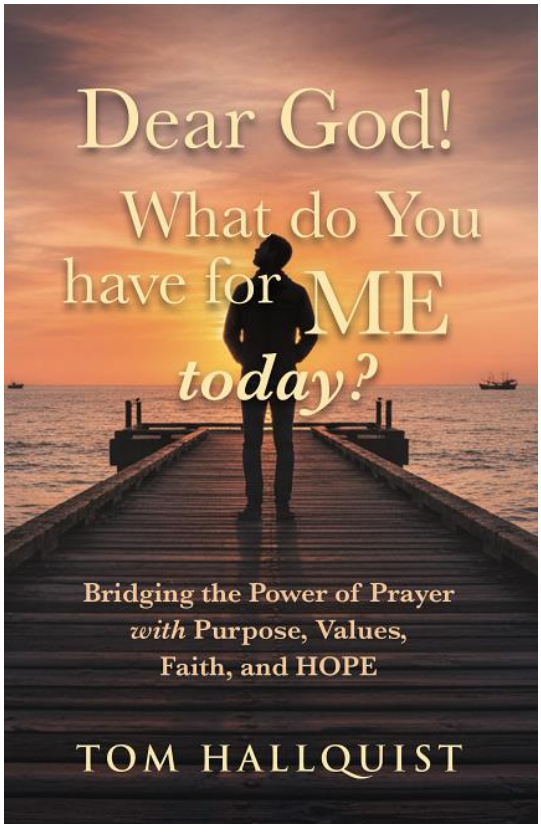
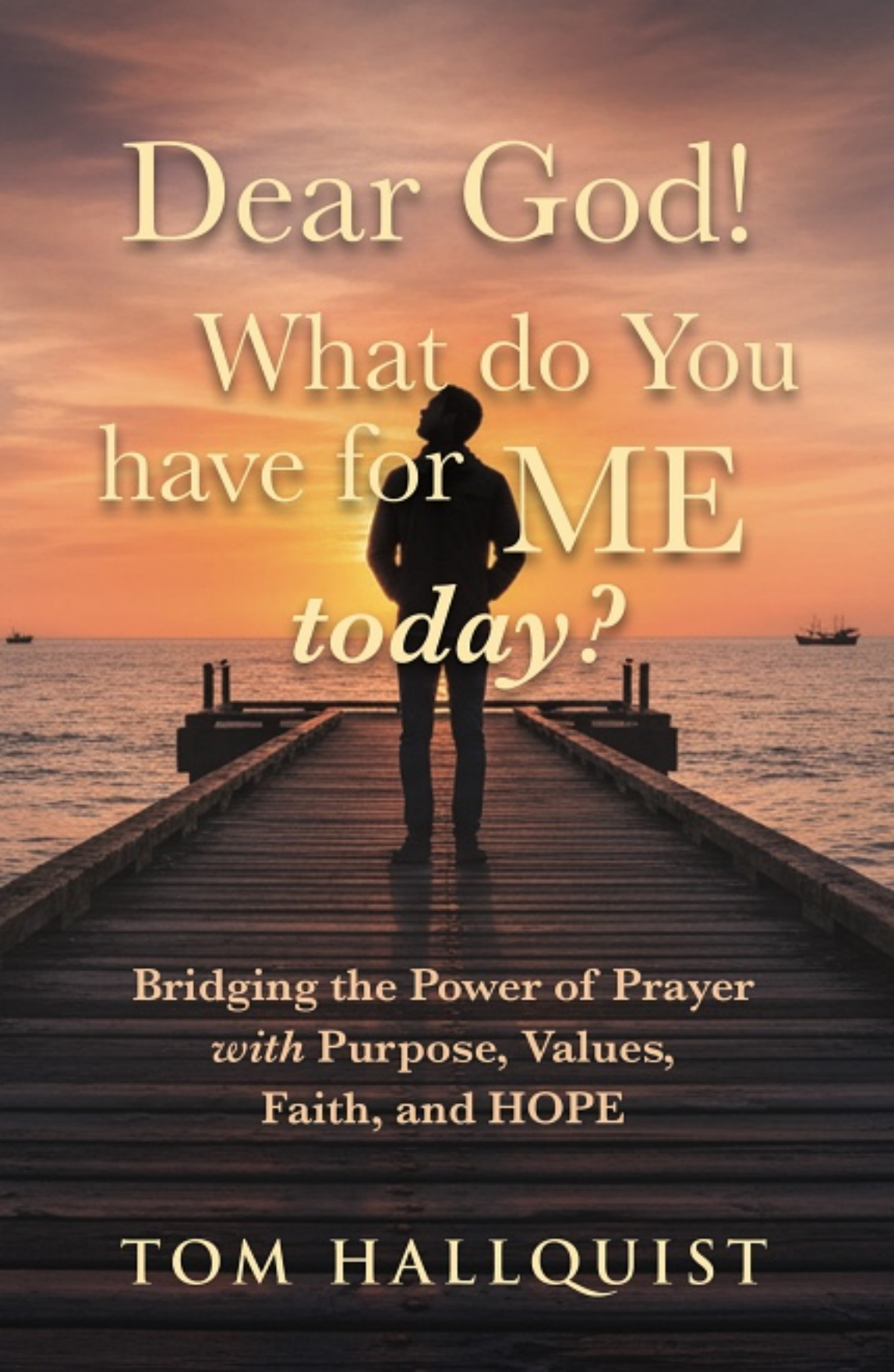


This book exists because too many people quietly give up on themselves. People who have survived because of their positive attitudes towards power of prayer, purpose, values, faith, and hope. This book is about them.

Dear God! What do You have for Me Today?
Bridging the Power of Prayer with Purpose, Values, Faith and Hope
By Tom Hallquist

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Dear God!
What do You have for ME today?
Bridging the Power of Prayer with Purpose, Values, Faith, and HOPE
TOM HALLQUIST

Blurb

“Dr. Hallquist knocked the ball out of the park with this one. He has packed so much information in each chapter that you will find yourself, as I did, stopping every so often to examine the nuggets contained in each chapter. He offered a lifelong continuous process to realize your full potential to develop positive self-actualization for both the individual and the organization.”

Paul Hensley
Spanish Pastor
Tennessee State Resource Board
20 Year Prison Minister

Theme of the Book

“Every day happens for a reason.
The highs. The lows. The wins. The losses.
The people who come in and the ones who leave.
None of it is random. Every moment carries a lesson. Every lesson is guiding you closer to your purpose.
So, when life feels heavy, pause, breathe, and remember: there’s meaning in that too.”

Dr. Regan Aymett

Other Books by the Author

Bridging Mindset Gaps. Murrells Inlet, SC: Covenant Books, Inc. 2020.

Building Cultural Bridges. Koln, Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2009

Family Reunification. Self-Published. Co-authored with Dr. Malinda Davenport-Crisp, 2008.

Back cover, *Oh God, What do you have for me today?*

This book exists because too many people quietly give up on themselves. People who have survived because of their positive attitudes towards purpose, values, faith, and hope. This book is about them.

Incarcerated men and women believed their lives were already defined by their worst decisions. Parents who felt they had failed their families, students who doubted their intelligence, and professionals who appeared successful but felt empty inside. Different backgrounds, different incomes, different circumstances, yet the same underlying belief: “What is my purpose and is this all my life will ever be?”

This is not an autobiography. It is a collection of lessons and life stories and how people connect through stories. They hear someone else’s experience and think, “Maybe that sounds like me,” or “If they can do it, I can do it or just keep trying and don’t give up!” These stories show practical steps toward mindset change—not just encouragement, but direction.

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Paperback ISBN: 978-1-961268-80-7
Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-961268-81-4
Ebook ISBN: 979-8-88532-704-6

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Trenton, Georgia.

BookLocker.com, Inc.
2026

First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Hallquist, Tom
Dear God! What do You have for Me Today? Bridging the Power of Prayer with Purpose, Values, Faith and Hope by Tom Hallquist
Library of Congress Control Number: 2026919882

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About the Author

Tom Hallquist, EdD, is a retired Associate Professor of Communication Studies at Columbia State Community College, Columbia, Tennessee, and an adjunct professor at Belmont University, in Nashville, Tennessee. Dr. Hallquist has also taught communication courses at Bethel University, Arden Hills, Minnesota and University of Northwestern, St. Paul, Minnesota. He also was an instructor at the Davidson County Sheriff's Office jail facilities in Nashville where he taught GED classes, as well as classes in purpose, values, faith, and hope. He was a volunteer chaplain for the hospital facility for the Tennessee Department of Corrections. He also taught prison courses ranging in topics from parenting from prison, anger management, entrepreneurship, organizational leadership, and reentry into civilian life. All his classes, whether in prison or on the college campus, focus on practical, purposeful, faith-based, and value-driven education. Dr. Hallquist is a motivational speaker and advisor for prison reform with the emphasis on reentry classes on the first day of incarceration.



Chapter 1
Why Am I Here?

Discovering Purpose

At some point in life, whether we admit it out loud or not, most of us ask the same questions.

“Who am I?”

“Where am I going?”

“How will I get there?”

These questions do not belong only to philosophers, theologians, or people in crisis. They belong to all of us. They appear quietly during moments of frustration, loss, uncertainty, or change. Sometimes they surface when life is falling apart. Other times they come when everything appears to be going well, yet something inside still feels unfinished.

For me, the question became very real in the late 1980s when I was trying to build a new company. By that time, I had already graduated from college in 1970 and had spent nearly two decades working and helping develop a transportation business. From the outside, my career seemed stable. But inside, I felt restless. I believed there was a problem that needed solving, yet I did not know exactly how to solve it.

There was a need to develop a cost-effective company that did data analysis for organizations and pay freight bills to help offset expenses.

At that time the business world was in the middle of a technological shift. Companies were moving from adding

machines and manual bookkeeping to computer systems. Large corporations could afford expensive machines like the IBM AS/400 or the IBM System 36. Those systems often cost around one hundred thousand dollars or more. Small companies could not afford that transition. Many of them were left behind simply because the technology was too expensive.

I could not stop thinking about that gap.

I believed smaller businesses deserved the same opportunity to modernize, but at a cost they could manage. That belief pushed me to start experimenting with personal computers. I bought my first IBM PS/2 and began learning and developing dbase programs that could analyze data. Soon I purchased several more machines and started connecting them together. I learned with the assistance of friends through trial and error how to cable the systems into a network.

At the time, what we were doing almost felt groundbreaking, and I was not prepared or had the knowledge needed for programming. Fortunately, friends helped me with coding using DOS and Linux systems and even incorporated formulas from dBase III Plus and began writing programs that could run across workstations, especially in Excel to create and edit spreadsheets.

As the data analysis was developed, a freight payment program was written in its infancy to assist companies. My first account was from a major steel company out of Minnesota with the understanding they would test the freight audit and analysis program. For a year I would travel back and forth on weekends between Minneapolis and Chicago. After the year of being a nomad, the family moved to Minnesota.

The program was adequate and worked, but not to the standards. I tried to further develop the programming, but I eventually reached a wall. I had taken the project as far as I could on my

own. The frustration was overwhelming. I knew the idea had potential, yet I lacked the expertise to finish it.

That was when a Pastor Mark Nelson approached me and spoke about something called the Prayer of Jabez. I will be honest, I was skeptical. He encouraged me to say the prayer consistently, day after day, and to ask for guidance. I agreed, though at first I did not fully believe anything would change. But something did change.

New ideas began to form. I realized that if the project was going to move forward, I could not do it alone. I needed help. Around that time several programmers had recently been laid off from IBM. When I approached them about joining the project, they told me their normal consulting fee was around one hundred thousand dollars. I had to be honest with them. I told them I simply could not afford that. The company was still in the developmental stage.

A woman who also believed in the Prayer of Jabez connected me with a group of young men who had been programming together since high school. They were brilliant, though somewhat shy and deeply focused on computers. I approached them and explained the situation.

I told them, “I need help, but I cannot pay you right now.”

To my surprise, a couple of them agreed to work with me and joined the project. Together we worked through the technical challenges and continued developing the software. What began as frustration slowly turned into progress. The system we were building started to work, especially with data analysis.

The problem now was that I did not have any clients; they all felt that I was too small of a company and had an innovative concept that wasn’t tested.

That is when Pastor Mark came back into the picture and told me to start saying the Prayer of Jabez again every day. Within a week I started to get calls from potential clients that I previously called on to inform them of this inexpensive five station work solution for their businesses.

Now I had to start hiring employees and the amazing aspect was that this innovative concept lasted fifteen years and helped keep my family and business debt free. I was able to sell the programs and concepts to new customers and old clients. I believed in what I was doing.

Looking back, that experience taught me something important about purpose. Purpose often appears during moments of struggle, not comfort. When we feel stuck or frustrated, it may be because we are standing at the edge of something that requires us to grow, collaborate, and trust something bigger than ourselves. I still had not figured out, “Why me?”

But the search for purpose in my life began even earlier.

In 1971 my brother was involved in a serious accident. I remember driving back from the Naval Hospital in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, on a Sunday afternoon during a rainstorm. I was crying and praying because the doctors were considering amputating his leg. If that happened, his career as a Navy pilot would be over.

That drive home was one of the most emotional moments of my life. I remember praying with everything I had, asking God for help. At one point the rain stopped, and the sun broke through the clouds, and I felt an overwhelming sense of peace. It is difficult to explain, but at that moment, I truly believed that prayer mattered.

When I returned to the hospital the following morning, the doctors delivered unexpected and great news. Gangrene had not

set in, and they were going to try to save his leg. Over time he went through numerous operations, but his leg was saved and he continued flying as a pilot.

That moment changed my perspective. It showed me that life is often guided by moments we do not fully understand at the time. Yet even after experiences like that, it is easy to drift.

Over the years I remained a believer, attended church, and tried to live responsibly, but the deeper sense of purpose sometimes faded into the background. That is why the experience in the late 1980s with the computer company and the Prayer of Jabez felt like a second awakening. It reminded me that purpose is not something we discover once and keep forever. It is something we must continually rediscover.

From that point forward my life began moving in directions I never planned. I say the Prayer of Jabez every morning and ask God, "What do you have for me today?" Sometimes I laugh and other times I wonder what he has in store for me.

Africa and How it Changed my Life

I never expected to travel to Africa. Yet one day someone simply asked, "Would you like to go?" I had always wanted to see Africa, so I said yes.

That trip led me to a remote area near the Sudanese border in Ethiopia, which was surrounded by a mountain range and basically was an isolated area in Ethiopia. Once we got over the mountain range and looked down into the valley, it was like we were driving into a world 2000 years ago. Africa's Brigadoon.



It was not too far from refugee camps in Gambella. The drive there was an adventure but became more so when our lead car hit a woman and she had a severe head injury. The group decided that Daniel Jobirri and I would take the women to a clinic around ten miles back from which we just came. I also kept asking, "Why am I here?"

Once we arrived at the clinic, we discovered that the sanitary conditions were worse than fishing camps I encountered elsewhere. The clinician there examined the lady by sticking his unwashed finger in the abrasion and touched her skull. He said, "She needs stitches, but I only have enough thread to sew four stitches." He sewed in the stitches, and I paid him with jars of jelly I took from the hotel that morning.

As a side note: on the way back to Addis, we came across a traffic jam, east of Nekemte when a car hit a goat in the middle of the road. The argument was the value of the goat and how many generations of producing more goats should be the fine. Daniel mentioned they had been arguing for some time about the payment. I paid a few jars of jelly for a woman who had a puncture all the way to the skull—value of a woman compared to the value of a goat.

Meanwhile, Daniel and I took the lady with the head injury to a Catholic Hospital in the town of Nekemte, which was halfway to our destination where we spent the night. The person I gave

credit to was the lady who never complained but was so thankful we were there. The following morning, we left Nekemte and the paved roads to drive on turned into animal trails for another five hours until we reached the isolated village.

At the village we greeted very warmly, and we were also told that there were natives that have never seen a white person before and to expect them cover themselves with ash, which some did as a sign of respect. I was beginning to figure out why we were there. I am also eternally grateful to Daniel for being there me to help guide us through this ordeal.

Our mission was to meet with five local tribes and encourage them to build a school together. Food for the Hungry had committed to providing teachers and educational support, but the community itself had to build the school.

Convincing the tribes was not easy. Each tribe wanted control over the project. If only one tribe built the school, that tribe would dominate it. I believed strongly that all five tribes needed to work together so every child would have equal access.

For four days we met with the tribal leaders in a large grass structure filled with nearly four hundred villagers. Another speaker, Dr. Kevin Meyer, and I shared messages with them through translators. Because the language had to pass through several translations, every sentence took time. What would normally be a thirty-minute talk became hours.

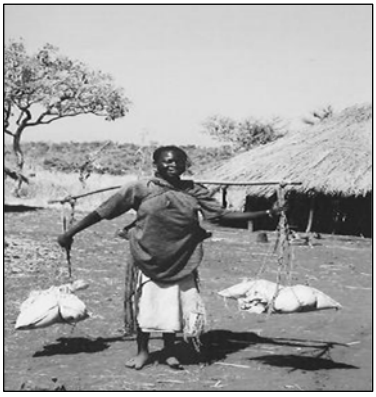
Kevin had the foresight to speak on the Book of Esther for the Old Testament about the power of the women, even though the tribes are patriarchal and each man usually has three to five wives. Kevin knew that to convince the tribes to come together his strategy was if the wives were happy then the men would also be happy and hopefully the vote would be favorable.

On the final day I stood up to speak and suddenly my mind went completely blank.

I leaned over to Kevin and whispered that I could not remember what I planned to say. He offered to take over, but something inside me said no. I stood up and began speaking anyway. I started out by stating, "God sent us here to your village. He could have sent us to another village, but He sent us here!" The message lasted nearly three hours as translators carried the words through multiple languages. I spoke about the Beatitudes and about serving one another.

When the meeting ended, however, I felt frustrated. The tribes still had not agreed after four days to build the school together.

As we walked back toward the village, I saw a woman carrying heavy sacks of grain. Without thinking, I lifted the sacks and carried them on my shoulder. It was incredibly heavy. The tribes watching us felt uncomfortable seeing an outsider carry the burden, so one of them took it from me. Then another tribe took it. Soon all five tribes passed the sacks from one to another until they reached the village.



The next morning, they came to us with their decision. They had agreed to build the school together.

That moment eventually led to something remarkable. One school became several, and over time eight schools were built in that region. Years later I learned that a woman from Switzerland had donated nearly two million dollars to support the effort. Today, those schools are still educating children even in the war-torn area of western Ethiopia.

I did not plan any of that. I simply said "yes" when the opportunity appeared.

People I Met Started to Change my Life

Experiences like these have shaped my understanding of purpose. Purpose is not reserved for a select group of people. It belongs to everyone. It belongs to executives and laborers, teachers and students, inmates, and entrepreneurs.

One of the greatest tragedies I see, especially when working in prisons and with struggling communities, is the loss of purpose. When people believe their lives have no direction or value, despair begins to grow. Without purpose, people start defining themselves by their mistakes.

I have seen this happen with college students who doubt their abilities. I have seen it with business owners who achieve financial success but feel empty. And I have seen it most clearly in prisons.

Many incarcerated individuals believe their lives are already finished. They see their crimes as the final definition of who they are. Yet when they begin asking deeper questions about purpose and values, something changes.

I once worked with a man who had spent decades in prison for a violent crime. After his release he struggled to find work. No one

wanted to hire him because of his past and physical stature of being six feet eight inches tall. He felt hopeless.

During one of our conversations, I asked him a simple question: "What do you enjoy doing?"

He thought about it for a moment and said he loved detailed cars. Washing them, waxing them, and restoring them gave him peace of mind.

So, we started there. He began detailing cars for people in his community. At first, he charged a small fee, far less than professional services normally cost. Soon the demand grew. Eventually he expanded the business, hired workers, and even began detailing boats stored nearby.

By the time he reached his mid-sixties he was able to retire comfortably. The man who once believed he had no future had built a small business and regained his dignity.

Purpose often begins with simple questions like that.

What do you care about?

What values guide your decisions?

Who can you serve with your skills?

Another example came from a young woman, and her story illustrates how purpose can change a life.

She grew up believing she was responsible for her parents' divorce. Her father left and never contacted her again. Her mother struggled with addiction and remarried a man who abused her. Eventually she ran away at fifteen.

Her life quickly spiraled into drugs, prostitution, and repeated arrests. By the time she entered my class in prison she hated school and hated herself. She believed her life had no value.

But during the class we began discussing the same core questions.

“Who am I?”

“Where am I going?”

“How will I get there?”

At first, she resisted the conversation. Over time something changed. She began realizing her past did not have to determine her future. She began considering the possibility that her purpose might involve helping others avoid the same path she had taken.

Before long she started leading Bible studies inside the prison. The woman who once believed she had nothing to offer was now encouraging other inmates.

That is the power of rediscovering purpose.

Purpose is not defined by success, money, or status. It begins with understanding who we are and what values we choose to live by. When people answer those questions honestly, direction begins to appear.

Without purpose, despair grows. With purpose, change begins.

Every person must eventually ask the same questions.

“Who am I?”

“Where am I going?”

“How will I get there?”

Those questions are not signs of weakness. They are the starting point of transformation.

Chapter 2
Values That Guide the Journey

Moral Compass and Personal Responsibility

Once we begin asking questions about purpose, another question naturally follows.

What will guide my life?

Purpose gives us direction. It answers where we are going. But values determine how we get there. Without values, even the clearest purpose can be lost along the way.

I have seen people with talent lose everything because they compromised their principles. I have also seen individuals in the most difficult environments hold firmly to their values and completely change the direction of their lives.

The difference is not opportunity.

The difference is values.

Values act as an anchor. When life becomes uncertain, when pressure increases, when circumstances feel overwhelming, values keep us steady. Without them, it is easy to drift. It is easy to follow whatever influence is strongest in the moment.

But with values, decisions become clearer.

You may not always have control over your circumstances, but you always have control over the values you choose to live by.

For me, the foundation of values began at home.

Family Influence

I was fortunate to grow up in a family where values were not just spoken about. They were lived out every day. My parents and grandparents did not simply tell us how to behave. They showed us through their actions.

They taught us respect. They taught us to work hard. They taught us to treat others with dignity. They taught us to help people even when there was no reward.

Those lessons stayed with me, not because they were repeated in words, but because I saw them in action.

My mother was a registered nurse. She served during World War II and later worked in a doctor's office. But what stood out most was what she did outside of her job.

In the late 1960s, she saw a need. There were people dying, either in their homes or in care facilities, who did not have anyone to sit with them, talk to them, or care for them in their final days. There was no formal system like hospice at that time. So, she just went ahead and started visiting people. One person was a beautiful lady called Grandma Dumyhan, the grandmother of the Vosnos family and a close friend. They offered to pay, but mom did not do this for the recognition or money. She did it because there was a need.

She gathered a group of nurses and began visiting these individuals. They provided medical care when needed, but more importantly, they provided presence. They sat with people. They listened. They made sure no one felt alone in their final moments.

That left a lasting impression on me and mom was placed there for a purpose.

It taught me that values are not proven by what we say. They are proven by what we do when no one is watching.

My father and my grandparents reinforced those same principles. My father was a quiet man who never lied or swore. He was recognized by a Teamster Union president that he was a man that he highly respected because of his character. My dad never spanked my brother and me; all he had to do was look at us and we knew we did wrong.

He also taught me and my brother a valuable lesson. "If you want to run a business, start at the bottom and work up to the top." He had us sweep floors and work with the mechanics; by doing so, we became "Grease Monkeys!" He taught us how to unload a 550-pound drum off the back of a truck by dropping it on an empty cardboard box. He made us load and unload trucks at night.

When it was time to drive a truck, we drove the oldest with a windshield that opens in front, and we had to double clutch to move from one gear to the next. His message was that you must earn advancement and have it not given to you. That is how one earns respect and learns the self-actualization process.

My grandfather Hallquist, who was an immigrant, believed strongly in hard work and personal responsibility. He often emphasized that doing your job was not enough. You should always do more than what is expected. You should help others whenever you can. He always said, "Thank you," and his handshake was firm and good as a contract.

He built a business by waking up early, going to the market, and delivering goods to communities that needed them. But what stood out was not just his work ethic. It was how he treated people.

He treated everyone with respect, and he had a positive attitude. The black workers at the South Water Market in Chicago nicknamed him "Happy."

That may sound simple, but it is not always easy. It requires consistency. It requires discipline. It requires seeing value in others, regardless of their background, ethnicity, or circumstances.

My grandfather Nemitz had the same philosophy of hard work, respect for others, a firm handshake, and told us to look the other person in the eye. What set himself apart from others is that when someone needed assistance, he was there to help.

One day my grandfather took my brother and me to the Delhi to deliver a load of shelled corn to the grainery. Afterwards he stopped by the local restaurant and got Cokes for us.

Several other farmers were there, and they all greeted us kindly and showed respect for my grandfather. One farmer started to tell us a story about my grandfather. He said that Herman, my grandfather, was one of the strongest men in the area.

He said my grandfather could stand at the round table with four beers at the corners and lift the table from one side and not spill a drop of beer. Wow, that was a great compliment, but what he said next has left an everlasting impression on me and my brother.

The farmer, and I wish I knew his name, said that hobos or migratory workers would ride the train that cut through my grandfather's land. They told the farmer that the Nemitz farm was a safe farm and if anytime they needed help, they had the assurance that Herman Nemitz would help them out.

The gentleman who bought my grandparents farm told me on several occasions that he had heard the same thing and that my

grandfather even allowed them to use the shower in the basement and feed them. The message among hobos was that the Nemitz farm was safe and that message was spread throughout the hobo community that no harm was to come to the that farm.

Those early lessons shaped how I began to see the world.

They also shaped how I made decisions later in life.

Respect for others no matter what circumstances they come from or what social status. I guess it is the "Golden Rule."

One of the values that was emphasized repeatedly in our home was simple.

Do not compromise your principles.

That sounds straightforward but living it out can be difficult. There are moments in life when compromise feels easier. There are times when you may be pressured to take a shortcut, to follow the crowd, or to do something that goes against what you believe.

In those moments, your values are tested.

I remember growing up in a community that was uniform. Most people looked the same and lived similar lives. But one experience challenged that environment in a meaningful way.

There was a young African student who did not have a place to go during the holidays in 1965. He did not have a family to spend time with. I asked my parents if we could invite him into our home. They agreed.

He joined us for a holiday meal, and we brought him to church with us. It was not something people were used to seeing at the time. There were some looks. There was very little discomfort.

But discomfort did not matter. What mattered was doing what was right.

That experience reinforced a simple but powerful value.

Treat people with dignity.

Not when it is convenient. Not when it is accepted. But always.

Values are often tested in moments like that. They require us to act, make a choice, not just believe.

If you believe in something, pursue it.

There will be obstacles. There will be setbacks. But values require perseverance. They require the willingness to stand firm, even when others disagree.

As I grew older and began working with individuals in different environments, especially in prisons, I saw how critical values truly are.

Values become even more important in difficult environments.

In those settings, people are often influenced by their surroundings. They may feel pressure to adopt certain behaviours or align with certain groups in order to survive.

This is where values must be clearly defined.

One of the challenges I often encountered when working with inmates was this question: “Whose values are you following? Are they your values, or are they the values of the environment around you?”

This is not always an easy question to answer. In many cases, individuals have spent years adapting to their surroundings. They have learned to think and act in ways that helped them survive, but those same patterns may not help them move forward.

Three Scared Women in Prison

I worked with a group of young women who were entering prison for the first time. The experience was overwhelming for them. They did not know how to act or what to expect. Everything felt unfamiliar and intimidating.

In that environment, they believed they needed to act a certain way to protect themselves. They believed they had to appear tough.

At the same time, they saw themselves as victims of their circumstances. They believed their past experiences had led them to where they were.

There was truth in their experiences. They had faced difficult situations. But at some point, we had to address a deeper question.

Did they have a choice?

That question changed the direction of the conversation.

Acknowledging that they had a choice did not erase their past. It did not dismiss the challenges they had faced. But it shifted their perspective.

It moved them from a mindset of being stuck to a mindset of taking responsibility.

That is where values begin to take shape.

Values require ownership.

They require us to say, “I am responsible for my decisions moving forward.”

This does not mean the journey becomes easy. There will still be struggles. There will still be setbacks. But values provide a framework for growth.

I often describe it in a simple way: some people feel like they are stuck at the bottom of a pit. They walk in circles, repeating the same patterns, making the same decisions, and experiencing the same outcomes.

Values help us begin to climb.

The climb is not always smooth. Sometimes we slip. Sometimes we fall back. But if we remain committed to our values, we continue moving upward.

That is progress.

Another important aspect of values is understanding personal worth.

Many people struggle not just with what values to follow, but with how they see themselves.

Do I have value?

That is where values begin to take shape. Values require ownership.

They require us to say, “I am responsible for my decisions moving forward.” The three women took responsibility for their actions and became role models for other inmates.

This does not mean the journey becomes easy. There will still be struggles. There will still be setbacks. But values provide a framework for growth.

Pastor Michael Rickenbaker – Changing Lives

Pastor Michael Rickenbaker, who serves a church community and has a prison ministry, told me of a hardened inmate who attended his serves but always sat in the back of the chapel and never participated. He claimed he attended just to get out of his unit. In 2005, he attended a baptism. While the other inmates knew they were going to be baptised and they prepared to get wet, he was wearing his regular clothes and stayed in the back of the chapel and just watched.

When the ceremony was over everyone left except the hardened inmate. He approached Pastor Rickenbacker and asked if he could get baptised. Micheal baptised him and watched him walk back to his cell soaking wet, but a new man with a sense of value and self-worth.

In 2007, he was released. He had developed a positive attitude and a sense of value with the help of Pastor Rickenbaker.

In 2026, this hardened criminal contacted Michael and told him he saved his life because Michael believed in him and helped him gain self-worth and value. He is still employed at the same place that hired him after he was released and in 2008, he met a woman and they have been married for eighteen years. Michael asked him how he got his phone number and he said, "Through Google search." It is an easy process.

Michael helped this hardened criminal change his mindset, change his life and gave, and convinced him that he had value.

The value question is more important than many realize.

If a person does not believe they have value, it becomes difficult for them to live by strong values. They may settle for less. They may accept behaviours that do not align with who they truly want to become.

That is why one of the first steps is recognizing self-worth.

You have value.

Not because of your past and not because of your current circumstances, but because of who you are.

Once a person begins to understand that their decisions begin to change.

They begin to choose differently.

They begin to think differently.

They begin to act differently.

Values and self-worth are closely connected.

When you value yourself, you begin to live in a way that reflects that belief.

I often encourage people to reflect on a few simple questions:

- What do I believe is right?
- What do I stand for?
- What kind of person do I want to become?

These questions help clarify values. Once values are defined, the next step is commitment.

Values are not helpful if they change depending on the situation. They must remain consistent.

This is where the principle of not compromising becomes important.

There will be moments when compromise feels easier. There will be moments when it feels like the only option.

But those are the moments that define us.

Do we stay true to our values, or do we adjust them based on convenience?

Every decision shape our path.

Another practical way to approach values is by examining our actions. When something goes wrong, we can ask a few simple questions based on Simon Sinek's Golden Circle:

- What happened?
- How did it happen?
- Why did it happen?

These questions help us understand the situation. But there is one more question that is just as important.

What am I going to do about it? Now fix it!

Values are not just about reflection. They are about action.

They guide us in making better decisions moving forward.

They help us correct mistakes and grow from them.

For anyone who feels lost or uncertain, it is important to start somewhere.

You do not need to have everything figured out at once.

Start with a few core values.

Respect. Integrity. Responsibility.

Commit to living by those values each day.

It will not be perfect. There will be challenges. But over time, those values will shape your decisions and your direction.

They will become the foundation for your life.

As we move forward, it is important to remember that values are not just personal. They influence others.

When you live with integrity, people notice.

When you treat others with respect, it creates an impact.

When you refuse to compromise, it sets an example and maintains the importance of value.

Values are not just about who you are.

They are about the influence you have on others.

At the end of the day, we all face struggles.

We all experience moments of doubt, failure, and uncertainty.

But values give us a way forward.

They remind us that no matter where we are, we have the ability to choose how we live.

We can choose to grow.

We can choose to take responsibility.

We can choose to move forward.

Purpose gives us direction.

Values guide the journey.

Faith gives us peace of mind.

And when the three come together, change becomes possible because of hope.

Chapter 3
Faith Without Perfection

Practical Faith, Not Religious Performance

Faith is a word that many people understand in different ways. For some, it is connected to religion. For others, it is tied to tradition or upbringing. And for many, it feels complicated, something that requires a level of perfection they are not sure they can reach.

Over the years, I have come to see faith in a much simpler way.

Faith is not about perfection. It is not about having all the answers or meeting a standard that feels out of reach. It is about belief, trust, and a willingness to step forward even when the path is not completely clear. It begins quietly, often in moments when we realize we cannot rely on our own strength alone.

When I was younger, faith was something I learned in church. It was part of Sunday school, something that was taught and accepted. At that stage of my life, it was more about structure than relationship. It was about learning what was right and wrong, understanding expectations, and following a path that had already been defined.

But over time, that understanding began to change.

It did not happen all at once. It evolved through experience. It changed through challenges and through moments that forced me to rely on something greater than myself. As I became more involved in working with people, especially in prison ministry and in different parts of the world, faith became less about structure and more about connection.

I stopped seeing it as something tied to a denomination or a system. Instead, it became personal. It became practical. It became a simple willingness to say, “Here I am. Use me.”

That shift changed everything.

Faith was no longer about trying to do everything right. It was about being available. It was about trusting that even when I did not fully understand what was ahead, there was still a purpose in moving forward. It became less about performance and more about relationship.

There are many discussions about religion, denominations, and institutions. There are different interpretations, different expectations, and sometimes even disagreements. I have seen situations where religion has been used in ways that do not reflect its true purpose. I have seen it become focused on rules, on control, and at times even on financial gain.

Those experiences led me to simplify my own understanding.

Faith, for me, is not about belonging to a specific group or following a set of external expectations. It is about a personal belief. It is about trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ and allowing that trust to guide how I live, how I serve, and how I respond to others. It is a relationship, not a performance.

That kind of faith opens doors.

It leads you into places you never expected to go and into situations you never planned for. It places you in moments where you realize your role is not to control the outcome, but simply to be present and willing to accept the outcome

"Building Cultural Bridges"

I started my master's degree at Bethel College and Seminary in the year 2000 at the age of 53. I kept asking myself, *What am I doing and why am I in a class with students thirty years younger than me?* What started out as a continuing process of finding out who am I and what is my purpose turned into a life changing and exciting challenge of saying, "Thank you God for allowing me to serve You by assisting others."

The first week of class, I got a call from Dr. Leta Frazier stating that she needed help with finding a room for an Ethiopian grad student who just arrived on campus. He had $11,600 to pay for the college fee to get a master's degree. He paid the cashier and asked her where she stayed on campus. She told him that Bethel did not offer room and board for graduate students and that he should contact the chair of the communications department, Leta Frazier.

I told Leta that I was forty miles away and asked why she called me. She said my name came up first in her mind, and she also admitted she really didn't know why except that she felt I would come up with a solution. I laughed and told her that I would try to find temporary housing for Getachew. I made a few calls and was told there was an empty apartment in married student housing that he could probably use until they could come up with a solution. I called campus security and told them of the situation and asked them if they would pick up Getachew and take him to married student housing. They agreed, and I told Getachew that I would contact him in the morning and that we would come with a game plan.

This was the first significant conflict in understanding different cultures. In Ethiopia, if a stranger needed assistant, help would be given. Getachew later explained to me that his father's car was taken by a neighbor's son without permission, Getachew asked

his father why he did not call the police? His father said, "He needed it more than more than me and will return it when he is done." Getachew told me this: "In my culture if a person is hungry, he is fed; if a person needed clothing he is given clothes."

I met with Getachew and with other international graduate students. Within a short period of time, we discussed various other difficulties that were not addresses by the college. Cost of health care was one of the main difficulties for international grad students. Their cost was over $400 per month because they came from third world countries and they could not be enrolled in the undergrade health insurance program.

Hannah, an Ethiopian student in our grad class, suggested that I make a call to an Ethiopian insurance agent asking what can be done to assist international graduate students to get affordable health insurance? He suggested we enroll them as college students not declaring them as grad students, which was an approximate cost of forty dollars per month.

We formed an ad hoc committee of international students to discuss other various difficulties. I became more aware of the pride that international students have for their own cultural values, beliefs, and traditions. I knew they would persevere and get the degree, and I also found out that they were extremely grateful that someone reached out to help.

We would get together several times a week and discuss problems and come up with solutions. I found out that there were problems with furniture, clothing, medicine, dental care, medical care, work, and visas were common occurrences.

I found out that they would go dumpster diving for Krispy Kreme Doughnuts at 4:00 am to pick up boxes of doughnuts being thrown away. They would go to grocery stores and get outdated

food products. They would then store them in a common room at married student housing and then share.

I felt that the difficulties of the international graduate students should be addressed by the college administration. I called the president of the college, Dr. George Brushaber, and scheduled an appointment. I told him that I only needed fifteen minutes of his time to discuss international graduate student's difficulties, frustrations, misunderstandings, and loneliness. The meeting lasted over an hour.

Later that night I got a call from Dr. Leta Frazier stating that she got a call from Dr. Brushaber and that he effective immediately cancelled the International Graduate Program at Bethel. My heart sank, and I said, "What happened? What did I do wrong to get this program cancelled?" There was a long pregnant pause of silence, and then Leta said, "It is cancelled until we get a problem in place that will address the needs and concerns of international graduate students." She stated that the president said, "We need a director to run this initiative and until we get that director, there will be no program for international graduate students, period."

Then Leta said that Dr. Brushaber wanted me to be the director. I told Leta that I had my own company and that I was just a student. She then said it is a paid position. I said okay. I was honored to be on the payroll of a great institution. I was paid a dollar, and I still have that dollar today.

The problems and difficulties were now being addressed. The provost, Dr. Jay Barnes, came up to me and asked why I did not come to him first and I told him I got his attention now. Jay and I became good friends, and I was thrilled when he became the president of Bethel when Dr. Brushaber retired.

Jay became a work horse for the international initiative and the first thing he addressed was to get furniture into married student housing for people who needed beds, table, couches, etc. The problem was that Bethel was not aware of the problems due to the pride of the international students.

One lesson learned was that if there is a problem, start at the top and work down the ladder. The initiative also gained confidence in their own ability to resolve difficulties, but one was a difficult problem and that was use of computers. The library had computers, but the walk was almost a half a mile and in Minnesota winters that was difficult.

I made a few calls to computer companies to see if we could get discounts at a price international students could afford. I called a company in Nashville and got the same response going up the latter that they could not help—wanted to, but were told no by the powers to be. They gave us a little discount, but when laptops are over a $1000, a little discount really doesn't help.

I contacted IBM in Minneapolis and explained the need. This time I told the first two people I talked to the need, and when they said that they could not really help me, I said I wanted to speak to the president or the senior vice-president.

I think they understood my dilemma and put me on hold. Their music was better than the hold music in Nashville. After what seemed like a long period of time, a gentleman answered the phone and apologized for the delay. He mentioned that he got the drift of my needs from the other men but wanted to hear it from me.

I told him I was working with third world international graduate students who needed laptops for their education. They had to walk a mile and a half to the library to use the school's computers. I told him that they wanted an education so they

could go back to their homeland and make a difference there. I told him the way it was with the difficulties they were facing and could not afford to pay a $1100 for a computer.

He told me to be patient and put me on hold. After fifteen minutes he came back on and told me there was an over shipment of IBM 360 laptop computers with a red mouse in the middle of the keyboard. They were listed for $1100, and he ask me how many I wanted. He said they were fully loaded with Microsoft Office 98 and came in a leather case. I said we cannot afford $1100! He said in a loud voice, "I will sell you them for a dollar. Now how many do you want?" I said twenty-eight, and why I said twenty-eight I don't know. A week later a truck pulls up to the Bethel receiving dock and a skid is delivered with twenty-eight laptop computers from IBM. That was the best $28 I think I ever spent.

Those computers were distributed to the students and others that needed assistance. Some were even distributed to students at Daystar University in Nairobi, Kenya. One computer went to the future director of UNESCO for the southern Africa.

There are more examples of the students receiving aid stories of faith and caring for our fellow humans. In this section I am closing with one more story.

The committee was so grateful of the blessings they have received, and they wanted to give back. One way they suggested was to go to churches and give their testimonies and to sing. The first church was just after the new year, and the service was amazing and brought tears to the eyes of the congregation. At the end of the service, the pastor came forward and right out said "How much money do you need?"

I said, "We don't want money." The students said, "What are you talking about?" I told the pastor what our need is for you to take

a few of these amazing individuals and bring them into your congregation, which they did. We went to other churches, and they did the same thing and asked the students to become members of their church. They sang in the choir, taught Sunday school, and became members of the congregation.

The outcome was that several received full ride scholarships and church congregations accepted individuals from different cultures.

Start at the top and work down. It works.

Don't take no for an answer.

If one believes in what they are doing, don't give up, just do it.

We have a purpose.

We have values.

We have faith. (I am going to also add faith in oneself.)

We have hope.

God has a plan for us all.

Another side note: During a break in one of our grad classes, I went up to Hannah Mariam and apologized but mentioned that her beautiful facial structure reminded me of Haile Selassie, a man I higher admired.

She told me thank you and looked away. I felt I said something wrong but was not sure. After class Hannah came up to me and thank me again for the compliment and said she was his great granddaughter and that there were still people trying to eliminate her family.

Hannah and I became good friends, and even with the help of a fellow student from Tawain, Chi-Hung Ke, we created an

organization called Cultural Brokers International that helped colleges develop programs for international grad students.

Hannah Mariam has become a leader in Ethiopian community by sharing the history and legacy of her great-grandfather, Emperor Haile Selassie I, offering important insights to the future of the African continent, not only in her beloved country, but in the United States and internationally.

Mary Mambo – A Healer: a Mentor by Example

One of the most powerful examples of this kind of faith came during my time in Africa.

I did not plan that journey. I did not fully understand what I was stepping into. But what I experienced there changed my understanding of faith in a way that words alone cannot fully explain.

I met a woman named Mary, a registered nurse who had been working at a hospital in Nairobi. She had a stable career and a path that many would consider successful. But she saw something that she could not ignore. She saw suffering in the communities around her, particularly among women living in extreme poverty and battling illnesses like HIV.



Many of these women came from rural areas where illness was often hidden because of stigma. Families would say their loved ones were dying of something else, avoiding the truth because of fear and shame. The reality was much harder. The living conditions were harsh, and the life expectancy for many of these women was incredibly short.

Mary saw this and made a decision that would change everything.

She left her job at the hospital and opened a small clinic in the middle of one of the most difficult environments you could imagine. It was not well funded, and it did not have the resources of a major hospital. But it was built on something stronger than resources.

It was built on faith, purpose, values, hope, and a need.

She believed she was called to serve, and she acted on that belief.

When I first visited the Cana Clinic, I was overwhelmed by the conditions. It was unlike anything I had ever seen. The environment was difficult, and the need was constant. But what stood out most was not the hardship.

It was her commitment.

It was her compassion.

It was her refusal to turn away.

That is what faith looks like in action. It is not just something we talk about. It is something we live.

As her work continued, she recognized another need. Her need was more than for the mothers, but now also for the children. The children in that community were not being cared for, and many would die from the conditions of the Mukuru slums of Nairobi, Kenya. Newborn babies were often discarded in garbage dumps. One baby was rescued by a worker and taken to the Clinic and given to Mary. Later that afternoon when I arrived, I held the baby and we named that child Katie Ann after my two daughters. When I came back a couple months later, I found out a couple from Switzerland had adopted Katie Ann, and I just said, "Praise God." Since many children had no access to housing, education, or a stable environment, they had very little hope for the future.



Mary felt she had to started again.

She found a small space and began gathering children. At first, only a few showed up. Then more began to come. Within days, the number grew. Within a short period of time, what started with just a handful of children turned into something much larger.

They were given a place to learn, a place to eat, a place to sleep, and a place where they felt they belonged. Over time, that effort expanded into a school and eventually into a larger program that continued to serve the community.



Lives were changing.

Children who once had no direction began to believe they had a future.

That is what faith does.

It creates opportunity where there was none. It brings hope into places that feel forgotten. It moves people to act when it would be easier to look away.

Another part of that experience involved a group of women who were struggling to survive. Many of them were working in conditions that offered very little dignity and almost no stability.

They were doing what they could to get by, but they had no clear path forward.



We knew something needed to change, but we did not have a clear plan.

Within a short period of time, an opportunity presented itself. Materials were provided, and the women were given the chance to create items by hand. It started small, but over time, it grew into something meaningful.

They began earning income in a different way. They began to see themselves differently. They began to understand they had value beyond their circumstances.

That transformation did not come from a speech.

It came from action.

It came from faith being lived out in a real and practical way.

I have seen that same kind of transformation inside prisons.

When individuals first enter, they are often afraid and uncertain. They feel pressure to act tough, to protect themselves, and to fit into an environment that demands strength. But over time, when they are introduced to a different perspective, something begins to shift.

When they begin to understand that they still have value, that their life is not over, and that they can still have purpose, their mindset begins to change.

Faith plays a role in that transformation.

Not in a forced way.

Not in a way that demands perfection.

But in a way that offers hope and change.

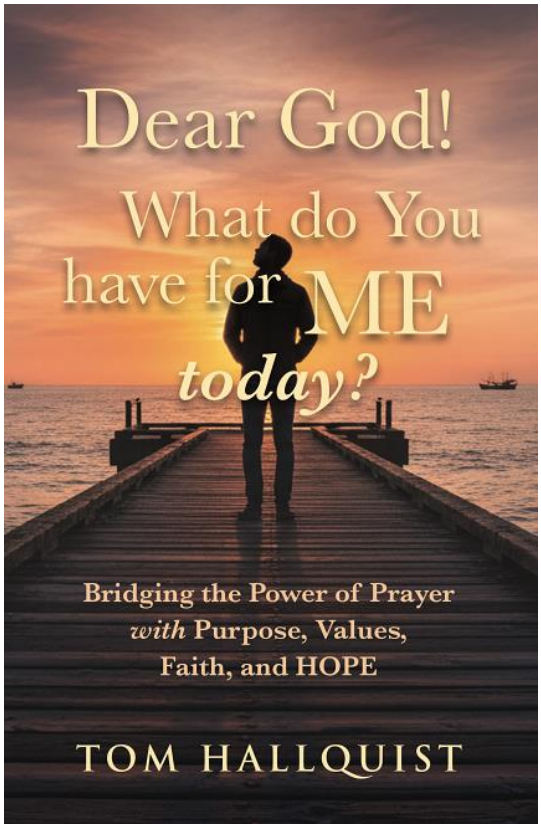
Water Purification Projects

This is an amazing story and brought back memories. I made a presentation last fall about creativity to initiate change in the mindset of a culture. Athi River is around eighteen miles east of Nairobi on the way to Mombasa on the coast. I spent several weeks in Athi River during my four visits to Daystar University.

I was there when the students-built purification ponds with stone and gravel. The first pond was polluted; the second pond, one could start seeing the bottom; and by the time the water traveled through the gravel sand and stones, one could drink the water.



We took the concept of clean water into the Rift Valley and convinced a Maasai tribe to use well water and not lake water. I spent hours trying to explain the convenience of not having to carry buckets of water from the lake back to their homes and the time it would save by having a well in their village. The women argued that this was their time to socialize. I finally convinced them by using two plastic bottles: one filled with lake water and the other from the well. I drank from the well water but refused the lake water. I came back the next year, and the well was dug and operating. The chief's son gave me his ceremonial war club, and his mom gave me a hug.



This book exists because too many people quietly give up on themselves. People who have survived because of their positive attitudes towards power of prayer, purpose, values, faith, and hope. This book is about them.

Dear God! What do You have for Me Today?
Bridging the Power of Prayer with Purpose, Values, Faith and Hope
By Tom Hallquist

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