

**I AM  
NOT  
BUT I  
KNOW**

**I AM**

**WELCOME TO THE  
STORY OF GOD**

**LOUIE GIGLIO**

**i am not  
but i know  
I AM**

~~LOUIE GIGLIO~~  
[iamnot]

Multnomah Books

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For my mom—Martha Jeane Giglio—I love you.

## contents

Start Here . . . . .	9
Look Up . . . . .	17
Divine Invitation . . . . .	29
Light Flies . . . . .	43
Became . . . . .	57
Big River . . . . .	71
The Little Leader . . . . .	83
Be Still . . . . .	97
Furious Rest . . . . .	111
Embracing Smallness . . . . .	127
You Can Trust Him . . . . .	139
APPENDIX A	
The One-Word Bible Study Method . . . . .	149
APPENDIX B	
Why the Beatitudes Are the BE Attitudes . . . . .	155
APPENDIX C	
God's Passion for God's Glory (and why God is not an egotist) . . . . .	161
Notes . . . . .	167
Gratitude . . . . .	171

**START** here

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**L**ife is the tale of two stories—one finite and frail, the other eternal and enduring. The tiny one—the story of us—is as brief as the blink of an eye. Yet somehow our infatuation with our own little story—and our determination to make it as big as we possibly can—blinds us to the massive God Story that surrounds us on every side.

It's a little like me being shocked a few weeks ago by the reaction of two of New York City's finest as they motioned me over to their squad cars in the middle of my mid-morning run. The first officer's opening line (the exact wording of which, I'm sad to say, cannot be repeated here) led to the inexcusable reply,

“What does it look like I'm doing?”

I quickly realized I had said the wrong thing, especially to a New York cop. In a heartbeat my hands were on the hood of his car and threats of arrest were flying all over the place. I was startled and unnerved, and though it was now too late, my mouth was shut. Unless asked, I wasn't saying another word, especially a sarcastic one.

To make matters worse, all I could produce in the way of identification was a hotel key card—one of those fancy new ones that looks cool but doesn't even contain the name and address of the hotel. The whole scene was going downhill fast...

Things had started off innocently enough that morning as I headed out the door of our midtown-Manhattan hotel and began plodding down the sidewalk toward the East River about eight blocks away. But before I was two or three blocks away it started to rain. First it was just annoying—an intermittent spitting kind of rain. Then the wind picked up and



a steady, chilling downpour started making things miserable. Assessing the situation, I determined I was too far from the hotel to make turning back a sensible option, so I kept running north along the river, pressing on in the driving rain.

I don't know what kind of shape you're in, but when I run I think more about survival than scenery. And when I'm running in a cold downpour, I barely think at all. I certainly don't look around to read a lot of the signs. Thus, I wasn't paying much attention when suddenly my path was blocked by a chain-link fence. It stretched from the riverbank on my right to a concrete lane divider that had been following me on my left. Once again I considered my options. Retracing my steps still didn't make sense. What made sense was getting out of the rain. So without thinking I hopped over the lane divider and headed for the shelter of an overpass I now noticed across the way.

Quickly the overpass turned into an elevated roadway, so I could keep running under cover. I continued north, not really noticing that the lane to my right at some point became two lanes of traffic, and then three. After another mile or so, all three lanes of traffic were moving slower than I was and a driver in one of the cars shouted something in my direction. But in the rain and traffic, I couldn't quite make out her words and was trying to ignore her anyway. Then the overpass drifted away to the left and I was once again exposed to the rain.

Soon I noticed the lower levels of the United Nations buildings on my far left, and nearer and just ahead two police cars parked on a wide concrete median. A single officer sat in each car, their eyes meeting mine as each step I ran drew us closer. Everything seemed to be fine, until my forward progress was interrupted by the piercing “*blurp*” of one of the officer’s sirens and the intense motion of his hand directing me to approach his car.

It was at that moment I realized for the first time I was running down the middle of the FDR, a six-lane expressway that snakes along the eastside shoreline of Manhattan. No wonder the officer’s first question when I finally splashed to a stop in front of his car was incredulous and unprintable.

How can you run down the middle of a New York freeway and not know it? I think the same way you can live your entire life completely oblivious to the grand story of the Creator of the universe that is unfolding all around you. The same way you can spend your days making so much of someone as small and transient as you or me, and so little of someone as glorious and eternal as God.

That’s why this book is not about you and making your story better, but about waking up to the infinitely bigger God Story happening all around you, and God’s invitation to you to join Him in it. It’s about looking up to see that there’s a story that has been going on long before you

arrived on the planet and one that will go on long after you're gone. God is the central character of this story and of this book. He commands center stage in existence, Creation, time, life, history, redemption, and eternity.

I'm not trying to put you down or imply that you don't matter. Nor am I saying that you are absent from the grand Story of God. In fact, just the opposite. Amazingly, you appear on every page, existing in God's thoughts long before this world was made. I'm simply stating the obvious—that

## **THE STORY ALREADY HAS A STAR, AND THE STAR IS NOT YOU OR ME.**

And here's why it matters—if we don't get the two stories straight, everything else in our lives will be out of sync. We'll spend our days trying to hijack the Story of God, turning it into the story of us. Inverting reality, we'll live every day as though life is all about you and me. We'll live as though life is our one-act play and history *our* story—as though Creation is our habitation alone, existence our playground, and God our servant (that is, if we decide we need Him at all). We will throw every ounce of our energy into the fragmented and fleeting story of us. Calling the shots ourselves, me-centered thinking will dictate every move we make and how we feel.

And in the end—when the last clap is clapped for our tiny tale—our story will fade to black, a pitiful return on our one-shot chance called “life on earth.”

About thirty minutes into my ordeal with the officers, the situation lightened a bit as I realized the worst that was going to happen to me was a ticket for jaywalking, something I certainly deserved. As we were waiting for my life’s history to appear on the squad car’s computer, the nicer of the two cops asked within earshot of the other, “So what do you do for a living, anyway?”

Hmmm.

Opting for the short answer, I said, “I’m a pastor.” Two sets of eyebrows rose.

“A pastor! What kind of pastor are *you*?”

I think he was looking for the name of a denomination, but I replied, “I’m a Christian.”

“Oh, yeah? Well what are you doing in New York?”

“I’m here to speak to a group of college students tonight out in Queens.”

“So, what are you going to tell them?”

For a split second time stood still. And then I told him, “I’m going to remind them that life is short and our time on earth is really brief,” I said. “That’s why we have to make sure our lives count for the stuff that lasts forever.”

That’s what I want to do in these pages, too. Lead you to a fresh awareness of the six-lane-wide-freeway-sized

God Story that you and I are running down the middle of every day.

It's a place that requires a constant choice. We can choose to cling to *starring* roles in the little-bitty stories of us, or we can exchange our fleeting moment in the spotlight for a supporting role in the eternally beautiful epic that is the Story of God.

Think of it as trading up. Abandoning the former and embracing the latter will allow our little lives to be filled with the wonder of God as we live for His fame and the unending applause of His name. And joining our small stories to His will give us what we all want most in life anyway: the assurance that our brief moments on earth count for something in a story that never ends.

**LOOK** up

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[London]

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## **G**iven the unusual

August heat, it's remarkably cool in here. And quiet.

At least it was until now.

A noisy Italian family has just clamored past me down the aisle, oblivious to the stillness.

From where I'm sitting, it looks like Grandma, her favorite (perhaps only) son, his wife, and their three kids.

They all seem instantly impressed, even the daughter, who is now fighting through her outer shell of teen-cool to pull the headphones out of her ears. As she looks up, her mouth is wide open, her lips mouthing *W-o-w!* in slow motion for no one in particular to hear.

A rapid flurry of conversation is being exchanged between them, spearheaded by the dad whose voice is near-ing full volume. Making out the word *magnifico*, I think he just offered for the family's consideration, "isn't this place magnificent?"

Everyone except the littlest one nods, especially Grams, who seems to be genuinely awestruck by what she sees, and maybe equally moved that she is seeing it with the people she loves most. She looks to be close to seventy. A small, roundish woman with a gentle smile and still sparkling eyes.

Dad, as you might expect, has the tourist look—sandals (with dark socks, of course), zip-off cargo pants, sunglasses perched atop a closely shaved head, and the can't-leave-home-without-it fanny pack. He's holding an open brochure which rattles in the air as he gestures wildly.

Then there's Mom—all classic Italian glam with her designer jeans, high heels and hip shades.

Isabella, the teen daughter (yes, I know her name now, as do all those within fifty feet of her dad) is trying her best to have a good time without appearing to be overly "into"



the family outing. Her jeans are ragged out and about four inches too long, hiding what I think are Birkenstocks underneath. A pink backpack follows her every move, as does the attached snowboard-shaped key chain that swings from side to side. Fortunately for her younger teen brother, the key chain is at just the right height for him to demonstrate his kung-fu skills with his foot, which he does repeatedly on the way down the aisle.

And then there's little Paulie. At maybe five or six, he must be the darling of the clan. Every other second his name echoes off the walls, being constantly called by father, mother, brother, sister, and grandma. But Paulie is zoned out in Nintendo land, and I'm pretty sure he doesn't hear a thing. He's simply following along with a child's sixth sense, never taking his eyes off the video images dancing on the screen of the game player that's firmly in his grip.

Little does he know, he's in a place that bears his name.

Enormous and ancient, St Paul's Cathedral is one of the world's most amazing structures, completed more than three hundred years ago in an era when the very act of coming to worship caused you to look up in awe and wonder.

For an hour or so a steady stream of reverent (and not so reverent) onlookers have come by. A multitude of faces and cultures. A tour group of about sixty. A few dozen

school kids with British accents. Couples. Loners. Families like my Italian family. And you know what? They've all been doing exactly the same thing—craning their necks and looking high above. For good reason—the ceiling looms nine stories above, giving way to the world's second largest vaulted dome, a cavernous opening spanning more than a hundred feet—a jaw-dropping ring of open wonder rising still higher overhead.

To say this place is huge is a massive understatement. It's almost two football fields long, the dome alone weighs sixty-five thousand tons, and the cross that adorns its outer shell rises 365 feet above London's Ludgate Hill, the spot of earth that has been home to a church building since 1087.

But St. Paul's is lifting my heart and my head toward something even bigger, something higher, Someone more. Sure, Christopher Wren's architectural masterpiece is a testimony to the ingenuity, skill, and determination of man. But even in its grandeur, St. Paul's fails to reach near heaven, and its exterior is often shrouded by scaffolding and tarps as fatigue-fighters and renovators wage a continuing battle against the corrosive powers of time. And though the cathedral miraculously survived the relentless bombings of World War II, St. Paul's will not stand forever. Yet the God this building speaks of will, a fact that seems more real to me than ever as I gaze up from my pew.

Sitting here, I'm feeling pretty small.

Granted, we shouldn't need massive buildings to evoke an awareness of grandeur in us, especially given the cathedral of earth and sky we call home. Besides, the real church is those of us who believe—a spirit-infused marvel of God's constructive genius—and not the lifeless fortress of stone that encompasses me now. Just the same, this place is special, and by simply being here I'm shrinking on the inside, listening to the constant echo that declares both bigness and smallness, His and mine.

Now a young girl is whispering excitedly to her friend, “This is where Princess Di got married!” Granted these walls have witnessed their fair share of pomp and pageantry, but somehow pop culture is lost on me in this moment. St. Paul's speaks of more than history. This place is a window to eternity. It's as if the building is doing in this moment just what it was designed to do—whispering softly,

**“GOD IS BIG. REALLY,  
REALLY BIG.”**

And, I am not.

Sitting here, I feel so small—and small feels surprisingly good. So good I begin to wonder why it's so surprising that feeling small feels so good.



The truth is, feeling small may not be so bad if in recognizing our smallness we come to realize the wonder of God—a God who is beyond our ability to fully describe or imagine, yet someone we are privileged to know, love, and embrace. Looking up from our tiny estate we are faced with the supremacy of a God who not only is fully capable of running the entire cosmos today—a task that doesn’t tax Him in the slightest—but of sustaining the affairs of our lives as well.

You would think getting a glimpse of God’s true size would have us happily lining up to embrace our little-bitty lives, especially given we are loved so dearly by the One who gives them to us in the first place. But then again, human history is not exactly the record of man’s unquenchable quest for smallness. More accurately, our history is a stark reminder of our insatiable quest to make our names, our fortunes, our fame, and our kingdom as vast and enduring as possible.

Unfortunately, such a quest is an exhausting proposition. For one thing, none of us seems to know when “big” is big enough, leading us up a dizzying and deceptive staircase that promises contentment while constantly beckoning us one rung higher to an “even more.” But somehow more is never quite enough and the climb continues. Even more

exhausting, our preoccupation with ourselves puts us at odds with God Himself, given that any attempt to pump up our names is, in effect, an attempt to push Him from the center and steal His glory—a quest as tiring and futile as trying to extinguish the sun with an eye dropper.

So if you're at a place in life where weariness and strain are more commonplace than rest and wonder, this book has found you at just the right time. God knows you better than you know yourself. He knows just how small and frail you are. He knows you're just one person, and a tiny one at that. He knows all the things that you are not—and He made you that way for a purpose. That's why He has never asked you to be more than you are—little you with a great big God.

But God also is in touch with just how potent He is, desiring to do huge, God-sized things through you if you're ready to abandon the path of making more of self and embrace the miracle of being small, yet knowing His name.

It all starts when you look up.

It's been a few minutes, but that's exactly what my Italian friends are still doing. While they're looking up, I'm wondering if they've ever seen a glimpse of heaven, or if they know they have been invited to know God intimately and join His story.

I can't help thinking about Isabella. Obviously, I don't know her, but I gravitate toward her because she looks a lot like the students that our ministry seeks to lead. It may just be me, but I don't think there are too many sixteen year olds who are living in a greater story, embracing each day as if the purpose of life is a whole lot bigger than them. Sure that's a generalization (There are a lot of passionate, Christ-following teens out there!), but so many teenagers are all about me and mine—my hair, my fashion, my friends, my approval and acceptance by others, my being in the right place at the right time with the right people. Funny, they're a lot like us, just not mature enough to manage their selfishness as well as some of us older folks do. I really want Isabella to wake up to the bigger story because most of her life is ahead of her, and she brings a sense of youthful wonder to the table that all of us in the story really need.

Then there's little Paulie. Oh boy. How can he *not* think life is all about him? After all, isn't that what we are saying a lot of the time to kids these days from the second they're born? But what they really need to hear at birth is, "We love you so much, and want you to know we are really excited you are here. Welcome to the story that is already in progress!"

What about Dad? Chances are, he's a lot like me in the sense that a lot of the time he thinks he is at the helm of his life. I can see him on the phone, doing the deal, managing

the enterprise. He thinks it's all in his hands—the business, the relationships, the equity, the direction, and the future. He loves his family, but he's married to his work. He believes in God, but in the daily flow of life he acts like he doesn't need Him at all. He thinks he's generous, yet he keeps shoving his stuff into a bigger pile. He thinks he has it all together, but the foundation is a lot shakier than he knows. At the end of the day, he's going to be dumb-founded when he finds out just how tiny he really is, and discovers that God gave him life and breath and everything in between so that he would have something to contribute to the massive God-mission that has no end.

As for Mom, I'm guessing that her story on most days is whatever is on the other end of the phone, whatever the latest raging topic is between her friends. It's like somehow she's telling me something without saying a word—"My kids have the right stuff, I have the right stuff, we live in the right neighborhood, attend the right schools, do mass at the right church, vacation in the right places...." I doubt she knows where she put the story down, that is if she ever picked it up in the first place. I wonder if she knows that God invented the stuff in Botox and that He loves her with or without it. I'm sitting wondering if her heart is shrinking with the dying story of her and hers, wondering if she's ever known the rush of hearing Him call her by name.

Oh yeah, I almost overlooked the middle boy. But I

guess it's not the first time. He's not the anointed—daddy's little girl—or the precious little baby boy. Everyone is always looking out for Paulie, even him. Oops. I'm not talking about the middle son, am I? He's pretty determined he's going to make something in life about him. But I hope he doesn't.

And we close with sweet little Grandma. At the family table she probably never sits down—always serving, always moving, always making sure everyone else has what they want. One minute she's making sure the lasagna is served piping hot, and the next that Paulie gets his cobbler with just a little scoop of ice cream on a different plate because he doesn't like it when the cobbler and the ice cream touch each other. Dad wants coffee with milk. Isabella doesn't like the apple cobbler, so there is a small cherry one for her. No wonder Grandma never sits!

My first inclination is to just give her a hug and say thank you, thinking that she is living such a bigger story, not settling for a tiny one that is all about her. But just then it hits me that sin is deceptively strong and that pride has many faces.

I want to tell Grams that it's okay for her to sit and eat. I'm presuming Grandpa has already gone and I'm guessing she wonders a lot about where he is and if she'll ever see him again. Eternity is on her mind a lot, as it should be.



# **I WANT TO TELL HER THERE'S A BIG, HUGE, HOLY GOD ON THE OTHER SIDE WAITING FOR HER.**

And encourage her that even though she will be completely floored by His glory when she sees Him, she doesn't have to be afraid. I want to tell her about the love of God and the gift of His Son.

You think Grandma's too old for all this tiny story/huge story stuff to matter?

I don't. If I could, I'd remind her that Moses was a little older than she is now when he got a surprising invitation to look up, trade up...and step into an incredible role in the great Story of God.