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& OTHER WAYS  
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ON GOD'S  
ADVENTURES  
—

JESSIE CLEMENCE

 Discovery House®

*If I Plug My Ears, God Can't Tell Me What to Do:  
And Other Ways We Miss Out on God's Adventures*

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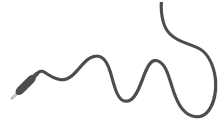
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# Playing Hide-and-Seek



## ISAIAH 55:10-11

*As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*

**P**icture this. The year: 1985. The location: a farmhouse in southwest Michigan. The scene: it's dark, just before bedtime. My father is playing hide-and-seek with my brother, my sister, and me. Our mother is enjoying twenty minutes of peace with her sewing machine while we play with Dad. Suddenly, you hear screaming as my father jumps out of a dark closet and yells, "BOO!" to his three terrified children.

As soon as the terror subsides, we beg him to do it again.

Welcome to hide-and-seek, Morgan style. When these memories roll through my mind, I can still feel my stomach flip-flopping as the adrenaline rushes through my nine-year-old body. I can still feel my brother falling to the ground as I knock him out of the way in my fright. And I still barely notice my baby sister at all as I trample her four-year-old body. I don't have any excuse—I'm just scared. Down the hallway I thump through the darkness to the light at my mother's sewing table.

Those evenings of hide-and-seek are also some of my best memories from childhood. Who doesn't love to see Daddy stuffed in a closet, hiding between his Carhartt coveralls and three pairs

of snow pants? Who doesn't love to be a little scared every once in a while—under extremely controlled conditions? I know I did.

But now I'm all grown up, so I don't need to play hide-and-seek anymore. If I want to spend time with my dad, I break something around my house and then beg him to come over and fix it. Or I develop a pressing need for an omelet from Cracker Barrel and suggest he join me there. Dad certainly doesn't need to ball himself up behind the recliner in a darkened living room to make me happy now.

If I've learned how to spend time with my earthly father, why do I keep trying to play hide-and-seek with my heavenly Father? Why am I always hiding in plain view when He calls? Why do I tend to cover my eyes and plug my ears, assuming that if I can't see or hear Him, He can't see me?

Because that's pretty ridiculous. I'm pretty sure God can see me there, with my feet pulled up under me, hunched into a big ball of *I'm-Ignoring-You* on the couch we've had for fifteen years. He knows where to find me; that's my spot.

Yet the scene repeats itself through the years. God speaks to me; I plug my ears and pretend not to hear. God calls to me; I make believe I'm busy with super-important other things. Because, you know, Lord, that kitchen floor is not going to mop itself. And the children are not yet old enough to drive themselves to hockey practice.\*

Am I alone here? Am I the only one who has problems hearing and obeying God? I'm going to guess I'm *not* alone, that perhaps you also have trouble hearing God when He calls and then following through with your end of the bargain. Because we're all human, and that's what humans do. History has proven this, from Adam and Eve to Moses to Peter to the modern-day church.

\* Just kidding. My kids don't play hockey. I can bet dollars to donuts they're downstairs right now, reading books or writing plays or playing video games. Sports make us nervous.

## What Is God Asking You to Do?

What God requests of each person is as varied as people themselves. Here, let's make a little list, just to clarify what we're talking about. These are real-life examples from the lives of some of my friends, revealing what they felt God was asking them to do:

- ▶ Sell the house and move to Texas for a new job.
- ▶ Move to Alaska to be a missionary.
- ▶ Homeschool the kids.
- ▶ Take care of aging parents.
- ▶ Go back to college.
- ▶ Quit a good job to stay home with the kids.
- ▶ Stick to a budget to begin tithing.
- ▶ Become foster parents.
- ▶ Adopt children internationally.
- ▶ Work overtime to support a spouse whose ministry makes no income.

These are just a few modern-day examples. We haven't even touched on the biblical ones:

Remember Moses? He heard from God through a burning bush and ended up leading God's people in the desert for forty years.

Remember David? He was anointed as the next king but then had to wait many years before he was crowned.

Remember Peter? Despite denying Jesus loudly and clearly, Jesus used him mightily in the beginning years of the church. Each of these started with God asking His child to trust Him and obey—then to follow through. And every example has the same outcome. God orchestrated every detail to accomplish His will.

Notice the pattern? From my friend Betsy, who moved to Dallas, to the apostle John, who wrote the book of Revelation from the island of Patmos two thousand years ago, God needed only a

heart willing to say yes. When we whisper “yes” to our heavenly Father, He responds, “Great! I’ll make all the arrangements!” And we are off on the adventure of a lifetime.

))) **When we whisper “yes” to our heavenly Father,  
He responds, “Great! I’ll make all the arrangements!”  
And we are off on the adventure of a lifetime.**

Some people are going to get the *big calls*. You know what I mean—those people called to Africa to run orphanages or those who hear God asking them to leave jobs with large salaries to start a ministry with no salary at all. Many of us know people who get these big calls, but we’re confident that we aren’t called to them ourselves. Does that mean we don’t need to pay attention to the rest of this book? Are we safe to continue doing whatever we want?

No! It’s impossible for every Christian to start an orphanage, move to Africa as a missionary, *and* also start a local homeless shelter. We all can’t do it all. But this shouldn’t stop us from seeking to do exactly what God has for us to do. He might ask us to be the person who makes a good income and then financially supports the missionary. He might ask us to stay in our own neighborhood and reach out to the neighbors who haven’t been to church since 1995. He might start by asking us to soften our hearts and allow Him access to the deepest part of who we are so He can work miracles in places no one else may ever see.

No follower of Christ can wisely pretend that God doesn’t have a plan for his or her life. The truth is that He has a plan for each of us—just as He had a plan for the Jews who were in captivity in sixth-century BC Babylon. In Jeremiah 29:11 we read that God told them: “For I know the plans I have for you . . .” which makes it pretty clear. Likewise, God is involved in our



lives today, and He even has a plan. (See Ephesians 1:11.) In our own estimation we may seem small and somewhat insignificant, but it's not our perception that's important here. We need to be looking for God's perspective, because He didn't create His plan from our frame of reference—He used His own! And it's big! And exciting! Then He even planned our little lives to fit into His big, exciting plan. Once we realize He has a purpose for us, it's a little easier to understand why He would call us to something we can't possibly understand.

))) **Sometimes God calls us to new things that radically change our lives. Sometimes God calls us to new things that radically change our hearts.**

Sometimes God calls us to new things that radically change our lives. Sometimes God calls us to new things that radically change our hearts. A year from now some of us will be in places we never expected. We might be living in a new country, with new children, and with a new career. But some of us are going to listen to God and—from the outside—not one little thing will change. We'll still be in the same house, with the same people, driving the same old Buick. But our hearts might be brand-new, which means our lives will be brand-new even when nothing physically changes.

Here's a perfect example of what I mean. Jesus gave His disciples the Great Commission and told them to go and reach other people for Him. He told them to make sure those new followers were baptized and taught to follow His commands (Matthew 28:19–20). So that covers the big calls. Going and reaching and baptizing and teaching—big stuff. But what are those commands we need to teach? He said: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This

is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matthew 22:37–40).

Jesus was talking to all of us. As followers of Christ, each of us is called to love God with all our hearts, to love the people He's given us, and to teach others about Christ. That covers everyone, whether we have the big call to be a missionary or the more familiar call to parent our children well. Whether we're twenty-one years old or sixty-one. Whether we've been a Christian for twenty years or twenty minutes.

Once we understand that those foundational principles apply to everyone, things get interesting. Each follower of Christ is given a different set of talents, a different set of circumstances, and a different amount of time to live out those basic commands. There is no one-size-fits all approach to loving God and loving others. Yes, some of us are going to get the *big calls*. Our lives are about to become very different from anything we have considered before. But none of us is called to live a stagnant life; we are each called to an active faith. Whether we're about to adopt three children from China or volunteer at the local elementary school, our task is to work out God's basic commands within the specifics of our own lives. The commands and the Great Commission may be simple, but that doesn't make them *easy*. As we move forward, we will discuss the many issues that may come up as we work out God's call in our own lives.

We're going to stop plugging our ears and hoping God stops talking to us. When He calls, we will answer. No more missing out on the adventures He has planned for us.

## **Moses and That Burning Bush**

Let's start in the book of Exodus, chapters 3 and 4. You'll see that our friend Moses was wandering around, watching the sheep for

his father-in-law. He was near the mountain of God, which was possibly the only excitement he had for the day. (Oooh, a big hill. Whoopee!) Imagine being a shepherd. You have no iPod, no smart-phone.\* It's just you and hundreds of sheep. In the sun. Day after day after day. The sheep eat; you watch them. The sheep need a new pasture, and you lead them, half awake. Ferocious sheep-eating beasts attack, and you beat them off with a stick. At least you're now awake.

I don't intend to demean the career of shepherding. It's a valuable position in many communities, even today. But other than the shepherds at Christ's birth, we don't usually think of them making significant contributions to the events of history. You don't really remember Moses the Shepherd, do you? And why not? Because God had other plans for his life, and they were *huge*.

Exodus 2 tells us that Moses had started life quite . . . shall we say . . . interestingly. His parents had hidden him by a river in the reeds, the Pharaoh's daughter adopted him, and he was raised in the palace. Moses spent his formative years in wealth and privilege. He was likely well educated, greatly entertained, and gainfully employed. As an adult, he killed an Egyptian who was beating a fellow Hebrew. After he fled for his life to Midian, his career path consisted of herding sheep, watching sheep, and hiding in the desert while he kept the sheep safe. Most likely, his days were endlessly the same. Perhaps God moved Moses from being a prince to a shepherd to teach him how boring life can be when we aren't fulfilling our intended purpose.

So, back to Exodus 3: Moses and the sheep were moseying around, and all of a sudden he saw a bush burning. This was a welcome break from the routine, so he hurried right over to the excitement. He was expecting blazing shrubbery, but he got

\* What Moses would have Tweeted: "In the wilderness with sheep again today. Feels like yesterday."

more than that. He heard the Almighty make contact with him. God had seen the misery of the Israelites, and He was about to do something about it. Moses, of course, was His chosen vessel to end the Israelites' suffering in Egypt.

Apparently, Moses had long before given up any dreams of being important. His life now revolved around his family, the sheep, and whatever else folks did out there in the boonies thousands of years ago. Maybe he sat around and thought about the past—about being fed grapes by babes in togas, or about enjoying the breeze created by palm fans—but he probably assumed his future was going to look exactly like his present. Hot. Boring. Normal.

But speaking from that blazing shrub, God explained His plan to Moses. It was simple: "I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt" (Exodus 3:10). God rarely complicates our life with His details. He knows that if we have too many details we'll cling to the plan instead of to Him. Moses responded to God's announcement with a string of excuses so long it's almost funny. *"Why would Pharaoh listen to me? What do I tell them your name is? What if they don't believe me? Have you noticed I don't speak very well? And also, could you send someone else?"* I can feel the desperation in the poor man's voice, can't you? The guy started out the day tending sheep, and this was not how he expected—or wanted—it to end.

God had a response for every excuse, every practical concern Moses had. He replied, in effect: "I will be with you. My name is I AM WHO I AM. Here, I have some miracles planned. They should get Pharaoh's attention. I know you're worried about your ability to speak, but I created your mouth. I will help you! Still not convinced? Fine, your brother Aaron is on the way. **Now take your staff and GO!**"\* (see Exodus 3:12, 14; 4:2–17).

\* Next Tweet from Moses: "Note to self: skip excuses next time. Interaction with bush will go better."

I love Exodus 4:14: “Then the LORD’S anger burned against Moses and he said . . .” Don’t you love it when someone *else* irritates the Lord? It gives me hope that perhaps I am not the only blockhead on earth. The almighty God was there in front of Moses in a burning bush. Even with this amazing display and direct contact with God, Moses still hesitated. He must have been very scared, or very stubborn. But isn’t it encouraging that God loved Moses enough to use him, even though he was so terrified and mulish?

Fast-forward thousands of years. Where are the Israelites now? All over the earth! They aren’t in Egypt, still slaving away and making bricks. Where is the Pharaoh? Not in charge any longer. This proves a point—when God needs something done, it is going to get done. If He’s going to use a human to do it, it’s still going to get done, even when that human is, um, human. We are weak. We make huge mistakes. We sin so grievously that we break God’s heart. Even on our best days, with our best intentions, we are small, ineffective, and immature.

This does not matter to God. In fact, it is precisely what He is looking for. Our weakness points out His strength. Our limits bring glory to His omnipotence. First Corinthians 1:26–29 says:

Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world’s eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you. Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God. (NLT)

By ourselves, we are nothing. We can't do anything. We know this, and I think this is why we plug our ears when He comes calling our name. What can we possibly do to help *God*? But when God orchestrates and arranges our lives, there are no limits. He knows no bounds, and whatever He has planned, He will do. Why would we hide from God when He's capable of handling every challenge we face?

*What is God asking you to do?* Do your excuses make you sound like Moses? Perhaps you don't feel educated enough, rich enough, or old enough. Maybe you think no one would listen to you or that your past is too dark for God to use you. You could be worrying about disappointing your parents or throwing away your plans for the future. Even when we want to obey God, there can be actual real-life problems standing in our way. Those "problems" are another reason we plug our ears when God calls. Let's face it; Moses might not have wandered over to that bush if he had known what God was about to ask him to do.

Moses knew he was a murderer.

Moses knew he was not welcome among his own people.

Moses knew he was really good with a flock of sheep and really bad with a flock of people. None of those problems screams out, "Excellent Leadership Qualities!"

Lest you think I'm picking on poor Moses, let me tell you a little story about myself. A few years (yes, years) ago, God said to me, "Write a book."

I plugged my ears.

But He started up again, a little louder each time. I finally couldn't ignore Him anymore; the idea of writing a book was always at the back of my mind. I sat down with the laptop, wrote out an outline, and started my book. My favorite genre is "cozy mysteries." You know, someone gets shot or poisoned, the quirky detective shows up, and the genius solves the mystery against all

odds. (Think Agatha Christie.) I've read about three thousand of these books, so I decided to write one.

The 50 percent of a book I did write wasn't half bad. I just couldn't come up with any more words or plot. So I said, "There, God. I did it. I failed. But at least I tried, so that's out of the way. Now what do you have next?"

God said, "Write a book."

I said, "I tried that, remember?"

He said, "Write a book."

Friends would make offhand comments like, "When are you writing that book?" They didn't even know I *had* written a book—or at least half of one. So I sat back down and started a new mystery. I wrote seven pages, twice. I hated every page, and I deleted it all. Twice. Finally—convinced that I was hearing the voices in my head again, not the Almighty—I gave up and started thinking about new career paths.

Somewhere in the middle of dusting my living room, God whispered to me a few weeks later, "Maybe it's not supposed to be fiction." Well, wow! I hadn't thought of that. My mind started whirling, and I began to think of all the great nonfiction writing that had made an impact on my life.

I sat down, started a new outline, wrote four chapters of a new book, and then deleted it all. It just wasn't working. So again, I said, "There. Tried again, failed again. I really am hearing voices, and *I am done*. Seriously, what do you want me to do?" I had just read a devotional on listening to God, and I put Him to the test. For two weeks I tried to listen to God. I sat quietly (not my strong suit), I opened up my heart, and I shut my mouth. I listened.

And God said to me, "Write a book."

I am dense and stubborn, but I am not an idiot. So here we are, in the first chapter of my book. I tell you all of this so you know that God is asking me to do big things too, and I am totally out of

my comfort zone. I have a bachelor's degree in family studies from Western Michigan University. It's a great school and I loved my major, but it isn't exactly a degree in literature from Harvard or a master's in practical theology from Indiana Wesleyan University. I just know that God has given me a task, I am not skilled enough to accomplish it, and He's going to get it done anyway. I want His words to be on these pages, so I am listening and praying and studying His Word.

I pray that your heart will be open as you continue to read, not because I have such fascinating insights into the Word of God, but because He has something for you here, and you need to absorb it. We are going to study our weaknesses in light of God's plan for our lives. We may be a mess, but this isn't going to stop God.

Please meditate on the following passage found in Isaiah 55:8–13. It contains principles that are foundational to understanding obedience and God's plan for our lives.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

“As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth:

“It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

“You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before



you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Instead of the thornbush will grow the juniper, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow.

“This will be for the LORD’s renown, for an everlasting sign, that will endure forever.”

God’s ways are higher than our ways, and His plan is greater than anything we could imagine. Are we willing to move with Him to that next step? Are we willing to unplug our ears and climb off our spot on the couch? Are we ready to stop hiding from our Father? I hope we are, because God wants to take us each on an adventure. Here we go!

### **QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU EVALUATE YOUR NEXT STEP WITH GOD:**

1. What is God asking *you* to do? Does it involve a huge life change, a huge heart change, or both?
2. On a scale of 1 to 10, how do you feel about God’s plan? (1 means your fingers are still jammed in your ears; 10 means you are enthusiastically in the middle of the scariest project of your life.)
3. If you step out in faith and obey God, what changes do you anticipate? Are you prepared for them?
4. What reasons do you have for not following God in this particular request?
5. What will God have to provide for you to accomplish this task?
6. Rewrite Isaiah 55:8–9 in your own words.
7. Look up the following passages of Scripture and apply them to your current situation:
  - a. Esther 4:12–14
  - b. Matthew 8:23–27
  - c. Luke 5:1–11



## **Betsy and Her Family Move to Texas**

*Betsy and her husband, Matt, grew up in southwest Michigan. I don't know if two people could be more connected to their community. Their extended families lived within a few miles, their kids attended the same Christian school Betsy and Matt had attended, and they worshiped in the same church with their grandparents and cousins. I don't think there's a place in Kalamazoo where they couldn't find someone they knew. Betsy had a thriving clientele for her hair salon, my own luscious locks included.*

*As you can imagine, this is a nice, cozy, snug way to live. But Matt started thinking about finding a new job, one that would meet the family's needs better and provide a more positive work environment. What started as an idle thought turned out to be God, sparking a move to Texas—1,060 miles from Kalamazoo. This is what Betsy said about the move:*

I don't think I've ever spent so much time in prayer. I felt that God was directly speaking to Matt and me through answered prayers, but I continued to pray, pray, and pray. I wanted to seek God's will and not my own. God opened doors and smoothed the way to show us what we needed to do. He gave us our own human will to decide whether or not we wanted to walk through those doors and follow Him, but it was very clear that He was providing a job for Matt in Texas.

It is hard to obey God; it is much easier just to ignore His calling and stay in our comfortable bubble. I wanted to obey Him, though, because He has our best interests at heart and would lead us through this.

The Sunday after we decided to move, God spoke to us through our pastor. The sermon was about leaving your comfortable life behind and going where God is leading. It was a powerful sign of confirmation. I was both scared and excited! I was excited to know

God's plan for us, but I was scared about how it would all work out. I feel that my fear pushed me closer to God to lean on Him.

We've had to make a lot of sacrifices to follow God's call. We left family, friends, school, and church. It was very hard leaving all that behind and seeing how we were not only affecting our kids' lives but also all of those close to us. I have a new appreciation for family, friends, and the community we belonged to. This move has made me realize that it is very easy to take things for granted.

We've had to make some sacrifices, but my spiritual life has grown by leaps and bounds. It has made us grow closer as a family, and we've really gotten to know our kids. I realized that God always provides! My eyes have been opened to truly listening and seeking God's will. When we take away the limitations we put on God, it is amazing what He can do in our lives.

Giving God complete control of our lives and our kids' lives has been really hard. I like to be in control. I like to be organized and have everything planned out. It's hard to follow His will when I may not totally believe it's what is best for our family. In my eyes what was best was to stay in a "comfortable life," surrounded by friends and family.

Here's the problem with doing that: It doesn't draw us closer to our Lord. It makes us lazy and self-sufficient. God has taught me to let go and give Him control, and He will provide. As much as I love my kids, God loves them a thousand times more and knows what is best for them. That has been something I remind myself of daily!

If I had to do it over, I wouldn't change anything. We don't know where God is leading us next, so we must have faith and see where we will end up. It is all according to His plan and purpose. He is teaching us valuable life lessons here that we would never have realized if we had stayed in Michigan.

I do know this: If you pray for God to use you and take control of your life, prepare yourself for an amazing, life-changing experience. God knows the big picture, and that is where we have to believe that someday His purpose for us will be revealed. If you pray for God to open doors, don't be afraid to walk through them. You never know where He is leading you! ■