



When pastors fall to ruin, ministries get destroyed and congregants get wounded. *Glorious Finish* examines the roots of moral failings and how leaders can build habits to remain captivated by God's glory. For the sake of the Kingdom, learn how to serve with humility and integrity, keeping the end in mind.

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A STARTING POINT NAMED DESIRE

I'll confess: I'm a motivational mess and have been for decades. This is not to say that I lack motivation. I've never been accused of being a sluggard. My friends would describe me as a highly driven, type-A, sleep-deprived overachiever. My consternation is not about finding energy to "get 'er done" but about the reasons that fuel my passion.

Maybe that is why in college, certain lines from a variety of chapel speakers never left me. Years later, I am not even sure who said these things but I suspect they must have been saying them just to me:

- You can do all the right things for all the wrong reasons.
- Tell someone what to do and they will do it for a season. Show them why they are doing it and it will take a brick wall to stop them.
- If you please God, it doesn't matter who you displease. If you displease God, it doesn't matter who you please.

I've even been helped (and haunted) by the famous statement attributed to an unlikely source, atheist Friedrich Nietzsche, who said, "He who has a *why* to live for can bear with almost any *how*."¹

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What we do, on the surface, is easy to see and fairly straightforward to evaluate. *Why* we do it can be a complex matter. Truly, in many cases, only the Lord knows.

BUT WHY?

Over the years, God graciously worked on me to make prayer a major priority in my life and ministry.² Even though the Lord designed prayer to be pure and powerful, my compulsion to pray was often tainted by a broad selection of lesser motives. I've prayed because I felt guilty when I didn't. I prayed to gain approval, hoping to be perceived as a good and godly pastor. Early on, I prayed in hopes that God would bless me, propelling my church to grow, so that I would be validated as an effective church leader. Twisted as it seems, God was the heavenly church-growth vending machine and I hoped to be the lucky, but prayerful, winner. I eventually started praying with a primary motivation for "revival" only to realize that I was focusing on the outcome rather than the Source. I was seeking revival from God to the neglect of seeking God for revival.

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God for revival.**

The lesson I learned in prayer, and one that has powerfully shaped and sustained my walk with God, is that the only enduring motive for prayer is that God is worthy to be sought.³ I am convinced this Godward motivation will be the exclusive essence of all my prayers in eternity and must shape the "why" behind my daily time with Him, and my leadership of others in seeking His face. But, let's just say, the morphing of my motives, not just in prayer, but in all aspects of ministry, has not been a straight and simple road.

SO . . . WHY?

So, let me ask: *Why* did you enter Christian ministry? What compelled you to stay on the arduous journey to your current leadership role? What is the *raison d'être* that wakes you up each morning? What motivates you right now to stay in the fight in spite of the complexities and wounds of church ministry?⁴

I've concluded that the motivational metamorphosis for most of us is more like a series of seemingly endless surgeries on a patient with massive orthopedic deformities. God carefully assesses, breaks, cuts away, implants, and reshapes why we do what we do—in repeated and lifelong resolve. Jesus is determined to help and heal us so that we will walk with integrity, intentionality, and Christ-centered endurance.

REASONS, RHYTHMS, RESULTS, AND REWARDS

The initial desires that drew us into ministry powerfully affect the instinctive drivers that tend to define our ministry. That is why our sincere determination to faithfully finish this marathon for the glory of God must continually invite the influence of the Word of God, the Spirit of God, and the people of God to help us clarify and even purify our deepest motivations for serving Christ, His kingdom, and His people.

Paul Tripp notes, “There is nothing evil about desire. God created us with the capacity to desire. Everything we say and do is the product of desire. Yet it is very hard for sinners to hold desire with an open hand.”⁵ He goes on to explain that misguided desires morph into demands, which form our perceived needs. These “needs” shape expectation. False expectations lead to disappointment. Tripp suggests that disappointment can lead to anger wherein we even judge God as unfaithful. This is the slippery slope, not uncommon to

those in ministry, if we do not regularly submit our desires to God's Word and Spirit.

We are going to examine the apparent motivations that shaped and sustained our New Testament heroes. We will aim to reset

some core rhythms that can ensure authentic and eternally significant ministry results. Together, let's set our sights on the heavenly prize that awaits the faithful and fruitful servants of the King.

Our sincere determination to faithfully finish this marathon for the glory of God must continually invite the influence of the Word of God, the Spirit of God, and the people of God.

Here's a reminder of the path we will follow together: Our reasons tend to establish our rhythms. Our rhythms fuel the actual results of our ministry. The cumulative outcome, for better or worse, determines the eternal reward of all that we have done.

THE DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD OF AMBITION

In setting forth leadership qualifications for the church at Ephesus (and every church), Paul passed on to Timothy a trustworthy truth, "If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task" (1 Tim. 3:1).

To aspire is to "desire, long for, or stretch out" for something. This Greek word appears two other times in the New Testament. Hebrews 11:16 uses it in reference to a desire for heaven. In 1 Timothy 6:10 it is translated as a "love for money." Our aspirations can be truly heavenly or imperceptibly earthly. Therein is our challenge.

In today's church environment, our deepest aspirations can be triggered by superficial and ultimately deficient stimuli. We can

mistakenly envision gospel ministry as it is represented by well-paid megachurch pastors, bestselling authors, popular podcasters, and social media rock stars. Tainted ambitions can easily infect our idea of “calling.” Most of us are not compelled by the mundane day-to-day congregational care of rural ministry, the stress and tension of bivocational pastors, or the blood that has just been shed by the little-known missionary in a closed country.

THE PRICE TAG OF DESIRE

For two decades, I met each year with a fresh crop of men over a period of nine months. One of my five ministry priorities was to pour my life into the next generation of leaders. We gathered weekly in very early morning sessions to pray, memorize Scripture, and discuss five books. Each had profoundly shaped my ministry philosophy. Always first in line was *Spiritual Leadership* by J. Oswald Sanders. I have literally worn out four editions as I devoured this treasure dozens of times.

In the opening chapter, Sanders appropriately deals with the topic of “ambition.” He notes that it is better for the position to seek out the person . . . than the person to seek out the position.⁶ Addressing Paul’s assertion that leaders should “desire” this noble task, Sanders clarifies what Paul likely meant in contrast to our conceptions:

We may understand his statement [in 1 Timothy 3:1] in terms of the prestige and respect given to Christian leaders today. But such was far from Paul’s mind. In his day, a bishop faced great danger and worrisome responsibility. Rewards for the work of leading the church were hardship, contempt and rejection. The leader was the first to draw fire in persecution, the first in line to suffer.

Seen in this light, Paul’s encouragement does not

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seem so open to misuse by people merely seeking status in the church. Phonies would have little heart for such a difficult assignment. Under the dangerous circumstances which prevailed in the first century, even stouthearted Christians needed encouragement and incentive to lead. And so Paul called leadership an “honorable ambition.”⁷

He summarizes, “When our motives are right, this work pays eternal dividends. . . . Ambition that centers on the glory of God and welfare of the church is a mighty force for good. . . . True greatness, true leadership, is found in giving yourself in service to others, not in coaxing or inducing others to serve you.”⁸

THE MYSTERY AND MORPHING OF OUR MOTIVATION

We all want the purest of motivations. Yet, even Paul admitted, sometimes we just don’t know. Paul wrote, “For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me” (1 Cor. 4:4). His next words are wise and riveting: “Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, *who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.* Then each one will receive his commendation from God” (v. 5). In

In eternity’s reward system, motives are paramount.

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We must keep our eyes fixed on the final and eternal evaluation of our motives and means of ministry. We soon learn that the complexities of Christian service can subtly poison the pure stream of our love for Christ and His people. Our own insecurities can drive

us to a pursuit of an appearance of success that is not Spirit-birthered. Comparison with another leader and his ministry can land us in the pit of depression. Trying to please the powerful voices of demanding people in the church can push us past the limits of balance and reason. Pure ambition may have launched us into the Lord's work but somewhere along the way, other triggers threatened our health and happiness in the grind of day-to-day church ministry.

Author Skye Jethani summarizes this well:

Ambition is not inherently bad. When it is sparked by our communion with Christ, it can be a righteous energy that drives us toward the work of God. It can inspire us to take risks, try new approaches, or venture to new lands. The challenge, therefore, is to recognize the volatile and combustible nature of ambition. When paired with godliness and humility, and guided by a love for others, it can ignite life-giving change in the world. . . .

But any fuel that can accomplish so much good carries inherent dangers as well. Ambition, when combined with the accelerants of ego and insecurity, can become a source of great destruction. The drive to achieve can backfire on a leader, causing terrible harm to families, congregations and the work of God in the world.⁹

I love his conclusion that pure ambition is rooted in “the life-giving fire of communion with Christ.”¹⁰

THE PATHWAYS OF A PURIFIED HEART

As we face the daily choice of managing our motivations, we can have genuine hope. The late Bible teacher Warren Wiersbe noted, “*Ministry takes place when divine resources meet human needs through*

loving channels to the glory of God.”¹¹ Christ’s divine resources are even now meeting our need for purity, clarity, and resolve. His love

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for you and your responsive love for Him can reset your reasons for doing ministry right now. A fresh vision for His glory in and through you on earth, and your participation in His eternal glory in heaven, can reshape why you do what you do.

The Word of God is living, active, and sharp to discern “the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). Our intimacy with Jesus in sincere, Bible-opened worship can ignite new determination to serve humbly, live healthy, and cross the finish line truly holy.

WHY, WHAT, AND FOR WHOM?

For several years, pastor Jim Cymbala and I traveled together to about a dozen cities hosting one-day events to launch a global fellowship of pastors known as The 6:4 Fellowship. This pastor-to-pastor network exists to call church leaders back to the primary and powerful priorities of “prayer and the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4).¹² In almost every city, Cymbala would appeal to the leaders with this challenge: “You don’t want to get to heaven and have Jesus ask you, ‘What were you doing down there after all? You were not doing what I told you to do.’” He often followed with an admonition to serve Jesus with a pure motive, a prayerful heart, and Spirit-inspired methodology.

I think of 1 Corinthians 3:10–15 where Paul writes,

Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test *what sort of work* each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

The final accounting of our ministry will not be the “size” of ministry we forged but the “sort” of ministry we shaped. This final assessment will not be based merely on what we did, but why we did it, how we did it, and for whom.¹³ Eternity is a long time to live with misguided reasons, neglected rhythms, and convoluted results that defined our ministry. Conversely, the pathway of purified ambitions, holy rhythms, and biblical results feed joy this side of heaven and assure reward when we arrive. Tozer admonished, “We who follow Christ are men and women of eternity. We must put no confidence in the passing scenes of the disappearing world.”¹⁴

Yes, ministry begins at a starting point named desire. But we would do well to discover what ignited the flames of ministry passion for world-changers like Peter, Paul, John, Stephen, and others.

Let's do so now.

This final assessment will not be based merely on what we did, but why we did it, how we did it, and for whom.

It appears that all that is ever spoken of
in the Scripture as an ultimate end
of God's works is included
in that one phrase,
the glory of God.

JONATHAN EDWARDS

We were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

2 PETER 1:16

GLORIOUS ENCOUNTERS OF A TRANSFORMING KIND

Eyewitnesses. They are crucial in solving crimes, reporting news stories, verifying conflicting accounts and recounting enchanting stories of days gone by. Eyewitnesses see, sense, feel, remember, and report what they have encountered, whether it is a horrific accident, one of the breathtaking wonders of the world, or the joyful arrival of a newborn baby.

Having traveled to almost fifty countries, I am still enlivened by my own eyewitness experiences. The catacombs in Rome moved me to tears as I was gripped with the devotion of the early Christians. The headstones from the 1400s in the chapel of Fordell Castle in Scotland inspired me with a rich sense of the heritage from which the Henderson clan descended. The majestic enormity of Hubbard Glacier in Alaska as it calved with thunderous claps overwhelmed me with awe in the power of the Creator.

I am sure you've been an eyewitness to extraordinary scenes throughout your earthly passage. You've never forgotten the images, the emotion, the wonder. They may be preserved in the photo gallery on your smartphone, hanging in a frame on your office wall, or just indelibly embedded in your memory. Sights so astonishing, beautiful, and unforgettable stay with us for life.

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But the eyewitness accounts of the New Testament writers eclipse any and all of our best treasures of majesty and wonder. Jesus Christ! The God-man. Lord of lords. Righteous Teacher. Bread of Life. Good Shepherd. Sacrificial Savior. Risen King.

Their close encounters of a transforming kind shaped the very identity, mission, and hope of each witness. Today, their accounts, compellingly recorded in the Scriptures, can also redefine our own sense of meaning, calling, and destiny.

PETER: CALLED BY GLORY

Imagine the moment. Jesus invites you and two companions up to a mountain for an extended prayer time (Luke 9:28). In short order you get drowsy and doze off only to be awakened by the most astounding light you've ever witnessed. Jesus' face is shining and "his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke 9:29–31).

As Jesus speaks, a bright cloud swallows your little prayer band. You are overtaken by the awesome presence of almighty God, as He speaks in power, "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!"

Admittedly, some prayer meetings are forgettable. But not this one. In his second letter, Peter wrote, "We were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Peter 1:16). Peter's life and teaching became rooted in this life-changing moment of the glory of Jesus.

Paul Tripp describes the impact well,

It was a jaw-slackening, heart-stopping, mind-blowing display of divine glory. . . . Enough of the small glories they had been living for, enough of the small-minded

plans they had made for the lives, and enough of the lack of recognition of what they had been called to—Christ’s transfiguration was designed to be for them a moment of life-changing transformation. They were being rescued from earthly glory by true glory so that they could take this glory around the world to whoever would listen and hear.¹

Peter, who was called, cared for, and commissioned by a glorious Lord did indeed proclaim a reality that has gone throughout the world. The accounts of his ministry in the early chapters of Acts and his two epistles powerfully communicate our “living hope” and assurance of “an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven” (1 Peter 1:3–4). He longed that our faith, precious beyond gold, would “result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:7).

As Peter described himself “as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ” and spoke of a *glory* in which leaders could partake *in this life*—yet a glory that would someday be fully revealed (5:1). He said that leaders would “receive the unfading crown of *glory*” when their Chief Shepherd appears (5:4).

Considering what Peter had seen and known, we can only imagine what these words meant to him as he concluded, “And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, *who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ*, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.” Peter had a very clear reason for serving Jesus.

You cannot effectively teach what you have not tasted. Peter, the eyewitness, saw, tasted, and passionately embraced the glory of Jesus.

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I often quote an old Brazilian proverb, “The heart cannot taste what the eyes have not seen.” I would add that you cannot effectively teach what you have not tasted. Peter, the eyewitness, saw, tasted, and passionately embraced the glory of Jesus.

In his final letter he began by declaring that “his divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who *called us to his own glory and excellence*” (2 Peter 1:3). Yes! We are called to Christ’s glory and excellence. We are reminded by Tripp’s admonition. No more small glories. No small-minded plans. No small ideas about Jesus and His calling. We can be rescued from temporal glory to eternal glory.

I’ve always been struck by Jesus’ words to Peter in the final chapter of John, where He described Peter’s final days on earth in less-than-comforting terms. Yet, Jesus’ purpose was “to show by what kind of death he was to *glorify God*” (John 21:19). Immediately after this, Jesus tells Peter, “Follow me.” When a soul has beheld the glory of Jesus, even a painful or obscure death can be embraced as a joyful following of Christ to a glorious finish.

JOHN: COMMUNING WITH GLORY

We cannot forget John, the beloved disciple, who was also part of the prayer trio on the Mount of Transfiguration. At the beginning of his gospel, he declares, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and *we have seen his glory*, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). John would use the words “glory” and “glorify” forty times in his gospel and seventeen times in the book of Revelation.² It seems clear that John’s entire life and teaching were revolutionized by his belief in, love for, and intimate knowledge of the living and glorious Word of God.

SAUL: CONVERTED BY GLORY

Do you remember the circumstances of your conversion? Where were you? Who else was there? How did it happen? For me, it was in an old Baptist church in Fairfax, Virginia, on the final evening of a five-night revival series. My older brother, Dennis, had preached every night. His wife, Billie, prayed with me at the altar. I was confronted by my sin and rebellion. Repentance gripped my heart. My only hope for salvation and eternal life was the death and resurrection of Christ. The gospel was wonderful to my young heart that night. It was truly glorious. I am sure your story is glorious as well. But Saul's moment of conversion was beyond extraordinary.

Saul, a reputable Jewish leader, was on his way to Damascus to shake out another band of these new-fangled Christ followers when, in an awe-inspiring display of His glory, the risen Christ confronted him. The account in Acts 9:1–19 demonstrates the power, authority, and saving grace of Jesus in Paul's life. Matthew Aernie writes, "At one moment he was working *against* the Messiah, and in the next he was working *for* the Messiah. Seeing Jesus on the Damascus road reversed the trajectory of Paul's life, resulting in a ministry that would have lasting impact on the church."³

This glory encounter completely upended Saul's religious paradigm, transformed his heart, and set him on a world-changing gospel mission. He would boldly recount the experience in his testimony before a hostile Jewish mob in Jerusalem (Acts 22:1–21) and later before King Agrippa (Acts 26:12–22). Saul's glory encounter at his conversion inspired potent glory-language to ooze throughout his New Testament letters.

PAUL: CAUGHT UP TO GLORY

Every parent of young children knows the excitement of Christmas as the kids wait in unbridled anticipation to open their presents. Mom knows what is inside the little box under the tree. Dad can't wait for Johnny to enjoy the big gift next to the fireplace. Having chosen each carefully wrapped present, parents can only imagine the delight the kids will experience when they can finally reveal and experience each treasure.

We cannot forget that Paul was granted the extraordinary grace of another supernatural visitation, this time to the “third heaven” (aka “paradise”), where “he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter” (2 Cor. 12:2–4). Like the knowledge and anticipation a parent has in a gift for a child, Paul had an experience of eternal glory that fueled his understanding of our ultimate destination. He was a true glory-veteran who witnessed the road ahead of us all. He couldn't speak of the actual experience but certainly lived and taught the overarching realities he understood from this glory encounter.

Staying in 2 Corinthians, where he mentioned his visit to paradise, we find that Paul transparently communicated the essence of gospel ministry in his defense against false teachers. He refers to “glory” in various usages twenty-one times.⁴

Paul, the zealous religious Pharisee who was transfixed and transformed by the glory of Christ, explicitly proclaimed the absolute superiority of new covenant glory over that which at one time was foremost to his Jewish mind (2 Cor. 3:7–11). He promises “all” who know Christ can experience an intimate relationship with our glorious Jesus, becoming like Him through continual transformation (3:17–18). Paul makes it clear that this is the strategic point of spiritual battle as the devil seeks to blind people to this glory (4:3–4). Yet, he confirms that our heart-deep treasuring of the “light of the

knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” is the force of gospel impact in our mission to the world (4:5–7).

STEPHEN: COMFORTED BY GLORY

Then there is Stephen, the wise, Spirit-filled, reputable servant (Acts 6:3, 5) turned wonder-worker (6:8) turned courageous preacher (7:1–53) turned willing martyr (7:54–60). After a hard-hitting gospel message, his audience of Jewish leaders fumed. But in the face of their murderous angst, Stephen encountered a dazzling back-to-back experience of the glory of Christ, one moment on earth, the next in eternity. Facing the teeth-grinding rage of the deeply convicted religious mob, God graciously gave him a glimpse of glory, which proved to be a moment of martyr’s grace when he desperately needed it. As I have said countless times, God has tailor-made grace for everything we face, including martyrdom.

But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and *saw the glory of God*, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” (Acts 7:55–56)

Rage-propelled stones crushed the life from his body. In excruciating agony, he prayed with eyes fixed on eternal glory, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” The account records, “And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’ And when he had said this, he fell asleep” (vv. 59–60).

The grace of Christ’s glory in execution and the glimpse of Christ’s glory in death enabled Stephen to do the unthinkable. He forgave his executioners. Just like Jesus. That is the power of a heart fixed on eternal glory.

JESUS: CONSUMMATION OF GLORY

To attempt to communicate the glory of Jesus Christ in a few words is like trying to replicate the power of the Hubble telescope with a pair of department store binoculars. But we must remind our hearts even now that, while no man has seen God, Jesus “has made him known” (John 1:18). “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col. 2:9). Christ’s objective and obsession on earth was to glorify the Father (John 7:16; 8:50–54; 12:28; 13:31, 32; 17:4).

As He knelt in prayer just hours before the cross, He affirmed the reality that He Himself be glorified by the Father (17:1–10). He prayed for an ongoing, intimate experience of glory for His disciples: “The *glory* that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one” (John 17:22).

He included His ultimate purposes of eternal glory as He prayed, “Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see *my glory* that you have given me” (John 17:24). And, today, right now, we are admonished to “run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for *the joy that was set before* him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:1–2). Our Savior fixed His gaze on the joy of eternal glory and now calls us to look not at the temporal things that are seen, but the eternal things that are unseen (2 Cor. 4:18) in our resolve to live with integrity and endurance in ministry. Paul Tripp concludes, “God . . . sent his Son . . . so that you would not only be forgiven for your allegiance to your own glory, but have every grace you need to live for his.”⁵

ALL: CALLED TO GLORY

To the ultimate possible degree, we want to fix our hearts on a commitment to Christ's glory on earth while also setting our sights on a compelling vision of our calling to His glory in eternity. Do not let these ambitions seem pie-in-the-sky, so otherworldly that it is irrelevant to the bottom-line days of your life.

We were created for God's glory and therefore all have an intrinsic glory appetite. Sin has marred and still detours that hunger toward lesser things. Yet, the glory of God, now and forever, must be the compelling craving for every called servant of Christ. Admittedly, there are times when the disconnect between this magnificent obsession and our mundane profession is a struggle.

We were created for God's glory and therefore all have an intrinsic glory appetite. Sin has marred and still detours that hunger toward lesser things.

The best we can do is describe God's glory because it is not just an aspect of God but the essence of God. From a gospel standpoint, again, Jesus Christ is the glory of God (Heb. 1:3; John 1:14; 14:9; Col. 1:15). Perhaps my humble assessment of the various facets of "glory" from the unauthorized Henderson Bible Encyclopedia will help. Here is how I have attempted to get my head around this amazing reality.

Glory is . . .

- Spirit-inspired magnification of the person of Christ by His people
- Spirit-initiated transformation through the presence of Christ within His people

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- Spirit-imparted manifestation of the ministry of Christ through His people
- Spirit-illuminated anticipation of the eternal exaltation of Christ with His people

Come, taste and see that the Lord is good—and glorious.

SEEING CLEARLY

C. S. Lewis gives an account that serves as an illustration here:

I was standing today in the dark toolshed. The sun was shining outside and through the crack at the top of the door there came a sunbeam. From where I stood that beam of light, with the specks of dust floating in it, was the most striking thing in the place. Everything else was almost pitch-black. I was seeing the beam, not seeing things by it.

Then I moved, so that the beam fell on my eyes. Instantly the whole previous picture vanished. I saw no toolshed, and (above all) no beam. Instead I saw, framed in the irregular cranny at the top of the door, green leaves moving on the branches of a tree outside and beyond that ninety-odd million miles away, the sun. Looking along the beam, and looking at the beam are very different experiences.⁶

So many times in ministry we are looking at the beam, rather than along the beam. We see glimpses of the glories of Jesus in changed lives, ministry victories, healed marriages, financial provision, the faces of our children, and the magnificence of creation. But we cannot survive the weariness and warfare of ministry as

mere spectators of the glory. We must become full and faithful participants in all Jesus desires to be for us, do in us, and manifest through us.

Certainly, I am not proposing that we all begin to chase after Damascus-like light shows in order to have an authentic sense of faith and calling. I'm not suggesting we find a way to make up and market a "Glow Mountain Prayer Meeting." But we cannot be content with "at the beam" ministry that subverts our pursuit of the sunbeam—Jesus Himself.

As new covenant believers, the "beam" of the presence of Christ is not to be found on Damascus Drive or Transfiguration Trail. Paul did not set up memorials at the sight of his glory encounters. Peter impulsively suggested such a thing. Rather, the glory of Jesus they witnessed became the life of Jesus they possessed. His eternal glory became their compelling conviction and ultimate calling.

A. W. Tozer wrote,

The church must claim again her ancient dowry of everlastingness. She must begin again to deal with ages and millenniums rather than with days and years. She must not count numbers but test foundations. She must work for permanence rather than for appearance. Her children must seek those enduring things that have been touched with immortality.⁷

Paul Tripp gives an illustration about taking his children to Walt Disney World. They are filled with uncontainable anticipation as they imagine the delights of their destination. Along the way they

His eternal glory became their compelling conviction and ultimate calling.

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see a sign that says “Walt Disney World 120 miles.” Tripp proposes the crazy scenario that, instead of going on to Disney World, the family just parks and vacations next to the sign. He then writes,

The sign is not the thing. It was created to point you to the thing. The sign cannot give you what the thing can deliver. The sign can only point you to where the thing can be found. The sign pointing to Walt Disney World will not ever give you what Walt Disney World can. . . .

Here’s what you need to understand: only two types of glory exist—sign glory and ultimate glory.⁸

Let’s admit that many days we need deliverance from the “sign glory” of the visible world of ministry mechanics, distracting pursuits, and a variety of manifestations of our own ambitions. God calls us to ultimate glory.

EYEWITNESSES ON MISSION

Yes! We are eyewitnesses of His glory and thus emissaries of the glory of His gospel to a world blinded by darkness. The “*light of the glory of God* in the face of Jesus Christ” is now indwelling us (2 Cor. 4:6). “We all, with unveiled face, *beholding the glory of the Lord*, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of *glory* to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18).

The all-sufficient enjoyment of glory here and now, coupled with the assuring and inspiring call to glory in eternity, can become our ultimate enticement toward holiness, encouragement in trials, and enabling in our weakness. What could be more desperately needed in today’s ministry complexities?⁹ “If one is to finish well,

ministry must begin and end with God. It is about Him and His glory, not about me,” wrote one wise pastoral mentor.¹⁰

We would do well to heed John Piper’s admonition:

Once the renovation of our hearts happens through the supernatural work of regeneration, the pursuit of the enjoyment of the glory of God becomes more and more clearly the all-satisfying duty of the Christian. And indifference to this pursuit, as though it were a bad thing, appears as an increasingly great evil.¹¹

Our practical enjoyment of the glory of God, then, must shape our daily choices at the root of all of life and ministry. As John Baillie prayed, “Let me understand the vanity of what is time bound and the glory of the eternal; let my world be centered not in myself, but in You.”¹² This must lead us to a daily resolve to start each day, and infuse all of ministry, with an authentic and foundational rhythm of biblical worship.

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