A GAP

is a place of weakness, vulnerability, and danger—a place of real threats. Today, people face serious difficulties in their marriages, with their kids, in their communities, in the nation, and across the globe. Quite often, the situation seems hopeless . . . but it’s not.

In this book, Wilfredo De Jesús gives nine examples of courageous people in the Scriptures—men and women who recognized “gap” situations and trusted God to use them to make a difference. With clarity, power, and warmth, Pastor Choco points us to Jesus as the ultimate example and resource. As you taste the grace and greatness of God, your heart will be transformed, and He will give you the courage to step into the gaps around you.

And then, the world—our families, our communities, our nation, and the farthest corners of the globe—will experience God’s grace and greatness, too.

Widely known as “Pastor Choco,” Reverend Wilfredo De Jesús is Senior Pastor of New Life Covenant Church in Chicago, the largest Assemblies of God congregation in the nation.

He is the founder and Executive Director of New Life Family Services, a nonprofit agency that operates a homeless shelter for women with children.

In 2013, De Jesús was named one of TIME Magazine’s 100 most influential people in the world and recognized for his leadership and influence with Evangelical and Latino audiences.

De Jesús is sought after as a motivational speaker throughout the nation and abroad. He resides in the Humboldt Park community of Chicago with his wife, Elizabeth, and their three children: Alexandria, Yesenia, and Wilfredo, Jr.
WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT
IN THE GAP...

If you want to learn how to be a person who stands for righteousness, who goes into the deepest valleys to be the light and the voice of truth, then read *In the Gap*. Pastor Choco inspires us with powerful examples of people throughout history who are Gap Leaders.

— Mark Batterson, *New York Times* best-selling author and Lead Pastor of National Community Church in Washington, DC

*In the Gap* is far more than an inspiring book about how to make a compelling difference. It’s ideal for pastors to use in church-wide campaigns, or for class or small-group settings. Each chapter brings Bible characters into today’s challenges with a fresh, engaging style. A self-assessment, discussion questions, and DVD offer additional practical uses. This is another winner from Pastor Choco!

— Warren Bird, coauthor of twenty-six ministry books including *Better Together: Making Church Mergers Work*

Pastor Choco’s book is powerful. It challenges and empowers us to stand in the gap for our generations and communities. Pastor Choco is uniquely qualified to speak on this vital topic because he has literally stood in the gap for his community and the nation—and ultimately, he has stood in the gap for God’s kingdom. I highly recommend Pastor Choco’s book to you. By reading it, you will walk away empowered to stand in the gap as I did when I encountered Pastor Choco’s life!

— Russell Evans, Senior Pastor of Planetshakers City Church in Melbourne, Australia
In the Gap is a bold and daring challenge to stand strong and watch God work! Through the lives of great Bible heroes of yesterday, Wilfredo De Jesús challenges us to live more courageous lives today! If it’s strength, bravery, or faith that you need, read this book! You can’t read In the Gap without being inspired to live a more gutsy life for God!

— Dave Ferguson, Lead Pastor of Community Christian Church in Chicago, Illinois

This book identifies a tremendous need—it shows how God wants to use and equip us to be men and women who stand in the gap for the vulnerable in our society. This concept is crucial if we want to be like Jesus. If our communities hear us proclaim His good news, they also need to see the good news in action. And no one is better positioned to teach us how to do that than my friend, Pastor Choco. In the Gap reveals the heart of Choco’s ministry, which is really the heart of Jesus’ ministry.

— Dr. Tim Harlow, Senior Pastor of Parkview Christian Church in Orland Park, Illinois

There are few voices in a generation that have the authentic authority to call the army of the Lord to action. Pastor Wilfredo De Jesús is one of those voices. In his new book, In the Gap, De Jesús directs believers to stand up and stand strong. The message inspires and instructs, challenges and confronts, encounters and encourages. It is required reading for anyone determined to make a difference in the world.

— Dr. Chris Hill, Senior Pastor of The Potter’s House of Denver, Colorado

Our world is full of “gaps”—places of weakness and vulnerability where we must stand on behalf of needy people and worthy causes. Pastor Choco reminds Christians of the call to stand in those gaps.
He explores the traits of “gap people,” holding up a mirror for us to examine ourselves. This book issues a much-needed challenge to the church, encouraging us to stand securely on Christ while we stand lovingly in the gap.
— Justin Lathrop, Director of Strategic Relations, Assemblies of God

Pastor Choco is a man of God who has lived out what it means to stand in the gap for others. This book will challenge you and inspire you to look around and make a difference.
— Pastor Clemente Maldonado, District Superintendent, Midwest Latin District of Assemblies of God

Every dreamer has a dream for others. It begins with a seed that flourishes into a harvest. Choco De Jesús is a dreamer who has always been the one to stand in the gap. In this great book, Choco reveals to us his lifelong strategy that has been a hallmark in his life. If you want to have your dreams fulfilled, this book is for you!
— Obed Martinez, Senior Pastor of Destiny Church in Indio, California

The church is called to be the hands and feet of the gospel in the broken world. In his new book, my friend and fellow pastor Wilfredo De Jesús challenges God’s people to fill the gap between despair and joy in our communities. We need to hear this message, and then make it happen!
— Miles McPherson, Senior Pastor, The Rock Church, San Diego, and author of God in the Mirror: Discovering Who You Were Created to Be

In the Gap is a profound message written to answer the rising cry within us to impact the hurting society around us. Wilfredo De Jesús
clearly, biblically, and inspiringly expounds the keys to respond to the
gaps evident in the faces and families across America and the world.
More than a book, *In the Gap* is the written proclamation to the cause
we have all been called to join.

— Sergio De La Mora, Senior Pastor of Cornerstone Church in San
Diego, California

The book you’re holding will teach, inspire, and help you stand in the
gap for someone. Pastor Choco can teach you how to do it because he
has personally raised up an army of people in Chicago to stand in the
gap for the hurting. You’re about to change someone’s life. You’re about
to become a stand-in-the-gap champion!

— Stephan K. Munsey, PhD, Senior Pastor of Family Christian
Center in Munster, Indiana

Pastor Choco gives a clarion call to all of us to stand “in the gap” for
those in need around us. This book will certainly inform you, but it
will also inspire you to be the person Jesus has destined to stand in the
gap for others. Jesus paid the price for us and has given us His Spirit—
now it’s time for us to stand in the gap for people in need.

— Benny Perez, Lead Pastor of The Church at South Las Vegas in
Henderson, Nevada

*Radical, revolutionary, innovative, anointed, and cutting-edge* are words
I use to describe Pastor Wilfredo “Choco” de Jesús. His new book
reflects nothing less. *In the Gap* will challenge and inspire you to step
out of your comfort zone, realign your priorities, take a radical stand
for the less fortunate, and be creative with innovative ideas to reach
your hurting community.

— Rev. J. R. Rodriguez, Superintendent, Texas Louisiana Hispanic
District of the Assemblies of God
In his new book, *In the Gap*, Pastor Choco provides a biblical prescription that empowers the reader with the necessary tools to fill the areas in and around us left empty by sin, heartache, apathy, and relativism with grace, hope, and love. This book is a must read, indeed!

— Rev. Samuel Rodriguez, President, National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference

Choco De Jesús is a powerful voice for God in challenging His people to fight for others. Unlike anyone else I know, he models this trait in his own life with the courage, faith, and inner strength of God. Now he’s written a book that will stir you to do the same. Read *In the Gap* today, and prepare to be challenged!

— Stovall Weems, Senior Pastor of Celebration Church in Jacksonville, Florida

I am thrilled to read Pastor Wilfredo (Choco) De Jesús’ new book, *In the Gap*. Not only is Choco a dear friend, but he is also a person I look up to and draw insight and spiritual strength from on a regular basis. As you read this book, I know that Jesus is reaching from heaven to take hold of your hand today. Quite often, He uses someone to stand in the gap who can touch Him while reaching out to rescue others who are too weak to reach up on their own. This book will help you stand in the gap for those who need Jesus.

— Rich Wilkerson, Senior Pastor of Trinity Church in Miami, Florida
IN THE GAP

TIME’S 100 MOST INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE IN THE WORLD

WILFREDO DE JESÚS

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN GOD’S PEOPLE STAND STRONG
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INTRODUCTION

Gaps All Around Us

“I looked for someone among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none” (Ezek. 22:30).

A gap, by definition, represents a place of weakness, vulnerability, and danger. It is a defenseless location of exposure and limitation, a point where people face real threats. Gaps exist in our countries, our communities, and at home with our families.

In September of 1939, the German army launched an attack into neighboring Poland. Their strategy was revolutionary in the history of warfare . . . and the effects were devastating. The Panzers (German tanks) punched a hole in the Polish army’s defensive wall. Then, the tanks, artillery, and infantry poured through the gap and attacked the defenders from the flanks and rear. The ferocity of the attack was so sudden and effective that it became known as Blitzkrieg, lightning war.
When an enemy attacks the gaps in our lives, we are hopelessly overwhelmed—if not for the grace of God and the intervention of His divine hand. As we read Scripture, we see how Moses stood in the gap for his people. Countless times, he pleaded for God to have mercy on his doubting, rebellious followers. At critical times, when the future of the people of God hung in the balance, Moses spoke to God for them and faithfully instructed them to follow God with all their hearts.

Centuries later, in about 590 BC, God’s people were weak, vulnerable, and in danger. The mighty empire of Babylon threatened to attack Jerusalem and destroy Judah. The Jewish political leaders were terrified and turned on their own people. The religious elite used the chaos to gain power by lying to the people, and the common people committed crimes against each other. The poor, the needy, and the immigrants were mistreated. Even the weather caused heartache and calamity. Everything, it seemed, was going wrong for the people of God. In this chaos, God looked for someone He could trust, someone who would stand strong and represent His power, wisdom, and love. God’s people desperately needed someone to stand up for them. Sadly, God had to report:

“I looked for someone among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none” (Ezek. 22:30).
In many ways, nothing has changed in two and a half millennia. People are still in distress, and God is still looking for men and women to stand in the gap in our homes, in our neighborhoods, in our cities and towns, in our nation, and in every corner of the world. Every news account tells us that people are in trouble. They are weak, vulnerable, and in danger. If no one stands in the gap for them, it will be a catastrophe. In many cases, a series of catastrophes have already occurred, and the gap is even wider.

This isn’t a black or white problem, or a socio-economic problem. The problem isn’t affecting some of us, but all of us. It affects our deepest hopes and fears. The gap looks like:

— a prodigal child,
— an unfaithful spouse,
— an abusive family member,
— an addict who is out of control,
— lying, stealing, and cheating,
— sexual promiscuity,
— parents who have lost hope for their kids,
— neighbors (even church members) who hate each other and poison their communities,
— gangs, violence, and other crimes,
— the elderly who are forgotten and overlooked,
— children who grow up unable to read,
— poverty from lack of training and skills,
— social breakdown, including human trafficking, attacks on the sanctity of marriage, racism, immigrants lost in the system, prostitutes and others who have made terrible choices and feel cut off from the goodness of God.

Do you recognize any of these gaps around you right now? You may have protected yourself and your family from many of them, but all of these life-threatening problems are only minutes away from all of us—and many of us live with these difficulties all day every day.

Huge gaps have opened up in our world. Do we even notice? Do we care? God is asking, “Will you stand in the gap for these people? Will you stand in the gap for My sake and My glory?”

What is a “gap person”? Who is the kind of person God is looking for, the type of man or woman, young or old, who has insight into the problem and courage to take bold action. God isn’t looking for people who feel no fear. He’s looking for people who walk toward their fear and stand in the gap to help those in need.

The Bible uses a Hebrew term to describe the kind of person who stands in the gap for others: *ish habinayim*. *Ish* is a man; *isha* is a woman. *Habinayim* is “one who places himself between the two camps and offers single combat.”¹ The effort involved means to break or burst out, like a child coming out of a womb, to break through, break open, or break the limits of a stronghold. So, an
*ish* (or *isha*) *habinayim* is a champion for a cause, a person who protects or supports someone in need, a man or woman who finds the courage to sacrifice everything to represent God and block evil from destroying those He loves.

When we look at the Scriptures and the history of God’s people, we find at least nine traits that characterize “gap people.” Particular people found in the pages of the Bible exemplify each of these:

- Nehemiah identified a problem to solve,
- Esther understood her times,
- Noah was “all in,” no matter what the cost,
- David was anointed by God to do the work,
- Barnabas saw hidden potential,
- John the Baptist was willing to take risks,
- Gideon was sensitive to the voice of God,
- Deborah earned a reputation of wisdom and strength, and
- Caleb had “a different spirit.”

All of us have the privilege and the responsibility to stand in the gap for those around us. Love, courage, and tenacity, though, don’t come out of a vacuum. We look at Jesus. John the Baptist told people, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29) When we look at Him—and begin to realize the wonder of His awesome power and consistent love—our hearts are transformed. The message of the gospel never gets
boring. When we were weak, vulnerable, and in danger, Jesus stepped out of the comfort and glory of heaven to give, not just His time, but His life for you and me. He didn’t just risk His reputation; He poured out His blood for us. We were broken sinners, but Jesus loved us so much He gave it all to pay the ransom to bring us back home to God.

People who are in desperate need may have nothing to offer us in return for our care. That’s how Jesus loves us—unconditionally—and that’s what it means for us to love people in need. His story of the good Samaritan demonstrates what it means to stand in the gap for someone. We need to notice—to see others’ needs: spiritual, physical, relational, and emotional. Our hearts need to be soft enough to feel the pain of others and strong enough to care. Compassion is one of the marks of a person who stands in the gap. And like the good Samaritan, we need a plan. “Random acts of kindness” are wonderful, but most needy people have complex problems that aren’t solved easily or quickly. The word compassion means “with passion.” It’s easy to be passionate about our careers or our education or even our entertainment but what about our passion for the poor? When we encounter hurting, struggling people, we need to resist the temptation to pass by on the other
side of the road, assuming that “it’s not my problem.” We need enough passion to actually reach out to help a person.

The story of the good Samaritan shocked those who heard Jesus that day. It was inconceivable that a foreigner—Jews despised the Samaritans—would go out of his way to show such care to a Jew who had been attacked by thieves. And of course, Jesus is the ultimate good Samaritan. He was a foreigner—not from another nation, but from another realm. He stepped out of the glory of heaven to earth, cared for the helpless and hopeless, and paid the price we could never pay for our freedom, healing, and purpose.

When we consider becoming people who stand in the gap, we must draw on the love, power, wisdom, and example of One who stood in the gap for us.

Why are we hesitant to stand in the gap for those in need? There are many reasons. We don’t want anyone to take advantage of us. We have our own priorities of comfort and pleasure, and we don’t want the inconvenience. We fear that people will think we’re weird if we invest our time and hearts in the lives of those who can’t give us anything in return. We may be fearful that if we pour ourselves out for others, God will leave us empty and alone. Selfishness and fear—these are the most common reasons we’re reluctant to stand in the gap for hurting people around us.

The people we’ll examine in this book, and the men and women today who stand in the gap in their families and
communities, believe in a God of awesome power, strong love, and infinite wisdom. In spite of the complexities of their situations, they trust God is greater—far, far greater—than the problems people face. Out of hearts filled with God’s kindness and strength, they pour themselves out to mend broken hearts, restore relationships, and rescue the souls of the people they find on the side of life’s road.

In the days before Jesus was betrayed, arrested, tortured, and killed, He explained what it means to be a gap person. He told what will happen when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne and considers the people before him. One group will be those who saw others in need—hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick, and in prison—but didn’t bother to help them. The other group will be those who went out of their way to care for misfits and outcasts. The King will be pleased with them and will say to them:

“Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me” (Matt. 25:34–36).

The people will ask, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did
we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?” (Matt. 25:37–39)

The King will smile and reply, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matt. 25:40).

The astounding truth Jesus taught was this: When we stand in the gap for hurting, discouraged people who are often difficult to love, He considers that we’re actually pouring out our love on Him. And nothing pleases Him more!

There are many good motivations to be a gap person. We’re being obedient to God’s command, He pours out His Spirit on us, and we see lives changed. But perhaps the most compelling motivations are that we represent and resemble Jesus when we pour our lives out for others, and that makes Him proud.

In the chapters of this book, we’ll explore the nine traits of people who stand in the gap to care for others. At the end, you can take the questionnaire to see where you’re strong (and perhaps where you need some improvement) as you stand in the gap.

Every Sunday before we sit to hear the Word of God, we make this confession of faith and commitment. As we begin, let’s make this same confession.

Your Word is written in my mind.
Your Word is hidden in my heart.
Your Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light to my path.
I will seek you with all my strength.
I choose to live my life according to your Word.
Your Word, O Lord, is eternal.

May the God of grace, wisdom and power fill you with His Spirit and give you courage to stand in the gap for those around you!
NEHEMIAH

. . . identified a problem to solve

“So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart. But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the people of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem’s walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry” (Neh. 4:6–7).

Exile. It’s a word that most people in America today can’t really understand. When people are exiled, what is most important is taken away: security, familiarity, comfort, and relationships. They’re torn from everything they know and love, and they’re forced to live in a foreign land. In an era of rapid transit and world travel, foreign lands are more accessible than ever before, but vacationing in another country is nothing like being exiled. We can’t begin to imagine the conditions of a barren camp for refugees. Enslaved and separated from any social network, exiles lack sufficient food and water, have no protection from harsh weather, and are exposed to sickness and disease from filthy and overcrowded living quarters. The life of a displaced refugee is fearful and lonely.
When the Babylonians defeated Judah in 586 BC, they destroyed the temple in Jerusalem, stole the golden vessels from the altar, and took most of the captured people back to Babylon. It was a forced march. There are ancient images of men and women being dragged along dusty roads with fish hooks in their noses. The physical and emotional pain was excruciating, but the destruction of the temple broke their hearts. For centuries, God’s people had worshipped there in the presence of God. His shekinah glory dwelled in the holy of holies in the innermost part of the temple. Miracles happened every day. No matter which way the wind blew, the smoke from the sacrifices always went straight up to heaven. In the fields, God gave them a bumper crop in the sixth year so they could take the next year, a sabbatical year, off from their labors.

Now, all that was gone. Jerusalem was destroyed. The temple was torn down and looted, and about 50,000 inhabitants stumbled into exile in Babylon . . . including Ezekiel.

After many years, God’s people began to return to their homeland. Zerubbabel and Ezra led the first group. They restored the altar, the sacrifices, and worship of God. About twenty years later, a new temple was built and dedicated. During this period, the Persians conquered Babylon. Nehemiah was a Jewish man who had remained in Persia. His story begins 141 years after the fall of Jerusalem. He rose to a place of honor as the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes.
YESTERDAY AND TODAY

Before we continue with Nehemiah’s story of courage, we need to understand something about ancient culture and biblical truth from the Old and New Testaments. The temple was the place where heaven and earth met, the place where God dwelled in His awesome glory. The wall around the city protected the temple. God’s people couldn’t imagine their temple being destroyed by a foreign army that worshiped foreign gods. But it happened because they became too self-absorbed, full of doubts, greed, and fear.

At the moment Jesus died on the cross, the heavy veil separating the holy of holies from the rest of the temple ripped apart from top to bottom. Why is this significant? The curtain no longer separated the people from God. Because of Christ’s supreme sacrifice, God’s presence and His glory no longer reside in a building. They reside in His people. One of the amazing truths of the New Testament is that you and I are temples of the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote to the people in Corinth: “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body” (1 Cor. 6:19-20). We are the place where heaven and earth meet! And we need to build walls of protection to defend and cherish God’s glory in us—walls of integrity, obedience, faith, hope, and love.
So, when we read about the events that occurred in Nehemiah’s life so long ago, we can make specific applications in our own lives. All around us, the enemy attacks people, but some are too absorbed with doubt, greed, and fear to fight back. Their temple is ransacked, and their walls torn down. Sometimes, it’s not just our family members, friends, or co-workers who are devastated. Sometimes it’s us.

God is always looking for someone to stand in the gap. About 141 years after Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians, God’s people were still in distress. They were victims of injustice and racial hatred. The walls of the city lay in ruins. It was like living in a house without walls to protect them and to keep them warm. At this moment, Nehemiah answered God’s call.

THE REPORT

Nehemiah had a dream job. He was the king’s right-hand man . . . trusted, important, respected by everyone in the kingdom. By this time, the Jews living in Persia weren’t the ones who had been led away by fishhooks through their noses. That was long, long ago, almost as distant in time as the Civil War in this country. The Jews had made a home in Babylon and Persia, and at least a few of them had positions of prominence. Their great-great-great grandparents had been pitiful exiles, but after many years living there, they had made Babylon their home.
Nehemiah was just as settled into his role as we might be if we had a prestigious position in our city or our nation. One day in the capital city of Susa, he saw Hanani, one of his brothers, who had just come back from Judah, which was 766 miles away. Nehemiah asked what was going on back in their homeland. He might have expected his brother to say, “Not much,” or “Things are fine.” He didn’t. He reported that the people of Jerusalem were in big trouble. Outsiders were harassing the citizens, raping the women, and stealing from the people—and no one could do anything about it.

HE PRAYED

With revelation comes responsibility, and for Nehemiah, hearing this news broke his heart. But he didn’t jump to conclusions or act impulsively. Many of us get the sequence wrong. For us, it’s “fire, ready, aim!” Nehemiah’s heart was shattered, but he knew he needed to prepare before he acted.

For days, he wept, fasted, and prayed. The condition of God’s people in their homeland was simply unacceptable to him. God gave Nehemiah a holy discontent, a fire in his bones to make a difference. His prayer wasn’t an outburst of anger and self-pity. He didn’t demand anything from God. Instead, he focused his heart on the greatness and grace of God. He didn’t blame “those people” for the problem. Though Nehemiah was hundreds of miles away, he identified with the people who were suffering.
He included himself in the group that needed God’s cleansing forgiveness. His prayer teaches us three steps to humbly make a request of God.

1. He acknowledged God (praise),
2. He reminded himself (and God) of the covenant He had made with His people, and
3. He confessed his sins and the sins of the people.

Only then did Nehemiah lay his request at God’s feet:

“LORD, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man” (Neh. 1:11).

If you don’t want to find out what’s really going on in the life of an individual, a family, or a community, don’t ask. You might discover a problem that’s making people “distressed and downcast, like sheep without a shepherd.” Nehemiah shows us another important trait: When the pain others feel breaks your heart, don’t act impulsively. Of course, imminent danger requires immediate action, but in most cases, we need to follow Nehemiah’s example to spend time getting the Father’s perspective through persistent prayer. Prayer is a weapon against the schemes and attacks of the enemy. It’s a channel of God’s incredible blessings.
It puts us in touch with God’s heart, His power, and His grace. This kind of prayer isn’t reserved for the super-spiritual saints, missionaries, or pastors. God invites all of us to seek His face. Nehemiah wasn’t a prophet, a priest, or a Levite. He was an ordinary man with an extraordinary heart for God. When Nehemiah heard about the shattered walls and the abused people of his homeland, he didn’t walk away in apathy, find a friend to have a pity party, or throw his hands up in despair. He put his hands together in fervent prayer to the God who gives wisdom, hope, and power . . . the God who can move a mountain . . . the God who can move the heart of a pagan king.

Prayer is a weapon against the schemes and attacks of the enemy. It’s a channel of God’s incredible blessings.

HE PLANNED

For Nehemiah, prayer was preparation for action. In the National Football League, the referees give teams twenty-five seconds after one play ends before the next time the ball is snapped. Both teams, the offense and the defense, use this time in their huddles to call their plays and get the right players on the field. Then, the quarterback and the defensive captain say, “Break!” It’s time for action. Every player knows that when he hears “break” that it’s a call to duty, a call to act and implement
the plan. Every pastor, leader, teacher, and disciple has similar calls to action. At specific times and places, they need to move past their fears toward what God is calling them to do. Prayer is our time to huddle, to get plays from our heavenly Coach, and prepare to take bold action. Too often, people think prayer is the ultimate goal, not preparation to act. As an excuse to avoid hard decisions, some people tell me, “Pastor, I’m still praying about that.” Don’t get me wrong. I’m all for prayer. We desperately need to tap into the wisdom and strength of God so we’ll be ready to do what He calls us to do. But that’s the point: God has called us to do something!

Nehemiah prayed, and his prayer led to his plan. He knew the only person who had the authority to provide the resources to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem was King Artaxerxes. A few days later, as Nehemiah was serving him, the king noticed that he was preoccupied. The king had never seen his trusted servant like this, so he asked, “What’s wrong?”

Nehemiah realized the moment of truth had come. He was terrified, but his fear didn’t stop him. He replied with respect and boldness: “May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my fathers are buried lies in
ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?” (Neh. 2:3)

Persia wasn’t a democracy. Artaxerxes was the most powerful and feared man in history. He had absolute power over his nation and his people. In our country, we have town hall meetings to complain to our elected officials, and we write or say anything we want to about them. In ancient Persia, any hint of disappointment in the king might mean instant death! Nehemiah took a real risk by voicing his concerns. To his great relief, the king answered, “What is it you want?”

Instead of blurting out his request (which is what most of us would have done), Nehemiah prayed silently before he opened his mouth. At that pivotal moment, he stayed connected to God, the ultimate source and resource. He then told the king, “If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it” (Neh. 2:5).

The king gave Nehemiah everything he needed: letters of safe conduct to travel, timber for the beams of the gates, and time away to get the job done. Nehemiah commented, “And because the gracious hand of my God was on me, the king granted my requests” (Neh. 2:8). He never lost sight of the fact that even the most powerful people on the planet are tools in the hands of Almighty God.

Years ago when we were about to embark on a missions trip to the Dominican Republic, I was made aware that Santo
Domingo needed ambulances. I saw the mayor of the city of Chicago, Mayor Daley, at a press conference, and I took the opportunity to share the need. I asked if the city could donate two ambulances to this poor country. To my surprise, in a few days I received the response that the mayor had authorized the donation of two ambulances.

Now we just had to figure out how to get them to Santo Domingo. I went to the mayor again and requested a letter for safe passage across state lines. We needed to drive the ambulances to Miami where they would be loaded on a cargo ship. Mayor Daley granted my request. I saw his answer as scripture coming to life. Asking for a letter from a leader of a major city posed a risk. He could have felt bothered, and he could even have retracted his donation of the ambulances. But I knew God was with me, and that it was His job to work in the heart of this man. All I needed to do was ask.

Nehemiah understood a profound truth: If you’re experiencing a great difficulty, and you’re ready to undertake a great work, then you need the power of a great God.

Nehemiah exemplified the “gap person trait” of being able to identify a problem, then craft a plan to meet it. He didn’t
just hope the problem would go away. He didn’t push it off on someone else. Nehemiah felt the weight of the responsibility to rebuild the devastated walls of the capital of his ancient homeland. During his days of prayer and fasting, God gave him direction to ask the king for all the resources. The request was simple enough, but it was full of danger. He was risking his life, and if he failed, God’s people would continue to suffer from attacks and injustice in Jerusalem.

HE PROCEEDED

King Artaxerxes must have loved and trusted Nehemiah. He not only gave his cupbearer all the resources he needed to rebuild the crumbled walls; he also sent his cavalry with Nehemiah as an escort to protect him. Nehemiah led them 766 miles, but the journey took a few detours, possibly to Lebanon, to cut huge cedar trees for timber for the gates.

Imagine the scene: The right-hand man of the most powerful ruler on earth shows up at your devastated city with hundreds of cavalry soldiers in their finest uniforms, dragging wagons of huge logs. If you’re a citizen of Jerusalem, you don’t know what to think! Is the king’s man coming to oppress you or help you? Is he friend or foe?

Nehemiah didn’t tell anyone about his vision or his plans. Under cover of night, he inspected the city and the remains of the walls. On horseback in the dark, he secretly examined the
southern walls to check their condition. Traditionally, Jerusalem had been attacked from the north. He probably assumed the northern parts of the wall were completely destroyed. For over 140 years, they had been no more than mounds of crumbled stone.

Before he announced his plans and called people to action, he wanted to know the extent of the problem. Finally, after three nights of reconnaissance, he called Jerusalem’s priests, nobles, officials, and people together. He told them, “You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace” (Neh. 2:17). He told them the whole story of Hanani’s report, his prayer, his request of the king, and the king’s gracious answer. He wanted them to know this wasn’t just something he had dreamed up. It was God’s idea, and he was God’s messenger and servant. Nehemiah was inviting them to join him in a great work.

They replied, “Let us start rebuilding” (Neh. 2:18). They put on their tool belts, grabbed their work gloves, and looked to Nehemiah to give them directions.

HE PERSUADED

Some people are so negative they can find fault with a bowl of ice cream. No matter what good things are going on around them, they are messengers of darkness. They have a spiritual
gift—the gift of discouragement! Immediately, Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arab mocked Nehemiah and the men who agreed to help him rebuild the walls. These men had a vested interest in keeping God’s people weak and vulnerable. They were gap people—but they didn’t stand in the gap; they exploited it!

They made the most serious accusation against Nehemiah, one that would have made the workers shudder. They asked, “Are you rebelling against the king?”

Treason was punishable by death . . . often a long, slow, painful death. I can imagine the people looking at each other and wondering, *Uh, are we sure this Nehemiah has permission to do all this? If not . . . we’re in deep trouble!*

Nehemiah didn’t back down an inch. I can almost see him stand up straight as he boldly and loudly answered their charge. He could have told them that King Artaxerxes had given them permission, but the presence of the cavalry already made that clear. Instead, he claimed a higher authority: “The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it” (Neh. 2:20).

That was enough. The people were persuaded that Nehemiah had all the authority he needed to lead them. He had met the first test with courage.
FACING CHALLENGES

Standing in the gap involves difficulties and invites opposition. When you reach out to help a prodigal child, an addict, a homeless person, someone who is depressed, or a person who is chronically unemployed, things often get messy. When you confront gangs and racial injustice in your community, you can expect opposition and real danger. The three men who accused Nehemiah of treason illustrate three different challenges.

Compromise

Sanballat’s name means “may sin come to life.” He was the governor of Samaria, a region north of Jerusalem. When the Northern Kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC, some Jews stayed behind in Samaria. They intermarried with their pagan conquerors and formed a new life. When Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah came back from Babylon to restore the nation, the Samaritans, including Sanballat, felt threatened. They opposed resettlement because the returning exiles would upset their new world. The hatred between Jews and Samaritans started then, and it continued during the time of Jesus.

The Samaritans had bent their lives, their standards, and their faith to accommodate the pagans among them. It may
have begun gradually, but after a few years, the Jews there had lost their distinctive faith and culture. Today, the world is still trying to bend us to their way of life. They insist, “It’s no big deal. Everybody’s doing it.” So we make tiny, incremental choices to bend God’s best for sex, truth, money, time, and relationships. Like the frog in a kettle, the heat keeps getting turned up, but it happens so slowly that we don’t even notice—until we’re boiled in sin!

People in the world look at Christians who love Jesus and are serious about their faith, and they shake their heads, “For crying out loud! Can’t these people lighten up a little? They need to learn to have a little fun!” Yes, sin is fun for a season, but sooner or later, it takes a bite . . . and then devours.

When Sanballat attacked Nehemiah, he used a whip and a hammer. He asked sarcastic, demeaning questions, and he brought an army. In both ways, he tried to intimidate Nehemiah and his workers. Nehemiah records:

“When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, ‘What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble—burned as they are?’” (Neh. 4:1–2)
If you want to stand in the gap for people in your family or your community, some people will ridicule you, mock you, and try to intimidate you. Your courage and faith threaten them, so they’ll do anything they can to make you compromise. If they can get your faith to slip, they’ll mock you even more. No, none of us is perfect. We’re all flawed, and God isn’t finished with us yet. But our task is to hold on tenaciously to Christ, to trust Him for wisdom and strength, and to stand strong against the temptation to compromise our ethics, the truth, and the vision God has given us.

Division

Tobiah was an Ammonite, a pagan, yet his name means “God is good.” Even though we might assume that his name meant he would support Nehemiah, he opposed him. Every time Tobiah’s name was spoken, it was like a stone in a shoe: it caused the Jews to flinch! Everywhere he went, Tobiah caused resentment, confusion, and division. Centuries before, when God instructed His people to conquer the Promised Land, He told Joshua and his soldiers to wipe out the Ammonites. Instead, God’s people compromised and failed, so the Ammonites continued to harass them.

Tobiah governed the area around Jerusalem. Nehemiah was rebuilding God’s city right under his nose! His reaction was to create doubt and sow discord between the people and Nehemiah.
Tobiah shouted so the workers could hear him, “What they are building—even a fox climbing up on it would break down their wall of stones!” (Neh. 4:3)

He was trying to say, “Nehemiah’s plans are terrible, and his building technique is poor. All this work is for nothing! And besides, Nehemiah isn’t even from around here. What are you doing following him?”

When work on the walls proceeded and success was in sight, opposition intensified. Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, and the Ammonites were furious. They plotted to attack Nehemiah and his men. Nehemiah responded as a great leader: he prayed and posted guards to protect the city. He put men with swords and spears with their families. He was sure they would be more diligent and fight more ferociously to protect those they loved.

From that time forward, half of the workers built the walls while the other half stood guard with spears, shields, bows, and armor. Each of the men, even those who were working on the wall, carried a sword on his hip.

For us, division comes in two forms: internally and externally. Our enemy tries to create a divided heart, to tempt us to pursue things that aren’t God’s best. The lure of power, control, and comfort can steal our hearts. It’s not that these things are inherently wrong. They’re often God’s gifts to us. But when they take first place in our hearts, they split our attention and our allegiance. Like David, we need to pray, “Teach me your way,
Lord, that I may rely on your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name” (Ps. 86:11).

Our enemy also wants to create division between people. Conflict isn’t the problem; unresolved conflict is. It’s normal for people to disagree and even to have their feelings hurt from time to time. When they can be honest with each other, forgive and restore, the relationship can be stronger than ever. Unhealed wounds, unfounded gossip, unforgiven sins, and unrelenting resentment drive a deep wedge that can’t be smoothed over by a smile and a “God bless you.”

Unhealed wounds, unfounded gossip, unforgiven sins, and unrelenting resentment drive a deep wedge that can’t be smoothed over by a smile and a “God bless you.”

Paul wrote the Christians in Galatia, “You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other” (Gal. 5:13–15).

When we try to stand in the gap to help those in need, we can expect the threats of division—in our hearts and in our relationships. Winston Churchill once observed, “You have
enemies? Good. That means you’ve stood up for something, sometime in your life.”

Storms

Geshem’s name means “storms,” the kind of heavy rains that drench the ground in the fall and winter in that region of the world. Storms blow up unexpectedly and can cause devastating erosion of the land. Remarkably, Geshem is the only person in the Bible identified as an Arab.

Nehemiah and the workers finished the walls with incredible speed, but before they could build and hang the gates, Sanballat and Geshem again tried to stop them. They used threats, intimidation, and distraction, but Nehemiah saw through all their deceptions. Then, they used their final ploy. Nehemiah tells us,

“One day I went to the house of Shemaiah son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who was shut in at his home. He said, ‘Let us meet in the house of God, inside the temple, and let us close the temple doors, because men are coming to kill you—by night they are coming to kill you.’

But I said, ‘Should a man like me run away? Or should someone like me go into the temple to save his life? I will not go!’” (Neh. 6:10–11)
Geshem and his allies weren’t playing games. Storms are destructive. We may see hurricanes, tornadoes, and tsunamis featured on the Weather Channel, but other kinds of storms—addiction, abuse, abandonment, poverty, depression, sex slavery, prostitution, loneliness, shame, and hopelessness—destroy individuals, families, and whole communities. For Nehemiah and for us, a half-completed wall isn’t enough protection. We need to finish the work, no matter what it takes. Miraculously, Nehemiah and his men completed the work to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem in only fifty-two days. They had been lying in ruins for 141 years, but Nehemiah stood in the gap, identified a problem, created a plan, and completed the job God gave him to do.

I don’t know how many times Nehemiah got discouraged, but he kept looking to God for hope and strength. I don’t know how many people complained about all the work, but Nehemiah just smiled and said, “Keep working. God is with us.” I don’t know how many lies were told about him, but he trusted God with his reputation. The storms were fierce. God didn’t protect him from experiencing the storms, but He gave Nehemiah and his men courage to weather the storms. Pastor John Hagee
once said, “God never promised you smooth sailing, but He did promise a safe landing.” Nehemiah closed his ears to gossip and criticism, and he opened his heart to God and to his calling to stand in the gap.

**STAYING POWER**

Sometimes, we stand in the gap for a cause or a person for a short time, and then our role is over. More often, however, God wants us to keep standing in the gap for a long, long time. When Nehemiah finished rebuilding the walls of the city, he could have told people, “Okay, I’m done. I finished what I came here to do, and now I’m going back to my comfortable life in the king’s palace in Susa.” But Nehemiah didn’t say that. He stayed in Jerusalem for twelve years. He knew that opposition hadn’t stopped when the last stone was put in place and the last gate was hung. The temptation to compromise, the threats of division, and the storms of his adversaries would continue, so he stayed to protect the walls and care for the people. He wasn’t just a builder; he was a believer. He led a reform movement to draw people back to God and to make their faith strong and vibrant. With Ezra, Nehemiah worked hard to restore the city—physically and spiritually.

Quite often, God wants us to build a new culture and a new hope instead of city walls. Martin Luther King, Jr. had the spirit of Nehemiah. He saw the poverty and oppression of African-
Americans in the United States and was determined to marshal the power of non-violence to change the nation. He began by leading strikes in Southern cities. However, many in his own community felt uncomfortable with his efforts. Some black leaders advised him to stop because they feared backlash from the white establishment. Again and again, King remained steadfast in the face of opposition—from within his own community and from the entrenched, powerful whites. He was often arrested for speaking out for equality. When he was in the Birmingham jail in 1963, several prominent black clergymen openly questioned his motives and methods. In his famous letter responding to them, he explained,

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial ‘outside agitator’ idea. Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere within its bounds. . . . We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct action campaign that was ‘well-timed’ in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word ‘Wait!’ It rings in the ear of every Negro
with piercing familiarity. This ‘Wait’ has almost always meant ‘Never.’ We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that ‘justice too long delayed is justice denied...’ So I have tried to make it clear that it is wrong to use immoral means to attain moral ends. But now I must affirm that it is just as wrong, or even more so, to use moral means to preserve immoral ends.”

Dr. King’s wisdom, courage, and vision were the catalyst that changed a nation—or at least, began to change a nation. He realized staying power was essential. His legacy remains. Leaders today stand on his shoulders to fight for equality and justice.

In many cases, one of our strongest statements of leadership is “just showing up.” When Elizabeth and I wanted to build a home, some people advised us to move out to the suburbs and travel back to the city every day. I said, “No, we’re going to live in the ‘hood. We want to live with our people. We want to share their hopes and their fears.” Of course, living in our community isn’t as safe as it is out in the suburbs. We’ve been robbed, and I’ve even received a death threat. Several times within the first few years of moving into our new home, we were awakened in the middle of the night at the sound of loud blasts from car horns. When we looked out our bedroom window, we could see a car blazing on fire. We soon realized that we had built the house right next to a popular dumpsite for stolen cars. For a moment I feared we had
made the wrong choice to move into the neighborhood. The cars were so close to our home—what if one morning we woke and our home was on fire? But then I remembered how important it was that we live in the neighborhood we serve. Our people get robbed and are threatened every day. How can they know we understand them if we don’t live in their world? Like Nehemiah, Elizabeth and I want to live, lead, and do life together with the people God has entrusted to our care.

ANOTHER MAN

About 480 years after the walls of Jerusalem were restored, another man rode past the walls of Jerusalem—during the day instead of the night, and on a donkey’s colt instead of a horse. A few days later, He fought the world’s greatest enemy. In agony, He hung between heaven and earth, between life and death. We were destined for destruction, but Jesus paid the penalty we deserved to pay.

Oh, how those walls could talk! They witnessed the incredible courage of a man who led his people to rebuild and protect them from their enemies, and they watched as another Man gave everything to rescue them from sin and death. Jesus stood in the gap for us. He told the enemy, “You can’t take
my son! You can’t take my daughter! They are mine. I love them so much I’m willing to die to bring them home.”

Every time we see Jesus in the Gospels, He’s standing in the gap for people. When the religious leaders wanted to stone a woman caught in adultery, Jesus stood between her and her accusers. When blindness or sickness or deformity threatened to ruin a person’s life, Jesus stood in the gap to heal. When sin crushed a person’s soul, Jesus stood in the gap to offer love and forgiveness. When death took His friend Lazarus, Jesus’ heart was broken. He stood in the gap to bring life from the tomb.

Of course, some don’t want Jesus to stand in the gap for them. When Jesus was suspended on the cross between heaven and earth, one thief mocked him, but the other asked Jesus to remember him. That’s our choice, too. In fact, when we look at the Gospels, we always see extreme responses to Jesus. No one says, “Oh, He’s a nice guy, that’s all.” They either hate Him, fear Him, or adore Him. When we get even a taste of His grace, He becomes our greatest gift.

Let the love of Jesus move your heart. When that happens, you will see the wonder of His incredible grace, and your heart will break over the empty lives around you. Both—wonder and sorrow—are evidences of a person who finds the courage to identify a problem and dive in to solve it . . . a person like Nehemiah who stands in the gap.

Do you see a problem to solve? Of course you do. Is it your lost child, your angry spouse, your addicted brother or sister, your
depressed parent, your annoying neighbor, your demanding co-worker, or something else tugging at your heart? Let compassion fuel your courage to do something about it.

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At the end of each chapter, you’ll find a few questions to stimulate reflection and group discussion. It’s easy to read a chapter of a book and put it down without wrestling with the principles. Instead, take some time to think, write, and pray over the questions. If you’re in a class or small group, use these questions to guide your discussion. I hope your conversations will be rich, and I trust God will use your discussions to build your faith so you’ll stand in the gap for those in need around you.

THINK ABOUT IT . . .

1. How would you define and describe what it means to “stand in the gap” for someone?
2. Was weeping a right response to the problem Hanani brought to Nehemiah? Why or why not?

3. Read Nehemiah’s prayer in Chapter 1. What stands out to you in the content and zeal of his prayer?

4. When you think of people in need, which of the challenges seems most difficult: compromise, division, or storms? Explain your answer.

5. Why is it important to have staying power as you stand in the gap? What might happen if you were to walk away too soon?
6. What is God saying to you through the story of Nehemiah?

7. What do you hope to get out of this book? How do you want God to work in you and through you as you read it?
END NOTES


This book is designed for individual study, small groups, and classes. The best way to absorb and apply these principles is for each person to individually study and answer the questions at the end of each chapter, then to discuss them in either a class or a group environment.

Each chapter’s questions are designed to promote reflection, application, and discussion. Order enough copies of the book for each person to have a copy. For couples, encourage both to have their own book so they can record their individual reflections.

A recommended schedule for a small group or class might be:

**Week 1**

Introduce the material. As a group leader, tell your story of finding and fulfilling God’s dream, share your hopes for the group, and provide books for each person. Encourage people to read the assigned chapter each week and answer the questions.

**Weeks 2–10**

Each week, introduce the topic for the week and share a story of how God has used the principles in your life. In small groups, lead people through a discussion of the questions at the end of
the chapter. In classes, teach the principles in each chapter, use personal illustrations, and invite discussion.

PERSONALIZE EACH LESSON

Don’t feel pressured to cover every question in your group discussions. Pick out three or four that had the greatest impact on you, and focus on those, or ask people in the group to share their responses to the questions that meant the most to them that week.

Make sure you personalize the principles and applications. At least once in each group meeting, add your own story to illustrate a particular point.

Make the Scriptures come alive. Far too often, we read the Bible like it’s a phone book, with little or no emotion. Paint a vivid picture for people. Provide insights about the context of people’s encounters with God, and help those in your class or group to sense the emotions of specific people in each scene.

FOCUS ON APPLICATION

The questions at the end of each chapter and your encouragement to group members to be authentic will help your group take big steps to apply the principles they’re learning. Share how you are applying the principles in particular chapters each week, and encourage members to take steps of growth, too.
THREE TYPES OF QUESTIONS

If you have led groups for a few years, you already understand the importance of using open questions to stimulate discussion. Three types of questions are limiting, leading, and open. Many of the questions at the end of each lesson are open questions.

Limiting questions focus on an obvious answer, such as, “What does Jesus call Himself in John 10:11?” They don’t stimulate reflection or discussion. If you want to use questions like these, follow them with thought-provoking, open questions.

Leading questions require the listener to guess what the leader has in mind, such as, “Why did Jesus use the metaphor of a shepherd in John 10?” (He was probably alluding to a passage in Ezekiel, but many people don’t know that.) The teacher who asks a leading question has a definite answer in mind. Instead of asking this kind of question, you should just teach the point and perhaps ask an open question about the point you have made.

Open questions usually don’t have right or wrong answers. They stimulate thinking, and they are far less threatening because the person answering doesn’t risk ridicule for being wrong. These questions often begin with “Why do you think . . .?” or “What are some reasons that . . .?” or “How would you have felt in that situation?”
PREPARATION

As you prepare to teach this material in a group or class, consider these steps:

1. Carefully and thoughtfully read the book. Make notes, highlight key sections, quotes, or stories, and complete the reflection section at the end of each chapter. This will familiarize you with the entire scope of the content.

2. As you prepare for each week’s class or group, read the corresponding chapter again and make additional notes.

3. Tailor the amount of content to the time allotted. You won’t have time to cover all the questions, so pick the ones that are most pertinent.

4. Add your own stories to personalize the message and add impact.

5. Before and during your preparation, ask God to give you wisdom, clarity, and power. Trust Him to use your group to change people’s lives.

6. Most people will get far more out of the group if they read the chapter and complete the reflection each week. Order books before the group or class begins or after the first week.
Widely known as “Pastor Choco,” Wilfredo De Jesús is the Senior Pastor of New Life Covenant Church in Chicago. Under Pastor Choco’s leadership, New Life Covenant is the largest church in the Assemblies of God Fellowship.

Wilfredo was born and raised in Chicago’s Humboldt Park community. When he was seventeen years old, he received Jesus as his Lord and Savior at a small Pentecostal Spanish-speaking church in the community. From that moment, his life was forever transformed.

He remained in that same little church for over twenty years before he was appointed Senior Pastor in July 2000. Since then,
the church has grown from a weekly attendance of 120 to 17,000 globally through church plants and more than 130 ministries reaching the most disenfranchised—the brokenhearted, poor, homeless, prostitutes, drug addicts, and gang members.

Rev. De Jesús has been instrumental in the development of several community-based programs such as New Life Family Services, which operates a homeless shelter for women with children. Some of the church’s other vital ministries include the Chicago Master’s Commission, an intensive discipleship program for college-age students, and the Chicago Dream Center, which offers various programs and services to assist individuals and families to move toward self-sufficiency and to overcome poverty and its ill effects.

Pastor Choco’s vision is simple: to be a church for the hurting that reaches people for Jesus.
In 2012, Wilfredo released his first book, Amazing Faith, in which he shares his life story and message: “No one is beyond the transforming power of God’s love. When we let Him, God fills our hearts with His love, strength, and purpose, and we become complete.”

In April 2013, De Jesús was named one of TIME Magazine’s 100 most influential people in the world and recognized for his leadership and influence with the Evangelical and Latino audiences. He wants others to understand that his accomplishments are based on a life dedicated to God and His purposes. In other words, whatever the accomplishment, to God be the glory!

De Jesús is sought after as a motivational speaker at various church events, leadership conferences, and assemblies
throughout the nation and abroad. He resides in the Humboldt Park community of Chicago with his wife Elizabeth. They have three children, Alexandria, Yesenia, and Wilfredo, Jr.
For more information about this book visit www.influenceresources.com
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A GAP is a place of weakness, vulnerability, and danger—a place of real threats. Today, people face serious difficulties in their marriages, with their kids, in their communities, in the nation, and across the globe. Quite often, the situation seems hopeless . . . but it’s not.

In this book, Wilfredo De Jesús gives nine examples of courageous people in the Scriptures—men and women who recognized "gap" situations and trusted God to use them to make a difference. With clarity, power, and warmth, Pastor Choco points us to Jesus as the ultimate example and resource. As you taste the grace and greatness of God, your heart will be transformed, and He will give you the courage to step into the gaps around you.

And then, the world—our families, our communities, our nation, and the farthest corners of the globe—will experience God’s grace and greatness, too.

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GOD IS ASKING, "WILL YOU STAND IN THE GAP FOR MY SAKE AND MY GLORY?"

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN GOD’S PEOPLE STAND STRONG