

A Young Man, After God's Own Heart

Jim George



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A YOUNG MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART

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A Personal Letter to You

Dear Friend,

As a guy, I love adventure...of every kind! And as you and I are about to begin a joint journey into adventure, I am thinking about one particular “extreme adventure.” It fits our aim in this book of becoming a man after God’s own heart.

I don’t know how many times I’ve seen it from the air and admired it from the ground, but there’s something very special about Diamond Head. That’s the name of the extant volcano that forms a rugged, unmistakable landmark at the southern end of Waikiki Beach on the island of Oahu. On my last visit to this tropical island, I was challenged by my son-in-law (also an extreme adventurer) to not just look at Diamond Head, but to actually hike it!

So, off Paul and I went on an extreme adventure. We hiked. We climbed. We pushed on...until we made it to the top. And boy, was the effort worth it! The view across Oahu was incredible—truly an awesome sight.

Isn’t that the way it is with the climb to experience the view from the top of any mountain peak, or high hill, or citadel where a castle or fort formerly stood—difficult, but worth it? But tragically, many young men never know what an utterly breathtaking view life is from the top (and I’m no longer talking about mountaintops!). Why? Because they never make it to the top of anything. Somewhere along their climb to “something,” they stop, or get distracted, or stumble, or fall. And they never get back up, or they turn back, because the climb is too extreme.

But my new friend, that's not what I want for you. No, I want you to feel and experience that spectacular view from the top of your mountain called "life." And to help you get there, I have written this book. I originally wrote this book ten years ago. Now, ten years later, I'm thrilled to have another opportunity to add new insights after reading letters from and talking to young men from around the world who have benefitted from this book. I'm excited that the publisher has asked me to update the text and add two new chapters that reflect the feedback I've gotten from young men like you.

My desire as you read this book about your priorities as a young man is that you would not make some of the mistakes that I and others have made on the way to the top of our mountains. Mistakes can cost you many years in your quest for reaching the top—in your desire to make it, to succeed, to reach the summit, to become a man after God's own heart.

In this book my goal is to simply and clearly lay out some of God's priorities for you as you start your climb to greatness. Making these priorities your own is vital to preparing you for your life's climb.

To sharpen your focus and heighten the adventure, I have added some material at the end of each chapter. In "Tough Decisions for Today," you'll find a list of thought-provoking questions about the priorities discussed in that chapter. "The Cutting Edge" exercises are aimed at getting you into your Bible to reinforce your knowledge of God's priorities. You'll learn about the priorities you need to focus on, and you'll also learn some quick and easy ways to put them into practice.

So come on! The journey to understanding what God desires for you as *A Young Man After God's Own Heart* is an exciting one. Don't miss out on the quest...you will never be the same!

Your fellow traveler,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim George". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Part One



Beginning the Adventure

What Is Your Heart's Desire?

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

—ACTS 13:22

When I was 12 years old, my parents and I went on our one and only family vacation. Leaving from my boyhood home in Oklahoma, we passed through Dodge City, Kansas, on our way to Colorado. Of course, we had to stop in this historic old-west town and visit the famous Boot Hill Cemetery—you know, the place where all the famous outlaws are buried.

To this day I can still remember looking down at a tombstone with a message something like this:

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

And, would you believe it, at the end of the grave were two boots sticking up out of the earth! Later I learned that “Old Joe” wasn’t actually buried there. And much later I found out that the words on a tombstone are called an *epitaph*, which means “a short tribute to a dead person.”

Since that unforgettable visit to Boot Hill, I've collected a few other epitaphs. For instance, a Greek poet wrote this on the tomb of Spartan heroes in the fifth century B.C.:

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

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

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

Because I have a science degree from college, I like what was written about a scientist who died at the age of 85:

He Died *Learning*

All of these epitaphs were written by someone who knew the dead person. Benjamin Franklin, however, the famous American statesman, wrote his own tribute:

The body of B. Franklin,
Printer
Like the cover of an old book
Its contents torn out
And stript of its lettering and gilding
Lies here, food for worms.
But the work shall not be lost
For it will, as he believ'd, appear once more
In a new and more perfect edition
Corrected and amended
By the Author.¹

There are also humorous epitaphs, such as...

All dressed up and no place to go.

Or...

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

To which someone later added...

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

To me, the epitaph that is the most inspiring of all is one found in the Bible. It's a tribute to King David, one of the most famous people in the Old Testament. Of him God writes,

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

Checking Out a Man After God's Own Heart

The life of David is a fascinating character study. David lived a life of extreme adventure. As a young man, probably about your age, he killed the giant Goliath. He once protected his father's sheep by killing a lion, and on another occasion, by killing a bear. His story is one of the great "rags to riches" accounts. David started out a shepherd boy...and ended up as a king. He became a great warrior and turned the tiny nation of Israel into a powerful kingdom that ruled most of the Middle East during the tenth century B.C.

But David's greatest claim to fame is God's epitaph, "I have found David... *a man after my own heart.*"

I don't know about you, but I find this tribute curious. In it, God is stating His approval of David's heart and life. That is interesting because David's actions were not always godly! For instance...

- David was a warrior who "shed much blood" (1 Chronicles 22:8).
- David sinned with a woman named Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:4) and then ordered her husband to be put into a dangerous battle position so he would be killed (2 Samuel 11:5-17).
- David had many wives (2 Samuel 3:1-5).
- David was a neglectful father, and his family suffered strife and tragedy as a result (2 Samuel 13:15-18,28-29; 18:33).
- David went against God's command and pridefully counted the number of his troops. The result? Seventy thousand of his people died in a plague (2 Samuel 24:10,15).

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

Yes, David committed some sins that most of us can't even imagine or conceive of doing! Yet over the long haul, David wanted to be righteous. He loved God, and his heart's desire was to do God's will.

And do you know what? This is the kind of man God looks for today, too! God doesn't expect perfection. (We can sure see

that from David's life!) However, in spite of all that David had done wrong in his life, God could still look at David's *heart* and say he was a man after His own heart—a man who desired to do God's will.

Checking Out Your Heart

This, my friend, is the grace of God. There can be no other explanation! By his actions, David didn't deserve God's blessings. But in his *heart*, David had the right desire. He longed to follow and please God, even though at times he stumbled and fell.

That brings me to an important question: Do *you* want to be a man after God's own heart? Or, put another way, is *your* heart's desire to follow after God?

You may think that's impossible. And if you do, you're not alone. If you're like me, you have a tendency to take three steps forward—then two steps back—in your spiritual walk with God. You may think that being a man after God's own heart is too high a goal. You may assume that it's not possible because of some of your past actions.

But you must never forget this: Where did God look? He looked at David's *heart*. And that's where God is going to look in your life, too!

That's where the adventure of becoming a man after God's own heart begins.

Checking Out God's Grace

My adventurous beginning in the Christian life was a little rocky. As a young man I went to church regularly...but that was it. There wasn't much depth to my faith. So when I went away to college, my heart desired many of the wrong things. I wanted a girlfriend, a neat car, plenty of money, lots of fun and friends,

and I got them all...but then came my spiritual fall. I was a lot like the “lost son” in the story Jesus told in Luke 15, who...

...got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.... When he came to his senses, he said, “...I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son” (verses 11-19).

Like this guy, I “came to my senses.” I realized I was starving to death spiritually. I, too, looked up and came back to my heavenly Father. And, like the father in the story who was “filled with compassion” (verse 20), God graciously received me back. And life has been an extreme adventure ever since!

God, in His great grace, does this for any man—young or old—who comes to Him. And God does this for those (like me) who come to their senses and turn back to Him. From that point on, life is never the same. It's the ultimate adventure!

And now I've got a question for you. Have you drifted away from God? Do you ever feel like you are living in “a distant country” spiritually? Do you want to experience the powerful grace of God in your life? Well, if that is your desire, then read on!

Turning Your Life into an Extreme Adventure!

In the chapters to come, this section will ask the tough questions about your heart, your life, and the type of adventure you are on. So let's get serious here for a moment...and learn more about becoming a young man after God's own heart:

Question #1—When God looks at your life, what does He look for? Well, praise God, He doesn't look for perfection! Being a Christian is not about being perfect. In fact, the Bible says that there are no perfect men—no, not one (Romans 3:10)! Like David, and like me, every person—including you!—has sinned. Every person has disobeyed God. And it is that sin that separates us from God.

That's the bad news.

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

Because Jesus was perfect and never sinned, He was able to die for your sins and mine. He paid the penalty for sin, which is death. The Bible tells us that "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). He was the perfect sacrifice for our sins. Because of what He did, we can be cleansed of sin.

Now, *that's* awesome!

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

- looking to God and His grace (Ephesians 2:8-9),
- repenting of our sins and turning away from them,
- accepting God's gift of eternal life through His Son's death for us,
- receiving God's mercy and forgiveness, and...
- living by His grace.

Now hear this: Being a Christian doesn't mean you won't sin anymore. You will still sin, just like I do. But sin will stop being the regular pattern of your life. Why? Because as a Christian, you are a new creature in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

And what happens when you do sin? The Holy Spirit, who lives in you, convicts you so you can repent of your sin and return to enjoying fellowship with God (Psalm 51:12).

Question #3—What is your heart's desire? We've looked at David's heart and his desire to follow God. We've also looked at how God worked in my heart. But now for the most important question: What about *your* heart? What is your heart's desire? It would be great if, when God looks at your heart, He can say, "I have found you to be a man after My heart—a man who desires to do all My will"!

Question #4—Have you received Jesus as the Savior and Lord of your life? Perhaps you have already taken this step of faith and received Christ as your Savior. If not, or if you aren't sure, this is truly the First Step toward beginning the journey of becoming a man after God's own heart. A prayer like this can help you take this most important step toward turning your life into an extreme adventure:

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

Now, my friend, if you are a new Christian as of this moment, write today's date here:_____.

Next, is there a Christian you know who would be really excited to hear about your decision? Give that person a call right now!

If you are or have just become a Christian, this one final epitaph—found on an actual tombstone in England—could be just for you.

I have sinned;
I have repented;
I have trusted;
I have loved;
I rest;
I shall rise;
I shall reign.²

Tough Decisions for Today

What is your heart's desire? What do you desire most in life? And what do your actions show? Your hobbies, your friends, your music—do they say loudly that you desire to follow after God's own heart...or after your own heart? Jot down two or three changes you can make in your life.

Are you ready to turn your life into an extreme adventure—the adventure of following Jesus Christ? In light of what you've read in this chapter, list two or three qualities or steps you've learned are necessary to take when you follow Christ.

The Cutting Edge

*Present yourself to God as one...
who correctly handles the word of truth.*

—2 TIMOTHY 2:15

Read Luke 15:11-31. What does this story teach...

...about the father?

...about the son?

...about the older brother?

...about admitting your mistakes?

...about forgiveness?

What is God's message to your heart?