

“There is no word in the English language like the word *adventure*. *A Trip around the Sun* will awaken your hunger to make your life your adventure. If you can read this book without being stirred to life—check your pulse.”

—John Ortberg, senior pastor of Menlo Park Presbyterian Church  
and author of *Soul Keeping*

“This is a terrific book, written by two of my favorite people on the planet. I’ve known Dick and Mark for many years, and they’re trusted friends and guides. Though they are authors, scholars, leaders, and pastors, they don’t care at all about titles. They care about people. I’ve seen the way they embrace the disenfranchised and the way they interact with leaders of entire countries. It’s exactly the same. That’s because they’ve learned to love people the way Jesus did. You’ll want to do the same after reading this book.”

—Bob Goff, attorney and author of *Love Does*

“A magnetic message of risk, reflection, and relationship. Throw this one in your luggage for your next trip around the sun.”

—Christine Caine, author of *Unstoppable*

“This book will inform and inspire you during your annual trip around the sun. Writing from the overflow of remarkable living, Mark Batterson and Dick Foth provide an owner’s manual for an abundant and adventurous life.”

—Dr. Barry Black, Chaplain of the United States Senate

“Mark Batterson and mentor Richard Foth prove each trip around the sun deserves a healthy dose of adventure, risk, and relationship. With unique perspectives and a joint message, these two inspire their readers to ‘risk more, reflect more, and do more things that live on after we die.’”

—Reggie Joiner, founder and CEO of Orange

“Shared life stories forge the chain of values that bind generations into cultures, then civilizations. As cultural DNA, these stories can be the ‘good news’ of human existence. When they mirror God’s Word and God’s Son, they are profound life road maps. For well over six decades, Dick has shared his life stories with me. For a score of years Mark has done the same, modeling devotion inspiring us to our highest and best. *A Trip around the Sun* is a trip well worth taking!”

—John Ashcroft, former US Attorney General

“This book will stir your soul! The stories that weave through life and the adventures that shape who we are with each other are brought to life in a tangible, real, practicable way that will enhance and inspire your trips around the sun.”

—Curt Richardson, cofounder of OtterBox

Mark Batterson and Richard Foth with Susanna Foth Aughtmon, *A Trip Around the Sun*  
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“The synergy of Foth and Batterson is powerful. Everyone will find inspiration in these pages. As a father and grandfather I gleaned new ideas to involve my family in adventures that will bring them closer to Jesus.”

—Rep. Frank Wolf, 10th District, Virginia

“Batterson and Foth bring together an enormous treasure of life experiences and biblical principles to guide us into the larger adventure of living our years to the fullest! Whether you are young, old, single, married, parenting, or teaching, *A Trip around the Sun* is a must-read and re-read. It challenges you not to settle for the safe seat on the bus but rather to think big, take risks, and periodically recalibrate your life compass.”

—Barbara Melby, early childhood teacher

“I couldn’t wait for the next chapter. I enjoyed it very much!”

—Tony Hall, ambassador and former US Congressman

“Dick and Mark have captured powerful stories and lessons for us as we search to find ways to sharpen our ability to walk in faith. Dick’s friendship and connection overlapped my walk in service to our nation in challenging days—like the tragedy on the USS *Cole* and the attacks on 9/11—when I was looking to my faith for answers and direction. Together these gentlemen share some of the excitement and adventure and the love principles that change lives in our journeys ‘around the sun.’ This is a great read. It challenges us all in our walk with Jesus.”

—Admiral Vern Clark, former Chief of Naval Operations, US Navy

“When two great communicators from two different generations collaborate on a book chronicling their adventures following Jesus, it’s probably worth a look. Authors Mark Batterson and Dick Foth infuse warmth, disarming transparency, and insight into everything they do, and *A Trip around the Sun* is captivating and delightfully difficult to lay down. The gift of storytelling is in rare form here, and readers are invited into the authors’ personal and professional journeys with moments from their mentoring friendship, vignettes from history, great quotes from some of history’s great adventurers, and practical insights from God’s Word. Everyday things become meaningful things, and generational perspectives engage us. No matter how many trips we’ve taken around the sun, Foth and Batterson whet our appetites to risk doing life with Jesus full-out, to do it with friends treasured and those yet to be made, and to leave a legacy of high adventure with God that will impact generations to follow. *A Trip around the Sun* is well worth the read!”

—Dr. Beth Grant, author of *Courageous Compassion*  
and cofounder of Project Rescue

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# A Trip around the Sun

Turning Your Everyday Life  
into the Adventure of a Lifetime

Mark Batterson  
and Richard Foth

*with* SUSANNA FOTH AUGHTMON



**BakerBooks**

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To the ancestors who came before us—we're grateful.

To the generations who come after us—we're hopeful.

And to our wives, Ruth and Lora—  
it wouldn't be half the adventure without you.



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# Introduction

## *Choose Adventure*

### **Dick's Story**

Walking down the West steps of the Capitol, I hunched my shoulders against the cold. The conversation I'd had with an old friend proved to be life changing. As I looked down the National Mall toward the Lincoln Memorial, the scene took my breath away. Golden rays of late afternoon sunlight softened the edges of the granite monuments and Smithsonian museum buildings, which frame the unique expanse that tells our nation's story. It made the line in "America the Beautiful" come alive: "Thine alabaster cities gleam." I still couldn't believe we were here. It was November 1994.

After fourteen years as president of a small private college in the Santa Cruz Mountains of California, I had come east with my wife, Ruth. We joined a cadre of friends working behind the scenes in Washington to be encouragers. The capital can be lonely for folks in power. Most people who want to be close to them want something in return. Inspired by others before us, we hoped to offer friendship with no strings attached and connect those who responded with each other in small clusters. In public life, small groups can be safer places. There individuals often blossom from the hope and support offered in the spirit of Jesus.

We were making friends and putting down roots during these cool autumn days. Thanksgiving was just around the corner. Having left our own grown children and extended family in California the year before to move to Washington, DC, we wanted and needed a “family fix.” It also found us continuing the tradition we started with our family years before: *anyone without a place to go for the holidays was welcome at our table.* It made for good conversations and better desserts. This year we included Mark and Lora Batterson, a young couple who had moved from Chicago to Washington to work in the inner city. Though we were old enough to be their parents, we had one thing in common: *transition.* All of us were following a new dream.

Ruth and I had known Lora since she was a baby. Her father and mother, Bob and Karen Schmidgall, were gathering a congregation in Naperville, Illinois, around the time that Ruth and I were doing the same near the University of Illinois in Urbana. We connected with them immediately. Our friendship remained strong even after we left Illinois for California, almost twelve years later.

With that good history, looking out for their kids in Washington, DC, was a given. It was natural. To see Mark and Lora dreaming their own dream brought a thirty-year-long friendship full circle. We shared turkey and cobbler and laughter. We told stories and jokes. And ate more cobbler.

My friendship with Mark grew easily. When he and Lora felt called to form a congregation with what turned out to be nineteen people in an old school building in southeast DC, we chose to be two of the nineteen. It’s great fun and a great pain to start something from scratch. Besides, when you are young and dreaming the dream, you need one or two graybeards around. If only for the money!

When I was a twenty-four-year-old greenhorn pastor in 1966, some people with a bunch of years on me changed my world. Paul and Eileen McGarvey were two of them. Paul was a football

coach from a local high school and was fifteen years my senior. He would show up after two-a-day practices at the little building we were constructing and help me paint walls and actually make light fixtures. The lights looked quite good. Well, they looked good from twenty-five feet away. His presence and support of me, a stuttering young man from Oakland, California, made a huge difference. He showed me that he believed in me simply by showing up. Ruth and I wanted to be that kind of presence for Mark and Lora.

I invited Mark to join me at some of my breakfast meetings around town. We shared coffee and friends and talked about dreams. Mark went from being my friend Bob's son-in-law to being *my* friend. I watched as he found his own teaching style and began envisioning what National Community Church would someday become. I saw him blossom as a dad when Parker, Summer, and Josiah arrived. I saw him dream some pretty unique dreams and put feet to them. I watched him develop his gift for writing and flourish.

One day Mark walked me past a neighborhood crack house and said, "Wouldn't that be a cool place for a coffeehouse, just a block from Union Station?" A few years later we sat on that very spot drinking a latte at Ebenezer's coffeehouse. Within a couple of years it was voted the number one coffeehouse in Washington, DC.

To watch someone come into his own gives great pleasure. Mark is a Renaissance man in the best sense of the word. From his love for Scripture to his two-books-a-week reading addiction to his ease at taking pointers from old guys, he is a voracious learner. But he and I are quite different. He is a fine basketball player. That's not my game. He loves the Green Bay Packers. I grew up with the 49ers. He reads quantum physics to relax. I escape with Louis L'Amour. But the one thing that really connects us is *love of adventure*.

Adventure, by Google's definition, describes "an unusual and exciting, typically hazardous, experience or activity." It happens

often without design and has a hint of chance about it. Whether it's identifying with the original adventure of Jesus coming to earth to unlock our world or us taking a risk in love, adventure is lifeblood.

In a fresh work venue, a trip to the heart of India, or a new friendship, adventure ripples just beneath the surface. We were meant for more than a safe ride when God placed us here. Any part of this life that offers more, requires more, or asks more of us than we are used to is an opportunity to grow more, dream more, and be more than we are now.

At the heart of it all is discovery. I have, so far, circled the sun more than seventy-three times. I have discovered a few things that matter: *Loving in the hard times is the best kind of loving. At the end of the day most folks do exactly what they want to, so we need to focus on the want to. Life is a wilderness, but when we invite Jesus to be our Guide, all bets are off.* Any way you slice it, those things spell adventure.

Twenty years ago I thought we were inviting Mark and Lora over for a little turkey and a lot of berry cobbler. Apparently, we were in for an adventure.

## Mark's Story

When Lora and I moved to the nation's capital in May of 1994, we only knew one soul, my college roommate. Coming off a failed church plant in Chicago, we were looking for a second chance. So we packed all of our earthly belongings into a fifteen-foot U-Haul truck and moved to DC with no guaranteed salary and no place to live. Some would call that *foolish*. We chose to think of it as an *adventure*.

We found an apartment and started doing inner-city ministry. We poured ourselves into that ministry, but there wasn't anyone

pouring into us. We felt like we were all by ourselves. At first that can actually be exciting, but it wasn't long until we felt downright lonely. Then Thanksgiving rolled around. It was our first major holiday on our own as a young married couple with no place to go. That's when the conspiracy happened. Dick and Ruth Foth were longtime friends of Lora's parents, Bob and Karen Schmidgall, and I think my in-laws were genuinely concerned about us being so far from home with no family and very few friends. So the Foths didn't just invite us over for a turkey; they took us under their wing.

Two things made an impression on me that Thanksgiving. The first was Ruth's mixed berry cobbler with Häagen-Dazs ice cream. I have a remarkable memory when it comes to food! The second was Dick's vast knowledge of trivial facts. If you're playing a game of Trivial Pursuit, Dick Foth is a first-round draft pick. I jokingly remind Dick now and then that he has more trivial knowledge than anyone I know! But his breadth of knowledge while playing Trivial Pursuit was what first revealed a holy curiosity about life that I have learned to love and admire about him.

Lora and I walked away from that one little encounter feeling loved and cared for. For me, love and care comes in the form of warm cobbler and high-quality ice cream. Little did I know that God would turn that meal into a lifelong friendship and mentorship.

My first service as pastor of National Community Church was held at J. R. Giddings Public School on January 7, 1996. Only three people showed up our first Sunday because of the infamous blizzard of '96: me, Lora, and our son Parker. The upside was that we experienced a 633 percent growth spurt the following Sunday. Dick and Ruth were two of the original nineteen attendees. They even brought a United States senator and his wife along for the ride. That made me a little nervous, but it also gave me a boost of confidence. It was a defining moment for

me. Lora and I were just starting to dream this dream of planting a church in the nation's capital. We had no idea what it would look like or how it was going to turn out, but we knew the Foths were in our corner! Knowing that we had people who believed in us and were willing to dream with us made an incalculable difference at a critical stage of life and ministry.

I still remember my first sermon illustration that first Sunday.

Fifty people over the age of ninety-five were asked one question: *If you had your life to do over again, what would you do differently?* That's the perfect question to ask a group of people with five thousand years of cumulative life experience! Three answers emerged as a consensus: "We would risk more, reflect more, and do more things that live on after we die." After my message, the esteemed senator commented on that illustration, saying he really enjoyed it. What he didn't know was that it was about the only illustration I had. I had to go back to my sermon illustration books and borrow another one for week two!

While I didn't have much life experience at that point, I was hungry to learn. And I knew that Dick was someone from whom I could borrow a wealth of wisdom if he was willing to put it on loan to me. So Dick and I began to get together on a consistent basis. One of the most memorable meetings was lunch in the Senate dining room with the Chaplain of the United States Senate, Richard Halverson. The Senate dining room is only open to members of Congress, visiting dignitaries, and their guests, so it is a tremendous honor to be invited. You are rubbing shoulders with the who's who of Washington when you eat there. As we sat down for lunch, I could hardly concentrate on the menu because Muhammed Ali was seated directly behind us!

That lunch was par for the course. Dick Foth invited a twenty-six-year-old rookie pastor into his world. He shared his life, his faith, his wisdom, and his friends. And the reason is simple: *loving is sharing*. It's sharing your time, your money, your life, and

your mixed berry cobbler. Dick Foth knows more things about more people than anyone I've ever met. He is a walking, talking encyclopedia of relationships. And it was his genuine interest in me that allowed me to share dreams and fears I'd never verbalized to anyone else. Dick became my sounding board. And his life will echo in my life forever—or maybe I should say, my life will echo his.

A few years into our church plant, Lora's dad died of a heart attack at the age of fifty-five. I lost not only a wonderful father-in-law but also my go-to guy for all my ministry-related questions. At my father-in-law's funeral, I stood at his casket and asked God for a double anointing. I wasn't even sure what I was asking for, but I knew I wanted to make a difference the way Bob Schmidgall had. I admired so many things about his life and ministry, and now he was gone. Virtually every situation I encountered in ministry was a new situation, a new challenge. I think the Lord allowed me, at an early age, to realize that if we try to fly solo, there is a good chance we'll crash land! I remember wrestling with a challenging situation one day and voicing my frustration to Lora about not having her dad to turn to anymore. Lora said, "Well, why don't you ask Foth?" So I did what all wise men do: I listened to my wife! It's no stretch to say my relationship with Dick helped me make some of my best decisions and kept me from making some of my worst. Dick became more than a mentor. He became a spiritual father and trusted friend.

More than anything, what has connected Dick and me these past eighteen years is our love of adventure. We both live by a simple mantra: *choose adventure*. We come at it from two different angles. I love a good challenge. He loves a good story. But both are born of adventuring.

There is a boyish quality about Dick that I admire. If I had to describe him in a single word, I would choose one of my favorite words: *neotenic*. It comes from *neoteny*, a zoological term that means *the retention of youthful qualities into adulthood*. Dick

is the youngest seventysomething I know! I recently spent two days with a life coach putting together a life plan because Foth told me I had to. He went through the same exercise the year before. Who puts together a life plan in their seventies? I'll tell you who: Dick Foth. And I'll tell you why: he's still not sure what he wants to be when he grows up! Dick is dreaming bigger dreams in his seventies than he was in his twenties. And I want to be around people like that. It's death-defying and life-giving.

Dick has shown me how to grow old and stay young at the same time. And I want to follow suit. In the words of Ashley Montagu, "I want to die young at a ripe old age."<sup>1</sup> That's more than a personal aspiration. That's a biblical command. In God's kingdom, childlikeness ranks right next to Christlikeness. Becoming more and more like a child is the true mark of spiritual maturity.

It's said that Teddy Roosevelt, my favorite president, would often be seen chasing his kids around the White House playing games. He'd keep heads of state waiting while he finished up a good game of hide-and-seek. That youthful zeal is something Dick embodies. His adventurous spirit is contagious. And I think that boyishness is in keeping with something Jesus said: "Unless you become like little children, you can't enter the kingdom of heaven."<sup>2</sup> Kids get adventure. It's innate. They live life free of worry, full of faith, and with their eyes peeled for the next big adventure. We should live with a holy anticipation of what's around the corner. Whether it's training to swim the Escape from Alcatraz with my daughter, Summer; hiking the Inca Trail with my son Parker; a week-long rafting trip through the Grand Canyon with Josiah; or a Play and Pray retreat with our staff, I am always looking forward to my next adventure. When you see life as an adventure, your hopes and dreams are never more than a day away!

One of the lessons I've learned from Dick is that adventure begs for company. When I was in my twenties, most of my goals



revolved around my own personal development. But as I've taken more trips around the sun, I am trending toward togetherness. Almost all of my life goals—and I list 113 of them in *The Circle Maker*—have a relational component to them. I spent a magical day on Catalina Island, just off the coast of southern California, a number of years ago and fell in love with it. But I was there all by myself. I kept thinking, *I wish Lora were here*. So one of my life goals is to go back to Catalina *with* Lora. The first triathlon I ran by myself was certainly an adrenaline rush, but it doesn't compare to crossing the finish line with Parker when he was thirteen years old. I have reoriented almost all of my life goals so they involve someone besides me, because I don't want to cross the finish line by myself.

When you rise to the challenge of adventurous living, your days will be richer and your soul will be fuller. There will be more risks, more dares, and more obstacles. And in return, there will be more memories that started out as dreams. Adventure doesn't happen by accident. It has to be intentional.

I once wrote a magazine article titled “Get a Life.”<sup>3</sup> It was an exhortation to my tribe, pastors. I have a theory: if your sermons are boring, it's probably because your life is boring! You have to *get a life* outside the four walls of the church so you actually have something to say that people can identify with. If you want to preach more interesting sermons, live a more adventurous life! And that exhortation isn't just for preachers. It doesn't matter who you are or what you do: *your life is your sermon*. To take it a step further, your life is a unique translation of Scripture. I'm the MAB version. Dick is the RBF. You may be the only Bible some people ever read. So the question is: *Are you a good translation?*

In John 10:10, Jesus said, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (ESV). Do other people look at your life and want what you have? Or do they want no part of it? The

abundant life Jesus offers is two-dimensional: quantitative and qualitative. By quantitative, I mean *eternal* life. It's the definition of "happily ever after." By qualitative, I mean an *adventurous* life—a life that is anything but boring. That was God's original intent when He created humankind. When God finished creating the heavens and the earth, He told His image bearers to take dominion over it. It was an invitation to explore every square inch of planet Earth. That certainly doesn't mean you have to be an oceanographer or astronaut to fulfill that Genesis commission. The greatest adventures aren't halfway around the world. They are often right across the street, down the hall, or in the seat next to you. You don't have to go looking for adventure. If you follow Jesus, adventure comes looking for you. Jesus didn't carry a cross to Calvary so that we could live a halfway life. He died so that we could come alive in the truest and fullest sense of the word.

I have made forty-four trips around the sun, at this writing. And I can't wait for the next forty-four, Lord willing. I want to live my life with a childlike sense of adventure. I want to leave a legacy that is full of faith and full of fun. And I know that the greatest adventures are always done in tandem with the people you love the most. So I will spend my days dreaming big dreams and praying bold prayers. I want to live out my first sermon illustration. Like those who had taken ninety-five trips around the sun, I want to risk more, reflect more, and do more things that live on after I die.

Will you join us?



## Choose Adventure

# 1

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## For the Love of Risk

### Dick's Story

June 10, 1945. Fifth Avenue, New York City. A gigantic roar lifted to the skies as ticker tape filled the air. People began to shout, “There he is! Here he comes!”

In short pants and waving a small American flag, I was held by my dad in a crowd of shouting New Yorkers. The day was bright and the air electric. People flooded the sidewalks like ants, spilling down surrounding streets. Their cheers rose and fell like the roiling waves of the Atlantic. The tides of World War II had turned, and a beachhead of peace had been established in Europe. Radios and newspapers trumpeted the news that Germany and its great tyrant, Hitler, had fallen to the push of the Allies and a treaty had been signed. The troops in Europe were coming home.

Glistening horses ridden by New York’s finest in dress blues cantered past us. Suddenly, there he was. General Dwight David Eisenhower, Allied Supreme Commander in Europe, swept by

standing tall in the back of a gray convertible, grinning famously and waving with abandon to screaming crowds. That powerful image stays with me to this day.

Fast-forward a few weeks to the salt-sprayed decks of the SS *Gripsholm*, a Swedish ocean liner. I was a three-year-old on a journey by sea to India with my missionary-educator parents and sister. We had just dropped anchor in Naples, Italy. When chased out, the Nazis had blown up the harbor facilities. Bombed-out storage areas pocked the view, as did the shattered prows of sunken ships that pierced the surface of the harbor like tombstones in a watery graveyard. But I don't remember being scared. The briny scent of seawater filled my nose and the thrum of the ship engine vibrating beneath my feet translated to one thing: adventure!

That sense rocketed when we docked in Bombay, India. We stepped onto the pier to a cacophony of languages like Hindi and Gujarati and Malayalam swirling around us like a thick soup of pitch and intonation. The stifling heat sent sweat snaking down our backs and legs. The smells of spice and tea and people filled the air.

This was the land of Gandhi and Tagore, the beggar and the maharajah, the Bengal tiger and the king cobra. India assailed the senses. It was adventure with a zillion colors, sounds, and scents. For the next four years we lived in the far south of this subcontinent. Three of those years, my sister and I would board a cog railway steam train that would chug six thousand feet up into the manicured tea plantations of the Nilgiri Hills. Our destination? A British boarding school called Hebron. I came to know British education with all of its disciplines and rote learning against a backdrop of intense poverty, transcendent beauty, and now and again the sound of drums, cymbals, and flutes that signaled Hindu festivals in the nearby town.

Today they have an acronym for my kind of experience. It is TCK, for "third culture kid." That's a child who is introduced

to a culture other than his parents' at an early age. Those cultures blend together to create a third culture. What was not my native home greatly influenced the native me. Ecclesiastes says, "A threefold cord is not quickly broken."<sup>1</sup> That refers to the strength people get from standing together, working hand in hand, not being alone. I think one of my threefold cords is cultural: American, British, and Indian. These are not equal cords, but they are real and they are mine.

The southern writer William Faulkner wrote, "The past is never dead. It's not even past."<sup>2</sup> To this day when I walk into the condiment section of a supermarket and smell curry powder, I am in India. That olfactory connection happens in the blink of an eye. When I watch *Chariots of Fire* or *Downton Abbey*, the accents and the class system draw me in. I am there.

Tender roots nurtured in the soil of high excitement and new possibilities produce a plant with spreading leaves. I am shaped by the breadth of my early exposures and the depth of my experiences in those years. These memories have made me.

Each vivid picture seems to shout one thing: *I was made for an adventure*. Somewhere in my DNA is a strand labeled "Foth Adventure." No doubt it's a combination of genetics and those first encounters with decidedly different cultures, but I see life as a grand escapade. New opportunities and new friends are always just around the corner. Tomorrow's outcome will be better than today's. Life brims with possibilities and is crammed with discovery. So a trip around the sun can be 365 days of unabashed adventure.

I wonder if Abraham felt that way when he obeyed and went to a land he did not know.<sup>3</sup> Or Jesus on the run to Egypt at age two with his parents trying to escape a vengeful Herod.<sup>4</sup> Or Moses, a Hebrew kid, found in a reed basket in the Nile by an Egyptian princess and ultimately brought up in the royal household.<sup>5</sup>

I have come to believe that from the moment of conception, we are being formed with an adventure in mind. We were created to touch, taste, smell, see, and hear life. Our Creator has big plans for us. No settling for mediocrity. Rather, we have a high calling etched into our bones and written on our hearts.

God wants to engage us from first squall to last drawn breath and deliver us into a life He has dreamed for us. Whether our earliest memories are sailing the high seas in a steamship or walking into a kindergarten class by ourselves for the first time, the exploration of the world within us and around us is a drumbeat. And the beat goes on.

We were made to explore. For some of us that exploration is more outward than inward, like Admiral Peary going to the North Pole. For others it is more inward than outward, like Pascal and his thoughts or Thomas Merton's contemplations. Whichever it is, we were made for curiosity and more. That design drives us. It shapes our thinking and our dreams. It forms expectations of what life should be and lays the foundation of who we will become. It shapes our destiny.

I would submit it *is* our destiny. When I met twenty-four-year-old Mark Batterson in 1994, I met a kindred spirit. We had very different roots but a common way of thinking. I knew hardly anything about him, but I sensed a possibility that something good was going on. Little did I know.

## Mark's Story

Alfred Adler, the famed psychologist, is said to have begun every counseling session by asking his clients to tell him about their earliest memory. They would share those memories, and no matter what their answer was, Adler would say, "And so life is." If your earliest memory is flying in an airplane to visit your

grandparents, life is a journey. If your first recollection is huddling under the covers on a summer's night as thunder claps and lightning strikes, life is a storm.

I have a theory: 87.2 percent of how we think about ourselves can be traced back to a few pivotal experiences. All right, I made that percentage up. But I genuinely believe our outlook on life is determined by a few defining moments when God meets us and we meet God. It's Jacob's wrestling match with God. It's Moses at the burning bush. It's Jonah in the belly of the whale. It's Peter walking on water. Those moments are more than memories from the past. They are spiritual astigmatisms. They are the lenses through which we perceive the present and dream of the future. Those are the moments when God helps us see ourselves for who we really are.

One of my earliest memories took place when I was four years old. I used to borrow a bike from my friend down the street, with or without his permission. One day he got tired of it. He marched down to my house and said, "You can't borrow my bike anymore."

"Why not?" I asked.

"Because my dad took off the training wheels so you can't ride it!" He had a triumphant look in his eye. So I marched down to his house and got on his bike. In the short ride back to my house, I learned how to ride without training wheels. I parked it in my driveway and put down the kickstand. Then *I* had a triumphant look in my eye! That is how I am wired. Tell me to do something and I'm unmotivated. Tell me it can't be done and I will die trying to do it. And I'll love every minute of it. Where is the joy in achieving something that is humanly possible? Give me insurmountable odds and I'm hooked. Life is a dare. And so life is, as Alfred Adler would say.

Not much has changed in the four decades since that first two-wheeled ride down my block. When you tell me something

is impossible, you are handing me a fast pass to my next great adventure. Tell me no and I will start looking for the yes. It doesn't matter whether it's paragliding over the Sacred Valley in Peru, hiking the Grand Canyon rim to rim, or biking a century. I love a challenge! Minimum risk equals minimum satisfaction. Maximum improbability equals maximum possibility.

I think my love of risk taking was passed down to me through my maternal lineage. My grandpa on my mom's side, Elmer Johnson, was an adventurer extraordinaire. It's best evidenced occupationally. He was elected the first municipal judge of Fridley, Minnesota. He and my grandma owned and operated an A&W Root Beer stand. And he was a professor at Northwestern Bible College in Minneapolis, Minnesota, during Billy Graham's brief tenure as president. In fact, one of the prized pictures in our family photo album is a snapshot of Billy Graham with a nylon stocking over his head at a faculty party that my grandparents hosted. I have no idea what kind of game they were playing, but my grandfather was fun loving. He had a keen sense of humor and an even keener love of life. He took God seriously, but he didn't take himself seriously. And that enabled him to walk to the beat of his own drum.

While he was a professor at the University of Minnesota in the 1960s, my grandfather included the whole family in his adventuring. In the summer months the family would pack up the car and drive into the Deep South to collect student loans. In a time of great racial segregation, he would often take the family to visit black churches on Sundays. He felt as comfortable in these congregations as in his own church. He even gave an impromptu testimony a time or two. Cultural norms didn't dictate his ability to engage and appreciate the world around him.

Every family has its own folklore—stories that are larger than life, stories that take on a life of their own. One of those stories in our family is how my grandfather started wearing a



flannel shirt to Sunday night services when a suit and tie was the order of the day. My grandfather was criticized for it, especially because he was a deacon. But he felt like he could worship God better if he had a comfortable shirt on. Makes sense to me! I'm not sure what gene was responsible for that fashion decision, but whatever it was, I inherited it. If I'm wearing a suit, you can be fairly certain I am about to marry someone or bury someone!

I remember visiting my grandparents' home on the Mississippi River as a young child and being enthralled. Next to his love of adventure, my grandfather loved history. One of his prized possessions was a rare collection of dinosaur fossils. And there was one rule in my grandparents' home: *don't touch the fossils!* They were the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. To a five-year-old boy, they were also mysterious and alluring. If you recall, my life tends to be played out in terms of daring. And on more than one occasion this has gotten me into a little bit of trouble. I picked up one of these priceless fossils thinking, *No harm, no foul.* Then it slipped out of my five-year-old hands, fell onto the floor, and cracked in two. I'll never forget the sense of foreboding that washed over me as my grandfather walked in and assessed the situation. He didn't say anything. He just picked me up and held me close. Without using any words, he told me loud and clear: *Mark, you are far more valuable to me as my grandson than a dinosaur fossil could ever be.* The foreboding was replaced by an overwhelming sense of being loved. It was my first glimpse of amazing grace. I saw the power of what happens when someone loves you when you least expect it and least deserve it. It's life changing. It's life-giving. That kind of grace sets you free from past guilt and future fear. It allows you to experience the present as a *present*—a gift from God.

These two memories anchor my childhood recollections: a moment of adrenaline-pumping daring and a sense of all-encompassing grace. Risk taking and forgiveness. Experimenting

and hope giving. It is the double helix of adventure that runs throughout my life and my ministry. A great adventure can shape your destiny. A bike ride without training wheels unleashed the risk taker in me. A grandfather's hug grounded me in grace. Each set me on a path of freedom—the freedom to be me. Each opened a new door—the door to adventure.

You are hardwired for an adventure that is as unique as you are. You may think that you are not an adventurer. You may never stand on the deck of an ocean liner and feel the salt spray on your face or face down the great chasm of the Grand Canyon on a rim-to-rim hike. But we are all wired for the ultimate adventure of following Jesus. When Jesus called the disciples to follow Him, the average person in the first century never traveled outside a thirty-mile radius of their birthplace. These men were planning on living their entire lives fishing the Sea of Galilee, but Jesus sent them to the ends of the earth. He took them adventuring with Him—they hiked the Mount of Transfiguration, sailed the Sea of Galilee, and went on long camping trips. Along the way, they witnessed remarkable miracles on a regular basis. And they did more than witness them. They filleted the miraculous catch of fish and ate it. They toasted the water that Jesus turned into wine and then drank it to the dregs. They hugged Lazarus while he still had his graveclothes on. You can't put a price tag on those kind of experiences, but once you've had them, they define you forever.

The very nature of the gospel is Jesus inviting the disciples on an adventure. To do what they'd never done and go where they'd never gone. Never a dull moment! You cannot follow Jesus and be bored at the same time. Søren Kierkegaard, the nineteenth-century Danish theologian, went so far as to say, "Boredom is the root of all evil." Boredom isn't just boring. It's wrong.

No one knows how many trips around the sun God will give them, but Jesus is calling you to the same adventure as

His original disciples. He is offering you a life full of daring.  
Don't you want in on the action? The moment you say yes, the  
adventure begins.

And so life is.



When You Follow Jesus,  
All Bets Are Off