of our lives in the direction of His fame.
CHAPTER 2

KNOWN

But whoever loves God is known by God.
—1 CORINTHIANS 8:3

We try to be famous when we should long to be known. We strive to prove we know best when we should be seeking to be known by the One who knows all. We endeavor to make our names known when our only goal should be that we are fully known by Him. To put it plainly, it is far better to be known than it is to be famous.

We have established that we were created to pursue, possess, and even channel fame, but we have so frequently misallocated where that accumulated fame is to reside. There is an ever-present clash of ideals between what it means to be famous and what it
means to be known. If we are to have any success in our pursuit of His fame, it will require that we reorient ourselves toward His design. He desires that we be fully known by and hidden in Him. He desires that we pursue knowledge of His face and a dedication to His fame. These two objectives go hand in hand and cannot be effectively achieved apart from each other.

This reorientation toward a focus on being truly known by Him begins with a commitment to vulnerability before Him. He wants to give us a great name and help us earn a reputation throughout the land, but it requires a life that is fully given over to Him. It does not require a perfect life—far from it! In fact, it is clear He has repeatedly chosen for His work those who have abandoned pretense in favor of an embrace of their own weakness. He is looking for those who would seek genuine, transparent relationship with Him—those who would lay down their own reputations in favor of His. In other words, He is looking for those who desire to be known in every way—failures and all.

This idea has become easier for me to grasp since becoming a father. When one of our children says something like “You are the best dad in the world,” it absolutely melts my heart. It is the best affirmation they can give, and the weight of its value is increased by the fact that our relationship is genuine. My kids know all too well that I am not perfect, and they know I am aware of their imperfections as well. This mutual and genuine relationship makes an expression of great love all the more meaningful because it flows from a place of intimate knowledge of my shortcomings. It is truly unconditional.

I suggest it is not all that different for our heavenly Father. He wants to know every part of us and to express His unconditional love for us even while fully aware of our weakness. He is
not looking for perfection, but He does desire full surrender. He longs to know us in full.

If we are to be used by Him in a way that proclaims His fame, we must set our hearts not on fame but on being known by the Famous One. We must lay down our reputation in exchange for His and trust that He will build for us a reputation capable of carrying His fame.

It is better to be known than to be famous.

FAME IN THE LAND

The battle of Jericho is probably the event for which the biblical hero Joshua is best known. Joshua followed God’s instructions and defeated the fortified city of Jericho simply by having his people march around the walls for seven days and then raise a mighty shout. The walls of the city fell to the ground, and God delivered a great victory to the Israelites. It is an incredible story of God’s power, but I am most intrigued by what followed this great victory.

After the walls fell, Joshua issued this stern warning against anyone who would seek to rebuild the destroyed city: “At the cost of his firstborn son he will lay its foundations; at the cost of his youngest he will set up its gates” (Josh. 6:26).

The very next verse, Joshua 6:27, says, “So the LORD was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout the land.”

Generally speaking, threatening to kill your people’s children is a terrible strategy for achieving fame—at least the positive kind! But Joshua was not seeking fame; He was focused on obeying the voice of God and convincing his people to honor the command
against rebuilding Jericho. As a result of his obedience, Joshua’s reputation in the land was strengthened, and, more important, his association with the Famous One now went before him.

Just a few chapters later we find that the Gibeonites traveled to meet Joshua and deceived him into granting a promise of protection. Joshua’s fame had gone before him to such an extent that the Gibeonites begged to become servants rather than be destroyed. To be honest, that does not sound like much of a step up to me, but they were successful in their deception and Joshua granted their request.

But notice the motivation behind their great effort to seek Joshua’s favor. When Joshua asked who they were, the Gibeonites responded:

Your servants have come from a very distant country because of the fame of the LORD your God. For we have heard reports of him: all that he did in Egypt, and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan—Sihon king of Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who reigned in Ashtaroth. (Josh. 9:9–10)

The Gibeonites were lying about where they came from (in truth, they were neighbors), but they were certainly not lying about why they knew Joshua’s name! “Because of the fame of the Lord your God!” When was the last time someone showed up to see you unannounced because they knew you were associated with a God so powerful they simply had to be on good terms with you? Maybe it is a different answer for you, but for me the answer is never. I regularly have unscheduled meetings with people who want to accomplish a legislative goal or have a particular message
to spread, but I have never—not once—had this Joshua moment where someone has heard about the fame of my God because of something I have done and then scrambled to meet me as a result.

In many ways I think it is an indictment of my own priorities. I should be desperate to make the fame of my God known in the land. Sometimes that requires our own association with Him to be boldly proclaimed or acted upon. Humility is a noble pursuit—maybe even our highest calling, but refusing to be widely seen in association with the almighty God is not humility. In fact, it is the exact opposite. It is prioritizing my comfort and personal preference over what should be the driving goal of my life: making known the name of the almighty God!

I do not want to be famous. But I desperately want to have a reputation in the land that facilitates the fame of my God.

A GLIMPSE OF GOD

As we become more fully known by God, our desire to know more of Him in return will naturally grow stronger. We see numerous biblical examples of this, and I have drawn strength from several contemporary examples as well.

On the biblical side of the equation, the story of Moses paints an epic picture of a very flawed man who was called by God to do great things, and who grew ever more fervent in his desire to know the face of God and to obey His voice. There is no illusion or suggestion that Moses succeeded effortlessly in this area. In fact, he specifically struggled with it. His anger at God, the people, or himself repeatedly presented a relational hurdle for Moses to clear. But God continued to pursue Moses, and Moses
continually returned with even greater resolve to his pursuit of knowing the face of God.

My favorite illustration of Moses’ desperation to know more of God occurs in Exodus 33, as Moses was pleading with God to reveal more of Himself in order to confirm the instructions He had given. Moses had been speaking with God “face to face, as one speaks to a friend” (v. 11). God told Moses, “I know you by name and you have found favor with me” (v. 12). Yet, despite this intimate knowledge of and relationship with each other, Moses had not seen God with his physical eyes, and he longed to do so. Moses pled that God’s presence would go with him, and God granted the request specifically because Moses was known by God: “I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name” (v. 17).

God said yes, but Moses was not satisfied. He wanted to see God. Moses responded, “Now show me your glory” (v. 18).

Sometimes we seek God’s face and His intervention, but we walk away satisfied after receiving a narrow answer. Our thirst is quenched when God has addressed the situation at hand. We accept this narrow answer from God because we are still more concerned with our circumstances than we are our relationship with Him. But not Moses. Moses wanted to see God, and while he had God’s attention, Moses insisted that God reveal a bit more of His glory.

God’s response should make the hair on your neck stand up:

And the Lord said, “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But,”
he said, “you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.” Then the Lord said, “There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen.” (Ex. 33:19–23)

When Moses insisted and persisted rather than relenting, God granted his wish to observe a portion of the glory of God with physical eyes. What a moment that must have been! What a lesson about how God can handle a little stubborn persistence from those of us who desire to know Him and be known by Him. What an important reminder that God desires authentic relationship with us above a pious reverence that prevents us from pressing in to Him.

Also, what a staggering depiction of the vastness of God’s glory. Moses, one of the great heroes of faith in the Bible, must be hidden in a rock and shielded by the hand of God in order to be protected from being consumed by the full glory and fame of God’s presence. Even Moses was only permitted a glimpse of God’s greatness. Even he could only handle exposure to the back side of God’s fame.

Friends, the fame of our God is vast beyond our imaginations. Are we adequately desperate for even a glimpse of it? Do we know what even the back side of that glory looks like? Are we desperately seeking to be known by God in a way that allows us a face-to-face audience with Him? Are we using that audience to insist that God show us His glory?

He is willing to reveal His glory. He desires to know and be known. But we have underestimated His vastness. We have
declined to insist on more of His glory. As a result, He has shielded us from a glimpse of His glory.

It is time for that to change.

God, show us Your glory!

THE FAR SIDE OF GOD

Once we have a glimpse of God, I am convinced it will fuel a passion for more of Him. Our worship pastor at National Community Church, Chris Douglas, and his wife, Kathryn, have been an example to Brooke and me in recent days of this transition. Chris and Kathryn recently walked through the unspeakable horror of losing a young child. Grief from burying their child left its mark on Chris and Kathryn, and our church family grieved with them. After a time of reflection and restoration, Chris has talked and written openly about what it is like to endure such a deep wound and about the effort it takes to keep hold of God’s promises.

But I am most moved by Chris’s description of the place they find themselves in on this side of their loss. He described it as being “unsatisfied with what we had previously known about God.” He said, “I am no longer satisfied with knowing the near side of God. I am desperate to know the far side of God.” What a powerful illustration of how a time when God feels distant can fuel our longing to know more of Him. Because when what we know of God does not feel sufficient for our current trials we have two choices: to walk away or to press in deeper until we find more of Him.

What will we do when what we know of God—our glimpse of God—does not feel like enough to sustain us? What will we
Known

do when the near side of God’s glory is all we have? The vastness of God is unknowable and unattainable, but there is a far side of His character and His being that is knowable if we will press in rather than walk away.

I want to press in. I want more than just a glimpse of God. I want to be known by Him in a way that allows me to know the far side of His glory and fame. I want to know and be known in a way that allows me to truly insist that He move in my time.

God, give me more than just a glimpse of You! Show me the far side of Your glory!

Where am I known?

Where am I known? Another way to ask it is, Where does my fame reside?

It is a critical question to answer honestly, because if I am best known by the Famous One, I will be most motivated by the things that proclaim His name. On the other hand, if I am best known by those around me, I will be most motivated by the things that preserve my fame in their eyes.

As with so many areas of life, this is ultimately a matter of the heart. It is a question of where we are laying up treasure and what truly drives us. It is a choice, because we can only serve one master (Matt. 6:24). It requires an understanding that we cannot effectively amplify His fame unless we are fully hidden in Him. Conversely, we cannot be hidden in Him unless His fame is our highest goal.

There is a sobering two-edged component to this concept. So far, we have focused mostly on the exhilarating possibilities that
exist if we dedicate ourselves to God’s fame and to being known by Him. But it is equally true that if we choose to devote ourselves to our own fame and our own reputation, those lesser desires will enslave us (Gal. 4:9.) If we become more concerned with whom God is using—and whether or not it is us—than we are with the simple desire that He move, we fall into this trap.

Numbers 12 gives us an example of this danger in the lives of Aaron and Miriam. God had been using Moses in ways that were nothing short of miraculous. God and Moses had been interacting face-to-face, and God’s power had been consistently flowing through Moses on behalf of the Israelites. The people’s very existence had been preserved because of God’s power on display through Moses.

Even so, Aaron and Miriam responded with jealousy: “Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?” they asked. “Hasn’t he also spoken through us?” (Num. 12:2). In other words, “Look at us! We are great too!”

It sounds like such a ridiculous and selfish exclamation when we read it, but I think many of us do this on a regular basis. We see a spark of God’s glory at work, but our natural inclination is not one of considering how it can be fanned into full flame, but rather one of wondering how we can be cast favorably in its glow. We see God’s fame as being for our glory rather than viewing our beings as vessels for His. We envy the Moses figures in our lives at this moment, and we justify it by saying that we also desire to speak with God face-to-face. But much like Aaron and Miriam, we are all too often motivated by a desire for the people to look at us instead of at God.

We also forget all that Moses sacrificed for this relationship with God, and we do the same with people of our generation. We
forget that Moses continued to serve even though God barred him from entering the promised land (Num. 20:12). We forget that God had decided to abandon His people because of their stubbornness, and it was Moses who convinced God to be gracious and to remain with them (Ex. 33). It was Moses who had given everything so that his people might reap the rewards. And yet Aaron and Miriam thought they wanted what Moses had.

Living for God’s fame can come at a heavy price. There is no guarantee we will reap the rewards on this side of eternity. In fact, it is very likely that God’s moving through us will be the cause for those around us to resent us or abandon us. But keep your eyes fixed on His glory, because in the end you will reap just rewards.

Finally, let us all lay aside this foolish notion that we should be ungrateful for the roles God has assigned us. Instead, let us endeavor to unleash a move of God in our time, no matter the vessel. When He chooses to use us, let us step forward and run with it! When he chooses another, let us step behind them and support them with everything we have. It is all for His fame, anyway.

Where are you known?
Where does your fame reside?
Are you fully known by and hidden in Him?
When God moves through another, are you willing to fall in behind them?

Yes, we were made for fame—His fame. We obtain and amplify that fame when we are fully known by Him. It is better to be known than to be famous.
I cringe just a bit whenever I hear the word leadership. I cringe not because I think it an unimportant concept or because I have not benefited from great leaders in my life. In fact, the exact opposite has been true. I have had and continue to have the tremendous privilege of serving alongside some of the great leaders of our time. Whatever growth has occurred in me over the years is due in large part to the exemplary leadership of those who have invested in me. Leadership skills are invaluable, and there are many terrific voices to foster and steward those skills. But
I cringe because all too often we are encouraged to pursue the wrong kind of leadership, and it is suggested to us that leadership should be one of the primary goals we pursue.

Time and time again we are called to push our way to the front and develop skills that will make people want to follow us. We are encouraged to hold our heads high, draw on our charisma, and outshine the competition to attract more followers and gain more influence. We are told that working to increase our fame is justified in this case because it is for the good purpose of reaching more people with the message of Jesus Christ.

Not everything about this model is incorrect, but it is built on a fatally flawed premise and is fraught with danger. The book of James warns us, “Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly” (James 3:1). The danger is that if we are pursuing leadership for the sake of a larger audience, the only thing we are adding to our portfolios is personal responsibility and accountability for which we were not intended. If we pursue fame in ways God has not intended, or in a fashion or time He did not ordain, we are setting ourselves up for failure. Even worse, we are leading astray those who may follow.

God’s design is just the opposite. His design is that we follow well. His charge is that we follow hard after Him. Ironically, the natural result of following hard after Him will often be magnetic, and in many cases people will naturally follow. But the goal must always be that they follow Him rather than us. Worthwhile leadership requires a focus not on who and how many are behind us but on who and how fervently we are following the One who goes before us. It is about setting our eyes ahead on the One we are following rather than behind on the ones who may be following us.
I so appreciate the way our worship leader at National Community Church, Nicois Harris, communicated this concept. She said, “Hearing His voice is so much more important than finding my voice.” It is doubly ironic because hearing His voice is the only real way for Him to fill us with His voice as promised in Jeremiah 1:9: “Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, ‘I have put my words in your mouth.’” Hearing His voice is not only more important than finding my voice; it is also the way in which I find my voice in Him.

As we grapple with this idea of laying down our fame in favor of lifting high the Famous One, the concept of following hard may be the most important one to conquer in our lives. Please hear me—I am not condemning influence. In fact, this book recounts several examples of leaders whose fame is made known in all the land. But influence that is worth something beyond our own egos involves a perspective far different than a focus on how large or well-positioned we have built our platforms. True influence—and worthwhile leadership—is fixing our eyes on the One we are following rather than on those who may be coming behind.

True leadership is more about following hard than it is about how many are following us. It is about following the Leader more than it is about leading those who are following. It is less about our ability to impress and more about having the humility to submit. True leadership requires we become follower-leaders.

GETTING PASSED

True follower-leaders get passed. In fact, one of the best ways to determine whether you are walking in this kind of followership
is to look around and see if any of those you have been “leading” are passing you. This does not always occur in a linear way or necessarily translate to human titles or prestige, but if you are truly following hard after Jesus, those who are attracted to follow in your wake should be passing you in some areas and in some instances. If we are faithfully modeling for others what it means to have eyes fixed on Him, we should be seeing them drawn deeper and deeper into His call for their lives as well.

In the typical leadership model, a leader seeks to acquire a larger audience and more influence over time and always in an upward direction. In God’s design, a follower-leader’s audience may ebb and flow over time as God uses that follower-leader in different ways or as a result of God doing a new work in that follower-leader. Similarly, while a traditional leader is constantly drawing others toward his or her influence, a follower-leader is incorporating the voice of other teachers and instructors who are also following hard after the Famous One.

Does this approach mean we will get passed more often? Yes! And we should revel in that reality. When a leader’s reach is restricted to those within his or her influence, he or she is choosing to prioritize personal fame over the elevation of God’s fame. Rather than aspiring to keep others safely in our wake, we should be fervent in our efforts to propel them onward and even ahead of us. Not only does this perspective shield us from accountability that God did not intend us to have, but it also multiplies the impact we can have on behalf of His fame.

If we want to truly know—and truly experience—the fame of God, we have to be willing to get passed by those we are leading.
I want to be careful to avoid any suggestion that this pursuit of becoming follower-leaders warrants a resting on our laurels. Because just as a pursuit of our own visibility is out of step with God’s design, a refusal to hone our message and discipline our minds for the tasks He is preparing for us constitutes a squandering of His call for us.

First Peter 3:15 says it this way: “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”

Always be prepared. That does not happen by chance. Living prepared and ready to respond to an opportunity to proclaim God’s fame is not simply a matter of the heart or a simple choice. Yes, our hearts must be in the proper posture. Yes, we must choose in advance that we will respond when an opportunity presents itself. And yes, God has promised to send His Holy Spirit to provide words in a moment of need (Luke 12:11–12). But none of that fully heeds the admonition that we “always be prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”

Preparation is hard work. Preparation takes time. Preparation means marinating in God’s Word. It means deepening our mental and experiential interaction with His commands. And yes, it means honing our message. It means practicing and developing our delivery skills. It means sharpening the communication tools God has given us. It means anticipating that God will bring the opportunities and trusting that His Holy Spirit will lead in the moment, but also preparing ourselves—mind, body, and spirit—in order that we live always at the ready.
Choosing to be a follower-leader does not mean declining to prepare. Just the opposite! We are each called to hone our message and our communication skills in order that we might have maximum effectiveness when God calls our number.

FOLLOW THE FAME

These ideas of fame and following are intricately intertwined. In all reality they are impossible to properly develop apart from each other. The only way to be truly caught up in the stream of God’s fame is to live fully within His shadow. Conversely, the only way to follow hard after Him is to be completely fixated on, and by, His fame and majesty. It is a yes-and equation rather than an either-or question.

The book of Job gives a good illustration of this reality. As Job went through dramatic peaks and valleys of life, his friends also went through wild swings of usefulness—sometimes offering wise counsel and sometimes kicking Job while he was down. In Job 5, Job’s friend Eliphaz had been recounting some of Job’s travails. But I love what Eliphaz said when he pivoted to giving Job advice on how to respond to those challenges. He said, “If I were in your shoes, I’d go straight to God, I’d throw myself on the mercy of God. After all, he’s famous for great and unexpected acts” (Job 5:8–9 THE MESSAGE). The NIV translation says, “But if I were you, I would appeal to God; I would lay my cause before him. He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted.”

“If I were in your shoes, I’d go straight to God.” Why? Because He is famous! Because He is powerful. Because He can deliver you.
FOLLOW THE LEADER

We need His fame and His power, but in order to obtain it, we have to follow it. We cannot be afraid to associate with it. We have to prepare to walk in its stream. And when the moment comes—be it one of great opportunity or great adversity—we must be willing to follow the fame.

If I were you, I would run to God.
I would run to God because He is famous.
He is famous because He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed.
That is the God I would run to.

WHO CHARTS MY PATH?

You might be asking, What does it really matter? You might be thinking, This theory about focusing on following rather than leading is fine, but it is just semantics and does not make much difference. Those are fair questions and musings to have, and I confess to sharing them regularly. But a proper perspective on this dichotomy is in fact one that will make or break us. It is as crucial and foundational to the plan God has for us as anything outside of salvation.

The reason this concept is so critical is pretty straightforward. If we do not achieve a proper focus on following rather than leading, our choices will be dictated based on the anticipated response of our followers rather than on the plain commands of the One we are following.

It really boils down to the fact that we can only serve one master. Matthew 6:24 says, "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to
the one and despise the other.” We can reach and impact many realms and communities, but we can only have true fidelity to one. When the commands and teachings of the One conflict or discomfort the many who follow, which allegiance will we choose? When following hard and holding fast to Him means losing our grip on those within our influence, will we follow hard and hold fast anyway? Or will we slow our pursuit and relax our grip in order to accommodate those we don’t want to lose as followers?

Even those who personally witnessed the ministry of Jesus struggled with this: “Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved human praise more than praise from God” (John 12:42–43).

“They loved human praise more than praise from God.” Even more astonishing, the main cause of their hesitancy to openly profess belief was a fear of being thrown out of the church. Many of the people believed, but their highest priority was still maintaining favor with those around them. They wanted to be liked and accepted. They wanted a relationship with Jesus to follow the path they had already charted rather than allow an authentic relationship with Him to chart a new path for their lives. They were still more focused on and concerned with the reaction of those around them than they were on following hard after the One who was calling them.

Even Pilate, when he was considering what to do with the accusations against Jesus, struggled with this choice. Pilate had found Jesus to be innocent, and yet he agreed to hand him over to a murderous, bloodthirsty mob in order to be crucified. Why would a person of rank, influence, and authority do such a vile
thing? He did it because he was more interested in pleasing the people than he was in standing on the truth.

“What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?” Pilate asked them.

“Crucify him!” they shouted.

“Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate.

But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”

Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified. (Mark 15:12–15)

“Wanting to satisfy the crowd.” Pilate, a leader of many, was not concerned about where he was leading the many but rather was consumed by the anticipated reaction of the many. Because of this addiction to appeasing the crowd, Pilate surrendered an innocent man to be slaughtered by the followers Pilate was desperate to keep.

Forgive me for being forward, but Pilate's approach strikes me as not that different from much of the leadership style we often pursue in our own lives. We spend an enormous amount of time trying to figure out what the people want. In the political world, it looks like polling and peer-group testing. In my life, it looks like an obsession to put forward an image that will be embraced by those I encounter. For all of us, it so often involves making choices not based on what will take us in the right direction but based on what will place us at the front of the crowd. We are less concerned about the direction the crowd is heading than we are about where we are positioned within the crowd.

This type of leadership is worse than worthless. It is highly
destructive, and it results in us being responsible for furthering the lost state of those around us. It is tempting to buy into the notion that if we can just do what it takes to gain an audience with the lost, we can win them over for Him. The problem is that if we win influence with someone by virtue of pandering to their demands, we forfeit any ability to call them to a life that places their demands in a subservient position to the demands of the Famous One.

This is not an easy thing. Do not lose heart if this idea does not sit well with you. It does not naturally sit well with me, either. Our human nature is inclined to please people and to seek out favor from the world. Making a commitment to follow hard after Jesus in a way that will not always easily translate to those in our world is a difficult hurdle to clear. Paul, in his letter to the church in Galatia, put it this way: “Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Gal. 1:10).

Friends, if our highest goal in life is to attract a crowd and accumulate followers, becoming a servant of Christ is not the way to accomplish it. If our primary aim is to please and appease those who might be looking to us, we are going to miss the mark. Worse yet, we will miss the mark on behalf of not only ourselves but also all of those we have attracted as a following. If we want to please people, there are many effective ways for doing so. If you choose to walk that path, many will affirm you as a great leader. But you will not be using the impact of your life to amplify the fame of your God.

The fame of your God will be lifted high when you choose to follow hard after Him.
FOLLOW THE LEADER

The fame of your God will be lifted high when you choose to look for approval not to those who are following behind you but to the One you are following hard after.

The fame of your God will be lifted high when you lay down the pursuit of leadership in exchange for the incredible privilege, honor, and calling of following.

Let Him chart your path.
Choose to follow.
Follow hard.