

Jeff Leake

God *in Motion*

Making Sense of
the Loose Ends in Life

Foreword by Scott Wilson

What people are saying about *God in Motion* . . .

Have you ever had a moment when you wondered, “God, where are You?” I think we’ve all been there. Jeff Leake has written a book that honestly examines his own struggles with an understanding that God sometimes seems distant and inactive. If you’re in the middle of a storm in life, *God in Motion* will reassure you that God is working, even when you cannot see Him. Check out Jeff’s book. I know you’ll be encouraged!

— Greg Surratt, Lead Pastor at Seacoast Church,
Charleston, South Carolina
Author of *Ir-Rev-Rend*

If you’ve ever felt like God was distant, disconnected or silent, don’t worry—you’re not alone. Oh, Jeff Leake gets it! In *God in Motion*, Jeff makes practical what you may have always thought was theoretical—how to hear from God when you think He’s not saying anything at all! You’ve got to read this book.

— Matt Keller, Lead Pastor at Next Level Church,
Fort Myers, Florida
Author of *The God of the Underdogs*, MattKellerOnline.com

Jeff Leake’s grasp of spiritual realities is both thrilling and challenging. In his book, *God in Motion*, he explains that despair is often rooted in the misconception that God is inactive, unaware, and indifferent. With powerful teaching and heartwarming stories, Jeff assures us God is active—He’s already in motion—even when we can’t detect His hand at work.

— George O. Wood, General Superintendent
Assemblies of God, USA, Springfield, Missouri

Every time I listen to my friend, Jeff, I learn something that impacts my journey with Jesus. What an insightful leader and teacher! I love Jeff's depiction of Jesus. *God in Motion* is authentic, applicable, and immediately practical. People who read this book will walk away encouraged and growing. Read it and recommend it to those you want to encourage in their journey.

— Ron Heitman, Senior Pastor at Evangel Church,
Chicago, Illinois

Speaking out of his practical pastoral experience and his own extensive journey of faith, Pastor Jeff Leake wrestles in this book with the kinds of real life issues we all face every day. And, rather than varnish them with simplistic solutions, he uses solid biblical theology to build his view of God and how God works in our lives. I will definitely include this book on my list of gifts to give to my friends who need to be encouraged, enlightened, inspired, and challenged.

— Dr. Don Meyer, President of Valley Forge Christian College,
Schuylkill, Pennsylvania

For those of us who sometimes think that God is inactive, unaware, or indifferent, this book is a powerful reminder that God is always in motion—preparing a hope-filled future for us. Jeff is a life-long student of God's Word and an astute observer of human experience. In this book, he skillfully weaves together poignant stories and time-tested biblical principles to show us that God is always working on our behalf as we patiently and persistently pursue His heart and purpose.

— John Palmer, President of Emerge Ministries,
Akron, Ohio

My dear friend, Pastor Jeff Leake of Pittsburgh, teaches you how you can enter into God's multiplication, His adventures, and His wonderful rest. It is obvious that God is in motion in the MCM Network, led by Pastor Jeff, by the speed he plants churches all over America and beyond! The leading of the Holy Spirit brings ultimate ripple effects beyond our wildest imaginations because our God is a God in motion.

— Johannes Amritzer, President of Evangelical Mission SOS International,
Stockholm, Sweden

BOOK SAMPLER

God in Motion is a compelling guide for both the seasoned believer and those who are young in their faith. Jeff Leake writes clearly and personally about how God is working, no matter what our natural eyes can see. Through personal anecdotes, biblical examples, and thought-provoking questions, he engages us in super-natural awareness of God's constant activity. He considers the challenges readers may face in living this out, yet compels them to embrace the truth that God is both interested in and investing into their lives. Jeff isn't just putting some good ideas into writing; he is living them out by successfully reaching people, making disciples, and multiplying leaders.

— Rev. Brian Bolt, Founder of the CityReach Network,
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Jeff Leake is a leader whom God has set into motion for this crucial point in history. As an effective pastor, Jeff shares insights from his life and ministry experiences that will elevate your faith and keep you focused on the fact that God is at work in you and through you!

— Doug Clay, Treasurer, Assemblies of God, USA,
Springfield, Missouri

Have you ever had a moment when you felt God had bailed out on you . . . that He just closed the door and walked out of your life? Then this book is for you! Like an artist laying oils on a canvas in a beautiful, self-effacing style, Pastor Jeff Leake composes a portrait revealing a God so big that He can do anything, yet so personal that He cares about everything. This book will stir your heart and fire up your faith as you realize that even when you don't see him, God is as close as your breath! He really is at work in your life!

— Ron Johnson, Lead Pastor of One Church,
Orlando, Florida

BOOK SAMPLER

Jeff Leake's unique ability to align himself with the heart of God has inspired me for more than ten years. I'm in Philadelphia today leading a new church because Jeff sensed God's activity here before it became obvious to me. Through Jeff's life, I've been impacted by the principles articulated in this book. That's why I eagerly read it, knowing that every insight has been field-tested in the trenches of his personal life and ministry. I hope you'll read it and discover what God has been up to in the background of your life.

— Brad Leach, Lead Pastor at CityLife Church,
South Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Every time I'm with Jeff Leake, I come away feeling like I know this "God in motion" just a little better. Encouragement, acceptance, forgiveness, and a deep kindness come through every breath and every word. As I studied these principles and saw Jeff live them out, I was deeply comforted by the realization that God is in motion for me every day and is orchestrating powerful days for me.

— Geery Stolsfoos, Lead Pastor at Freedom Valley Worship Center,
Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

Authentic, thoughtful, articulate, inspiring, empowering, innovative and solid are the first words that come to mind when I think of Jeff Leake. He's a leader I turn to when I need help processing complex leadership dilemmas. The powerful concepts he shares in this book have been tested over time in the lives of the effective leaders he has sent out. Read, apply, and grow!

— Steve Pike, Church Multiplication Network,
Springfield, Missouri

BOOK SAMPLER

I've had the privilege of knowing Pastor Jeff Leake for many years and on many different levels. He was my senior pastor, he has been a Metanoia Missions International board member, and he presently serves as part of our apostolic oversight for the Hosanna Network of Churches. In every role, and with every hat he puts on, Jeff remains solid and constant, continually exhibiting the qualities of a godly leader. Without a doubt, Jeff will continue to be a leading, influential voice in the church's future.

— Eric Ferguson, Founder of Metanoia Missions International,
Findlay, Ohio

Father's Day of 1964 changed our lives forever when the author of *God in Motion* entered our home. I recall the joy of watching him take his first step physically. Greater joy entered my heart when I saw him taking his first step spiritually. When Jeff was a young man, we observed that God's hand was upon him and that He blessed him with great insight and extraordinary leadership gifts. I am confident that *God in Motion* will minister to you personally and provide a ministry tool to illuminate a welcome truth during difficult and discouraging experiences of those you love. Nothing happens to you by accident. God orchestrates and inserts plans and events for the accomplishment of His will and purpose.

— James Leake, President of Acts 20:24 Ministries,
Monroeville, Pennsylvania

There's a reason that Pastor Jeff Leake is being asked to preach all over the nation. He is an exceptional communicator with a special touch of God on his life. In fact, he has started over fifteen churches in the past fifteen years. I have no doubt that God will speak to you and inspire you through this book.

— David Spencer, veteran missionary and board member of Church Growth International, Seoul, Korea

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The author has paraphrased some passages of Scripture.

Note: The personal stories in this book are true, but in a few cases names and details have been changed to protect anonymity.

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BOOK SAMPLER

This book is dedicated to the love of my life, Melodie.

*She is my best friend, my devoted encourager,
my partner in ministry, and the person who believes in me
more than I believe in myself.*

*Without her encouragement,
this book would never have been written.*

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BOOK SAMPLER

Foreword

Today, a lot of people feel disappointed with God—and at some points in our lives, all of us feel that way. We've prayed for God to work in our marriages, but our spouses seem more distant than ever. We've pleaded with God to cause our children to walk with Him, but they're more interested in popularity than Jesus. We're burdened with worries about debt, our jobs, our parents, and our health. We've poured out our hearts to God, but the heavens seem silent. We want to shout, "What's the deal, God? Where are you? Aren't you paying attention to my needs?"

We're not alone. The prophet Isaiah recorded a time in the history of God's people when they were really disappointed with God. In fact, they'd given up on Him coming through for them. They were worried, anxious—and to be honest—pretty angry with God. The prophet responded with a pointed question and a reminder: "Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak" (Isa. 40:28-29). In a way Isaiah took the disappointed, doubting people by the shoulders, looked them in the eye, and said, "Hey, remember who you're praying to! God's not asleep. He's the loving Father, the glorious King, the One who is far wiser and stronger than you can imagine! He's the One we follow. He's the One we trust. Don't give up. Keep trusting Him!"

Then, Isaiah reminded the people of God's promise to come through, always—not necessarily in the way and the

timing they would like . . . but with the wisdom and strength they would need. In his most famous passage, Isaiah told them,

But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint (Isa. 40:31).

Will God come through? Absolutely. Will He do exactly what we want Him to do? Maybe . . . maybe not. The problem for many of us is that we insist that God fulfill *our* agendas, *our* plans, and that He meet *our* needs the way we want them met. Isaiah reminds us that God is God, the sovereign Lord of the universe. His understanding is inscrutable, and His plans are far greater than we can comprehend. He may not jump through our hoops, but He will always be faithful to accomplish His purposes—and His purposes are always good.

In this important verse about trusting God, modern translations use different words. Some say, “Those who hope in the Lord,” but others say “wait” or “expect” or “trust.” The Hebrew word means to twist, to tie, to form into a bond. Isaiah tells us that we need to wrap ourselves around the goodness and greatness of God. We need to remember His magnificent love, and not let anything pull us apart from Him—not worries, not doubts, and not delays. We talk often about “waiting on the Lord,” but it’s not really about time at all—it’s about the expectation that the God of glory will show Himself strong and wise in our lives.

Another important word in this verse is “renew.” We renew our hearts and our strength when we *take off* our

attempts to get our way and *put on* God's agenda for our lives. We say, "Lord, I don't understand what's going on, but I trust you. You promised to work all things together for good in my life. I don't see how that's happening right now, but I trust you anyway. No matter what, I'm all yours."

The strength God provides isn't an ability to grit our teeth and work things out on our own. Isaiah is talking about the power of God's Spirit imparted to us and flowing through us—the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the tomb!

What can we expect when we wait and trust God in the midst of our difficulties? Sometimes, God works miracles that are so magnificent our hearts soar like eagles! Often, God gives us the direction and strength to run like we're in a marathon. Day after day, we get up with a purpose, and we see real progress as we love our spouse, help our kids grow up, care for elderly parents, see success at work, and trust God to use us to make a difference in the eternal destinies of people around us. But sometimes, the heartaches of life threaten to crush us. In those times, a genuine mark of the Spirit's presence and power is revealed in our ability to put one foot in front of the other. We aren't moving fast, and we can't see beyond the next step, but God gives us grace to do the next right thing.

In every situation of life, God orchestrates resources, provides truth, and sustains us with faith, hope, and love.

Trusting that God is always at work to fulfill His agenda is what this book is about. It's not a promise that God will fulfill *our* plans and dreams, but that He will lovingly remind us that His plans are best and His power is available. No matter what happens in our lives, we can trust that He's

attentive, involved, and at work behind the scenes. Some of us need this reminder today. All of us need it from time to time.

I love Jeff Leake. I sense God smiles when He thinks of him, too. Jeff has a wonderful blend of kindness and strength, humility and vision. He delights in seeing people respond to God's grace. He and Melodie are a terrific couple, and God is using them in powerful ways.

If you talk to individuals who know Jeff, they'll tell you about his attentive love, listening ear, and genuine excitement about their lives. If you talk to his church leaders, they're thrilled to join hands with someone whose big vision and clear strategy are matched with authentic love for people. And now, I'm thrilled to say that God is giving Jeff a much bigger platform. He has never sought it, but leaders across the country and around the world recognize his warmth, insight, and spiritual power.

Jeff exemplifies the shepherd's care Paul described in his letter to the Christians in Thessalonica: "We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us" (1 Thess. 2:8). People are dear to Jeff, and they know it.

As you read this book, I know you'll feel that Jeff is sharing his love and his life with you because he loves you. It's an honor to recommend Jeff to you. I'm sure God will use this book to warm your heart, build your faith, and give you a fresh sense of the Spirit's love and power.

Scott Wilson
The Oaks Fellowship
Red Oak, Texas

Acknowledgements

Many people have shaped my understanding that God is always in motion and working powerfully in my life. I deeply appreciate the ways they have contributed to my life, my faith, and my message.

My parents, James and Rebecca Leake, were the initial and primary lens through which I saw God's activity in the world. Their love for God's Word was contagious, and their testimony to the supernatural helped me see God in action.

Melodie's parents, David and Bonnie Spencer, have helped me see how God is always working to expand His Kingdom. I watched their bold aggressive faith as they stepped out to accomplish the vision God put on their hearts.

Allison Park Church has been the crucible where I've learned and experienced the lessons of this book. Our faith-filled pastoral team has encouraged my every step. The people of APC have always been willing to follow me as I attempted to follow Christ, even when the immense scope of God's vision has challenged our faith. My church family has been incredibly encouraging, devoted, and passionate about the presence and purpose of God.

Thanks also should go to many of the pastors who have planted churches over the years. I've learned through their experiences as they follow Jesus.

The influence of Johannes Amritzer is mentioned in these pages. He has had a profound impact on my view of Jesus. Johannes showed me that God is still at work in the

same ways He acted through the lives of the apostles in the book of Acts.

Finally, I want to thank Pat Springle, who has helped put these words on paper. We discussed principles and themes I've taught for several years, dug into the Scriptures, debated how to communicate particular points, and looked for God in motion in the writing process. I appreciate Pat's contribution to the clarity and strength of this book.

Waiting on God?

God is always at work around us. Whether we realize it or not, this is reality. . . . Reports of God at work in the Bible are invitations for us to know and experience God ourselves.

Henry Blackaby

I was frustrated! Can I be honest about that? I felt stuck. I needed answers from God, but I heard nothing from Him. The problem wasn't that I'd given up on prayer. I was praying. In fact, I'd prayed about this specific situation hundreds of times. I'd even fasted and prayed for an answer. Still, there was no response from God. No answer. No breakthrough. No peace.

I had a problem. I was working in an extremely dysfunctional situation. I'd been an assistant pastor for two years in a church that I loved, but the staff team had disintegrated because of petty bickering. The dysfunction in our environment wasn't due to serious moral or ethical violations. No one was fired for committing adultery or embezzling church funds. Nothing had been done that would have made our

church the lead story on the local evening news. The decline began from a seemingly insignificant issue: Our staff team stopped resolving small disagreements. Like a corrosive acid, distrust and the unwillingness to forgive gradually ate away the network of our relationships. Soon, petty misunderstandings festered into bitterness, and people talked *about* people instead of *to* them. Instead of love, unity, and trust, we barely tolerated each other.

As these tensions rose, I asked God to allow me to pursue my dream, which was to identify a city in need and move there to plant a new church. As month after month passed, my anxiety increased. I begged God to release me from my assignment as the Assistant Pastor, but heaven was silent and nothing seemed to change. My utter frustration was compounded by an increasing workload. Several members of the pastoral staff had resigned (Why would they leave such a wonderful, positive place?), and many of their responsibilities were piled on my desk. To make matters worse, the staff that was left all went on vacation at the same time. My exasperation level reached a breaking point! Every day, I cried out to God for an open door so I could leave and start a new chapter in my life. Day after day, I prayed, but He seemed strangely mute.

One afternoon, as I drove home from an especially difficult day at work, the combination of fatigue and frustration boiled over. I let God have it! I prayed—if you can call it prayer. I shouted my anger at God. I screamed at the windshield, “God, this is totally unfair! I’ve been working like a dog. You know I want to leave here. This situation is ridiculous! I’m tired. I’ve done all I can, but it’s not getting better. What’s wrong? Why won’t you open a door for me?”

After seething in silence for a few minutes, I exploded again, “God, I don’t know how much longer I can take this!”

When I pulled into the driveway at our home, I felt mildly relieved that I’d vented my pent-up frustrations with God, but nothing in my circumstances had changed. I still had no peace, no direction, and no hope for change. To be honest, I felt God had abandoned me.

He had put me in an uncomfortable place in my work life, and then He had walked away—or so it seemed.

At the time, I’m not sure I would have admitted it, but as I look back on my response to that painful experience, I have to confess that I believed I deserved

better from God. I’d prepared for a life of ministry, I’d devoted myself to serve Him, and I was pouring out my life to help others. Surely, I deserved better treatment than this! If He wasn’t going to give me a new direction, He could at least give me an indication of how long I’d have to endure this hardship. But my repeated requests seemed to bounce off heaven. If God had answered my prayers with “No” or “Wait” or “Do this” or “Don’t do that,” I could have accepted it. The silence, though, was unbearable. I wondered if He was listening at all, and I wondered if He even cared.

In my despair, I began asking a different question: “Why doesn’t God want what I want?” This question led me to consider a different conclusion: If He doesn’t want what I want, then, maybe it isn’t that I need to try harder to get His attention. Do my desires, dreams, and expectations need to

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change? Maybe, the problem is me! I'd had an agenda for God, but He wasn't on board. Slowly, the idea formed in my mind and heart: I need to discover *His* agenda instead of insisting that He operate according to *my* timing and *my* plan.

At the time, unanswered prayer about my work situation seemed like the biggest problem in the world. However, since that day in the car, I've watched people encounter difficulties far more devastating than my uncomfortable work environment. I've watched single parents working hard to raise their kids in the hostile environment of a bitter custody fight. I've talked with people a few minutes after they've heard a diagnosis they never wanted to hear. Many men and women, young and old, have suffered from sexual or emotional abuse, abandonment, addiction, financial collapse, infertility, loss, natural disasters, and heartaches of every kind. When these unwelcome guests invade our lives, we instinctively ask hard questions, including "God, where are you?" "Why didn't you do something?" and "Can I ever trust you again?"

Honest to God

When we face tragedies and heartaches, we believe we have irrefutable evidence that God doesn't exist or that He doesn't care. Most of us would never voice this conclusion, and we're theologically sound enough to know neither is actually true. Still, in the depths of our souls, we may genuinely believe:

- God is *inactive*—so my prayers, fasting, and obedience must prompt Him to act.
- God is *unaware*—so my prayers must inform Him of the reality of my situation. Without my input, He's lost.

- God is *indifferent*—the intensity of my prayers must be the only hope to move Him to be compassionate and to act.

Doubt is insidious and deadly. We may try to convince ourselves we believe, but in reality, we completely justify our suspicions. For instance, if anyone had asked me during the time I screamed at God in the car if I believed He was inactive, I'd have given a theologically correct answer: "No, He's always at work" . . . then I would have muttered under my breath, "But I sure don't see it!" If a person had asked if I thought God was aware of my predicament, I'd have responded, "Of course, He's omniscient. He knows everything that's going on in the universe all the time." Then I would have muttered, "But *I'm* not silent when I notice people in trouble. What's going on with God?" And if anyone had asked if I felt God was indifferent, I'd have insisted, "The Father sent Jesus to demonstrate His love for us." Still, I would have wondered, "But where is He when I need Him?"

When we're pressed and stressed, the courtrooms of our hearts weigh the evidence and sometimes conclude, "On the charges of God being inactive, unaware, and indifferent, 'Guilty as charged.'"

If we believe God has abandoned us, we feel it's entirely up to us to get His attention and twist His arm to make Him take action. If we scream at the windshield and He doesn't show up, then we step into the street to flag Him down. A lot of misguided religious activity is designed for this purpose. We forget about grace. We conclude that our past is too shameful for God to come down to bless us or we're nobodies and He doesn't have time for us. We resort to one of two extremes: We either give up and quit pursuing God,

or we double our efforts to get His attention. We pray, give, serve, and fast—not out of a heart of gratitude but to motivate God to get involved with our lives. When He doesn't give us what we expect, we don't know what else to do.

When we read the Scriptures, we find something shocking: Many people in the pages of the Bible had their own

If we act like we're fine when we're dying inside, we shut off the opportunity to connect with God's heart.

Authenticity enables us to build a relationship of trust and love.

“screaming at the windshield” moments to tell God how upset they were with Him—and He didn't flinch. The Psalms are a holy collection of prayers and songs. Some of them shout praise to the wonder and majesty of God, some express heartfelt gratitude, but about half of them are “wintry.” In these psalms, the writers pour out disappointment, anger, fear, confusion, and hurt. God doesn't blast them for being honest with Him. Quite the op-

posite, He invites them to be ruthlessly authentic. If we act like we're fine when we're dying inside, we shut off the opportunity to connect with God's heart. Authenticity enables us to build a relationship of trust and love.

Venting to God is a great start if we're going to break out of a cycle of despair and begin to understand Him and His plan. But we will never fully engage with God just by downloading our grief or questioning His methods. At some point, we need a paradigm shift, a radical adjustment in our thinking so we can see God from a new perspective. We need to see God for who He truly is. When we're frustrated,

we're tempted to see God as *inactive*, *unaware*, and *indifferent*. Our painful and confusing moments seem to reinforce those ideas with hard evidence. In reality, God is exactly the opposite of what we feel. Indifferent? He cares more deeply about you than anyone ever could. Unaware? He knows every detail of your life, every detail of the past and every detail of the future. Inactive? Actually, God was working on your behalf before you were conceived. He is already working on things He has planned for you. He is constantly *in motion* preparing a future for you. But because His work is invisible to us, we often assume that nothing is happening.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul makes a radical declaration: "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, *which God prepared in advance for us to do*" (Eph. 2:10 emphasis added). Did you notice an important phrase in this verse? God has been working on you (His workmanship). At the same time, He's been working on your future (so that you could step into the good things He has prepared for you). He's not asleep, and He's not preoccupied. He's not twiddling His thumbs waiting for us to get His attention. He's been at work for eons to carefully orchestrate situations for His glory and our good. This encouraging statement, though, doesn't mean that life will be smooth and easy. God's purposes and paths *often* require perseverance and *always* require faith. In every situation—good times and bad, joy and grief—God is always at work.

Dread or Wonder

If we believe that the difficulties of our lives mean God is indifferent and inactive, we'll feel all alone. When we feel alone, we can become desperate. We think all the pressure

is on us to figure out what to do. We try to force God to fix our problems. In fact, we believe that if we don't force His hand through our desperate pleas, He'll never act. Living with an inactive God leaves us with a nagging, gnawing sense of dread. However, if we believe God is always ahead of us, preparing circumstances and us for great things, we live with a sense of wonder at His greatness and grace. Even when we don't see what He's doing, we trust that He's good, His paths are right, and He's actively leading us. Life then is a treasure hunt, a process of discovery, and a thrill in following a God of infinite love, wisdom, power . . . and mystery. When we're amazed at God's grace and purpose, we keep our eyes open so we don't miss the wonderful things He has prepared for us. And even if we miss a few of them (and we will), God graciously weaves the loose ends of our lives into a beautiful tapestry of purpose, blessing, and love.

This insight changes everything—at least it did for me. When I was screaming at the windshield, angry and anxious because I didn't see any evidence of God's presence in my circumstances, I was miserable. Over the years, I've learned to trust that God is at work even when I don't see His hand at all. When I am confident that God is always in motion, I have peace in dark times, assurance when I encounter roadblocks, and great joy when I finally notice what He's been up to all along. For years, I believed that God had been in motion on rare occasions and during biblical times, but I didn't understand that God never stops working on my behalf. Maybe you've thought, *Man, it would have been great if I could have had a front row seat to observe the parting of the Red Sea or to watch the battle between David and Goliath. Those were the moments when God was really at work!* What I want you

to consider is this: God is always at work—even in you and around you right now! And He’s doing far more than you can imagine. He’s extravagant, passionate, uncontained. If that’s true, we should live with expectation and wonder about the present and the future.

Ahead of Moses

As a young man, Moses had a plan, but he saw himself as the chief architect and power source. He was going to rescue God’s people from their Egyptian slave masters. He didn’t ask God for directions, and he didn’t trust in God’s leading. In his passion for justice, he murdered an Egyptian overseer who abused a Hebrew slave. Moses tried to keep the crime a secret, but everyone discovered his sin. Instead of being the champion of the Israelites, he was a chump. Forced to flee to the desert, he became an ordinary shepherd in the house of his father-in-law. For four decades, Moses’ dream was dead. At eighty-years old, he lived with smelly sheep on the backside of nowhere. He thought his life was over.

Then God showed up.

As he tended sheep, Moses saw a bush that was on fire, but the flames didn’t consume it. He went over to investigate. As he approached, God called him by name and announced, “Moses! Moses! . . . Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground” (Ex. 3:4–5). In this encounter, God told Moses that He hadn’t forgotten him during all those lonely years. He still had a purpose and a plan for him. In fact, He had always had a plan.

What I want you to consider is this: God is always at work—even in you and around you right now! And He’s doing far more than you can imagine.

God told Moses He was sending him back to Egypt to free the Israelites, but the man who had been impulsively bold forty years earlier had lost his confidence. He asked, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” (Gen. 3:11) For a while, God and Moses debated the wisdom of sending a failed, aged revolutionary to complete a task that began with a false start so long ago. But God wouldn’t take no for an answer.

From this encounter, we gain some important insights:

(1) God was in motion when Moses was confused and disillusioned.

For forty long years, Moses lived with nagging, painful memories of his failed attempts to deliver the people of Israel from their 400 years of slavery. He probably spent a lot of time wondering, *Where was God all this time? Why hadn’t God acted?* Moses probably concluded that God had no role for him in any future plans. After all, he was eighty years old and was far removed from his days as a leader in Egypt. Moses may have assumed God was distant and dormant but, in fact, God had been in motion all those years behind the scenes. He hadn’t forgotten His people who suffered in slavery, and He hadn’t abandoned Moses. God had a bold and elaborate plan all worked out for Moses to follow. In their encounter, Moses voiced his doubts, but God met every objection with a clear answer:

Moses asked, “Who am I to do this?”

God answered, “I will be with you.”

Moses wondered, “Who will I tell them is sending me?”

God responded, “I AM THAT I AM.”

Moses inquired, “What if they don’t believe me?”

God answered, “Throw down your staff and it will become a snake.”

Moses complained, “But I’m not good with words.”

God assured him, “I have made your tongue and can enable you to speak”

(Paraphrased from Ex. 3–4).

(2) God was in motion before Moses reached a conclusion.

Imagine being an eyewitness at this pivotal moment. God spoke to Moses out of a bush that burned but was not consumed. When God gave him directives, Moses had serious reservations. God directly answered all of his objections. The God of the universe had committed Himself to Moses. He assured him, “I, personally, will be with you. I am sharing with you my nature and my name (I AM), which has never been shared with anyone else.” God didn’t give Moses a single “sign” to prove His power and commitment. He gave three miraculous proofs: a staff that turned into a snake, a hand that became leprous and was healed, and the water of the Nile that turned to blood. But Moses begged God, “Lord, please send someone else!”

It’s challenge enough to believe that God will eventually act. But it’s an even greater challenge to believe that God wants to act *through me*. At these crucial moments, my choice to believe involves *risk*.

I can identify with Moses’ fears and doubts. Disappointments with life, with God, and with myself often

leave me disillusioned. It's challenge enough to believe that God will eventually act. But it's an even greater challenge to believe that God wants to act *through me*. At these crucial moments, my choice to believe involves *risk*. Moses was haunted by his first attempt to deliver Israel, which ended in epic failure. Perhaps he concluded that since God hadn't backed him up when he tried the first time, why would God back him up now?

To address Moses' doubts, God gave him another miraculous sign—He had already sent someone to meet the need. The Bible says the Lord became angry with Moses. “All right,” He said. “What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he speaks well. And look! He is already on his way to meet you now. He will be delighted to see you” (Ex. 4:14 author's paraphrase).

I have to confess that I've read this story dozens of times without realizing the implications of this interaction. Do you see what God explained to Moses? God shared a little bit of what He had already been up to. Moses hadn't even agreed to the job God was calling him to do, yet God had taken the liberty to speak to his brother, Aaron, on his behalf. God explained, “He is already on his way to meet you now.” Can you see the implication of this moment? God wasn't only working in Moses' life; He was working on *both ends* of Moses' life. On one end, He was speaking to Moses out of the burning bush. On the other end, He had *already* spoken to Aaron. God had prepared an answer to Moses' questions before Moses even thought of asking them. God had designed solutions for Moses' concerns before Moses even felt them. God had planned partnerships for Moses' future before Moses even understood what the future would hold.

For years Moses assumed that God was silent, but God was waiting for the right time to speak to him about the future. Moses believed God was dormant, but all along God had been planning and preparing the future. Moses felt as if God had abandoned him, but in reality, God had been walking with him and was planning on revealing Himself to and through Moses in a powerful way—so powerful that we’re still discussing those interactions today.

(3) God was in motion during moments of great consternation.

I love the fact that God had already spoken to Aaron before He appeared to Moses through the burning bush. This gives us great assurance. It means that God is actively at work when we might assume nothing is happening at all. In fact, He’s working on the other end of your life right now. There are people, positions, provisions, and partnerships being prepared for you even as you read these words. Remember Paul’s assurance in Ephesians 2:10: “. . . for good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Those words “in advance” mean more than just that God is preparing things for us to experience. It also means that God is preparing things in advance of our understanding—beyond our comprehension. He doesn’t tell us what He’s preparing for us. He surprises us with it. Moses had no idea Aaron was on the way to meet him and become his partner in this call from God. That part of God’s plan was invisible to Moses, but God was at work before and beyond Moses’ awareness.

When God appeared in the burning bush, He reminded Moses of the plight of his people back in Egypt: “I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have

heard their cries of distress because of their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them” (Ex. 3:7 author’s paraphrase). How do you think Moses felt when God reminded him that his people were stuck in oppressive slavery in a foreign land? He may have felt ashamed, grieved, or angry. He may have wondered, *Where is God? Why hasn’t He acted? Doesn’t He care about His people? Isn’t He aware of what’s going on?*

God answered Moses, “I have heard! I am aware! And I’m coming to rescue!” God began to reveal the plan He had been working on all along. This should be a powerful encouragement to us. The fact that we can’t see what God is doing right now doesn’t mean He’s not doing anything. He cares. He is aware. He is preparing the other end of our situations. He’s doing advanced work right now. We can’t see it yet, but it’s happening. Of course, this assurance doesn’t mean that everything about the future will be perfect. It doesn’t make the painful moments of our past or present any less difficult, but it assures us that we aren’t alone. No situation is hopeless—because God is present, aware, and involved.

How God Speaks

Some of us feel inspired by this encounter between God and Moses, but some of us feel deflated. We wonder, *So when do I get my burning-bush moment? It would be a little easier to accept this reality of a “God in motion” if I could have a profound experience and God offered real proof!* A burning-bush moment doesn’t happen every day. In fact, as far as I know, it only happened once in all of history. The truth is that relating to an invisible, all-powerful God will always be mysterious. To impart His heart and His message to us, God has used

a wide variety of methods, from a “still, small voice” to a blinding vision of the glory of God, from the gentle nudge of the Spirit to vivid dreams, from a roadblock to an open door. God isn’t limited by time and space. He’s creative, and He longs to connect with us. Most often, however, He uses His Word to share His mind and heart with His people.

The challenge for each of us is to hold two seemingly opposite truths in each hand: to believe that God isn’t distant, indifferent, or inactive even though He’s invisible and inaudible. How do we find a God like that? How do we relate to Him? How does He communicate His purposes to us? We’d like to have the guarantee that God will show up in burning bushes in our lives, but the fact is that God never appeared to Moses in the same way again.

God knows each of us, and He knows the best way to get our attention and convince us of His love and purpose. It’s His nature to be self-revealing. We may be slow to notice, and we may not like what we hear at times, but God delights in revealing Himself to anyone who wants to know Him. In the opening paragraphs of John’s gospel, he calls Jesus “the Word.” In first century Greek philosophy, *logos*, “the word,” was considered to be an impersonal principle of reason. John used it in a very different way. When John wrote,

To impart His heart and His message to us, God has used a wide variety of methods, from a “still, small voice” to a blinding vision of the glory of God, from the gentle nudge of the Spirit to vivid dreams, from a roadblock to an open door.

“In the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1), Jewish readers immediately thought of the opening lines of Genesis. There, God was the creative agent who formed the universe out of nothing. John was saying, “The one who created it all is the one I’m writing about in this gospel—it’s Jesus Christ, the living Word of God.” God isn’t a distant creator; He’s present, He reveals Himself, and He relates personally and intimately with His people.

I believe God specifically tailors His communication for each person, and He approaches each of us in different ways in particular seasons of our lives. We need never doubt that He’s present, caring, and active. We don’t have to wonder *if* He will connect with us, but the *how* and *when* of His communication is often puzzling. We may think that we really want to know God, but even more, He desperately wants to be known. He has gone to great lengths to reveal Himself to us. Jesus lived in glory, power, and wealth beyond imagining, but He “emptied Himself” and became a humble, poor servant—with no home, no money, and no possessions—to demonstrate His love for us.

The writer to the Hebrews gave us a glimpse of God’s passion to connect with us by sending Jesus. He explained as follows:

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven (Heb. 1:1-3).

What is God like? How does He want to relate to us? The answer to these questions lies in the life, heart, and actions of Jesus Christ. When we read the gospel accounts, we see what thrilled Him and what made Him angry, what moved Him to tears and what compelled Him to sacrifice His life. Do you want to know God? The author of Hebrews says, “Look to Jesus. He’s the exact representation of the character and heart of God.” If God would go to such incredible lengths to become a human being to relate to us, can’t we assume He longs to share His heart with us today?

Of course, this assumption takes faith. If we’re yelling at the windshield because we haven’t heard anything from God in a while, we need to back up a little and say, “Maybe . . . just maybe, God is already in motion, but I haven’t seen Him yet. Maybe I can trust that the God who loved me enough to come to earth and die for me hasn’t abandoned me after all. Maybe I can trust Him to work.” As we cling to this ray of hope in the middle of our doubts and confusion, we may realize our perspective needs some adjustment. We may have been expecting Him to fulfill *our will*, but He’s waiting on us to long for *His purposes*. There can be a difference . . . a big difference, and the delay may be God’s way of refocusing our priorities.

When I insist that God reveal Himself in a certain way at a certain time to fulfill my wishes, I’m usually disappointed. Often when I hear people tell stories of how God worked in their lives, I assume He has the same plans for me. But comparison like that destroys. It destroys our openness to the wonder and creativity of God. Over the years, I’ve learned that there are no formulas to show us how to relate to the God of the universe. Principles? Yes. Stories? Certainly. But

even a casual reading of the Bible shows a vast array of ways God shares His heart with human beings.

The Thrill of the Unknown

When we look closely at the life of Jesus, we find a beautiful and complex character. He was as tough as nails and incredibly tender, a fierce defender of those who were oppressed, and a delightful friend. He was decidedly different.

Jesus Christ was many things, but He was never boring. I think of Him as wild and good—someone who amazes me, challenges me, and thrills me.

He said and did things that confused people, yet He was supremely approachable. It seemed that no one could really get a handle on Him. His words and actions often perplexed even His closest friends. I get the idea that the disciples got up every day and asked themselves, “Well, I wonder what in the world is going to happen today!” They were seldom disappointed. In contrast, what does it mean for us to follow Jesus today?

Is there a sense of adventure? Too often, Christians have done something His most bitter critics never could accomplish: We’ve made Him boring. Jesus Christ was many things, but He was never boring. I think of Him as wild and good—someone who amazes me, challenges me, and thrills me.

Over the years, I’ve been learning an important lesson: When it appears that God isn’t paying attention, I can be sure He’s about to do something wonderful. My first glimpse into this principle of spiritual life occurred during the time when I was in the car yelling at God. Shortly after that, God

opened a door I had no idea existed. If I'd gotten my way and God had fulfilled my agenda, I would have missed the most amazing things God has given me to do. Let me put it this way: If God had given me what I wanted, I would have regretted it for the rest of my life. As I look back, I wonder what my "batting average" was during that season of my life. Did my desires line up with God's will half of the time? A third? A tenth? Today, I hope my desires are more in alignment with His agenda, but I'm sure I still miss some things He wants for me. More than ever, I want what He wants to be what I want, but I'm realistic about a flawed, finite human being trying to relate to an infinitely wise, good, and powerful God.

And for You

As you read this book, I hope God gives you a fresh, new perspective about Him and your life. To some degree, all of us come to God with our own agendas. Slowly, gradually, and wondrously, God softens our hearts, changes our perception, and shares His heart with us so that His agenda becomes ours. God is already at work to shape your life. In fact, He's been engineering circumstances since the beginning of time to capture your heart and give you a desire to honor Him. Look for Him and pursue the adventure of knowing and following a really good and really wild God.

Matthew records two short parables that Jesus told about people finding something incredibly valuable. In the first story, a man walked through a field and noticed a chest containing a priceless treasure. Jesus said, "in his joy [he] went and sold all he had and bought that field." In the second story, a man searched diligently for the finest pearls.

One day, he found one of startling beauty. This man, too, made a dramatic choice: “He went away and sold everything he had and bought it” (Matt. 13:44–46).

In these stories, both men found something of great value. One accidentally stumbled on it, but the other had been looking diligently. In both cases, what they found captured their hearts. They “sold everything” to possess the treasure and the pearl. In these stories, the treasure and the pearl represent Jesus. No one demanded that these men sell their possessions to have the treasure and the pearl. No one had to use guilt to force them. The value was so great that giving up everything was the only reasonable response.

Do you and I believe Jesus is that valuable? Is He a treasure worth more than all the possessions, positions, and popularity the world offers? Or do those other things still seem more important? If we insist on a manageable, safe, predictable God, we’ll have only a caricature of the real thing. There’s only one God, and He waits for us to discover Him in all His glory, mystery, and tenderness. Don’t settle for anything less. It’s the greatest thrill you’ll ever experience.

At the end of each chapter, you’ll find some questions. Take time to reflect on these and write your answers. Then, if you’re in a Bible study class or discussion group, share your thoughts with one another. God will use your conversations to sharpen your thinking and deepen your faith.

Consider This

1. When was the last time (or the most memorable time) you felt exasperated with God and told Him so? How did you feel when you told Him?
2. What are some circumstances that may cause someone to conclude that God is distant, indifferent, and inactive?
3. Can you think of some Psalms in which people poured out their hearts to the Lord? What emotions did they express? How did they find hope and help?
4. Read the story of Moses and the burning bush in Exodus 3. How do we see that God was already in motion before this encounter?

