

FAULT LINES

THINGS THAT SHAKE YOU DON'T HAVE TO BREAK YOU

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INTRODUCTION

Life is lived on levels and experienced in seasons. Through decades of ministry, I have witnessed and walked with those traversing shaky terrain. Some quakes were self-imposed and some we did not see coming.

Through those times, I have been both navigator and negotiator, navigating through difficult days and negotiating on behalf of those who needed to rebuild what their life-quake destroyed.

I am convinced that the power to bounce back is resident in the human heart. Resiliency is a great commodity. My desire is for you to win. I hope this writing helps.

CHAPTER 1

THE LIFE-QUAKE

Somewhere in the middle, it happens. In mid-stride, in the middle of the hustle and bustle of our lives, it strikes. It is the *life-quake* – the sudden, seismic shift in the landscape of our lives that exposes the cracks in our foundation and reveals the integrity of our supporting structures. It is the arrow that flies at noon-day, when the sun is at its peak. It springs up in trouble and in trauma, empowered by the unresolved, the pain of the past, and the existential angst churning just beneath the surface. Without invitation, announcement, or apology, it hits.

Much like its geological counterpart, the earthquake, the life-quake makes us feel as though nothing is stable and there is nowhere to run. Established structures of thought and emotion sway. Ethics and values strain to maintain their integrity. Relationships under its seismic grip feel the pressure of avoiding total collapse.

In the aftermath, we take inventory. We count the bodies and mourn the losses, amazed at the stories of those who survived and disheartened at the realization that others did

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not. Accounts of heroism emerge from first responders and regular citizens alike and give us a moment to catch our breath before the questions begin.

“Where were the warning signs?”

“Did we build properly?”

“Did we have a plan ... just in case?”

The truth is, right in the middle of our journey, in the middle of the life and legacy we are building, conditions for the perfect storm are brewing. When the life-quake strikes, it is because the ground we are building on has begun to move, and the devastation that follows reveals that we have been living and building on fault lines all along.

Fault lines are the unstable beliefs and values we build our lives on, expecting certain outcomes. When we find our value system shifting with age and experience, the unsettling feeling that what we *were* pursuing is not what we are *now* pursuing produces a chasm between what we once thought and what we now think.

We can all identify with the shock of seeing a life-quake strike those who had built lives filled with impressive achievement. I am not alone in the numbing bewilderment that accompanies the news that some “great one,” a hero, whom we have known intimately or from a distance, has fallen. “They seemed to be doing so well,” we think. “I had no idea,” we say.

I believe there is something in common among everyone I have ever known to experience this quake that results in crashing and burning. Quite simply, none of them ever set out to crash and burn.

No one starts a journey to get lost. No bride or groom walks down the aisle on their big day with a break-up in mind. No one crafts and cultivates the occasion with the intention of severing that celebrated union somewhere down the road. What parents ever gaze into the eyes of their newborn child, strategizing about how to so strain that bond that only bitterness and resentment return their gaze in the future? Businesses are started with dreams of “making it big” and attaining financial independence. We’re motivated in those early days of envisioning the great success we’ll achieve by the hopes of being our own boss and leaving a legacy for our children. We certainly don’t plan on losing our life savings and spending years trying to recover from financial ruin. The young evangelist, the interim pastor, the rising singer, when answering “the call,” did it with fear and trembling. They didn’t plan on crashing and burning.

Knowing that no one plans to experience devastation, this critical question is revealed: Did we plan *not* to?

An older gentleman who was dying prematurely once said to me, “By the time I figured out what life was about, it was time to say good-bye.”

Sadness and discouragement accompany tragic loss, along with the sobering reminder that none of us is immune to experiencing a life-quake. No one is invisible or hidden from its reach. Everyone gets weary and we all have the potential to burn out. Life-quakes are unimpressed by titles. They don’t check our zip codes or calendars. They don’t discriminate by race or gender or by whether we’re rich or poor. The familiar house built on the sand and the house built on the rock (see Matthew 7:24-27) both experienced the same storm.

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Knowing that these quakes can happen to any of us, we need to know there is hope. We can learn how to recognize the fault lines lying just beneath the surface in ourselves and others. We can learn how to rebuild and reinforce the structures of our lives to withstand the inevitable shifts and shaking. Ultimately, restoration is possible, and I believe that, while we cannot avoid all trouble or transition, we can emerge from devastation stronger than before.

An earthquake occurs when the surface of the earth shifts due to stored stress along faults or points of weakness just beneath the surface. When the stress below the surface exceeds the strength of the layers above, these layers fracture along a fault line, creating intense waves and violent shaking.

San Francisco, 1906

In the United States of America, no other fault line is more famous, more well-known, than the San Andreas Fault, stretching 750 miles through the state of California. Its prominence emerged in the great San Francisco earthquake of 1906.

The energy of the city of San Francisco at the turn of the century was palpable. Just walking through the streets, you could see people from all over the world and hear languages unfamiliar at that time to most Americans. Trolley cars clanged their way through the city while merchants set up shop in storefronts and stands along the street. In the morning, enticing scents wafted out of famous bakeries, carried along by the breeze off the bay.

However busy its residents were, though, the pace at which they moved belied the reality that, just under the surface of their city, tectonic plates were moving ever so slightly. No one

had given much thought, really, to the fact that this city was built along a fault line. And, as it goes with fault lines, it is not a matter of *if* the ground will shake, but only *when*.

In the early dawn hours on April 18, 1906, the San Andreas fault succumbed to the pressure beneath the surface, and a massive earthquake shook the residents of San Francisco and leveled the city. What followed was even more devastating, as broken gas lines ignited fires throughout the area, causing more damage than the quake itself. Casualties reached the thousands, and the event left more than half of the population of this shattered city homeless.¹ It remains one of the nation's deadliest disasters.

Often, the things that consume our time and energy are the things that are seen on the surface of our lives. Our activities, hobbies, work pursuits, and social status give the appearance of a life that is well-ordered, structured, stable, and satisfying. Yet, over time, the values we have built our lives on inevitably begin to shift. Some things rise to greater importance and priority while others shift downward. In the midst of building our lives on these seemingly steady structures, we come face-to-face with our own life-quakes – tragedy, trauma, or transition – and then we begin to tremble. When these hit us, our lives shake and our foundations crack. Many times, the damage is not all immediate, but the aftershocks that follow create a ripple effect that exposes a life built on a fault line.

Some people withstand these quakes and even come out better, having been able to shore up cracks in their foundation, while others tragically succumb to the devastation. Never figuring out how to rebuild, they crash and burn, bailing on

1 “Casualties and Damage after the 1906 Earthquake.” USGS: Science for a Changing World. <https://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/events/1906calif/18april/casualties.php> (accessed October 1, 2017).

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a lifetime of relationships and achievements because of the destructive disillusionment that produced their internal quake.

The familiar “mid-life crisis” is one example of a life-quake, but the truth is, it can happen at varying places along the timeline of a person’s life. Whenever we have competing values and ethics that begin to move under the surface of our lives, we find that the integrity of what and how we have built is tested.

RESOURCES

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BOOKS

Power Shifters

Boundary Shifters

Don't Curse Your Crisis

Breaking the Assignment of Spiritual Assassins

Soul Ties

Living on the Edge

Heal the World

SERIES

The Mystery of Power (MP3, DVD, CD)

The Mystery of Dominion (MP3, DVD, CD)

Bounce Back Better (MP3, DVD, CD)

The Commanded Blessing (MP3, DVD, CD)

The Mystery of Faith (MP3, DVD, CD)

Cycles (MP3, DVD, CD)

...and many more

MUSIC

Heal the World (CD, Digital Download)

Pierce the Darkness (CD, Digital Download)