

Chapter 07

The Life That Cannot Be Manufactured

There are some things that simply cannot be forced.

You cannot command a flower to bloom.

You cannot hurry the sunrise.

You cannot pull fruit from a branch before its season.

Life has never responded well to pressure... it unfolds.

We live in a world that rewards production.

Goals are measured.

Progress is charted.

Results are celebrated.

From childhood we quietly learn that effort earns approval.

It is a useful lesson in many parts of life.

It is a dangerous lesson when carried into the soul.

Somewhere along the way, many of us begin treating God as another achievement.

Read more.

Pray more.

] Serve more.

Know more.

Do more.

The invitations may be sincere.

Yet beneath them lives an exhausting question: *"Have I done enough?"*

I have sat beside too many dying people not to question that voice.

Near the end of life, no one asks whether they attended enough meetings.

No one wonders if they accumulated enough titles.

The questions become beautifully simple:

"Did I love?"

"Did I receive love?"

"Did I allow myself to be known?"

Perhaps those questions were the truest ones all along.

A vineyard teaches something that classrooms cannot.

The branch never struggles to convince the vine that it belongs.

It doesn't negotiate its place.

It doesn't earn the sap flowing through it.

It simply remains connected.

Everything else follows.

For years I misunderstood fruit.

I thought fruit was proof of effort.

Now I wonder if fruit is simply the evidence of shared life.

The apple tells us nothing about the branch's determination.

It tells us everything about the life flowing through it.

Perhaps we have spent too much of our lives trying to become better branches.

Jesus never seemed preoccupied with that.

He spoke instead of remaining in the vine.

He kept returning to relationship.

To communion.

To shared life.

I think that is why children understand grace more quickly than adults.

Children know how to receive.

Adults know how to calculate.

We measure.

Compare.

Earn.

Protect.

Children simply climb into a Father's lap...

Without wondering whether they deserve to be there.

Somewhere between childhood and adulthood, many of us exchanged trust for performance.

The older I become, the more I believe the spiritual life is not primarily about becoming impressive.

It is about becoming available.

Available to joy.

Available to compassion.

Available to interruption.

Available to wonder.

Available to Love.

...Availability may be one of the purest forms of faith.

There is a quiet freedom in discovering that the deepest work of God rarely feels like striving.

A tree does not awaken every morning anxious about producing shade.

A river does not rehearse how to flow.

Light does not struggle to shine.

Each simply participates in the life it has been given.

Perhaps the soul was never meant to be different.

The courage that astonished the religious leaders in Acts was not manufactured, it was received.

Peter and John had not attended a seminar on boldness.

They had lived in the company of Love...

Until fear no longer held the final word.

That kind of courage cannot be imitated, it can only be shared.

Perhaps this is the quiet mystery of the Christian life.

Not that we learn to live for Christ, but that, little by little...

...His life becomes visible through ours.

Not as *imitation*... As *participation*.

Not as *performance*... As *communion*.

Not because we have become *extraordinary*...

But because ordinary people have discovered an extraordinary Love that quietly refuses to let them go.

Sit With This...

Think of one area of your life where you have been trying very hard.

Now ask yourself a gentler question.

What if this is something to receive before it is something to achieve?

Don't answer too quickly.

Sometimes the soul needs permission to stop striving before it remembers how to rest.