

UNLEASHED INTRODUCTION

Whether we realize it or not, we meticulously plan out our lives. Our days are filled with schedules, to-do lists, and step-by-step plans for each and every section of our lives. Think about it...if you are a college student, your courses have a syllabus that lays out the entire semester. If you have a project or paper; at some point, even if it is the night before, you sit down, make an outline, and schedule out piece-by-piece when each section is done. If you are at work, you have responsibilities that you must complete, and each and every day you have a plan for how to accomplish these tasks. In your personal life, whether you are single or already a parent, you have sets of tasks and goals and a plan for how to accomplish it all. You have hopes and dreams and ideas of how you will make those things become a reality. Even if it is not written down, the plan is in place.

Our students are the same way. Whether they have a job, are on a team, in a club, or just go to school, they have their days planned out, goals set in front of them, and specific things they must do to accomplish these goals.

It is pretty easy to see that regardless of how freewheeling we think we are, our lives are pretty structured and calculated –except when it comes to our Christian lives. It seems to me that for many of us, we meticulously set up plans and goals for our lives and just seem to hope that our spiritual lives and the plans and purposes that God has for us will just somehow fall into place. If we continue on this path, we will find ourselves at the end of our lives having settled for mediocrity and having missed out on much of what God had for us, and the world around us will continue to suffer for it.

This study is about changing this. It is about forcing our students – as well as each of us – to completely wipe our lives clean. We must lay down all the plans and goals that we have set and focus in on what God would have us do. Then we must specifically voice and plan what God is calling us to do. We must no longer just assume we understand what it means to follow Christ, and we definitely must not assume that our students have that understanding. We can no longer just flippantly say general phrases about being a Christ follower; we

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instead must get detailed and specific and put those plans into action. We must stop compartmentalizing our lives and instead begin to let God's plans and purposes for us drive everything else we do. We must begin to carry the same vision for our spiritual walk as we have carried for all the other pursuits in our lives.

I believe this study will be challenging both for you and for your students. I also think you will be shocked by much of what your students, including those who have been in church for years, say about their understanding of what it means to be a Christ follower. This is okay though, because it is in these moments that both them, as well as you, will be able to grow, and through that growth our world will be able to change.

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Lesson 1: Where Are You Going?
2 Timothy 4:1

Take a moment to jot down where you see yourself in 5-10 years. You might want to jot down what you want to accomplish in high school, where you want to go to college, what career you want to pursue, etc.

Now take a moment to jot down where you see yourself in 5-10 years spiritually. What sins have you overcome? Who have you reached? What are you doing to reach others?

Could you come up with anything? I hope so, and I hope you are already taking steps to reach these goals. But for many of you, I am willing to bet that the second exercise was much more difficult than the first. There are many reasons why this might be the case, but I believe one of the major ones is that you have been failed. What I mean is that you are constantly bombarded with reminders to plan your future, but there is a good chance that when people tell you that they are only talking about college, your career, and maybe even your family and no one is talking about where are you heading spiritually. This is backwards and leads you down a road where you might be successful in the world's eyes but you end up missing out on all the wonderful blessings that God has for you. Basically you end up settling for second best in this life that God has given you.

It is time we reverse this process. It is time you stop planning out all your worldly goals and just hoping that your spiritual life falls into

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place, and instead seek God and what He has for you so you can know that the rest of your life will lay out the way it should. This does not mean that planning is a bad thing; it just means that as followers of Christ we plan differently.

In this study we are going to begin looking at this. We are going to look at how you can start taking all your abilities, passions, and desires to plan and create, and put that energy toward passionately pursuing God. Then in that process you will see just how much more you can accomplish in this life and the lasting impact you can have on the lives of those around you. So let's begin our study and get a vision for what God wants to do in our lives and what He wants to do through us to reach our communities and the world.

Let's do another exercise where you picture your future. They say when you are working on any project it is best to start with the end in mind and then work backwards to see how you get to that goal. I believe this can work in our lives as well.

Take a moment to picture your funeral. I know this may seem kind of morbid, but just hang in there with me. Who is there? What are people saying? Whose lives are different because of how you lived? Is anyone going to Heaven who might not have if you had not reached out to them?

I recently started thinking about this after I attended the funeral of a great leader in our community. It was amazing to hear people talk not about his income or his awards, but about his character, his impact, and how their lives and the lives of so many others who were not even there were forever changed because of this life of this man. It got me thinking about my life and what sort of legacy was I leaving. It made me consider what sort of impact I was having and what value the decisions I was making in what I pursued had for others around me. It definitely made me consider where my priorities were as far as my earthly goals and spiritual pursuits.

Read 2 Timothy 4:1-8.

Paul writes this passage near the end of his life. He knows he is about to die and is reflecting back on his life and the lessons he has learned. In case you are not aware, the story of Paul is one of the

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greatest stories of life change ever. Paul was originally known as Saul and was a leader in the Jewish faith. He used his power and passion though to go out and kill Christians. Then one day he was traveling down the road to Damascus, a city where there were many Christians, and his sole purpose was to arrest and kill those Christians. But God had different plans. Jesus appeared to Paul in a bright light and struck Him down and blinded Him. He confronted Saul and asked, "Why are you persecuting me?" He then told Saul that He had new plans for him and that he was to go on to Damascus and wait. Then a Christian named Ananias went under orders from God, a fascinating story of obedience in itself, and healed Saul. Saul's name was changed to Paul and he went on to reach thousands for Christ and spread the Gospel and plant churches all over the known world – not to mention that he wrote most of the New Testament. So as Paul reflects on his incredible journey, he has many insights and challenges for us, and so many lessons that we can learn. Because there is so much here, we will ease through this piece by piece. In this lesson we will just look at verse 1 to see what we can learn and apply to our lives.

1. Your life will end someday.

We will not live on this earth forever. In fact, we are not even promised tomorrow. It is so imperative that we realize this because too many people think the Christian life is something we live later. Many people your age will say things like, "I will live for God after I get married or am out of college." Or they will say, "Once I have money, a career, and some training, I will begin to live for God." But we are not promised any of this time we are counting on and we are given a commission to go out and reach others today. That is right. You are where you are now for a purpose. There are people around you today whom God wants you to reach out to who will not be around you in a few years, and for all you know if you do not go out and reach them no one else ever will.

I do not say all this to scare you or to discourage you. Instead I want you to realize the sense of urgency we must have for the mission God is calling us to. I want you to be blessed with a burden for the world around you. What does that mean? It means that I want there to be names and faces of people on your heart that you care about so

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deeply that you will almost not be able to eat or sleep until they are reached for Christ. I call this a blessing because it is just that. When you begin to live life this way you realize how foolish it was to live any other way. You begin to realize that while others see the Christian life as monotonous and caring for others as an inconvenience, it is in fact the only life worth living.

2. When our lives end, we will have to stand before God.

In Hebrews 9:27 we see that it is appointed once for man to die and then we will face judgment. This is what Paul is leaning toward when He speaks of God judging the living and the dead. There are two aspects to this judgment:

a. Judgment for those who do not know Christ.

Those who do not know Christ will have to stand before God and He will ask them why He should allow them to enter His Kingdom. If they answer in any other way than because they trusted in His Son Jesus to save them, then they will not be allowed to enter in. This means that they will spend eternity in Hell. It seems harsh, but this is reality and should add to our sense of urgency about living out our mission for Christ.

If your friends and family die without knowing Christ they will go to Hell.

The Bible teaches us clearly that we all have sinned and that sin separates us from God (Romans 3:23). The Bible also teaches us that there must be punishment for sin and this punishment is death (Romans 6:23). But here is the great and wonderful thing about all of this: God did not want anyone to face this fate so He sent Jesus, His one and only Son, to die in our place even though He never sinned and did not deserve death (John 3:16, 2 Corinthians 5:21), and if we confess to God that we are sinners, believe that Jesus died in our place, and that He rose from the dead, we will be saved. Since this salvation is a gift we did not earn (Ephesians 2:9) and Jesus was the ultimate sacrifice for sin (1 Peter 3:18), nothing can take that salvation away from you once you receive it (Romans 8:38-39)!

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This is the message we need to hear and need to be sharing with our friends—this message about how Jesus died for us but is now alive, and how He wants to save us from the terrible fate that awaits us because of our sin. Now, I know many of you may be thinking that this sounds great, but there is no way God would send people to Hell. In a way you are right; God does not send people to Hell— we choose Hell by rejecting Him and His free gift of salvation that He offers us.

b. Judgment for those who know Christ.

If we are Christians we too will face judgment, but not the same as those who do not Christ. Since our eternity is secure we do not have to worry about Hell, but we do have to give an account for how we lived our lives on this Earth. Did we stay free from sin? Did we have a humble and repentant heart? Did we do the work God called us to do? Then we will receive rewards according to how we lived our lives. But I do not think this is about the rewards because after being in the presence of a Holy and Perfect God we will not be able to help but just lay all those back at His feet. I think this is more about us allowing it to sink in that we might have to stand before God one day and explain why we abused this beautiful gift of grace by continuing to live in sin and therefore dishonoring the name of Christ. It is about having to give an account for why we used the time, talents, abilities, and relationships that God gave us for selfish means instead of to bring His name Glory. And it is about seeing the faces of those whose paths we crossed and knew throughout our lives who are going to Hell because we kept the saving message of the Gospel to ourselves.

I am not being overdramatic. This could be reality for you if you do not begin to live with a sense of urgency about your time on this earth. We have to get a vision for what our lives will look like in the end depending on how we use them. Then we have to allow that vision to help us focus on each and every moment God gives us so that we do not squander any opportunities to change someone's life.

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3. All that matters is what we did to show our love for God and love for others.

In Matthew 22:34-40, Jesus is asked what the greatest commandment of all is. He says it is to love the Lord your God with all your mind, soul, and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself. This is what all of life boils down to, and in the end it is all that will matter—how much you loved God and loved those around you. You can accomplish some nice things, be a decent person, and build an impressive resume, but all of that will be meaningless in the end. What will be left is the impact you left because you were fully devoted to love for God and love for the world around you.

You need to decide if things in your life work toward this love of God and love of your neighbor. If they do not, then get them out of your life. Now you may be thinking, “I am done with math because that does not help me love God or my neighbor.” Sorry, you are not off the hook! As a former math teacher, I can tell you that this gives you great opportunity to love God and your neighbor. It could be something as simple as modeling integrity or a strong work ethic in your class and through that light being able to share the Gospel. It might mean taking the time to assist others with their work. Or it could be simply having the vision to use your free time in class to build relationships and share the life-changing message of the Gospel with others. Whatever it is, ask God to help you see and use the time you have and the situations you are in differently.

4. We must live Kingdom-minded lives.

This life and this Earth are temporary. The things we accumulate in this life are temporary. The only thing that is eternal is the lives that are changed by the work we do for God, and as we have seen we need to be out doing this work. We are to see things differently than the world sees them. The world see this life as all that there is and thinks we should do all we can to gain wealth and have all the pleasures this world has to offer. This world believes that if it feels good and makes you “happy” then there is nothing wrong with it. But God is calling us to such more. God is calling us to be a part of building His Kingdom.

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and while His Kingdom will not be completed until He comes back one day, the work of building His Kingdom has already begun. You see, Jesus came to redeem sin and everything sin touched, because not only does sin destroy our lives and separate us from God, but it steadily destroys everything around us, from relationships all the way down. If you do not believe me just look at the world around us compared to the world we read about in Genesis during the story of creation. In the beginning God created everything and it was good. I do not know how we can look at all the violence, addictions, war, poverty, disease, etc., and say that things are good now. This is because sin destroys our lives and our world. But Jesus' death and resurrection gave us the opportunity to make things right and spend our lives bringing about restoration to others. This type of work is what will last. We need to live with this mindset. Instead of looking at your life and where you want to end up and considering how much money you want to make or what sort of earthly achievements you want to attain, think instead about being able to look back on your life and see all the work you did to build God's Kingdom and all the lives that are forever changed because of that work.

In closing, I am reminded of Proverbs 16:25 which says, "There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death." Not all of the goals you set and plans you make are bad, although some that are bad may not seem bad, especially to the world around you. But when we plan and dream in the world's way and with the world's priorities it will lead to death. Yes we all die, but I mean destruction and despair in our lives and spiritual death if we reject Christ. Therefore, we should instead live in such way that the only thing we care about is to be able to stand before God and hear Him say, "well done, good and faithful servant."

There are many things that go into being able to hear this, many of which we will dive into in the coming lessons. But the number one priority is making sure you have the relationship we talked about earlier with Christ. If you do not, take care of that now. If you do, take a moment to reflect and see how God needs to change your mindset, goals, and priorities so that you can live a life totally devoted to the Kingdom of God.

If you will, I believe He will answer and take you on a journey you never imagined and at the end of your life you will have no regrets.

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Discussion questions for after the lesson or spread throughout the lesson as you see fit:

- 1. What are some of the blessings you think we miss out on by not living out the vision that God has for our lives?**
- 2. What might be the negative effects of not living out the vision God has for your life?**
- 3. If you were to die today, what would people say about you?**
- 4. How does the fact that your life will end affect the way you want to live today?**
- 5. What faces of your friends do you see when you think about the fact that without Christ people will die and go to Hell?**
- 6. What does it mean to you that all of life comes down to loving God and loving people?**
- 7. How do you think we love God and love people?**
- 8. How do you need to change in order to live a more Kingdom-minded life?**
- 9. Take some time as a group to pray and brainstorm what changes need to take place, what work needs to be done, and how you as individuals and a small group can accomplish this work.**

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