

CHAPTER 1



GOD IN THE MOMENTS

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

Ephesians 2:10

My heart raced.

It had been an ordinary evening, but in just one moment, my health was deteriorating by the second. My wife Mila was terrified too. She had to rush me to the nearby Methodist Hospital emergency room in Sugar Land. I was still conscious but weak. I remember being lifted into an ambulance, but the rest of the night was a blur. The next thing I recall was being in St. Luke’s Medical Hospital in Houston Medical Center later that night. Suddenly, my world was dark, and it felt like everything around me was caving in. The doctors

and nurses rushed around evaluating one test result after another. I didn't have all the answers, but it seemed they were planning for a surgical procedure the next day.

It felt like the storms of life had shown up in my life without warning, and now I was scrambling even to breathe. I called Dr. Raad to talk to the doctors because I didn't want to go ahead with any surgery. He was an old friend from Lebanon and someone whose recommendation I trusted. The moment was moving too quickly, and there was only so much I could fully understand, so it meant the world to me to have someone who I didn't have to second-guess their decisions. Dr. Raad spoke to them and told me that I needed to listen to the doctors.

"Let them do what they have to do."

The End of My Strength

I remembered vaguely watching the monitor. I saw something that looked like a camera peeking inside my arteries and staring at something that looked like a severe muscle cramp. My eyes tried to follow every inch of the images, but my mind wandered. I tried to remain calm, but every inch of my body seemed to be suddenly wrapped in anxiety. All I knew was that I had suffered a heart attack. I had never been so terrified, but now I was breathing again.

After the surgery, the nurses explained that they had to go through a series of tests before the doctors would be confident, but I was on the mend. I felt sharp pains in my chest, and it got even more painful every time I tried to breathe or move. I had been in the St. Luke's Medical Hospital for three days. I woke up midway through a bright Saturday afternoon and was discharged a few hours later. It was March of 2007.

The sudden flood of health crises forced me to pause and reflect on my own life. I had to be mindful of how I spent my days and the

weight I carried on my shoulders. I was 39 years old, a young entrepreneur, and determined to succeed in the car business. The incident that seemed to have become the turning point was a bad business deal I struck with two brothers with whom I had partnered and who suddenly left me stranded in the dark. I had known them through a mutual friend, and now I was paying a heavy price.

Life had been good until one of the brothers suddenly took the inventory and the company's money and bolted. He went to Saudi Arabia and left us high and dry. I was on the hook for every contract and company's legal and financial obligation. This was everything I had worked so hard for, and now it was all gone.

The other brother called on the phone, but he was of no help. He claimed that he could not account for his brother's whereabouts and that he didn't have the money to pay me back. Standing right there, I knew it would take another ten years to recover, and I could feel the earth shatter right underneath my feet. Somehow, it was the shock of this news that sent me to the hospital not long afterward. I had a heart attack.

I had set out as an entrepreneur, with a single focus on succeeding in my chosen path. My business partners had left me with millions of dollars in debt and crushed my reputation overnight. It felt like my whole world had crashed. All of this was happening at a time when my son was still just a few years old, and the fear of not being able to care for my young family stayed constantly on my mind. I had just purchased a new house, and now I was not sure of how to provide for my family. Everything was gone. At least, that was what I thought. What I never could have imagined was that this sudden financial turmoil would be a turning point in my life.

What made matters worse was that the season was full of rumors of an impending stock market crash that was soon to lead to a sudden

loss of wealth by a large section of Americans and investors. So much of the world seemed to be falling apart around me, and I was no longer certain I was heading in the right direction. It seemed the turmoil had a lot to do with mortgage lenders making home loans accessible to individuals without the financial resources to finance properties but at a high risk of defaulting on loans.

The challenge that came along with imminent economic downturn forced investors to ask tough questions and hold on to their investment for fear of losing it all. For people like me, it would be difficult to recover from a stock market crisis. I was not sure of the impact on the people who would ordinarily show up in a dealership every morning and afternoon to buy a car.

In the hospital, I stared at the walls, unsure of what my next steps would be. The good news was that the doctors examined me thoroughly, only to find out I was no longer in a danger zone. It turned out that I had a heart muscle cramp from the stress and anxiety. I could not help but thank God for another chance to live. Before I was discharged, the nurse instructed me to go downstairs for another set of laboratory tests. I remember having a conversation with an old man who was also waiting in the laboratory center lobby. He was funny, and for a moment, he told a lot of jokes to take my mind off what had brought me there.

A nurse walked up. She was getting ready to escort another patient into the laboratory when she looked in my direction.

"Are you Moody?"

"No," I replied.

That was unexpected. I was sitting in a wheelchair, waiting for my turn for another batch of tests. The nurse looked familiar, but her question suggested that she could not have been a total stranger. Moody is my younger brother, and the young nurse must have known him. I was not sure if or where I had met her before. That

was surprising. It turned out she knew my family. It was later that I would learn that she was from Iraq and attended my father's church, the Arabic Church. But what a coincidence! Of all the nurses in the city of Houston, how was it possible that it was someone who knew my brother? I didn't see that coming.

I left the hospital that evening. The experience had shaken me, but fortunately, it had given me a reason to look over my life and cherish the moments I have. Not even a second of our lives was guaranteed, and just when I was busily pursuing my big plans as an entrepreneur, God was nudging me in a different direction. I was exhausted chasing my dreams, and deep down in my heart, there was a little void that I hoped success would fill. But it didn't. A host of unfortunate circumstances brought me to a point I never imagined I would be. Anytime I replayed these moments in my mind over and over, it was not lost on me that God was watching over me through every one of those moments.

In that moment, it felt like a series of storms were hitting me from all directions and even ruining my life. I had not lost my trust in God, but it felt like my faith was being challenged by the circumstances around me. I could not afford to lose sight of God's hand in my life, but it was difficult to see past the moments in which I was living. My life was surrounded by my own ambitions, hopes, and fears, and perhaps this was a moment to pause and ponder on what my journey had become.

My life was interrupted. I felt crushed, and my world was falling apart right before my eyes. There was nothing I could do to change that. I could not see any hope ahead. I tried to wrap my mind around everything I could do to restore my business, career, family, and health, but it was as if the harder I tried, the more confusing it got. In hindsight, it seems like that had been the hand of God getting my attention and redirecting my next steps.

Then guilt took over. I blamed myself for every missed opportunity. The negative thoughts filled my mind, and then the regrets crept in. I imagined how my life would have been better if only I could go back to a moment before, a few years before to change the steps I had taken. The weight of the guilt was heavy, and I had no way of knowing if I had wandered away from the path God had set for my life. I was not sure if He even had a path for me in the first place. I was exhausted and craving a sense of peace and assurance.

But God will move heaven and earth to redirect our steps if we open our hearts to His will. It didn't matter what difficult situations we were living through or even how hopeless we thought our lives had become. What I came to find was that there was nothing impossible for God to resurrect in our lives, but He needs our willingness too. In my life, at a point where I felt my lowest and the weight of disappointment and hurt was pushing me even further down, God had not left me alone. It seems there was no way for God to prepare for whatever work lay ahead for me without my humility to rely solely on God's provision. And He had my undivided attention.

Trusting God in the Chaos

This was long before I knew the power of God to use the ruins of one moment to change the course of our next. When it felt as though one door was slamming in my face, it was as if God was preparing me to head in an entirely new direction. This experience was before I had a personal encounter with an omnipresent God who is always by our side to turn the most heartbreaking moments of our lives into testimonies that only you and I can share.

In one moment, I was convinced that all my life had to revolve around business and success. The environment in which I found myself had given me every reason to believe that what was the most important was working as hard as I could, earning as much money

as I could so that I would support churches and ministries with my money. It even made sense to me. I didn't see anything wrong with my train of thought.

But God didn't need my help; He wanted my willingness to allow Him to lead my life. It was God's will for my life that was to reign every waking moment of my life, not my own expectations and hard work. I didn't understand that when we become empty vessels, the love of God would flow through us to touch other people. I knew God and I knew Jesus, but I knew nothing about serving the kingdom with everything I had and everything I was. The world seemed to have suddenly slowed down in the hospital, and I could think again. I was able to reflect on my own steps and start the difficult process of finding the missing pieces I had been so much in a hurry to see clearly.

Now, my path ahead seemed a bit clearer. There were some things that were important and many that were not so important. I felt broken. I felt robbed and angry. It was difficult to shake off the disappointment. My experiences and even the heartaches were really difficult moments I could not deny, but God was in every one of them. I had set out with a genuine heart to be an honest broker wherever life took me, but it was unfortunate that I stumbled upon people who did not care about integrity and character. They crash-landed my future in one instance and swept away my life savings in one unsuspecting afternoon.

In what seemed like a complicated and busy life, I was stuck on a never-ending roller coaster of events, business deals, and making elaborate plans. I was not settling on being a mediocre entrepreneur or interested in taking any shortcuts, so I knew the only way forward was to commit to whatever I did. I poured my heart into the work until I looked up, and I was standing all alone, betrayed, and empty.

I had the chance to pause. In fact, life forced me to pause. My attention shifted completely back to God. It was unrehearsed and unplanned, but it had taken an unfortunate circumstance to force me to reflect on my own journey. There had been many moments when I had been too busy to heed God's call. The world around me filled my days with too many distractions to sift through. But now, I had the chance to revisit moments that I had overlooked.

It took God pushing me into a new chapter of my life so that I would learn that the money in the bank account was not what determined the value of my life. I felt betrayed and broken. But it took this moment to recognize the significance of the most minor things that occupied my days. In that season, it seemed impossible to shake off that heavy feeling and embrace the truth that it was God who was in control of every moment of my life. The disingenuous business partners could not derail my purpose.

Even when all seemed lost, God was in the moments, in every single one of them. They were imperfect and unexpected, but I was grateful. These were the same experiences I was to use the rest of the way to remind me that even when I was at my lowest and had absolutely nothing, God kept me.

What I was getting to learn in a rather unexpected way was the truth that even when it feels as though the life we have known has stopped without any warning, and a sudden crisis interrupts everything I was working hard to achieve, the God who created the Heavens and the Earth still lives in the details. Even when I struggled to live through periods of uncertainty and came face to face with my human fragility, God did not disappear. In fact, it was in those moments that He felt even closer. Indeed, God is present in every moment, and when we reach our limits, we have no choice but to learn to depend fully on Him.

The God who specializes in piecing together the broken pieces of our lives had a plan for mine all along. God does not waste any of our moments; in fact, only He can and will use each of our moments for His glory. What I never could have imagined was that whatever He wanted to use my life to accomplish, the steps I was taking were only the beginning.

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TURNING POINTS

God Is Present in Every Moment

Even in our darkest and most confusing moments, God is actively present and working behind the scenes.

حتى في أحلك لحظاتها وأكثرها غموضًا، يكون الله حاضرًا وفاعلاً، يعمل في الخفاء ويتمم مقاصده من وراء المشهد.

God Uses Brokenness to Get Our Attention

Sometimes God allows us to reach our lowest point so we can finally look up to Him.

أحيانًا يسمح الله لنا بأن نصل إلى أدنى نقاط ضعفنا، لكي نرفع أعيننا إليه أخيرًا.

God Is in the Details

Even small, unexpected moments can be reminders that God is watching over us.

حتى الأحداث الصغيرة وغير المتوقعة قد تكون تذكيرًا بأن الله يسهر على حياتنا ويعتني بنا باستمرار.

God Redirects Through Disruption

What feels like life falling apart may actually be God realigning our path.

ما يبدو لنا وكأنه انهيار للحياة قد يكون في الحقيقة وسيلة يستخدمها الله لإعادة توجيه خطواتنا.