



Robert Glenn Johnson



Kingdom
Moments &
Movements

a daring how-to guide
for launching sparks of heaven

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KINGDOM MOMENTS AND MOVEMENTS

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Moments and Movements

“Wait. Isn’t it widely accepted wisdom that change takes time, especially real and lasting change?” This is, certainly and consistently, what our culture tells us. We are constantly told that change, growth, and fulfillment require a process, and that we should “trust that process” and move, slowly and persistently, toward the new life we envision, patiently enduring the tedious tasks involved with achieving our desired change and growth.

I affirm and trust the processes of getting to our desired changes, growth, and fulfillment. For example, when my daughters were children, I was intentional never to get caught up in the early assessments we do to determine how smart children are. I tried to not care about that. I tried to focus, rather, on helping them develop a strong work ethic, and I took my chosen focus to the point of believing that not only did effort matter more than natural ability, but that the effort put forth in working through a process was critical to developing good character in people.

Furthermore, while I celebrate sudden, dramatic miracles of healing, I have taught in my almost three decades of ordained ministry that since most of our broken conditions develop through a long process and over a long period, that the same will be true in the healing of them. Process and time are required. Furthermore, I have taught and believed that the process of healing teaches us certain les-

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sons that are critical for us to learn so that we don't keep landing back in the same situations. I still believe this.

So, which is true? Should we focus on “big” moments that quickly usher us into new realities, or should we just anchor ourselves in long processes and work faithfully toward our desired changes?

While these two ideas seem contradictory, they are actually complementary and represent different sides of the truth about what it takes to achieve real change, growth, and fulfillment. The difference between these two ideas is the difference between **a moment** and **a movement**. In this book, we will make and keep a careful distinction between these two ideas.

Substantive, significant, and lasting change (growth, fulfillment) often begins with a monumental *moment* and is lived out in a meaningful *movement*. Moments are the gateways into the movements through which we work our way toward fulfillment and completion of our visions and goals. Moments can feel magical while movements can feel mundane, especially if a movement wasn't launched by a powerful, inspirational moment. On the other hand, we can waste powerful moments if we don't turn them into movements of meaningful, faithful action. Monumental moments are given to motivate us into movements of measured and methodical motion. This is why both moments and movements are needed.

The reason so many of our attempts at real change fail is because we either are trying to do a movement without the magic of a moment or we are living as if we expect monumental moments to do all the work of transformation for us.

We can think of many examples of people who were stuck in undesirable situations and couldn't seem to move forward for one of the above reasons.

It is difficult to sustain a “movement” to lose weight or become a physically healthier person without being first stirred by a moment that some would call the “aha,” “turning point,” or “light bulb”

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moment. The same is true of trying to grow a marriage, deepen a relationship with children (especially adult children), pay off financial debt, sustain a savings plan, persevere in a new financial investment plan, break an addiction, develop a new habit, grow a church, rebuild a friendship, or return to school for more education. It's not wise to say that it's impossible to live out such new commitments without a monumental moment, but it is certainly very difficult.

On the other hand, we will seldom sustain the impact of big moments if we don't follow through on those moments with movement and action. We all know people who are "big moment junkies." They live their lives holding on to, searching for, and trying to create or re-create the thrill of "magical" moments, but they never move on to the kind of meaningful action that's required to turn moments into lasting change.

We will find it extremely frustrating to try to build relationships with "big moment junkies."

Haven't we heard too many stories of people who went back to being completely broke financially after having won millions of dollars in a lottery drawing? They didn't combine their monumental moment with meaningful movement.

Every pastor knows of people in his or her church who love the "high" of coming to the altar, but they never turn the power of altar moments into the practice of holiness.

Some people who call themselves advocates for justice end up being merely chasers of spotlights, a peculiar version of a big moment junkie. An injustice happens in the community. The media shows up, and the spotlight chasers, the big moment junkies, find their way to the center of the news camera. Yet, when the media leave and the social hoopla dies down, the spotlight chasers fade into silence.

In the age of social media, people can generate big-moment emotional highs when they get likes for pictures, videos, and other

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content they post on their social media outlets. It is important to remind them that a picture or a post is not a life. Social media stardom is no substitute for a real, meaningful, and substantive life.

Even churches can rely too much on big moments. Some churches become event-driven churches, going from high to high in the pageantry of their programs. Some churches are hooked on their exhilarating Sunday-morning worship service. Some churches are obsessed with revival church conferences.

The people who attend these churches aren't the first Jesus-followers to get lost in a big moment. On one occasion during his earthly life, Jesus went up on a mountain and was transfigured as he interacted with Moses and Elijah. Peter, James, and John were there with him, and it, no doubt, had to be an exhilarating experience for them. Peter was so awestruck that, based on the words he spoke, we could get the impression that he wanted to stay there for a while. Jesus, however, wasn't about to stay in that moment of glory. He wanted to transfer the glory of that moment into meaningful movement among the masses of people at the base of the mountain and beyond. What a powerful story with astounding implications for how we are to handle big moments (see Matthew 17:1-16).

To be clear, there's nothing inherently wrong with the passion of these churches that dwell on their preferred form of big moments. The big moments of programs, exhilarating worship services, and inspiring, uplifting revivals and conferences host unlimited possibilities for transformation, but these moments will be wasted unless such churches translate them into mission and vital ministry.

Moments and movements are like the wood types pine and oak. When I was a kid, we had a fireplace in our home, and one of my daily chores during the winter months in Mississippi was to cut, stack, and bring in firewood. My dad used only two types of wood: pine and oak. We used pine to start the fire, and then we added the oak. It was nearly impossible to have a fire at all without starting

with the pine, and it was impossible to keep a newly lighted fire going without adding the oak. In the task of “fireplace management,” I came to learn that if we started a fire with the pine and then added the oak, a fire that was started around 6:00 p.m. would last until deep into the night.

Monumental moments are the pine that ignite a fire, and a sustained movement is like the oak that keeps the fire going. If we allow God to ignite a good fire in our lives, and we feed it with faithful action, we can build powerful, “fired” movements that will keep on producing deep change, growth, and fulfillment, even in our “nights” (our darkest days).

A Moment in Need of a Movement, or a Movement in Need of a Moment?

A great example of how moments and movements require each other is the event considered to be the beginning of the civil rights movement: the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which resulted in the Supreme Court ruling that segregation on public buses is unconstitutional.

Under the rules of segregation on public transportation, Black people were required to sit at the back of buses, and even if they had taken a seat at the back, if a white person boarded the bus and all the seats toward the front half of the bus were filled, Black people were to give up their seats for the white person.

On that momentous day of December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks was asked to give up her seat on a bus. She refused, was arrested, and Black people in Montgomery, Alabama, launched a boycott of the Montgomery public buses that lasted for a year and removed segregation from public buses.

Some people tell the story of the boycott with an emphasis on the moment when Rosa refused to give up her seat on a bus. Sometimes the story is told as the tale of a tired little lady who was just trying to get home after a long day of work, too weary that day to

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cooperate with the demands of racial segregation on public transportation. Sometimes, the storyteller will say that Mrs. Parks was tired but that her fatigue gave her the courage to refuse to give up her seat. These storytellers, regardless of how they relay the story, view that moment as the spark that ignited the boycott.

Others, however, tell the story in a way that emphasizes the years-long planning and preparing that had happened long before the moment when Parks refused to give up her seat. They even point out that she had herself been deeply engaged in trainings for non-violent protest. They indicate that she was chosen by the leaders of a movement that was already in motion as the right person through whom to go public.

Both versions of the story hold part of the truth. The Montgomery Bus Boycott was a movement in need of a monumental moment, and once the monumental moment happened, it needed a movement to give it long-lasting impact. Both needs were met, and the Montgomery Bus Boycott is widely viewed as one of the most successful protest movements in American history. As a result of the success of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Martin Luther King Jr. became one of the most influential civil right leaders in the world, but he never had as much success in future efforts as he had in Montgomery. In Albany, Georgia; Birmingham, Alabama; Selma, Alabama; Chicago, Illinois; and Memphis, Tennessee, he had limited or some measure of impact, but nothing came close to the nearly complete victory he had in Montgomery. Why? In all these other places, either the monumental moment or the methodical movement was missing. In some cases, like Chicago, Illinois, both were missing.

The closest he came again to the Montgomery level of successful protest was in Birmingham, where a protest movement had been organized and launched but was in need of a monumental moment. That “magic moment” came while King and most of the adult protesters were in jail, and because King was unable to travel and raise

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money for the protest, the movement was losing momentum. James Bevel, an associate of King's with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, suggested that they involve children. When the children readily agreed, they marched, and it turned the momentum back in favor of the movement. When Bull Connor, the Birmingham commissioner of public safety, responded to the marching children with water hoses, billy clubs, and police dogs, the national media blasted the images onto televisions across the world. The tide of public opinion turned in favor the movement and in favor of giving Black Americans their full rights as citizens.

"Miracles come after a lot of hard work," writes Sue Bender.¹ However, hard work, if it is to be sustained, needs a good miracle moment, or a few, to start the work and keep it going.

Conclusion

Turning monumental moments into momentum for transformative movements is the mechanism that drives human progress. This book takes this truth seriously and will attempt to give practical guidelines for maximizing monumental moments, turning them into movements, and then sustaining those movements for lasting impact.

Before we get to the practical guidelines, let's take a look at a few stories from the Bible that show the teamwork of monumental moments and maintained movement.