# YOU ARE GOD'S Plan and there is no plan b

Dwight Robertson Foreword by Efrem Smith What people are saying about ...

## You Are God's Plan A

"Understanding the unique and powerful plan of God for our lives ushers in a sense of dignity, purpose, courage, compassion, and strength that God alone can construct. Dwight Robertson splashes light across a confused and cluttered subject. He reconnects us to The Plan ... in fact, God's Plan for each of us, and in doing so he ignites our soul. From the scrap heap of do-it-yourself, Dwight draws us back to the beauty of God's initial design and Plan. This is why He made us ... this is where we find our ultimate joy."

**Dan Wolgemuth,** president and CEO of Youth for Christ/USA

"Dwight Robertson expresses on paper what overflows out of his heart: an intense passion for the vehicle God uses to draw people into His Kingdom—laborers! By the time you complete this book, you'll have caught the same zeal to use your ordinary gifts and abilities, while also allowing and expecting God to come through in extraordinary ways."

**Bay Forest,** former Phoenix Suns NBA player, speaker, author, and founder of Focus Ministries

"Every once in a while you get exposed to a concept so potent it changes the way you see the world. *You Are God's Plan A* was one of those concepts for me. I was first introduced to this message as a

college student. It has followed me, remained in me, and shaped my ministry for the last decade. Dwight was the first person who clearly explained to me that every ordinary life can make an extraordinary difference for the kingdom of God. The awareness of this reality has served me well and enabled me to empower thousands of others. I am now the pastor of a church that grew from 0 to more than 5,000 over the course of a few short years. The paradigm that facilitated this kind of explosive growth all goes back to a simple and powerful message I heard in college: *You Are God's Plan A*."

Steven Furtick, lead pastor of Elevation Church

"Dwight Robertson speaks to the *every* in *every*one of us. *Every* part of us. *Every* bit of us. *Every* element of us. With practical power, he encourages us to both embrace and invest all God has made us to be for His Kingdom purposes."

**Elisa Morgan,** president emerita of MOPS, publisher of *FullFill*<sup> $r_M$ </sup>, and author of *She Did What She Could* 

"Every believer needs to know that they have been 'fearfully and wonderfully made'—with gifting and an assignment as a builder in the Kingdom of God. Dwight is an anointed speaker and writer who captures the essence of this profound truth in this discourse. This book is a must-read for preacher, elder, deacon, praise team, and parishioner."

**Raleigh Washington, DD,** president of Promise Keepers

"Clear, biblical, and personal, *You Are God's Plan A* is a must-read for anyone seeking God's purpose for their lives."

Eric Affeldt, president and CEO of ClubCorp

"With authenticity and transparency, Dwight Robertson delivers the message that all God's followers are uniquely called to ministry. Regardless of our vocation, a fulfilled life is loving and serving others in Christ. *You Are God's Plan A* is a call to action. It encourages and empowers the personal ministry of loving individually and caring deeply."

W. Ralph Jones III, president and CEO of Jones Companies, Ltd.

"Dwight Robertson's *You Are God's Plan A* is a riveting book that gives permission to every Christian to live an unashamed, victorious life for Christ our King. This book helps us to know that everyone is a minister and the ministry looks like our lives. God purposefully gave each of us gifts, and this book inspires us to use them for the building of the Kingdom!"

**Adrian Despres Jr.,** evangelist and chaplain of University of South Carolina football

"Dwight Robertson's book *You Are God's Plan A* is powerful! It hits a chord in every one of us, no matter where we are in life. In the end, the only important question will be 'What difference did my life make?' And the only appraisal that will matter is what God

thinks. This book is a Spirit-anointed guide that will assist you in your personal journey."

**C. Kemmons Wilson Jr.,** founding family of Holiday Inn

"Dwight Robertson has produced a page-turning, Kingdom-advancing, great read. *You Are God's Plan A* is filled with chance encounters, God's little coincidences, divine appointments, and holy disturbances. These define Dwight's life, and they describe a life committed to God's Plan A. Are they occurring in your life?"

**Joyce Godwin,** former board chair of ECFA, ISI, MAF, and AirServ International

"If you have ever wrestled with questions like 'Can God use me?' or 'Could I really make an eternal difference?'—and all of us have—this practical and powerfully illustrated book gives a resounding *yes!* Dwight Robertson makes a compelling case answering both why and how every believer should get 'off the sidelines and in the game.' This book is on my must-read list; I highly recommend it to you!"

**Steve Moore,** president of Mission Exchange, founder of Keep Growing, Inc., and author of *The Dream Cycle: Leveraging the Power of Personal Growth* 

"You Are God's Plan A is an absolute encouragement to me because it loudly declares that everyday people are the ones God will use to transform the planet. We just have to look at life through God's lens. This book is a reminder that changing the world is not about

having a position, but a disposition ... to give our lives. Get ready to be challenged by the stories in this book."

**Dr. Tim Elmore,** founding president of Growing Leaders and author of *Habitudes* 

"The call of *You Are God's Plan A* is clear and concise. In the mind of God, there is only one option and that option is us! As a pastor, I can only imagine what would happen if the people of God lived out the words of this book. If we answer the call, we will see the Lord transform the way we view our lives and the people around us."

**Robert Gelinas,** lead pastor of Colorado Community Church and author of *Finding the Groove* 

"You Are God's Plan A is filled with fresh, thought-provoking life experiences that will help you find and connect with the purpose God has shaped for you. More than ever, I've been encouraged to 'get off the sidelines' and get involved in God's Plan A for reaching the world."

**Georg Andersen,** ASID, architectural/interior designer, and author of *Silent Witness* 

"God is waiting to bless you and challenge you through the prayerful reading of this book. Let Him speak to you, guide you, and use you mightily. God wants to fill you with Himself and make you a vital part of His Plan A."

**Dr. Wesley L. Duewel,** president emeritus of OMS International, and author of *Mighty Prevailing Prayer* 

"CAUTION: Do not read this book if your desire is to be a spectator in the Kingdom of God. This book will challenge and change you ... but equally important, it will leave you encouraged."

**Tobin Cassels III,** president of Southeastern Freight Lines

"Dwight Robertson's book *You Are God's Plan A* masterfully shows that every life matters. It proves that God gives all of us (who are ordinary people) the opportunity to impact the world beyond our imagination."

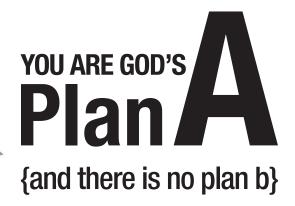
**Ryan DeVoe,** founding family of JD Byrider Corporation

"I highly recommend this book to anyone who wants to live a life of purpose. *You Are God's Plan A* changed the way I look at living life and will bring transformation of thought and actions to anyone who reads it."

Scott Porter, president of Formula Boats

"This is a book of encouragement that every Christian needs to read. Read it, then pass it on."

**Bill English,** author and consultant for Mindsharp



Dwight Robertson



YOU ARE GOD'S PLAN A Published by David C. Cook 4050 Lee Vance View Colorado Springs, CO 80918 U.S.A.

David C. Cook Distribution Canada 55 Woodslee Avenue, Paris, Ontario, Canada N3L 3E5

David C. Cook U.K., Kingsway Communications Eastbourne, East Sussex BN23 6NT, England

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The stories presented in this book are personal and include details about the lives of family members, friends, and neighbors. While some names and story details have been changed for privacy's sake, I've sought to remain true to the essence and impact of each story.

LCCN 2009940961 ISBN 978-1-4347-6463-8 eISBN 978-1-4347-0189-3

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Published in association with the literary agency of Wolgemuth & Associates, Inc. First edition published by Kingdom Building Ministries in 2006 © Dwight Robertson and Mark Vermilion, ISBN 0-9788142-0-7

The Team: John Blase, Susan Tjaden, Amy Kiechlin, Sarah Schultz, Jack Campbell, and Karen Athen Cover Concept: Brand Innovation Group Cover Design: Amy Kiechlin Cover Photo: iStockphoto

> Printed in the United States of America Second Edition 2010

> > 12345678910

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### **Foreword**

We are living in an ever-increasing multiethnic, multicultural, and urbanized world. Technology has also given us access to a fast-paced and global perspective on this challenging and complex reality. For Christians today the cultural realities surrounding us can seem somewhat intimidating. We may wonder, *How can I advance the Kingdom of God within all of this?* or, *Do I really have what it takes to make a difference in the world?* We may be asking these questions of ourselves, while at the same time wrestling with an inner desire to find our God-created purpose.

It seems that it was not too long ago that just about everyone went to church. And, for the most part, those I went to church with and lived in community with appeared to look the same and share the same values. Well, a lot has changed in what seems to have been a relatively short period of time. Many church researchers are saying that on any given Sunday less than 30 percent of those living in the United States are in church. Many Christian sociologists are saying that even though our nation is becoming more and more multicultural, the church is still the most racially segregated institution we have. These two issues alone pose a great challenge for the body of Christ.

Even in the midst of these and other challenges, there is great news revealed in this book. God is not intimidated by the realities existing within the world He created. No matter the complexities, God is still in the business of using ordinary people to be about the extraordinary work of Kingdom advancement in the earth. Yes, God has decided to use you and me—no matter what is going on in the world—to be vehicles of His love, truth, compassion, mercy, justice, and transformation. The words in the opening chapter of the book of Jeremiah ring true for us today: Before we were formed in our mothers' wombs, God knew us and set us apart for an incredible work. This is what God unfolds through Dwight Robertson in this book. God has placed a Plan A within each and every one of us, that we might participate in the revolution of His Kingdom being made manifest on the earth.

We cannot do this work in our own power. Only through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit are we equipped for what Dwight Robertson calls "laborership." This dear brother and friend is the leading voice on equipping the laity of the church in finding their personal, God-breathed, Kingdom-building ministry. Yes, there are many challenges facing us today, but we can be Kingdom laborers and radical reconcilers expressing the love of God in the world. This passionate and practical resource, I believe, is a vital tool for the empowerment of an army of laborers prepared to advance the Kingdom of God right where they are.

**Efrem Smith,** senior pastor of the Sanctuary Covenant Church, author of *Raising Up Young Heroes*, and coauthor of *The Hip-Hop Church* 

# Introduction

Over many years, evangelist Billy Graham has earned respect from people of all faiths. But during the cold war era, at the height of the Brezhnev regime, he faced quite a bit of ridicule from conservatives in America for visiting the Soviet Union and meeting with leaders from the government and state church. "Why would Dr. Graham treat the enemies of America and detractors of the Western church with such courtesy and respect? Shouldn't he condemn Soviet human-rights abuses and their restraints on religious liberty?" they scoffed. One critic blamed him for setting the church back fifty years.

Upon hearing the accusation, Graham lowered his head and answered, "I am deeply ashamed. I have been trying very hard to set the church back *two thousand* years."

God's Plan A for redeeming the world was enacted two thousand years ago. But don't take that to mean the plan is irrelevant or outdated. God's plan is as relevant, powerful, and doable today as it was when Jesus enacted it.

But somehow over time, people have diluted, distorted, and even forgotten His plan. In order to understand it, then, we must press the rewind button and go back two thousand years to the days when Jesus walked the earth.

#### Really Seeing People

When I read the gospel accounts of Jesus' life and envision how He lived and ministered to the people around Him, I'm struck by the contrast to how most of us live our lives and approach ministry today.

When Jesus saw people, He didn't hurry past them—without noticing them—in order to get to His next meeting at the synagogue. He noticed people and their needs. He acknowledged them by slowing down and connecting with them in life-giving ways. He saw them and stopped, becoming God's extended plan of love and grace to those in need.

Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every infirmity. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. (Matthew 9:35–36 RSV)

When people in Jesus' day used the word *saw*, they understood it meant not only seeing with the eyes but also perceiving and seeing below the surface to a person's thoughts and heart—to the person's true self. In fact, in Jesus' day, the distinction between seeing people on the surface and seeing people below the surface didn't exist. So this Scripture passage and others like it tell us that when Jesus saw the people around Him, He truly *saw* them, through and through.

Most of us don't. Not really.

#### "I See You!"

Not long ago, my son, Dreyson, started the school year at a new elementary school. When he returned home after the first day, I asked him how his day had gone.

"Awful, Dad," he moaned. "All the other kids already have their

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friends. They didn't even notice me. No one saw me at recess. No one sat by me in the school cafeteria. And no one talked to me in class or after school. I was *invisible*, Dad!"

An interesting word choice, isn't it? And yet, unfortunately, *many* people feel this same way. Every day they live overlooked, unnoticed, and unseen lives. "Invisible" seems to best express how they feel.

How often do we see people with our eyes but fail to see them past the surface? We may see them according to a category we've created for them or the role they play in our lives, but we often fail to discover anything else about them. *Seeing* a person as more than your neighbor—or the kid next door whose parents work all the time, or the guy in the cubicle next to you, or the checkout girl who bags your groceries—isn't easy. But none of those people should be categorized. They're real people with real lives and real stories. Unfortunately, most of us spend little time interacting with them. We barely even get to know their names, let alone any of the details of their lives.

It's time we slowed down and started seeing people like Jesus did. Or like people from the Zulu tribe in southern Africa do. Zulus greet each other by saying "I *see* you!" The response is "I am here!" What a powerful greeting!

The moments you share with people are more than transactions—they're interactions. Do your actions say "I see you!" to the people around you? The change is subtle yet significant. Next time people serve you at a restaurant, bank, or store, speak to them as if you truly see them. Instead of responding to them as if they were impersonal servants, treat them like real people with real lives and real stories. Now, that may not seem like a big deal to you, but it will be to them.

Greet your servers by name (they usually wear a name tag) and

ask them about their day. Encourage them. Tell them what you appreciate about their service. When you do, you'll be among the very few who *see* them.

And you'll be setting the church back two thousand years.

#### **Beyond Seeing**

Seeing is important. But Jesus didn't just see people. He *stopped* and served them. Seeing and stopping were two of the recurring hallmarks of His love.

He looked into the faces of children who weren't highly valued in society ... and He stopped; He made the time to hold them on His lap.

When a man covered with leprosy fell to his knees and begged Jesus, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean," Jesus *stopped* and touched him (Luke 5:12–13).

When He encountered a woman caught in adultery, He *stopped* and called her to a better life (John 8:1–11).

When faced with people oppressed and tormented by evil spirits, He *stopped* and delivered them (Matthew 8:28–34, for example).

When He encountered Matthew in his workplace, He *stopped* and began a long-term relationship with him (Matthew 9:9).

When everyone else ignored and walked past hurting people, Jesus didn't. He saw them and stopped.

Jesus never knew a stranger. Everyone belonged in one category: people to love. He valued others by asking them questions, discerning their needs, touching them, and serving them in practical ways. Every changed life resulted from an engaging conversation with a stranger.

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In the same way, we can follow in Jesus' footsteps by engaging strangers with a smile, an open heart, a word of encouragement, or even a spiritual deposit that could potentially change a life.

#### One Word

At one point, Jesus turned to His disciples and shared *with them one word* that explained why He stopped and saw in response to the needs around Him:

Then [Jesus] said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the *laborers* are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out *laborers* into his harvest." (Matthew 9:37–38 RSV)

The word? Laborers.

It may not be a very glamorous word, yet it's what will set us back two thousand years to the way Jesus lived and ministered—and move us forward into a bright future, building God's Kingdom according to His Plan A. What the world needs, Jesus said, are laborers. Common, everyday laborers.

Laborers are Jesus' means for reaching the world with His love and forgiveness. They aren't just critical to His plan. They *are* His plan.

His only plan.

Kingdom laborers are God's Plan A.

But what exactly is a laborer? After all, it's not a normal household word people use to describe most Christians. After studying the word in Scripture, I've developed a simple definition: *Laborers are*  ordinary people who deeply love God and actively love others. They seek to live a life of love ... every moment of every day.

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A laborer is a minister—not just the professional kind like pastors and missionaries, but the common, ordinary kind like my wife (an art teacher) and children (students).

Laborers are everyday, everyplace ministers like my friend Shane, who works as a radio executive and leads some of his seeker friends and coworkers in a Tuesday-morning "breakfast club," sharing relevant Bible truth from his own life and helping them better discover God's amazing love and purpose for their lives.

Or like my friend Bill, who owns a large freight company and deeply cares for the welfare of his employees.

Or like my friends Norm and Becky, who served a short stint as overseas missionaries before unexpectedly returning home. They decided God must be sending them into a different kind of ministry. So, Norm pursued a career in sales, and Becky became a full-time mom. And, together, they became "missionaries" in their neighborhood, caring for and sharing with their neighbors in life-changing ways.

Or like James the Roofer, a special guy you will meet in the next chapter.

Laborers are ordinary people who express their love for God through practical, hands-and-feet service. They embody Jesus' primary means for reaching the world with His love. Because they live everyday lives in everyday society, they influence people in ways that few professional ministers could. And through their everyday jobs, they reach people who would never step foot in a church building.

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Want to know what a laborer looks like? Look in the mirror. God has called *you* to be one.

And since laborers are God's Plan A for reaching the world, that means *you* are God's Plan A for reaching the world around you.

*You* are God's Plan A to the other soccer moms and dads you meet when you take your kids to practices and games.

*You* are God's Plan A to your coworkers, with whom you spend more hours than nearly anyone else.

*You* are God's Plan A in your neighborhood, where you have time and opportunities to develop natural and meaningful relationships with your neighbors.

You are God's Plan A in your high school classroom or college dorm.

*You* are God's Plan A at your favorite restaurant, where the servers know your name.

Not your pastor. You.

You are God's Plan A. (And did I mention there's no Plan B?)

# Part One THE PLAN

God has a plan for loving and reaching the world—it's *you!* 

#### 0ne

# Overlooked and Undervalued

"Where did *that* come from?" I asked my wife, Dawn, as I rose from my recliner to take a closer look at the nasty water spot I had just noticed on the entryway ceiling of our home.

"We had some really intense thunderstorms yesterday," she explained, staring at the ugly spot. Apparently the combination of high winds and quarter-sized hail had taken its toll on our roof over the weekend while I was gone.

Dealing with a leaky roof was the last thing I wanted to tackle following a hectic weekend. After a full speaking schedule and then flight delays, missed connections, and turbulence on the way home, I just wanted to relax.

However, when Dawn said another round of storms was forecast to hit that week, I knew the work needed to be done that day. Feeling a bit nervous about hiring someone I knew nothing about—and yet knowing I didn't have much of a choice—I grabbed the Yellow Pages and the phone and started dialing. Seven calls later, I found someone who could fit me into his schedule. When this roofer, James, answered the phone, his reassuring voice and polite manner immediately put me at ease. He told me he could be at my house in four hours.

Right on time, the doorbell rang. Opening the door, I was surprised to see a rugged-looking guy with long hair pulled back in a ponytail. I confess he didn't quite fit the mental image I had conjured up during our phone conversation.

After introducing himself and asking some questions about our

problem, he returned to his truck, grabbed his ladder, and climbed up onto the roof to assess the damage. A few minutes later, he crawled back down and quoted me a price for the work. It was surprisingly reasonable. He said the job would take only two or three hours, and he could do it right away. I agreed to the price, and before long, he was back on the roof, making the repair.

About an hour later, I heard a knock on my door. I cringed, thinking it was too soon for him to be done. As I opened the door, I thought to myself, He's probably going to say that the damage is much worse than he expected—and that it's going to cost a lot more than he quoted.

"All done!" James announced. "It shouldn't give you any more problems. If it does, just give me a call." Then he handed me a bill at a price that did not match his original quote. It was much *less*.

"I finished your roof quicker than I expected," he said. "So I only charged you for the actual time it took to complete the job."

Thankful for his honesty, I went to my home office to retrieve my checkbook. When I returned, James was talking to another customer on his cell phone. As I wrote out the check, I listened to his interaction with the other person. He treated her with the same professionalism and courtesy as he had treated me.

"Don't ever hire an answering service," I said as I handed him his check. "You really do a great job interacting with your customers on the phone. You have a way of quickly gaining people's confidence."

Then something unexpected happened.

He humbly looked at the ground for a moment, and then he looked me straight in the eyes and said, "Thank you for your kind words, but to be honest, I haven't always been good with people."

"What do you mean?"

"I made some pretty bad choices when I was younger. But about thirteen years ago, God caught my attention, and I began a personal relationship with Him. My life really changed after that. I'm a very different person than I was before."

As he shared some of the changes that had transpired in his life, he occasionally looked down and shook his head, still amazed at the work God had done.

"My desire is to serve God every day by serving my customers with kindness and respect," he explained. "I treat every roofing job as a daily assignment from God."

He spoke so openly about God that I glanced around to see if something had given him a clue that I was also a Christian—like a Bible lying within view. Nothing was there that would tip him off, so I said, "James ... brother ... hey, I'm a Christian too."

James' face lit up. He was excited to discover that we shared a common faith in God. And I was thrilled to find someone who lived out his faith so naturally in the everyday moments of his work life.

"Do you realize you're going places where few pastors could go and reaching people with your personal story that few pastors could reach?" I asked.

"You know, I've been thinking about that a lot," he replied, "but I've never heard anyone talk about it that way."

"James, God has uniquely positioned you to minister to others!" I continued with a growing sense of excitement. "You remind me of how Jesus ministered when He was here on earth. Most of His ministry took place *outside* the synagogue walls. He met needy

people and served them where *they* lived. James, that's what you're doing!"

By that time, Dawn and our two children, Dara and Dreyson, had entered the room. I asked if we could pray for him and his ministry. He agreed, and so our family surrounded James the Roofer and placed our hands on his shoulders.

"Lord," I prayed, "we commission James for ministry. We pray for James just as church leaders would do for missionaries before sending them out to their fields of service."

His body trembled under our hands as we prayed. Then he began sobbing, which I didn't expect from such a rugged guy. Teardrops fell on the hardwood floor, literally forming a small puddle. As we concluded, James needed a moment to regain his composure.

"I'm sorry for crying," he said while sniffling. "It's just that no one has ever treated my ministry as if it's important. For the past thirteen years, I've believed that this is how God has chosen for me to represent Him to others—and in all that time, no one has ever validated that what I do for Him is important."

James went on to explain that he regularly prays that God will send him customers who need to hear about Jesus. Then he prays for each of them by name and asks God to give him opportunities to minister to them. He told us about one of those opportunities:

"A few years ago, I was working on the roof of a home in innercity Denver. Suddenly a gunshot sounded from inside the house, and then I heard a scream. I scrambled off the roof and ran inside to find an older man lying on the floor in a pool of blood. His family had already called 911, but it was clear the man wasn't going to survive.

"Knowing that this may be his last chance to spend eternity in heaven with Jesus, I knelt down next to him. He couldn't move, but he locked his eyes on me.

"Sir, God loves you very much. Do you want to know if you're going to be with Him in heaven when you die?' I wasn't sure if the man could hear me. He couldn't talk or move his body, but he could move his eyes up and down as if he were nodding his head. That moment, I led the man into a relationship with Christ by asking him questions and allowing him to continue answering with his eyes. He died a few moments later."

As James finished his story, I looked around at Dawn, Dara, and Dreyson. We were all fighting back tears. Before this holy moment ended, I asked James for his business card and told him I'd place it on our refrigerator next to the other prayer magnets for our missionary friends. Then our family promised James that we would pray for him and his ministry. Although we haven't seen him since that day, we still pray for him.

Then he thanked us repeatedly as he walked out our front door.

After my chance encounter with James the Roofer, I returned to my recliner to reflect on our exchange. God began deeply stirring and convicting my heart. I was grieved because James felt so overlooked and undervalued in his ministry to others. Week after week, he sat in church services that validated "up-front" and "specially called" people in their ministries. But no one had ever validated or commissioned James into the ministry that God had called him.

I thought about the countless people who must feel the same way—the nameless, faceless followers of Jesus who serve Him in ordinary ways in their ordinary lives. But, tragically, no one notices,

validates, or affirms their faithfulness. No one notices that their ministries are extremely important to God.

Yet the Bible clearly shows us that God chooses and uses ordinary people like James the Roofer to do the extraordinary work of His Kingdom in the ordinary venues of life.

He always has. He still does. And we have every reason to believe He always will.

Where was it along the way that we lost track of Jesus' plan? When did we become so preoccupied with our own modern methods that we stopped recognizing and valuing the extraordinary work God performs through ordinary people? Instead, we've become enamored with "professional" ministers (people who make a living from their ministry service) and Christian celebrities (the highly gifted few who serve in ministry spotlights and on ministry platforms). We point to these people and methods as the standard for what it means to do something important for God.

But the day-to-day ministry of faithful servants like James the Roofer is at the heart of God's plan for reaching the world.

It's time to take a closer look at what God says in His Word about the nature of ministry and who's called and qualified to do it. Jesus chose the ordinary. He validated the weak. He called out the imperfect. He honored the poor in spirit. He sought after the humble of heart. And He gave them all a significant role to play in His Kingdom work.

If you've avoided involving yourself in the work of God's Kingdom because you don't think you have anything significant to contribute, then I have good news for you: God *wants* to work through you. He *chooses* you.

Perhaps you're like James the Roofer—you faithfully serve God in His Kingdom work, but you feel overlooked, undervalued, and maybe even unimportant. I have good news for you, too: God highly values your service to Him, regardless of the recognition you might receive. His announcement to you right now is "*You* are My plan!"