A Man After God's Own Heart

UPDATED AND EXPANDED

JIM GEORGE



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For my two Pauls—
Paul Seitz
and
Paul Zaengle,
the best two sons-in-law
a man could ever have.
May you continue to be
godly husbands, fathers, and spiritual leaders,
and men after God's own heart.

Acknowledgment

My heartfelt thanks to Steve Miller, friend, encourager, and a true man after God's own heart.

Contents

A Word of Welcome	7
PART ONE: THE PURSUIT OF GOD	
1. What Is Your Heart's Desire?	11
2. Desiring Spiritual Growth	21
3. Making Spiritual Growth Happen	29
4. The Marks of a Man After God's Own Heart, Part I	39
5. The Marks of a Man After	
God's Own Heart, Part II	49
PART Two: The Pursuit of God's Priorities	
Your Wife	
6. A Heart That Loves Your Wife, Part I	61
7. A Heart That Loves Your Wife, Part II	71
8. A Heart That Leads Your Wife	81
Your Children	
9. A Heart That Loves Your Children	93
10. A Heart That Leads Your Children	103
Your Work	
11. A Heart That Is Diligent at Work	115
12. A Heart That Glorifies God at Work, Part I	123
13. A Heart That Glorifies God at Work, Part II	135
Your Church	
14. A Heart That Loves the Church	145
15. A Heart That Serves the Church	155

Your Witness	
16. A Heart That Reaches Out	. 165
17. A Heart That Builds Bridges	. 177
PART THREE: THE PURPOSE OF GOD	
18. God's Purpose in You	. 187
19. Passing It On	. 195
A Final Word	. 205
Study Guide	. 209
How to Study the Bible—Some Practical Tips	. 241
A One-Year Bible Reading Plan	. 247
Notes	255

A Word of Welcome

Every major accomplishment in a man's life requires a major level of commitment. I'm sure you can remember such an accomplishment in your life. Perhaps you were starting your own business. Or maybe you were contemplating a job change or mapping out a new direction for your company or your family. Whatever it was, there was probably some initial hesitancy. One day you were eager to start...and the next day you weren't so sure. But once you made the decision to proceed, all the long hours of effort were worth it because of the joy of seeing the fruit of your labors.

Another man, King David, whose life is sprinkled throughout this book, understood this principle of commitment when he desired to buy land and build an altar to God. However, because David was the king, the landowner wanted to give him the land. But David realized that the greater the commitment, the greater would be the blessing. Therefore he declared, "I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing" (2 Samuel 24:24).

I'm thrilled to have had two opportunities to put the barebones principles of my 35-plus years of ministry to men in print. I say two because the first opportunity came some 14 years ago when I was asked to write the original book. It has been a great privilege over the decades to teach, train, equip, disciple, counsel, and mentor many men using these principles from God's Word. And in the lives of man after man, these truths have reaped major blessings in their spiritual lives, in their marriages and families, in their churches, and on the job. Once any hurdles of hesitancy were dispelled and a decision was made to proceed full speed ahead, all the effort was definitely worth it. Now 14 years later my publisher has given me this second opportunity to revise and update the original material. Much has happened during this time and I am thrilled with this opportunity to reflect upon and add to my original material.

If you read the original book, I invite you to pick up this revision and refresh your thinking about these priorities. It's easy to forget some of these principles, so a refresher course may be in order, and I think you will be encouraged by the new material I have added. And if you have yet to read this book, I invite you to embark with me on a journey toward greater growth and maturity. Join me in making giant strides toward becoming a man after God's own heart. Prepare yourself to learn about

- the priorities of a man after God's own heart,
- the practices of a man after God's own heart, and
- the purpose of a man after God's own heart.

You will reap major blessings in every area of your life as you make your own commitment to follow after God and do everything He wants you to do (Acts 13:22).

May God encourage and strengthen you as you make the journey of your life—the journey to becoming a man after God's own heart.

Your fellow traveler, Jim George

Part One THE PURSUIT OF GOD



In the Scriptures, God is frequently represented as searching for a man of a certain type. Not men, but a man. Not a group, but an individual.

When God does discover a man who conforms to His spiritual requirement, who is willing to pay the full price of discipleship, He uses him to the limit, despite his patent shortcomings.¹

—J. OSWALD SANDERS

1

What Is Your Heart's Desire?

I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.

—Астя 13:22

hen I was a young boy, my parents took me on our one and only family vacation. Leaving from my boyhood home of Miami, Oklahoma, we passed through Dodge City, Kansas, on our way to Colorado. And of course, we had to stop in this historic town and visit its famous Boot Hill Cemetery.

To this day I can still remember looking down at a tombstone with an inscription to this effect:

Here lies Old Joe.
He died with his boots on.

And at the end of the grave were two boots sticking up out of the earth! Later I learned that "Old Joe" wasn't actually buried there. And much later I found out that the inscription on a grave marker is called an *epitaph*, which is basically a short composition in prose or verse written as a tribute to a dead person.

Since that memorable visit to Boot Hill, I've collected a few other tributes. For instance, a Greek poet wrote this on the tomb of the Spartan heroes at Thermopylae in the fifth century BC:

Go, tell the Spartans, gentle passer-by, That here, obedient to their law, we lie.

This next one was written in memory of the English poet Shakespeare:

He was not of an age, but for all time.

Having a bit of a background in science, I like what was written of a scientist who died at the age of 85:

He Died Learning

Most epitaphs are written by those who knew the deceased person. Benjamin Franklin, however, the famous American statesman, wrote his own tribute:

The body of B. Franklin,
Printer
Like the cover of an old book
Its contents torn out
And stript of its lettering and gilding
Lies here, food for worms.
But the work shall not be lost
For it will, as he believ'd, appear once more
In a new and more perfect edition
Corrected and amended
By the Author.²

Then there are some humorous epitaphs too, such as...

All dressed up and no place to go.

Or...

Remember, friend, when passing by, as you are now, so once was I. As I am now, soon you will be, Prepare for death and follow me.

To which someone later added...

To follow you I'm not content. Until I know which way you went.

The epitaph that, to me, is the most inspiring of all (and also the most perplexing) is found written in the Bible. It's a tribute to King David, one of the most famous individuals in the Old Testament. Of him God writes,

I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do (Acts 13:22).

What Can We Learn from David?

The life of David makes for a fascinating character study. His is one of those great "rags to riches" stories in the Bible. David started out a shepherd boy and ended up as a king. He became a great warrior and consolidated the tiny nation of Israel into a powerful kingdom that ruled a large part of the Middle East during the tenth century BC.

But with all his accomplishments, David's greatest claim to fame, so to speak, is God's epitaph, "I have found David...a man after my own heart."

As I said earlier, I find this statement perplexing! God is declaring His approval of David's heart and life. That is puzzling in light of the fact that David's actions weren't always godly. In case you're unfamiliar with David's life, let me give you a brief overview of his checkered history.

- David was a warrior who shed much blood (1 Chronicles 22:8).
- David committed adultery with a woman named Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:4).

- David later found out that he had gotten Bathsheba pregnant. To solve his problem, David ordered Bathsheba's husband put into a forward battle position, where he was killed (2 Samuel 11:5-17).
- David had multiple wives (2 Samuel 3:1-5).
- David was a negligent father, and his family was plagued with strife and tragedy (2 Samuel 13:15-18, 28-29; 18:33).
- David, contrary to the Lord's command, pridefully numbered his troops, causing 70,000 of his people to die in a plague (2 Samuel 24:10,15).

And yet God states, "I have found David...a man after my own heart." How can that be? How could God possibly commend a man with this kind of background?

Yes, David was a man with feet of clay, a man who at times committed sins that most of us could not imagine, let alone commit. Yet over the long haul, David sought to be righteous and his heart's desire was to do God's will. This is the kind of man God was looking for as indicated by Jeremiah 5:1:

Go up and down the streets of Jerusalem, look around and consider, search through her squares. If you can find but one person who deals honestly and seeks the truth, I will forgive this city.

God doesn't expect perfection, as we can clearly see from David. With all that David had done wrong in his life, God could still look at David's heart and say he was a man after His own heart—a man who did all God's will.

The Enabling Grace of God

This, my friend, is the grace of God. There can be no other explanation! By his actions, David didn't deserve God's blessings.

But in his heart he had the right desire—a longing to follow and please God.

That brings me to an important question—one that can lead to a lot of meaning, purpose, and fulfillment in your life: Do *you* want to be a man after God's own heart? Or, put another way, is *your* heart's desire to follow after God?

You may think that's unrealistic because you have a tendency to take three steps forward then two steps back in your spiritual walk with God. You may imagine that being a man after God's own heart is too lofty a goal. You may conclude that it's not possible because of some of your past actions.

But you and I must never forget one thing: God looked at David's *heart*. And that's where God is going to look in our lives too. When it comes to becoming a man after God's own heart, we can count on the grace of God—a grace that enables us and strengthens us at all times.

The Grace of God to John Newton

We can find encouragement in the grace God exhibited to another notable man. His name was John Newton (1725–1807). Your life couldn't be any worse than that of John Newton's. He was a rough, debauched slave trader who later described himself as a "wretch" who was lost and spiritually blind. But one day the grace of God used a fierce storm to put fear into the heart of this wicked slave merchant. According to Newton's testimony, that storm—along with his reading of the book *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis—led him to genuine conversion and brought a dramatic change in his heart and in his way of life.

John Newton never ceased to marvel at God's grace which had transformed him so completely. To express that marvelous grace, Newton wrote the now-famous hymn "Amazing Grace":

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound That saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!

Shortly before his death at age 82, John Newton is quoted as proclaiming with a loud voice during a message he was giving, "My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: That I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Savior!"

Now that's the cry of a man after God's own heart. You see, God looked at John Newton's heart, just as He looked at David's. And, my friend, that's where He's going to look in your life too.

The Grace of God to You

Let's get very serious here for a moment. I want us to ask some hard questions:

Question #1—When God looks at your life, what does He look for? He doesn't look for perfection. Being a Christian is not about being perfect. The Bible says that there are no perfect men—no, not one (Romans 3:10). Like David, and like John Newton, every person has sinned. Every person has disobeyed God. And it's this disobedience that separates us from God.

That's the bad news, but now for the good news! The only perfect man who ever walked the face of the earth was Jesus Christ, God's only Son. He was truly a man after God's own heart. In every way and at all times, He did everything exactly as the Father wanted Him to. At Jesus' baptism, God the Father testified of this when He said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17).

Because Jesus was perfect and knew no sin, He was able to die for your sins and mine and pay the penalty for sin, which is death. The Bible tells us that "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). He was the perfect sacrifice for our sins. Because of

what He did, we can be cleansed of sin and "approach the throne of *grace* with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and may find *grace* to help us in our time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

Question #2—What does it mean to become a Christian? Briefly, becoming a Christian means...

looking to God and His grace (Ephesians 2:8-9),
repenting of or turning away from your sins,
accepting God's gift of eternal life through His Son's death on
your behalf,

receiving God's mercy and forgiveness, and... living by His grace.

Being a Christian doesn't mean you and I don't sin anymore. You will still sin, but sin will cease to be the predominant pattern of your life. That's because as a Christian, you are a new creature in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). You are a new child of God. And when you do sin, because the Holy Spirit lives in you, you are convicted and possess a desire to repent so that the joy of your fellowship with God can be restored (Psalm 51:12).

Question #3—What is your heart's desire? We have looked at David's heart and his desire to follow God. We have looked at how John Newton came to recognize God's grace and how his heart changed. What about your own heart? Can God look at your heart and say, "I have found you to be a man after My heart who desires to do all My will"?

Question #4—Have you received Jesus as the Savior and Lord of your life? Perhaps you have already taken that step of faith and received Christ as your Savior. If not, this is truly the first step toward becoming a man after God's own heart. If you have not yet become a Christian, you can take this most important step in life with a prayer like this one:

Jesus, I know I am a sinner, and I want to repent of my sins and turn and follow You. I believe that You died for my sins and rose again victorious over the power of sin and death, and I want to accept You as my personal Savior. Come into my life, Lord Jesus, and help me follow and obey You from this day forward. Amen.

Now, my friend, if you are a Christian, this epitaph found in a graveyard in England could be written of you:

I have sinned;
I have repented;
I have trusted;
I have loved;
I rest;
I shall rise;
I shall reign.4