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Give It One More Day

Don't Quit

Firsts are hard. With every "first time" in my life I have wanted to quit. It began on my first day of kindergarten when I missed my mom so badly that I started to cry while sitting at the Play-Doh table. Kindergarten was tough, but if I ever wanted to get to first, second, and third grade, I knew I had to get through it. I've never been thrilled about school-with every first day, first semester, first exam, first report card I have wanted to quit. Now I teach at schools, and I don't know who dreads it more, the students or me.

I wanted to quit my first time at summer Bible camp in fifth grade. Two days into it I was so homesick that the camp director called my parents and said, "In twenty-five years of summer camping, I have never seen someone as homesick as your son. You need to come and get him." When my parents came to take me home, my friend Kent also started crying, so we took him home as well. We were pathetic and proud of it. I never went to camp again.

Toward the end of my senior year in high school, I took a part-time night job at a meatpacking plant. I badly needed a summer job, but when I bear-hugged a quarter side of beef and lifted it off a meat hook, it flattened me right there. It was while lying under a side of beef that I sensed God calling me into church work, so after one shift I quit and painted houses the rest of the summer.

Our first year of marriage was filled with so much ten-sion and conflict that after six months we both concluded we'd married the wrong person. I was in seminary studying to become a pastor, and yet my marriage was falling apart. Whom could I tell? Whom could we go to for help? We were isolated, embarrassed, and thought about quitting. But we just tried to get through one more day, and then another, and then another after that.

I failed so badly in my first preaching class that I thought about walking away from four years of seminary training and becoming a mortician so I wouldn't have to work

with people who could talk back to me. I'm dead serious.

And my first year as the senior pastor at Eagle Brook Church was probably the worst year of my entire life. I made all kinds of mistakes, didn't know how to lead a church of 350, and was in deep conflict with several people, including a key staff member. I considered quitting several times during that first year and wondered if I had totally missed God's calling on my life.

It's taken me a long time to learn that every first is hard-first date, first breakup, first day at work, first rejection letter, first baby, first teenager, first major disappointment. When stuff gets hard, it's tempting to quit. And when you're tempted to quit, you sometimes have to hang in there for just one more day.

One of my first major disappointments came when I was a junior in high school. My sophomore year, my lunch table buddies, Mark, Mark, and Daryl each promised me a Hostess Twinkie if I'd join them and go out for the football team. So I did. I had a great year playing on the junior varsity team as a sophomore, but what really jazzed me was that the tailback for the varsity team was a senior, and it appeared that next year I'd be the starting tailback for the varsity team.

So all summer long my three friends and I worked out, lifted weights, and ran five miles a day. In late August, I entered the two-week football camp as the front-runner for the tailback position.

Summer football camps in the Pittsburgh area are brutal-three to four practices a day, running drills in ninety-degree heat in full pads, stirring up clouds of dirt that stick to your sweat, trying to sleep on bunk beds in a barracks full of high school boys. A hundred guys showed up on the first day, but by day fourteen only thirty-five were left standing. The coaches never had to cut anybody; most of them quit. Any given day there'd be half a dozen guys hanging over the fence throwing up.

But my three friends and I made the varsity squad as juniors, and we were pumped. The New Castle News ran its annual predictions, mentioning several seniors and a couple of us juniors as players to watch. But a week before our first game, I was about to face a major disappointment that I never saw coming. Rick was a 170-pound senior with the GQ look. He was lightning fast and had played split end the year before. Rick decided to shift to the tailback position, and suddenly my starting role was in jeopardy.

And I quit. Without telling anyone, I just walked away.

Our coaches couldn't believe it. They'd never had a player survive camp and then quit

after making the team. My friends were dumbfounded.

A week later the season started with our first game under the lights, and I sat in the stands huddled next to my girlfriend. Bitter and ashamed, I watched our team take the field. But in the second quarter the unexpected happened.

I watched my three lunch table friends rotate in and out of the game behind some of the starting seniors. And I saw one of them rotate in for Rick! *That would've been me.* And it tore my heart out. I'd been so blinded by my disappointment that I had never thought about the possibility of rotating in and out and sharing the position. I felt sick, and I sat there knowing I should have given football just one more week.

So Monday morning I went to the coach's office, and with humility I asked if there was any way I could get back on the team. Coach wasn't fond of quitters and said he'd have to take a team vote. The vote tipped in my favor, but I would have to pay my dues. Coach relegated me to the junior varsity squad, where I was used mainly as a blocking dummy for the varsity team. You haven't lived until you've seen a 180-pound full-back and a 220-pound lineman running at you like a couple of buffalos-you haven't lived and you might not live. I got splattered, spiked, and run over for seven weeks straight, but I endured it day after day hoping it would pay off.

And then it happened. With one game left in the season, Rick went down with a bruised thigh muscle, and everybody wondered who would take his place. I'll never forget walking into the locker room and looking at the information board, where every night before practice the blue starting team and the red practice team were posted. I looked at the board and just stared. Starting in the tailback position for the final game of the season was Bob Merritt. Eight weeks earlier I had been a bitter, defeated person sitting in the stands watching the game. Now I was the starting tailback in the final game against Mohawk High School. The winning team would enter the playoffs.

That rain-soaked Friday night was the biggest night of my life. That night I ran my heart out, punishing and running over defensive backs like I'd been punished and run over for seven weeks. I experienced the incredible high of chewing up yards, smearing my game jersey in mud, and barreling into the end zone for our first touchdown. I felt the backslaps from jubilant teammates and heard the thunderous applause from several thousand fans. And I experienced the agonizing low of fumbling a punt return that contributed to our loss.

I can access that eight-week season in my memory like it happened last week, and I've never forgotten the lessons that have stayed with me for more than thirty years and have helped me push through disappointments and difficult firsts. I learned that often

the only difference between those who succeed and those who don't is perseverance. Often it's not intelligence, talent, or strength that wins the day. Those things help, but often it's the person who just hangs in there and outlasts the others for one more day. When you choose to live by the adage "give it one more day," and you push through disappointments and difficult firsts, you have a chance to build a great life. But it's not automatic or easy. You might have to get run over for a while. And that's where we can gain some insights from Moses, who was also tempted to quit.

Moses was born into a Hebrew family but was adopted as a baby into the household of the pharaoh of Egypt during a time when the Hebrews were slaves of the Egyptians. As Moses grew into adulthood, he observed how harshly the Egyptians treated the Hebrews, and Moses ended up killing an Egyptian slave master. When Pharaoh heard of this, he planned to kill Moses, so Moses fled to a desert town called Midian, where he married one of the daughters of Jethro. Moses lived in Midian for forty years, trying to eke out a modest life in relative obscurity. But God had other plans for Moses.

The Bible says that while Moses was tending the flocks of Jethro, an angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in a bush that was on fire but did not burn up. When Moses approached the bush, God spoke to Moses and told him that he'd give him a Twinkie if he'd join the team and lead the Hebrews out of slavery. But when Moses heard God's request, he immediately thought about his deficits and disqualified himself.

People today see the same five deficits and want to quit or disqualify themselves.

The Inferiority Deficit

God recruited Moses to lead his team, but Moses said, "Who am I, that I should... bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" (Exod. 3:11). This is the deficit of inferiority. Inferiority is when you think that everybody else is smarter, stronger, faster, prettier, and better, and you're tempted either to quit the team or not even try. Moses said, "Who am I?"

I wrestle with the inferiority deficit just about every day. I feel inferior to people who are better speakers, writers, lead-ers, golfers, husbands, and fathers. Why do I feel this way? Because I am inferior. There have been and always will be people who are smarter, stronger, and better than me. Every day I'm reminded of how inferior I am. But if I let that defi-cit determine my life, I will never lead, teach, overcome, or achieve much of anything.

Maybe you've had to battle the question "Who am I?" Who am I to ask her out? Who am I to try out for the team? Who am I to apply for that job? Who am I to go to

grad school? Who am I to lead a youth group? Who am I to be-come a mother or a father? Who am I to leave home and venture out on my own? Everybody feels inferior because everyone has deficits. And even people who end up playing for the team are not without deficits; they just hang in there for one more day, and then one more after that, until their day comes.

Moses said, "Who am I?" Truthfully, he wasn't much. He was abandoned by his parents, rescued from a river, and adopted by a single parent. He committed murder, became a fugitive, and wound up working as an unskilled laborer tending sheep for his father-in-law. Moses had good reason to ask God, "Who am I?" God doesn't deny that Moses has deficits. God simply says, "But I will be with you."

Whenever I feel inferior and ask, "Who am I?" I look up at the plaque that hangs in my office:

I am not, but He is, and He is with me.
I can't, but He can, and He is with me.
I don't want to, but He wants to, and He is with me.
I didn't, but He did, because He was with me.

Moses asked, "Who am I?" And God responded, "You're not much, but I am with you, and that's all you need."

Many years ago I read about an American tourist who was walking through a park in London, not far from Buckingham Palace, and noticed two little girls playing together. Just to make conversation, the tourist asked them who they were, not realizing that they were Princess Elizabeth and Princess Margaret, who were under the watchful eye of their royal attendants. "And who are you two young ladies?" the man asked. One of the royal sisters turned and proudly responded, "Oh, we're nobody, but our father's the king!"

Correction: if your father's the king, you're not nobody; you're somebody! Your life is set. There is nothing you cannot do and nowhere you cannot go. You have instant and direct access to the king and with it all the influence, power, and protection you'll ever need. Princesses Elizabeth and Mar-garet were too immature to realize that when your father's the king, you have everything.

Moses said, "Who am I?" And God said, "You're nobody, but your Father's the King." And when your Father's the King, you have everything. How many of us live every day with the knowledge that our Father is the King? But it wasn't enough for Moses, so he reminded God of his second deficit.

The Authority Deficit

In the next verse, Moses said, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I am. them,] 'I AM has sent me to you" (Exod. 3:13-14).

This is the deficit of authority: "On whose authority are you coming to us?"

Moses didn't have the best reputation, even with the Isra elites, Sometime after Moses killed an Egyptian slave master, Moses tried to break up a fight between two Hebrews. But one of the Hebrew men questioned his authority: "Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?" (Exod. 2:14). So when Moses tells God that he has an authority deficit, he's right he has no authority and no name. So he questions God, "What au-thority do I have; whose name can I use?" When you lack authority, you sometimes need someone else's authority; you need the backing of someone who is higher up.

When I was fifteen, my best friend, Phil Print, and I skipped school one day. We filled our day with tennis, basketball, and riding our Suzuki dirt bikes up and down the rural roads of western Pennsylvania. It was a great day, until we came speeding over a rise in the road and saw a squad car coming right for us. We both hit the brakes and sprayed gravel every. where. We were delinquent and under age with no license, no helmet, and no eye protection-all violations of state law. We were in deep deficit.

The officer blocked the road with his car, opened the door, put on his hat, and walked up to us with one hand on his revolver belt. "He's going to shoot us," we thought.

He looked us over and said, "How old are you boys?"

"Almost sixteen, sir."

"Aren't you supposed to be in school?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you have a license?"

"No, sir."

"Where's your helmet and eye protection?"

"We forgot to wear them."

We thought we were going to jail.

Then he said, "What's your name, son?"

I mumbled, "Bob Merritt."

He got this pensive look on his face and then said with some levity in his voice,

"Merritt. You wouldn't happen to be Calvin Merritt's son, the pastor of First Baptist Church?"

I looked at Phil with a glimmer of hope and said, "Yes, that's my dad."

The officer said, "Really. I listen to your dad every week on the radio. I love your dad. Your dad has changed my life. Would you tell him that Officer Roberts listens to him faith-fully and wants to thank him for what he's doing?" And he let us go, a couple of delinquent, law-breaking fugitives.

That day I learned the power and privilege of a name and that when I have an authority deficit, I need to rely on the authority of someone higher up. God told Moses, "I am your authority. Tell them I AM has sent you."

By the way, do you remember Jesus's final words to the disciples in Matthew 28? "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. And surely I will be with you always, to the end of the age" (vv. 18-20). Jesus has all authority over everything and everyone. And he is always with us. When we have an authority deficit, there is a name that is above every name that we can claim as our own. And when we invoke the name of Jesus, we gain access to a power that can pull us through any predicament. But Moses wasn't done listing his deficits.

The Credibility Deficit

The next deficit Moses cited is in Exodus 4:1: "What if they do not believe me or listen to me?" Moses reminds God that he lacks credibility, that he doesn't have the credentials or the track record. "What if they don't believe me?"

So God asked Moses what he held in his hand. It was a staff. When God told him to throw it on the ground, the staff became a snake. When he picked it back up, it became a staff again. God gave Moses the ability to perform miracles in front of Pharaoh so that Pharaoh would know Moses was credible. Moses didn't have any credibility, so God was going to establish Moses's credibility.

Whenever I'm faced with a difficult challenge, I tend to focus on what I don't have instead of what I do have, I focus on my weaknesses, deficits, and lack of experience and skills what I don't have in my hand. God says, "Stop thinking about what you don't have and remember what you do have," What has God put into your hand? For starters, God has given you intellect to think, reason, and create. He's given you strength to work, build, and produce. He's given most of us family, friends, and

colleagues who are willing to help us. He's given you the ability to read. (Seventy percent of the world's population cannot read or write. If you can read, you have an immediate socioeconomic advantage over 70 percent of the world's population.) He's given most of us monetary resources that are excessive compared to the world's standards. If you live in the United States and you own a car, you are in the top 2 percent of the world's wealthiest people. Most of us own two or three cars, which puts us in the mega-rich category. He's given us the gift of salvation, forgiveness from sins, and the assurance of heaven when we die. And he gives us an ongoing flow of wisdom and strength, whenever we choose to access it, through Bible study and prayer. Most of us haven't utilized even a fraction of what's in our hand.

For three years I worked on getting my doctorate in speech communication at Penn State University, and for those three years I was a nobody, a number, one of thirty-five thousand students. The speech programs at the Universities of Wisconsin and Minnesota had rejected me, and I was admitted at Penn State provisionally. I had nothing in my hand.

The department administrator was a formidable, single, forty-something woman named Rita. Rita ran the place-even tenured professors flinched in Rita's presence. And if you were a lowly grad student, you were nothing, a bother, an annoyance. I actually liked Rita and enjoyed a tongue-in-cheek banter with her, but if you got in her way, made too many photocopies, or missed a deadline, you were toast. She once slapped my thirty-two-year-old hand and bodychecked me away from the copy machine for not going fast enough. The best I could ever get from Rita was, "What do you want this time, Merritt?" She merely tolerated me, a worthless grad student.

The day after I defended my dissertation and was awarded my doctorate, I walked into the main office to make a couple of photocopies, and a miracle happened. Rita got up from her desk, smiled, and with genuine respect and deference said to me, "Dr. Merritt, allow me to make those copies for you. Is there anything else I can do for you?"

I was stunned. I was the same person the day before my defense as I was the day after. I wasn't any more intelligent, gifted, or less bald. I was the same annoying grad student. But now I had something in my hand. And what I had in my hand made me credible in Rita's world. What I had in my hand would open up doors and allow me to teach, write, and lead in areas that otherwise wouldn't have been accessible to me. I'm not an intellectual; it takes me a whole day to write five or six pages for a message or a book. I am very average at every level. But I've tried to take what God has put into my hand and use it to the best of my ability.

Everybody has a credibility deficit in some way, but I would ask you the same question

God asked Moses: "What do you have in your hand?" Maybe you've come through an addiction, abortion, abuse, miscarriage, or divorce; maybe that's what you have that God can use to help others. I don't have any of those things in my hand, which makes me less credible to help those who struggle in those areas. Maybe you have a great marriage, financial stability, or expertise in how to raise healthy kids. God has put something in your hand that he wants you to use to accomplish something great, but he can't do it if you're sitting in the bleachers watching the game.

God put a staff into Moses's hand that would enable Moses to confound Pharaoh, turn the Nile River to blood, and split the Red Sea. Moses had in his hand all the credibility he would need. But he wasn't done complaining about his deficits,

The Ability Deficit

Moses said to God, "O LORD, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue" (Exod. 4:10).

I find it amusing that the main task God asks Moses to fulfill is in the area of Moses's greatest weakness-speaking. He's like most of us, deathly afraid of speaking in public. (Many people say they have a greater fear of speaking in public than of death.)

Add to his fear of speaking the fact that he's bad at it, and Moses has a real deficit. It's not his bag. It'd be like asking me to teach math. This is the ability deficit. Moses said, "I'm slow of speech and tongue." The connotation in Hebrew is that he's got a fat tongue. "You're asking me to do something I have never been able to do." Moses isn't exaggerating; it's a legitimate deficit. In fact, he should be commended for being honest about his weaknesses. People associated with Strengths Finder 2.0 would urge Moses to play to his strengths and not try to be someone he's not. "I can't do it," he says to God.

But this is a key point in understanding how God works in our lives. We typically think of Moses as a superstar leader, handpicked by God to accomplish amazing feats. But Moses wasn't a super anything. Nothing about Moses's upbringing or character was special or extraordinary. And it's not like Moses was excited about God's call on his life. He did everything he could to resist God. Moses was not leadership material. He was, at best, an average human being with several strikes against him.

So why did God pick him? He just did. There is no other reason. God just picked him. He could have picked Aaron, Jethro, or one of the Hebrew slaves. But he picked Moses-for no good reason. And God has picked you for no good reason. I believe God wants to take every one of us on an adventure, not because we're super-talented or

gifted but because God wants to use us. We've all been around people who are super-talented and bright, and God uses those people in great ways. But this is a story for those of us who are aver-age, nothing special, middle of the pack. That's me. That's probably most of you.

I think too many people miss God's call on their lives and are tempted to disqualify themselves because they look at their lack of ability and think, "There's no way God can use me. I'm not bright enough, talented enough, or strong enough." Or they think they have to wait for their abilities to develop to a high level before they're ready. But God doesn't work that way. I have never felt ready for anything God has asked me to do. God doesn't pick us based on our polished abilities; he picks us for no good reason, and then he sup-plies the ability when we follow him. He picks us because he put each of us on earth to accomplish a specific purpose for him. God's purpose for you right now might be to go back to school, raise your kids, support your spouse, teach a class, or mentor those in rehab. Why did he pick you? He just did, for no good reason.

Finally, in Exodus 4:12, God tells Moses, "Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say." The sequence is important. God tells Moses, "Now go." And then God says he will equip Moses to do the job. "Get going, and then I will help you. Get moving, and then I will teach you." God can't teach you anything while you're sitting in the stands watching the game. He works best with a moving target. The question is, are you willing and available to go?

The Availability Deficit

Moses said, "O Lord, please send someone else to do it" (Exod. 4:13). And this is finally when God got mad. He wasn't angry because Moses did something wrong; he was angry because he did nothing. Nothing upsets God more than some-one who wastes their life sitting in the bleachers when they should be on the field. So God reached the end of his patience, relented, and said, "What about your brother Aaron?...I know he can speak well" (Exod. 4:14). And God let Moses recruit Aaron to be his spokesperson.

Question: was God going to give Moses the ability to speak and lead? Yes. Was God going to accomplish his purposes? Yes. What it comes down to is being willing and available. God is going to accomplish his purposes-it's just a matter of who's willing and available.

I think Moses missed out. He missed part of the adventure of learning how to speak and lead, and I think it's one of the reasons why God refused to let Moses enter the

Promised Land. He gave that privilege to Joshua. God put a call on Moses's life, but Moses told God, "I'm inferior and incapable." And God said, "I know you're incapable. What I want to know is if you're available." If you're available, God will make you capable.

When my son was eleven years old, we took him to an exclusive, private golf course that had a caddie program, and David became a B caddie who was paid eighteen dollars for a five-hour, eighteen-hole loop. We would drive him over at 6:30 a.m., and he'd sit in the caddie house waiting to be called up to carry one of the members' bags-bags that were almost as big as he was and would sometimes drag on the ground. Sometimes he sat all morning and never got called up, and he'd come home dejected. But we encouraged him to hang in there and remain available. When he finally got twenty loops in, he moved up to A caddie, which increased his pay and seniority. The following year he became an honor caddie, and by age fifteen he was a senior caddie earning forty dollars per loop. David simply stayed willing and available.

At age sixteen he got promoted to the bag room, and he started getting spin-off jobs from certain members who began to know and trust him. We told him that the people who get the best jobs and promotions are the ones who are already working. Kids who sit at home during the summer generally don't get promotions. They also don't acquire skills that can take them to a new level.

Then early one spring, right after David turned eighteen, he got a call from the head pro, who asked David to become the full-time caddie master, a job that had been handled by older men. David became the youngest caddie master the Yacht Club has ever had. He was responsible to recruit, train, manage, and pay seventy-five caddies, not because he was any brighter, stronger, or more privileged than anyone else but because he stayed willing and available. And with each promotion, David learned new skills that would take him to the next level.

So are you available? Some people fill their lives with entertainment, travel, golf, acquiring properties, and maintaining an abundance of expensive toys. And they are not available to be used by God in any meaningful or eternal way.

God said to Moses, "I know you're not capable. What I want to know is if you're available. Because if you're available, I will make you capable."

Encountering Setbacks

So Moses and Aaron finally confront Pharaoh to try to free six hundred thousand Hebrew slaves who've been the workforce for the Egyptians for more than four hundred

years. Not a good bet. But in spite of bad odds, God supplies Moses with everything necessary to accomplish the task. He gives Moses supernatural power to do miracles in front of Pharaoh, and he tells Moses exactly what to say. Moses knows that God is leading him. It's a slam dunk!

But when Moses goes to Pharaoh to ask for the release of the Israelites, Pharaoh refuses.

Wait a minute. Didn't God lead Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh? Aren't they following God's plan? Why the opposition? Moses never saw it coming. Maybe they weren't clear, or maybe Pharaoh misunderstood, so they repeat their request: "Let the Israelites go." But Pharaoh retaliates by increasing the work quotas of the Hebrew slaves. When the slaves couldn't keep up, the Bible says they were whipped and beaten. And they blamed Moses for making a bad situation even worse.

What gives? For once in his life, Moses gets a clear leading from God, works through his deficits, finally makes himself available, does exactly what God tells him to do, says exactly what God wants him to say, and things turn ugly. Why? Well, sometimes you have to go through a season when you get splattered, spiked, and run over. Sometimes God needs to take you through some hardships and opposition to prepare you for bigger challenges. And I see four benefits of these kinds of setbacks.

They Build Your Faith

You might be right where God wants you to be, doing what God wants you to do, and still run into obstacles and opposition, often in the form of people who are stronger, faster, smarter, and better looking than you. In my case, it was Rick, the 170-pound, GQ-looking sprinter. For Moses, it was the most powerful person in the ancient world—the pharaoh of Egypt. But God has a way of taking care of pharaohs. You can be right where God wants you, doing what God wants you to do, and still experience incredible opposition. Why? To build your faith.

If Pharaoh had said, "No problem, take the slaves and go," there would've been no turning the Nile River red, no Red Sea crossing, no pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night, no manna from heaven and no displays of God's power. Obstacles are opportunities to display God's power and when we see God heal a bad marriage, turn power. And around an impossible career, remove an addiction, or re-store a rebellious teenager, it increases our faith. Setbacks and deficits are opportunities to display God's power and to build our faith.

They Increase Your Strength

In James 1, the Bible says we should actually be joyful whenever we run into problems and trials, because they increase our faith and develop our perseverance. And perseverance leads to strength and maturity. It's not by avoiding problems that we gain strength but by going through them.

Several months ago Laurie and I sat on a restaurant patio with my daughter and her husband to celebrate Meg's graduation from the University of Minnesota with a degree in educational psychology. It was a beautiful evening. We enjoyed the good food and warm sun and watched Meg open her graduation cards-smiles all around.

Looking at us sitting there you might've thought the past two years were easy. But those two years were filled with daily phone calls from Meg, who said things like, "I hate school; this project is stupid; my teacher singled me out today and embarrassed me. I can't stand her and I want to quit."

Laurie would say to me, "I had to talk Meg off the ledge again today."

Meg would call again and say, "If my teacher calls on me again I'm gonna die" or "This political correctness crap is driving me crazy" or "I'd rather poke my eyes out than go to school. I just want to run away and quit."

She had numerous meltdowns over roommate issues, parking tickets, tuition payments, and more than seven hundred hours of internship work. But there she sat with her master's degree in educational psychology, her license in school counseling, a fistful of graduation cards, and a promising future of job opportunities that she wouldn't have had if she'd given up.

But here's the question: what was happening to Meg every time she made it through a class, internship, tuition payment, or roommate conflict? She gained a little more strength, got a little more confident, gained a few more skills, and found the courage to take the next step.

What would've happened if she'd given up and quit? She'd be less confident, less knowledgeable, less skillful, and far less prepared for the job market. The Bible says, "Consider it pure joy... whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" (James 1:2-4).

This verse says that trials play a vital role in our development by making us mature

and complete. But most of us try to avoid trials because they're uncomfortable and require effort; they force us to battle through and figure out solutions. But every time you face a problem and you're able to solve it, you get a little stronger. You can't grow without a test; you can't gain knowledge and skills without a challenge; you can't become a person of strength and maturity unless you face difficult trials and learn how to solve them. James says, "Blessed is the person who faces a trial and gets through it, because they will become mature and complete, not lacking in anything" (see James 1).

They Force Us back to God

Moses was called, equipped, and sent by God, but then he ran into resistance and trouble. Exodus 5:22 says, "Moses went back to God" (Message). Don't miss that. Don't rush past that for something more profound: *Moses went right back to God.*

What's the first thing you do when you encounter a severe disappointment or setback? What do you do when you get rejected, replaced, or passed over? Where do you go when you're depressed, broke, confused, or in conflict with people? Do you buy the latest self-help book, run to your therapist, check your horoscope, think happy thoughts, or repeat over and over again, "I'm good enough, smart enough, and dog-gone it, people like me"? Do you first call your mother or your best friend? Moses did none of that. When you're in the pit, there is no gimmick, slogan, or saying that will get you out sometimes there's not even another person who can help. Sometimes the only thing you can do is go right back to God. And that's what Moses did; it was the first thing he did.

How does God respond? In Exodus 6, God repeats the phrase "I will" eight times. I have the "I wills" circled in my Bible. "I will do. I will bring you out. I will free you. I will redeem you. I will take you. I will be your God. I will bring you. I will give it to you." That tells me that God is wiser, more powerful, and more willing than any therapist, book, saying, or person, and he will do for you what you cannot do by yourself, *if you'll just go to him and ask.*

Is there anything you would like God to do for you, free you from, or bring you out of? If so, the next question is, have you actually gone to him in prayer and asked him to do it? It seems like such a simplistic and pointless thing to do; it seems like a weak bailout. But the Bible promises over and over that like a father with his son or daughter, God waits for and responds to his children who come to him in prayer. It's not automatic. God's timing isn't always our timing. Moses still had to go through a season when he got splattered, spiked, and run over by the Red Sea crossing and a surprise attack from the Amalekites, God would honor Moses's prayer, but in God's

timing and with the ongoing perseverance and co-operation of his servant. Some people go to God in prayer and expect immediate results, but generally, prayers get answered when people get moving. Prayers get answered when people persevere.

They Teach Us to Push through Quitting Points

Pastor Bill Hybels says that life is full of quitting points, when you have to find the resolve to push through for one more day. I faced a quitting point as a freshman in college. Three days into it I was lonely and afraid and I wanted to go home. Every time I began a new class and received the syllabus, I wanted to quit. Trying to learn Greek was a quitting point. Our first year of marriage was a quitting point. After our son, David, was born, we had two kids in diapers-that was a quitting point. My first year at Eagle Brook I faced a quitting point. Every Monday morning I face a quitting point when I sit down to an empty computer screen and wonder what God wants me to say this week that's fresh and life changing.

But here's the question: what kind of person would I be today had I quit school, quit my marriage, quit my church, and quit my job? I'd be an uneducated, unemployed, poor, broken, and lonely person without any experience, wisdom, or future. I'd never know what it's like to score a touchdown, receive a diploma, raise a family, get promoted, be a part of a staff, or lead a church. I'd just be existing. Maybe.

To be human is to want to quit when things get tough. It's much easier to quit a bad marriage than to work through the problems; much easier to quit a team, job, school, church, diet, or exercise program than to work through it. But quitting stunts your growth and stops your progress. It keeps you from building a great life. Now if you're lying under a side of beef or there's some kind of abuse involved, quitting might be advisable. But James 1:12 says, "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial [blessed are those who push through quitting points], because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life."

I was once picked up by a limo driver in Chicago who was a divorced mother of an eight-year-old girl. She excused her yawn and asked me the standard questions, "How are you today?" "What do you do?" "Where is your destination?" I learned that she'd been divorced for five years after a ten-year marriage. "I don't think he liked having kids," she said. "I haven't seen him since the divorce; he doesn't pay child support." She'd been up since three that morning making runs to and from O'Hare Airport. After driving eight hours, she would go home at noon, lie down for a while, and change into her FedEx uniform, which is her full-time job. She would drive from four until midnight for FedEx. "When do you sleep?" I asked.

"I don't get enough sleep-maybe three or four hours a day in between jobs." She drives for FedEx five days a week and the limo seven days a week.

Her daughter, whom she calls her little angel, stays with Grandma. She worries that she doesn't see her enough, but she told me at least three times, "I'll do anything for my little angel-she's everything to me." She hasn't had a vacation in more than ten years and wonders how anyone can afford one anyway. Most of her waking hours are spent driving strangers around Chicago, and when she isn't working, she is sleeping or spending a few moments with her daughter.

This probably wasn't the life she had planned on, but she wasn't giving up. She was pushing through just one more day, then another, then one more after that. She hoped that someday things would be different. I told her that I applauded her for doing everything she could to support herself and her daughter. I racked my brain for something hopeful to say. There was no miracle fix, no easy way out. For now, this was her life, and all she could do was just flat out persevere. I said, "Maybe it will turn for you someday."

"Yeah, maybe in time," she said. "Maybe in time."

I paid my fare, smiled, and said, "There are better days ahead for you. You'll make it." Those words seemed to connect with some place deep inside her. It was the first time I saw her smile.

I don't know what kind of disappointments or deficits you might be facing right now. And your situation might not be what you had planned for your life. But I do know that sometimes all you can do is get through one more day, then another, and another after that, believing that God is teaching you, strengthening you, and doing something in you that will make you more complete. It might take you eight weeks or eight years. But often the only difference between those who succeed and those who don't is flat out perseverance and giving it just one more day.