

Introduction

THE GOD MOMENTS OF YOUR LIFE

It was one moment. But don't call it only a moment. Because that one moment transformed every other moment in James Cameron's life. It was transforming not just because of what it meant that day in 1930. It was life changing because one moment can live in a man's mind all the days of his life.

One moment that, through the awesome power of memory, he relives every day.

The emotions of the moment still beat with passion in his breast. He can still feel the sweat on his palms. He can still see the hate in their eyes. But mostly, he can still hear the sound of the Voice. It was life-changing because he knew it wasn't a lucky break, a fluke, or a figment of his imagination. He knew that on that day, and ever since, God was there. God made the moment.

The moment made the man.

James Cameron is a man whose life was made by a God Moment.

In Marion, Indiana, 1930, a furious mob of thousands held a beaten-but-innocent teenage boy in its trap. They held vengeance in their hearts. They held the law in their hands. They held the boy's neck in a noose. But, unknown to the crowd, God held the moment in His hands.

James Cameron was sixteen years old the night he rode around town with two friends. But Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith proved to be the wrong kind of friends. They convinced James to help them steal.

When the victim they planned to rob stepped from his car, James recognized him. James had shined the man's shoes regularly—a good customer. James forsook the wrongdoing and ran. Soon after, he heard gunshots. Later that night, James was arrested for the murder of his former customer and the rape of the victim's girlfriend.

While James was incarcerated with the two so-called friends, a furious mob assaulted the jailhouse. Unprotected by the sheriff, the innocent Cameron and his guilty friends were seized by the fuming crowd and beaten.

Then came the God Moment. Shipp and Smith were already gone—limp bodies hanging from the tree. Then the noose drew tight upon James Cameron's neck.

Imagine the terror of the moment. All is tense—the rope, the boy's muscles, the crowd's fists. Imagine the chaos of the moment. Everything is wild—the boy's heartbeat, the nooseman's eyes, the mob's imagination. Imagine the clamor of the moment. Everything is blaring—the curses, the cheers, the screaming.

What happened next in that Indiana town, only James Cameron knows for sure in his heart. And he does know it for sure. A sweet, undefiled, and distinct voice, unlike any he had ever heard, clearly called out: "TAKE THIS BOY BACK. HE HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH ANY RAPING OR KILLING."

More suddenly than it had begun, the chaos turned to calm. The tumultuous crowd tamed. The shouts quieted to silence. Mysteriously, the white crowd slowly parted, making room for the bewildered, beaten black boy to hobble back to the jail. Instead of hanging to death from the tree that day, Cameron was eventually given a fair trial and convicted of being an accessory before the fact to voluntary manslaughter. He served four years in prison.

Some people say James Cameron imagined the voice. But Cameron knows that imaginary voices do not remove nooses from teenage necks. Some people say it was a human voice in the crowd. But Cameron knows that one mortal voice cannot quell the clamor of thousands. Some people say it was a lucky break. But Cameron knows that for black teenage boys accused of murdering a white man in 1930 there is no such thing as luck.

Today, the eighty-six-year-old Cameron says simply, "It was a voice from heaven. It was a miracle." If you ask him why it happened, he'll tell you confidently: "God saved me for [what] I'm doing today." Over the years, he has written books, spoken to crowds, and founded a museum. When asked if he had a choice between living a life in which the near-lynching happened and one in which it didn't, Cameron didn't hesitate: "I would rather have had it."¹

Everyone would agree that James Cameron experienced a remarkable

moment on that 1930 afternoon. No one could dispute the moment's importance. While his friends' bodies hung, Cameron's future hung. It was a life-and-death moment. But plenty of people have life-and-death moments. Narrow escapes. Near accidents. Close calls. James Cameron's experience was more than just an important moment in his life. It sculpted the shape of his destiny. It fueled the fire in his belly. It fed the gratitude of his soul.

Most people think that moments are just flashes in the pan—brief, fleeting events that are experienced and then evaporate. But moments are meant for more than that. Like the word's root, *movere*, "to move," pivotal moments are meant to move us. The Latin derivative, "momentum," is used in English as a physics term describing the product of a body's mass and velocity. Sports fans understand momentum to be the unseen force that turns the tide of a ball game. Likewise, moments are seemingly small movements which turn the scales of life. They can create history. They can shape the present and the future. But the moments must be apprehended for what they really are. They must be harnessed for what they really mean.

If James had assumed it to be a human voice in the crowd, he might have spent his life seeking a face to go with the voice. He would have been a grateful man with no one to thank. But he would not have developed a sense of destiny or purpose. If James had thought it was a fortunate fluke, he might have thanked his lucky stars. He might have spent his life hoping that some other lucky breaks would come along. But he would not have lived with a holy hope in his heart.

What changed James Cameron's life was knowing that not only was it an extraordinary moment, but also a supernatural moment. He knew God had spoken. In the middle of the most harrowing moment of his life, the boy heard God. So, for James, the event was not so much about the hatred of the crowd or the injustice of the times. It was about the love and purposes of God. Eternity invading time. Love diving into the midst of hate. Mystery interrupting mayhem.

Everyone has pivotal experiences of God's loving activity in their lives. I call them God Moments. You've had such moments. You may not have

recognized God in the moments, but He's been there. Think about it.

Have you ever had a narrow escape from a tough situation by some strange protection? It probably was God who rescued you.

Have you ever steered away from trouble and toward something more noble because something inside you quietly craved purity? Only God makes people want to be clean.

Have you ever received a blessing that you know you didn't earn? God is the giver of all good gifts.

Have you ever made a good decision that took you in a surprisingly good direction just because you "felt led"? That was probably God speaking to you.

Have you ever gone through a hard time only to discover later that it prepared you for something greater in your life? God is good at bringing value out of adversity.

Imagine the blessing, power, and faith that would be released in your life if you could see God in the important moments of your past. I want



GOD MOMENTS MEMO

FIVE KINDS OF GOD MOMENTS

1. **Amazing Rescue**—a moment when God guarded you, healed you, rescued you, or made a way out for you
2. **Holy Attraction**—a moment when God led you toward a healthier path, enabled you to resist a temptation, or inspired you to take the high road
3. **Unearned Blessing**—a moment when God gave you an unexpected blessing or an undeserved gift
4. **Revealed Truth**—a moment when God spoke to you through the Bible, inner peace, wise counsel, or a God-inspired message
5. **Valuable Adversity**—a moment in which God sustained you in a difficult time or made you stronger through the test of adversity

to help you discover your God Moments and help you weave them into the fabric of your daily life.

James Cameron not only recognized that it was God who acted in the moment, he also decided that he would never forget it. He's eighty-six years old, and he's appearing this week at a local university to speak about his experience. He'll be signing copies of his book that tells the story. He's never stopped thinking about the moment God spoke. He rehearses it in his mind over and over, and he's never stopped telling others.

I'm convinced that God has been involved in your life just as powerfully as he has been in James Cameron's. Your life is full of God Moments! The difference between James Cameron and most people is not that he had a special moment of divine intervention; the difference is what he did with the moment. The question is not whether you have had God Moments; the question is, have you harnessed their life-changing power?

Recently, I was overwhelmed by a passage of Scripture that I had previously read dozens of times. You've probably read it many times too. But suddenly, the text exploded with power. A neglected but infinitely powerful biblical principle leaped from the page and into my heart.

The excerpt follows the story of the Exodus in which God brought His people out of their slavery in Egypt. After God "passed over" the homes of the Hebrews who had sprinkled blood on their doorposts, He gave a command through His servant Moses. I had always focused my study and preaching on the drama of the deliverance of the captive Israelites and the suspense of the evil Pharaoh's pursuit. But suddenly I realized that, in the midst of this sweeping story, there's a gigantic secret for abundant life: "Commemorate this day, the day you came out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery, because the Lord brought you out of it with a mighty hand." Moses continues with the Lord's command: "For seven days eat bread made without yeast and on the seventh day hold a festival to the Lord" (Exodus 13:3, 6). The leader of Israel then gives God's clear reasoning:

This observance will be for you like a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead.... For the Lord brought you out of

● Egypt with his mighty hand. You must keep this ordinance at the appointed time year after year. (Exodus 13:9–10)

● “*Commemorate.*” It means making a planned effort to remember. Rehearse it. Take practical steps to make sure you don’t forget it. “A reminder...” The whole reason for the festival (and all the appointed feasts of Israel) was to help God’s people remember. The simple command to remember pervades the pages of the Old Testament:

● “Do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart” (Deuteronomy 4:9, emphasis added).

● “Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm” (Deuteronomy 5:15, emphasis added).

● “Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you” (Deuteronomy 8:2, emphasis added).

● “Remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth” (Deuteronomy 8:18, emphasis added).

● “I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will meditate on all your works” (Psalm 77:11–12, emphasis added).

● “Forget not all his benefits” (Psalm 103:2, emphasis added).

● “Don’t be afraid of them. Remember the Lord” (Nehemiah 4:14, emphasis added).

● “Remember the LORD in a distant land” (Jeremiah 51:50, emphasis added).

(See also Exodus 20:8; Deuteronomy 9:7; 15:15; 16:12; 32:7; Psalm 42:6; 105:5; 143:5; Isaiah 46:8–9; Zechariah 10:9.)

The powerful principle of remembering God Moments continues in the New Testament:

● “Don’t you remember the five loaves for the five thousand?” (Matthew 16:9, emphasis added).

● “I will always remind you of these things.... I think it is right to refresh your memory” (2 Peter 1:12, emphasis added).

● “You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen!” (Revelation 2:4–5, emphasis added).

Remember. Remember. Remember. Arguably, it is the most basic command of Scripture. Almost every book of the Bible alludes to the importance and power of memory. The Hebrew word for “male,” *zacha*, comes from the word for memory, *zachor*. To be a real man, in God’s eyes, is to remember well.

No one wants God’s people to remember His miracles more than God Himself. The Lord didn’t want it to be difficult for us to remember all He has done—He wanted to make it as simple as possible. So God gave His people a specific tool for harnessing the power of their moments with the Lord. God appointed seven festivals throughout the year that all Israel was required to celebrate. Each festival was designed to foster the memory of specific God Moments. If rightly celebrated by the Hebrews, the detailed festivals would virtually insure that God’s people would remember His hand in their lives—for all of their lives.

Christians, of course, are not restricted by the specific Mosaic laws. Paul clearly explains to the Colossian Christians: “Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.” (Colossians 2:16–17). The duties of the feasts are not incumbent upon the Christian, but the dynamics of them are. Christians are not bound by the proscription of the festivals, but we are empowered by their principles. With all the Old Testament underpinning, it is not surprising that Jesus’ culminating moment with the disciples hinges on the memory command: “Do this in remembrance of me.”

The modern evangelical church has been edified by excellent teaching about such principles as the power of praise, the gift of the blessing, and experiencing God. But we have neglected perhaps the greatest biblical principle for faith: remembering God Moments. Remembering yesterday’s God Moments builds your faith for tomorrow’s tests.

The way you remember yesterday determines how you will live tomorrow.

Even mature, well-meaning Christians have an incredible ability to forget extraordinarily beautiful moments of God. The memory dulls. The moment loses its luster. And soon, its life-changing power is gone.

But for the one who doesn't forget, there unfolds a glorious destiny. Consider more than James Cameron's story. Consider the faith heroes of God's Word...

- Noah...who hauled cypress wood, hammered planks, and gathered animals when there wasn't a cloud in the sky just because he remembered the day God spoke to him;
- Abraham...who raised a knife above the taut neck of his son on the altar, knowing God would provide the sacrificial ram because he remembered the day his elderly wife gave birth to the boy God had promised;
- Joseph...who graciously forgave the brothers who betrayed him because he remembered it was God who had given him the dream and appointed him ruler of Egypt;
- Joshua...who marched around the Jericho walls on Day Seven believing stone fortresses can be penetrated without a ladder or battering ram because he remembered how they crossed the Jordan waters without a bridge or a boat;
- David...who ran toward the giant rather than away from him because he remembered how God had strengthened him before, saying, "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine" (1 Samuel 17:37);
- Paul...who never forgot the blinding light or the striking voice that spoke to him outside Damascus but repeated it everywhere—even to King Agrippa—saying: "I was not disobedient to the vision" (Acts 26:19);
- Jesus...who was tempted in the desert but remembered the Word of God
 - ...who bled in the garden, but remembered the reason for His coming
 - ...who hung on the cross, but remembered the glory of Paradise
 - ...who broke bread and commanded, "Do this in remembrance of me."

James Cameron had a moment that changed him forever. You probably have had similar moments that you discounted as coincidence, luck, or fluke. You may have celebrated some God Moments briefly and then lost them in the fog of daily stress. I want to help you find those priceless moments so you can celebrate them again. I'll help you start your treasure hunt by pointing you toward the five major kinds of God Moments. I'll offer some practical help so you can then harness the power of the God Moments you uncover. I'll show you how to mark your moments with God, like the Israelites did with stone pillars, to help you never forget your encounters with the Almighty. But, mostly, I want these pages to fill your heart with fresh joy and faith.

If you don't believe God has been in your life, please join me on this journey. You are in for more than an eye-opener. You're in for a life-changer. If you've always believed that God is working in you, walk with me. You are in for more than a memory-refresher. You're in for a faith-builder. If you're in a current struggle, stay close. There's real hope ahead. The God Moment Principle has immeasurable potential for your life. I won't promise you a magical end to all your problems. I dare not promise you perfect peace, health, or wealth. But I am confident of this: Other than the Word of God itself and the power of the Holy Spirit, the God Moment Principle is the single most powerful tool for faith in the universe.



"It is a delightful and profitable occupation to mark the hand of God in the lives of ancient saints, and to observe His goodness in delivering them, His mercy in pardoning them, and His faithfulness in keeping His covenant with them. But would it not be even more interesting and profitable for us to remark the hand of God in our own lives? Ought we not to look upon our own history as being at least as full of God, as full of His goodness and of His truth, as much a proof of His faithfulness and veracity, as the lives of any of the saints who have gone before? ...Let us review our own lives. Surely in these we may discover some happy incidents, refreshing to ourselves and glorifying to our God." —CHARLES H. SPURGEON