

BEN DAILEY
FOREWORD BY J. DON GEORGE

LIMITLESS

THE LIFE YOU WERE MEANT TO LIVE

BEN DAILEY

LIMITLESS

THE LIFE YOU WERE MEANT TO LIVE

SALUBRISSM
RESOURCES

Copyright © 2016 by Ben Dailey
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Published by Salubris Resources
1445 N. Boonville Ave.
Springfield, Missouri 65802
www.salubrisresources.com

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without prior written permission of the publisher, except for brief quotations used in connection with reviews in magazines or newspapers.

Cover design by PlainJoe Studios (www.plainjoestudios.com)
Interior formatting by Anne McLaughlin

Unless otherwise specified, Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com. The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Scripture marked MSG taken from *The Message*.
Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002.
Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

Scriptures marked NASB are taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scriptures marked ESV are taken from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version of the Bible, copyright Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. All rights reserved.

Scriptures marked NKJV are taken from THE NEW KING JAMES VERSION®.
© 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

ISBN: 978-1-68067-112-4

19 18 17 16 • 1 2 3 4 5

Printed in the United States of America

1 DRIFT

“ God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing. ”

—C. S. Lewis

I'm not sure what happened, how it happened, or even when it happened. All I know is that I drifted.

I grew up watching my parents walk with God. My father was a pastor, and I had the greatest respect for him. When my mom and dad experienced fierce and unjustified opposition from church people, I blamed God. For years, I stayed angry with God for letting my parents suffer unjustly. Then, during the summer after I graduated from high school, God met me late at night in a shed behind my parents' house. It had been converted into a bedroom, and He shook up my world! The love of God flooded my heart. I had the sheer joy of sensing God's kindness, His power, and His presence.

At the time, I didn't have theological words to describe my experience, but it didn't matter—the love of Jesus was so real I could touch and taste it! He was alive and real to me, and I was fully alive to Him. It wasn't like I was walking around in a daze. It was just the opposite. I was acutely aware of God's presence

and my new purpose in life. I was overwhelmed with the question, “How could God love someone like me so much?” It was a question I loved to consider because it always led me back to the wonder of His grace.

I was aware that this revelation of God’s love was a gift from His hand to me. I hadn’t earned a thing. I had been angry, rebellious, and sullen, but God reached into this darkness with His tender hand of love. At the deepest part of my heart, God worked the miracle of healing and restoration. My repentance wasn’t coerced by guilt or shame. God had invited me to come to Him, to lay down my resentment and bask in the warmth of His kindness. I repented because I sensed His great love for me.

Conflicting Messages

When Jesus met me in the shed behind my parents’ house, I was captivated by the love of God. Obeying Him wasn’t a dry, empty, forced obligation. I wanted to please the one who loved me so much, and I was glad to do anything He asked me to do! But as I moved away from home and listened to all kinds of messages—in Bible school, to preachers on television, and in church each week—I heard two different messages. One said that God loves us unconditionally, His grace is free, and repentance puts us in touch with the wonder of His affection for us. This is the message that was given to unbelievers to assure them of the truth of the gospel.

The other message was for believers, and it was quite different. In many ways, this message said,

“You’d better obey, or else.”

“You aren’t committed enough.”

“You aren’t good enough for God.”

“You’d better try harder.”

“You need to be more disciplined.”

“You’d better follow the examples of the heroes in the Bible . . . and don’t be like those unfaithful people!”

“You’re not praying enough, giving enough, or serving enough to really please God.”

It doesn’t take too many of these messages to convince us that we’re walking a tightrope with God, and we’d better do everything just right to stay on. One little slip and . . .

Ironically, unbelievers are attracted to the unconditional, wonderful grace of God, but too many believers live in bondage and guilt, assuming they can never measure up to God’s standards. They’ve completely missed the ongoing grace God wants to pour into their hearts and lives. It almost seems better for people to remain unbelievers and be drawn to God’s grace than to become legalistic, moralistic, guilt-driven churchgoers.

These messages weren’t abstract to me. I internalized them until they became my identity, my reason to live, and my heart’s motivation. Grace vanished. I believed I wasn’t good enough for God, and I’d better try harder—much harder—if I had any hope of staying on His good side. Somehow, I had to earn His love and acceptance.

When I first trusted Christ, my obedience was an overflow of my experience of the love of God. Gradually, however, my obedience became a measuring stick that determined if I was a good enough person and, more precisely, a good enough Christian. I compared myself with others around me to see how I was stacking up. If I was serving more than they were serving, or if I had more emotional intensity than they did, I felt good about myself. I was winning! It was nothing but pride. When I failed, or when I saw others succeed, I felt the toxic blend of shame,

envy, fear, and resentment. Oh, I never talked about those feelings and perceptions. No one really talked about them, but they were as real as anything in the world.

Instead of finding the right answer and letting the love of God transform my heart, I doubled-down on my efforts to prove worthy of His acceptance.

Some people might read this and ask, “Well, Ben, why didn’t you go back to the grace of God and experience His love again? Why didn’t you correct the problem with the truth of the gospel?” That’s a great question, but the solution I heard over and over again was, “Try harder, do more, be more committed, and prove yourself to God.” Instead of finding the right answer and letting the love of God transform my heart, I doubled-down on my efforts to prove worthy of His acceptance. It was a never-ending rat race.

My drift away from the grace of God was gradual, imperceptible, and complete. All the demanding, condemning, guilt-inducing messages eventually felt completely normal. When I was growing up in California, my family often went to the beach. One day, my brothers and I went out into the waves on a float. I looked back to the beach and saw other parents and kids building sandcastles, and I relaxed in the ocean. A little while later, I looked up, but I didn’t recognize where I was. I scanned the beach. I saw a lot of other families, but I couldn’t see my family. I got out and looked around. I had drifted a half a mile up the beach to another part of the coast! I hadn’t been aware that it happened, but it happened nonetheless. That’s

what happened to me when I drifted away from the grace of God and found myself living by the demands of performance.

Every church that lives by performance has its own list of requirements. They used to be “don’t cuss, don’t drink, and don’t dance,” but today, they are more likely to be “give enough, attend often enough, serve till you’re exhausted, pray with passion, fast until you’re sick, and be absolutely sure about everything.” But I knew my heart, and I knew things about my deepest desires that weren’t what God wanted. I put on a show to impress others, and I often succeeded, but I was secretly sure that I could never do enough to impress God. There was just too much junk in my heart. I knew it, and I knew that God knew it.

The problem was that I was a pastor. I was supposed to point people to Jesus, but I had internalized the demanding messages and was communicating them to the staff and people in our church. I had become part of the problem. Leading and pastoring were more about me than about God. I was committed to building a great church, a really big church, a church other pastors would envy. When we didn’t grow as fast as I wanted, I became impatient with God’s timetable and methods. I started believing I could build Jesus’ church better than Jesus could!

I became committed to doing, to proving, to achieving, but I forgot to enjoy the unconditional, fathomless love of God. I lost my joy. I was running on empty—burned out, confused, and furious. Soon, I hated the church, I despised serving God, and I resented anyone who asked me to do anything at any time. I also hated someone else: me. I knew I was a colossal failure. I couldn’t live up to God’s perfect standards, and I couldn’t even live up to my own standards. Guilt, self-pity, and shame compounded my confusion and anger. I was a mess.

I recently heard a speaker describe our drive to prove ourselves as *performancism*. The “ism” means it’s a philosophy, a belief, a comprehensive way of looking at ourselves and the world. It’s not just a minor problem; it leads to a kind of spiritual death because it equates our value to our performance. It is the product of the mindset that what we do, what we have, and all we achieve signal our worth.

Never Enough

Living by performance is much like any other addiction. If you think this comparison is too drastic, let me explain how the addictive cycle works.

- Frustration creates anxiety that cries out for relief. For an alcoholic, life’s challenges, combined with the added heart-aches caused by the addiction, produce a lot of uneasiness. For the performance addict, the realization of not being enough is a constant source of anxiety.
- Addicts then fantasize about the chemical or behavior that promises relief. A performance addict imagines “the big win” that will impress people.
- Thoughts lead to specific behaviors to pursue the substance or behavior.
- The person engages in the behavior: drinking, drugs, shopping, sex, gambling . . . or performing to earn approval. The promise is that this activity will ease frustration, calm anxiety, and bring the joy they desperately seek.
- The “high” from the drug or the behavior may last for a few moments or a few days, but sooner or later, the person comes down. The person feels empty, alone, and more anxious than before, triggering a new cycle.

I can see now how all the elements of this cycle were working in my own life. Deep feelings of not being good enough triggered fantasies that I could do something to impress Kim, the people on our staff, the people in our church, and maybe even God. I dreamed big dreams of success—but always to stroke my ego and polish my reputation, not to honor God. And I put my dreams into action. When they succeeded, I felt fantastic . . . euphoric . . . superior . . . and arrogant. But the feelings didn't last long. I had to "keep feeding my habit" of success to make me feel good about myself. When I saw others succeed, I felt jealous. I saw them as competitors. Oh, I was slick enough to not appear that I resented their success, but just below the surface, I seethed. When I failed, I had to blame somebody. I often blamed my staff, Kim, God, or anyone but myself. When I couldn't shift the blame, I had to swallow the hard conclusion that I was defective and deficient. I felt waves of crushing shame, which drove me to conclude, "I never want to feel this way again! I'll make sure I succeed next time!" And another cycle kicked into gear.

No matter what I did, I lived with the nagging feeling that it was never enough.

No matter what I did, I lived with the nagging feeling that it was never enough. I worked like a dog, but I was afraid someone was working harder. I was intense in my zeal, but I was afraid someone else was more zealous. I prayed for long periods, but when I said, "Amen," I had a sickening feeling that I hadn't prayed long enough, sincerely enough, or specifically enough.

I relived conversations and beat myself up for saying something stupid or realizing the other person wasn't moved or

impressed by what I'd said. When I was at work, I was haunted by the fact that I wasn't the husband and father I needed to be. When I was at home, my mind was consumed with all the things I needed to do back at the office. When I went to my kids' sports events, I sometimes left at halftime because I couldn't stand feeling unproductive. My mind and heart were always consumed with the next thing I needed to do to be successful. I was so driven to accomplish things that I could never relax and just be "in the moment" with my wife, my kids, my friends, or my God. In fact, when we planted a church when our daughter Kyla was a little girl, I was totally absorbed with getting the church up and running. Today, I don't have any memories of her from the time she was three until she was six. It's not that I had a lobotomy and I'm missing those memories. I don't have any memories of her because I wasn't with her enough for the memories to even exist.

Receiving and Giving

God has called us to give love and joy to others out of the abundance of the grace He has given to us. In one of the feasts in Jerusalem, Jesus watched each day as the ceremonies of washings and sacrifices rose to a crescendo on the last day. John gives us a picture of the drama at the feast:

On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." By this he meant the Spirit. (John 7:37-39)

The Christian life is meant to be a continual filling of God's love, wisdom, and strength by the presence of the Holy Spirit

(Eph. 5:18). As God fills us and we overflow, we give, love, and serve those around us—not to get something from them to fill our emptiness, but out of the abundance of our fullness. The filling we need isn't church attendance or duties or service. We need to drink deeply of Jesus Himself, the living water. Only then can the river of living water flow from deep within us into the lives of others.

During my time of spiritual drought, another passage about water characterized my life. God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah to wake up His people:

“My people have committed two sins:
They have forsaken me,
the spring of living water,
and have dug their own cisterns,
broken cisterns that cannot hold water.” (Jer. 2:13)

I had been created (and recreated) by God to be a channel of the living water of Christ, but I had dried up. A cistern has no external source to fill it. It isn't a spring, and it isn't a well. It's just a container that holds the water poured into it. I had drifted away from the “spring of living water” to dig my own cistern. I felt like I was dying of spiritual thirst, but I had the wrong solution. I worked like crazy, ramped up my intensity, and tried to dig a huge cistern to hold water—but it couldn't; it was broken. No matter how hard I tried, I was still cracked and empty. Every time I tried to pour nourishing, refreshing water into my life through prayer and Bible study, it immediately leaked out. My life was all about my efforts to perform instead of finding Jesus refreshing.

The Scriptures use another liquid, oil, as an additional metaphor for spiritual life. Jesus told us, “You are the light of the world” (Matt. 5:14). The source of light is the oil in the lamp,

and oil is a symbol of the presence of the Holy Spirit. I had been giving, serving, and laboring so hard and so long that my light was flickering and dim. The oil in my lamp was extremely low because I wasn't replenishing it with the love and grace of God. I couldn't be a light when the oil of intimacy with God was so low.

All a Grind

I knew these passages of Scripture (and many others) about the need to experience God's love before expressing it to others, but the loud, noisy messages of performance drowned out God's whisper inviting me to come back to enjoy Him. When I felt desperate, empty, ashamed, and afraid (yes, all at the same time!), I tried even harder. I read the Bible, but only to get a word I could preach to impress people, not to find the true treasure of Christ. I prayed—but to ask God to bless my ministry so I could be more successful and ease the pain in my heart, not to know Him more intimately and find rest in His arms. I spent long hours planning and pulling off events and services, but there was no joy in it. When I got home, Kim wanted to spend time with me, but I saw her as an annoyance who asked too much of me, and in fact, often got in the way of my success. Kyla and Kade wanted their daddy, but I was too consumed with accomplishing great things for God to be the loving father God wanted me to be. No matter where I went, I was sure I needed to be somewhere else. No matter what I did, it was never enough.

I lived on a treadmill of discouragement about my failures and false hopes that if I just tried harder, I'd make it the next time. I just needed to be more committed. I needed to give more and do more. The next success, I was convinced, would bring true joy and meaning. But no matter how well things went, the successes never filled the hole in my heart. I was never quite

good enough—actually, *never even close* to good enough. But I kept trying. Life was a long, excruciating grind.

My drift away from the wonder of grace left me anxious, insecure, and hyper-controlling.

My drift away from the wonder of grace left me anxious, insecure, and hyper-controlling. For me, people and situations almost always felt out of control. The haunting prospect of failure and uncertainty about the future drove me to put my hands on every decision, and in fact, every person's mood all the time. I was always on, noticing everything—because everything was a potential threat! I was sure I just needed to be more diligent, more on top of things, and more insistent. This pathological obsession drove me nuts, and it drove people away from me . . . including those I love most.

Every culture has its own language, and the performance culture has one too. I listened to leaders who try to inspire us but often have a demanding tone and tell us to “give it all for God,” to live in “radical obedience,” to “give until it hurts,” and to “be sold out for Jesus.” All of these statements can be understood in the context of grace, but that's not how I heard them. They drove my engines to do more to prove myself . . . always more.

In all my efforts, I saw plenty of successes and a few failures. God was doing amazing things, but I couldn't see His hand. I didn't see His power and love working through me. I thought it was all about me just grinding out life and ministry. I couldn't enjoy the successes because I was haunted by every flaw—large or small, real or perceived. The highs quickly evaporated, and the lows devastated me. I began critiquing everybody

and everything, but not with a dispassionate eye. I felt condemned, so I condemned everything and everybody. Even when we saw God do amazing things—lives changed, people saved, the hungry fed, and God at work in other wonderful ways—I focused on what went wrong. My sour demeanor poisoned my relationship with Kim. She dreaded seeing me after every service and event because I inevitably ripped them to shreds. Week after week, I watched her countenance drop at lunch as I tore into what went wrong and who failed. In the services, she had been thrilled to see God do amazing things, but my criticisms turned her joy into discouragement.

For some people, the pervasive fear of failure and rejection soon leads to depression; for others, it produces an even more intense push to succeed—and no one had better get in the way! People walked on eggshells around me. At home, Kim knew the subjects that were off-limits, and she coached the kids to avoid talking to me about those things—and to avoid me completely at certain times of the week. Before the weekend services, Kim reminded them to leave me alone because I was preparing. After the services, no matter how well they went, I was harsh and critical. The look on my face screamed to my children, “Stay away!” My staff were always on edge, wondering if a single wrong word might set me off. However, outside my close circle of family and staff, most people saw me as completely calm, happy, and in control. At least, that’s the image I tried desperately to portray to them.

I became so raw and wounded that I overreacted to any perceived slight, and I resented any demand on my time. Every command from God became offensive, and I was deaf to any invitation to come close and enjoy His love.

I’d like to think this wrong perception of life and God was unique to me, but it’s not. As I’ve talked about my misguided

assumptions, many others have said, “Ben, that’s me too!” Christians in every walk of life—people in business, doctors, nurses, engineers, accountants, farmers, teachers, housewives, and all the rest—can lose their focus on Christ, and when they lose Him, they lose heart. The irony is that the more driven we are to prove ourselves as “good Christians,” the farther we move from the source of love, joy, and light. In *The Sacred Romance*, Brent Curtis and John Eldredge comment:

To lose heart is to lose everything. And a “loss of heart” best describes most men and women in our day. It isn’t just the addictions and affairs and depression and heartaches, though God knows, there are enough of these to cause even the best of us to lose heart. But there is the busyness, the drivenness, the fact that most of us are living merely to survive. Beneath it we feel restless, weary and vulnerable.¹

What If?

During my darkest season of feeling restless, weary, and vulnerable, I kept looking for the key that would fix everything. I wrote messages on “Three Keys to Success,” “How to Lead When You’re on Empty,” and “Twenty-One Days to Victory.” I went to seminars on how to be a better father, husband, pastor, and friend. I hoped someone somewhere could give me the answer. I searched everywhere to find the principle, the book, the conference, the concept, the *anything* that would fill the emptiness. They all made glowing promises, so I tried them all. But nothing worked. I was dying inside. It was like a carrot on a stick. Every time I seemed to get close to true fulfillment, the joy of love and life remained just out of reach. Legalism is exhausting because it promises so much but delivers so little. You feel

like you're getting close, but it's an empty promise. It's a carrot we can never quite put our hands on.

Actually, my attempts to implement all the principles only made me feel more discouraged than ever. The speakers and writers told how their lives had been transformed by the points they shared, but their concepts did nothing for me. I concluded that I was utterly, completely hopeless. At these events, I spent time with some of the speakers, and I discovered many of them were just as burned out as I was. Actually, these conversations made me feel a little better . . . after all, misery loves company.

Gradually, I realized there was no quick fix to my problems. I was in a desert, but I had no idea I was in the exact place where I could find a spring of water. I began to ask hard questions . . . good questions . . . questions that would eventually lead to an awakening in my life. I wondered,

- What if the cross of Jesus Christ is enough?
- Is it possible to experience true joy?
- How does the Holy Spirit provide assurance, comfort, and strength?
- Jesus' last words on the cross were, "It is finished" (John 19:30). What if it's really true? What if Jesus really meant what He said? Can I simply rest in His finished work?
- What if there is something different about the Old and New Covenants?
- How can I understand the connection between law and grace?

These questions were like a splash of cold water in my face. I had drifted, but it was time for the drifting to stop. I needed to listen to the writer of Hebrews who encourages us, "We must

pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away" (Heb. 2:1).

I had tried everything to prove myself worthy of God's love, and I had tried desperately to impress people to win their applause. When I failed over and over again, I tried even harder. Now, it was time to try something else. But I had to come to the ultimate, absolute end before I could begin.

God's grace is painted on the canvas of
despair.

—T. D. Jakes

Consider this . . .

1. Look at John 7:37–39. What does it look like and feel like when a person "drinks the living water" of Jesus so deeply that he or she overflows with love, compassion, wisdom, joy, and strength?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ben Dailey serves as the lead pastor of Calvary Church, a multi-site church in the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex. He is the author of *Collide: When Your Desires Meet God's Heart*. Known for his creative style of communication and passion for non-conventional ministry, he reaches one of the most culturally diverse congregations in the nation. His unique ministry approach, along with his passion to reach the unchurched, has produced an atmosphere for record growth. Ben has served as a church planter and ministry consultant.

Ben grew up on the coast of central California. After graduating from high school, he planned to go to college in Los Angeles. He was excited about the bright lights, beautiful people, and fast living . . . but God had other plans. Late one night, God met him and turned him around. In an instant, God charted a new direction for Ben's life.

Ben's character, passions, values, and ministry philosophy have been shaped by the powerful influence of two men: his father and Don George. Ben's dad has been a consistent model of joyful sacrifice. Ben always remembers his parents' home being a place of refuge to people in need. Reaching out to the disadvantaged was normal in their family. But for Ben's dad, it was never merely duty. He delighted in caring for those who were overlooked by society.

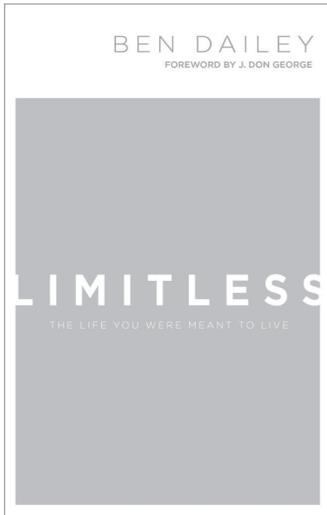
Early in Ben's ministry, he met Don George, senior pastor at Calvary Church in Irving, Texas. Ben didn't know it at the time, but God had put it in Don's heart to bring Ben and Kim under his care. Ben became his assistant, and Pastor George

mentored him in every aspect of pastoral ministry. Ben saw him in every conceivable situation in serving God, church members, the community, and pastors of other churches. Pastor George's influence profoundly shaped Ben's heart and his career.

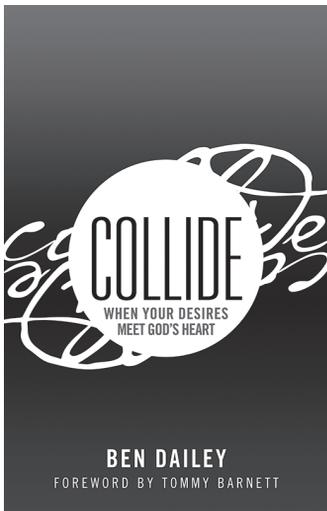
After Ben served as a pastor for several years in another city, Don George asked him to pray about coming back to Calvary Church. In the years since his return, Ben has become the lead pastor and has led the church to reach out far beyond its then-existing membership. The church has become known for ethnic diversity, wide-ranging ministries to the poor, and powerful outreach to the lost. In these years, the church has seen phenomenal growth.

Ben has been married to his wife, Kim, for twenty-one years. They have two children, Kyla and Kade.

FOR MORE INFORMATION



For more information about these and other helpful resources, visit www.myhealthychurch.com



It's inevitable. Sooner or later, our desires will collide with God's heart. His purposes are far higher than ours, His wisdom far deeper, and His love far wider. From our limited perspective, we think we know what God should do to bless our lives. We have dreams for our careers, our marriage, our kids, and every other aspect of life. Sometimes, we're right on track, but today, tomorrow, or a year from now, we'll realize our hopes and dreams have crashed. At that moment, we have a decision to make: Will we shake our fist at God, walk away, or cling to Him

more than ever before? The moment our desires collide with God may seem like the end of a dream, but in reality, it's the beginning of fresh insights and renewed hope.

“Many people live life *striving* in their own efforts rather than *thriving* in God’s grace. If you allow it, Ben’s message will transform the way you look at the grace of God and empower you to live a free and full life.”

—John Bevere, bestselling author

When the focus of the Christian life is on performance, we live by comparison, fear, and pride. When we focus on God’s grace, His amazing love destroys our fears. In *Limitless*, Ben Dailey reminds you that despite the cataclysmic disruption caused by sin, God has never given up on you. You don’t need to earn His love through duty or by proving yourself. Simply receive His love, bask in it, and let it change you from the inside out. Learn to believe that His grace and love truly are limitless.



Ben Dailey serves as the lead pastor of Calvary Church, a multisite church in Dallas/Fort Worth. Known for his passion for the gospel and creative style of communication, he reaches one of the most culturally diverse congregations in the nation. Ben has served as a church planter, ministry consultant, and is the author of *Collide: When Your Desires Meet God’s Heart*. Ben has been married to his wife and ministry partner, Kim, for twenty-two years. They have two children, Kyla and Kade, and currently reside in Dallas, Texas. Follow Ben on Twitter or Instagram @benwdailey.

SALUBRIS[®]
RESOURCES

salubrisresources.com

USD \$14.99
RELIGION / Christian Life / Inspirational



9 781680 671124