

PREVIEW

**L I V E
L O V E
L E A D**
BRIAN HOUSTON

Chapter 1
LIVE LIFE IN THE FAITH LANE

You call me out upon the waters

The great unknown, where feet may fail.

Oceans Hillsong Music 2013

Chapter 1

LIVE LIFE IN THE FAITH LANE

When following Jesus, be careful what you dream. Because you can rest assured that God will exceed the limits of your imagination if you're committed to advancing his kingdom. Living, loving, and leading like Christ will expand your life, stretch your heart, and deepen your faith. I know firsthand.

If you had met me at age twenty, you would not have nominated me in the “most likely to lead a global ministry” category. Although I was blessed with a loving family—my mum and dad and four siblings—and had grown up active in the church, I felt very awkward as a teenager. I was tall and uncoordinated; I was not a great student and was easily distracted. As I began to follow in my father's footsteps as a pastor and leader, I had to face the fear that so many people have of public speaking. The pressure of being a prominent preacher's son (which no one put on me but myself) caused me to be nervous and insecure, and I blinked incessantly whenever I had to speak in front of people. I didn't stutter, but my eyes did!

But I persevered, learning to relax and to rely on God, because I believed that leading was what God had called me to do. Deep down, I knew I was alive for a purpose bigger than I was, something more important than I could even understand or imagine as a young boy. I was determined that my frequent blinking and self-imposed anxiety would not prevent me from doing what I knew God wanted me to do. At an early age I awakened to the knowledge that God wanted me to serve him in ways that would make a positive difference in people's lives. So gradually, as my faith grew I began to experience his unfolding revelation of what he put me on this earth to do—lead, serve, and equip the local church.

Fortunately, I was blessed to be given a partner in living, loving, and leading—my amazing wife, Bobbie. Who knew that during a summer church convention, the beautiful young woman walking toward me on the beach, in a white swimsuit and carrying an ice cream, would care as much about ministry as I did? At the time, I just knew she was gorgeous! And, of course, she did bring me an ice cream. Several decades, three children, and a growing number of grandchildren later, our marriage continues to thrive, because we not only love each other but we love God first. Even when we first decided to get married all those years ago, Bobbie and I shared a dream to build the church, and be a part of a dynamic community of God's people growing, loving, and serving their family, friends, and everyone around them.

In fact, our dream of what a church could be arrived with quite a bang. During our engagement period, our constant conversation was about the future and our excitement to serve God together. At the time I was living in a house with a bunch of other single guys from our church. Bobbie and I had just finished getting a bite to eat when we began dreaming of the future.

Our excited discussion continued as I drove home and parked at the top of our neighbor Mrs. Wilson's very steep driveway. Bobbie and I often spoke about the price that we were willing to pay to serve God together—I remember vividly telling her that we may never own our own home or have financial security if we were to follow the call of God in our lives, and yet her constant enthusiasm made me love her even more. Caught up in the excitement of all that was ahead of us (including our wedding), we didn't even notice as the earth began to move beneath us. I was so invested in our conversation (and let's be honest here, a good-night kiss) that I had failed to engage the hand brake! I'm not sure Mrs. Wilson believed us when we tried to explain why we had crashed into her garage door at 2:00 a.m.!

DREAM CRASHERS

The catalyst for that unfortunate crash continues to echo around the world in astonishing ways neither Bobbie nor I could've ever imagined that night in Mrs. Wilson's driveway. Today I'm about to hop on a plane to speak for the first time in our recently planted church in Copenhagen, Denmark. I'm smiling ear to ear as I recount the story I've just been told of an unchurched film executive in Los Angeles who was so greatly impacted at a recent event of Hillsong UNITED (an international worship band that emanated from Hillsong Church) at the iconic Hollywood Bowl that he began making plans so that "others can experience this"—the truth and emotion that worship had evoked in him. His is just one of so many stories.

The enormity of what is in front of us during each season of life could be daunting, and yet it is important not to lose perspective—we dreamed of these days! Days where influential people would sit up and take notice of the Living God and the impact of his Church on the globe.

My response to the way God continues to pour his favor on Hillsong Church and has used us to advance his global kingdom mixes sheer joy with utter disbelief. Simply put, I'm astounded! Seeing Hillsong reach millions of lives around the world is more than two young kids in an old Nissan could have dreamed—it's witnessing God's power in action. It's seeing the small kingdom seeds we've been entrusted to plant over the past thirty years come to fruition. Living our lives sold out to God's kingdom cause has been the greatest adventure, and we continue to be excited about what he is going to do next!

In Australia we talk about cutting down the "tall poppy"—obviously referring to a flower that stands taller than all the others. It is an expression reserved for people who are doing more than most, or achieving unprecedented success. Often politicians, artists, entertainers, and businesspeople are scrutinized, and while this critical tendency can be used unfairly to take someone down a notch, it also reminds us not to think too highly of ourselves or assume all the credit. So let me be the first to cut down my own poppy, because I would never presume to take credit for any of the unbelievable and astounding endeavors that God continues to do through Hillsong. We're simply willing to serve, and we're blessed to be used along with so many others around the world who are building the Church and

taking the Good News of the gospel forward.

If I ever need to lower my own poppy a bit, I only have to remember how we started. You would understand if you could see the tiny apartment where Bobbie and I lived when we first moved to Sydney to serve in the church my parents had started there. If you could see me washing shopwindows for two dollars each (five for the really big ones) to make ends meet, if you could see Bobbie getting up early to help set up chairs for our service or painting clouds on the wall in the drab children's ministry area, then you would begin to grasp what God has done. If you could see me sitting on the piano stool with our green but gifted worship pastor, encouraging him to write church songs and lead people in worship. If you could see the little school hall where we first held services before we moved to a vacant warehouse surrounded by fields on the northwest outskirts of Sydney, then you would marvel just as we do.

FAITH OUTSIDE THE LINES

Life today is so different than it was when and where we started. In 1993, Hillsong Church was just ten years old. I sat down with a blank piece of paper in our office in Castle Hill. Looking out the window to forlorn shops across the road, I penned these words at the top of my journal: "The Church That I See." It was a bold declaration of the future, a fleece before God and the cry of my heart—a vision of the church I desperately longed to pastor. The statement spoke of international ministries, of influential music, and both convention centers and altars alike filled with people. I dreamed of television ministries not yet birthed and a college that seemed impossibly possible. It was a faith goal, and when I shared it with our church one Sunday morning I knew I had just stepped out of the boat.

Years later, we are living in the days dreamed about. The faith we had then wasn't even big enough for the depth of expansion and plans God had for our future. And what God has shown me again and again is that regardless of the level of success or expansive vision that we have, it all comes back to people. His heart is all about people. So as a result, I honestly see this as being about so much more than just numbers. Whether it involves membership, church budgets, weekend attendance, or music sales, I endeavor to look beyond numbers and see transformed lives. Too many people try to reduce faith and miracles into quantities, and I don't like trying to evaluate what God is doing by numbers alone. Faith can't be measured in square feet, dollars, and attendance figures. In fact, we remind ourselves regularly that Hillsong Church isn't about the crowd—it's actually all about the one. Like the one cab driver in Guatemala who, with tears in his eyes, told us about the impact of Hillsong music on his broken family. Or the woman in Uganda who discovered we were from Australia and said, "There are only two things I know about Australia: kangaroos and Hillsong." Or the people we meet in the strangest places—from the remote beaches of Africa to the bathroom queues of the world's largest airports—who express their gratitude for the ministry of Hillsong and the impact that God has had on their lives through an encounter with one person, one song, or one message.

It is my belief that most of the evidence of what God is doing goes largely unnoticed and unrecorded. The family reunited after a parent discovers the love of Jesus and completes parole. The divorced person feeling accepted and loved just as she is. The secret addict finding the courage to share his struggle within a community of encouraging believers. The hungry child fed. The lonely widow comforted. The orphan parented. The estranged reconciled. The lost found. Seeing the way God raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy, seats them on the level of princes, heals the broken, and calls the sinners righteous leaves me with no doubt that following Jesus is the only way to live.

Living in the faith lane isn't a paint-by-numbers picture. It colors outside the lines and sees with different eyes than the world does—eternal eyes with eternal perspective. Your Heavenly Father didn't create you to live a life of mediocrity.

He created you to live life in the faith lane.

WALKING ON WATER

Living in the faith lane is not necessarily life in the fast lane. Instead of driving, maybe living in the faith lane is more like swimming. I've spent a great deal of my life near the water on the great beaches of Australia, swimming or simply enjoying a coffee at a beachside café. This sunburned country is the biggest island in the world, which means we have more coastline than anywhere else. My native New Zealand is composed of islands as well, and as a boy, there was nothing I loved more than being at the beach, floating in the cool water, finding relief from the summer heat.

But living in the faith lane is much more than just floating along, letting life's current carry you wherever it wants. Living in the faith lane is about taking control of your future while still depending on Jesus for every step you take—even when that means walking on water. That certainly seems to be the example beautifully depicted in the Hillsong UNITED song, "Oceans," that we see from Peter's encounter with Christ one stormy night:

Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified.

"It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

"Come," he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." (Matthew 14:25–33 NIV)

A scrappy fisherman by trade, Peter can't believe his eyes when he and his fellow disciples

look up and see someone treading the choppy waters toward them. It has to be a ghost—no other explanation. As if the brewing storm isn't enough. They are really terrified now.

Then they hear his voice.

"Take heart! Everything is okay! It's only me!" Their Master's voice echoes like thunder. "Could it be...?" the disciples ask themselves.

But Peter wants proof. "If it's really you, Lord," he shouts into the howling wind, "then tell me to come to you on the water!"

"Come!" Christ yells back without a moment's hesitation.

And then it happens. Peter gets out of the boat and takes a step. Locking eyes with his Master, the fisherman tries not to think about what he's actually doing and just lets his legs do something they've done countless times. One step, then another, and another.

He's walking on water.

But then Peter notices the wind picking up again and he panics. Maybe he starts thinking, "I'm walking on water! Wait a minute—that's impossible! Can't be done!" And then he begins to sink like a rock.

Row Your Boat

I know that sinking feeling.

One summer when I was nine or ten, my family was on holiday at a lakeside cottage next to one of the South Island's famous "bottomless" lakes. While our parents talked and relaxed with friends, my older brother and I noticed a small rowboat at the cottage next to ours and couldn't resist "borrowing" it. Now this lake was deep, and I've since learned it was notorious for sudden weather changes and currents. We had just gotten to the other side when things began to look ominous and only halfway back when the storm clouds came rolling in.

As the wind continued to pick up and the current got stronger, we began rowing harder—though home never seemed to get any closer. Our arms began to grow tired just as the unthinkable happened: I lost my oar.

"What do we do now?" I yelled out to my brother.

"Go get it!" he shouted back above the sharp whistle of the wind.

He was two years older than me, and my options were few—so I jumped into the water.

Big mistake.

Reaching the oar was relatively simple. But with the current pushing me away from the boat and an oar in one hand, my arms were tired from rowing, and the stinging rain burned cold on my face. I began to gasp for breath.

Then I saw my brother swimming toward me. He was as crazy as I was! At least he was willing to come after me, feeling responsible—or guilty—for telling me to go into the water. As he swam closer and closer, I wondered how he was going to be able to save us both. Wouldn't the current now pull us both under?

But big brother had a trick up his sleeve—literally. He had tied a rope from the boat to his arm. So he grabbed me and we began pulling the rope in, dragging the boat closer and closer until we could

pull ourselves back into it.

By the time we made it back to shore to face our parents' punishment, the storm had cleared, and I had a newfound respect for what Peter and the other disciples must've faced out on the water that night.

I couldn't imagine trying to walk on the ever-changing surface of it. Impossible enough if the lake's surface was calm. But in a storm? Beyond impossible.

Unless you have faith. The kind that Peter had for those moments as he simply obeyed the Lord's command. The kind that he had before he started thinking about why he could not do what he was doing. The kind you have when you're living in the faith lane.

What is it that's ahead of you right now that feels impossible? What is the "middle of the storm, walk on water" task in front of you that feels immediately daunting and impossibly fearful? At some point, we all need faith to step out of the boat.

STEP INTO THE GREAT UNKNOWN

So often we fail because we get stuck in our heads, tangled in our thoughts, mired in speculation and probability, grasping to make life work any way we can. We want to walk on water. But we insist on trying to do it under our own power. If we put our trust in something else—technology to control the weather, money for a bigger boat, or a life vest "just in case"—then maybe we can figure it out. But we can't! The moment we think we can is when we take our eyes off Jesus—and that's when we begin to sink!

Life is a journey, a winding path filled with many unknowns. It's only possible to navigate because of God's power and grace.

Maybe you will relate to this story: It was in late 2012 and Taya Smith, one of our talented young worship leaders and a member of Hillsong UNITED, was simply just another face in the crowd. Her singing ability went largely unnoticed in our church arena, yet she faithfully served behind the scenes in our youth ministry.

Taya was working in retail and was forced because of holiday hours to take some time off, during which she had planned to visit with her family in rural New South Wales. But she had waited too long to buy a plane ticket, and now the flights were too expensive. So she was stuck in Sydney with one week's holiday—the same week that our church was recording the album *Glorious Ruins*. She went into church that Sunday night and was told to "be ready to hop up" at the end of the recording if there was time and join the rest of our youth band Young and Free. That night she sang her heart out, and my son, Joel Houston, took notice of it.

That following Tuesday morning, Taya woke up with a message on her phone from Mike Chislett, Hillsong UNITED's producer, asking if she would come down to the studio to do some backing vocals for the new UNITED project. Taya doesn't have her driver's license, so for two days in a row she caught multiple buses and trains from her home in the south of Sydney, and then she rode her skateboard from the train station to the UNITED studio in North Rocks—about one and a half

hours each way. It was during those two days that Joel gave her a new song to learn, and Taya recorded “Oceans.”

The story goes that once she finished the first take, she turned to the boys and nervously said, “I can do better.” Taken aback, they replied, “That was pretty good, though.” (If you have ever heard Taya sing, you can imagine how much heart and passion she puts into absolutely everything she does). I love how Taya recounts riding the bus home that night and recalling the prayer that she had prayed only two weeks before: asking God to either open or shut the door on an opportunity to sing professionally—and feeling the Lord’s prompting to lay that dream aside to step into the great unknown. The rest is history.

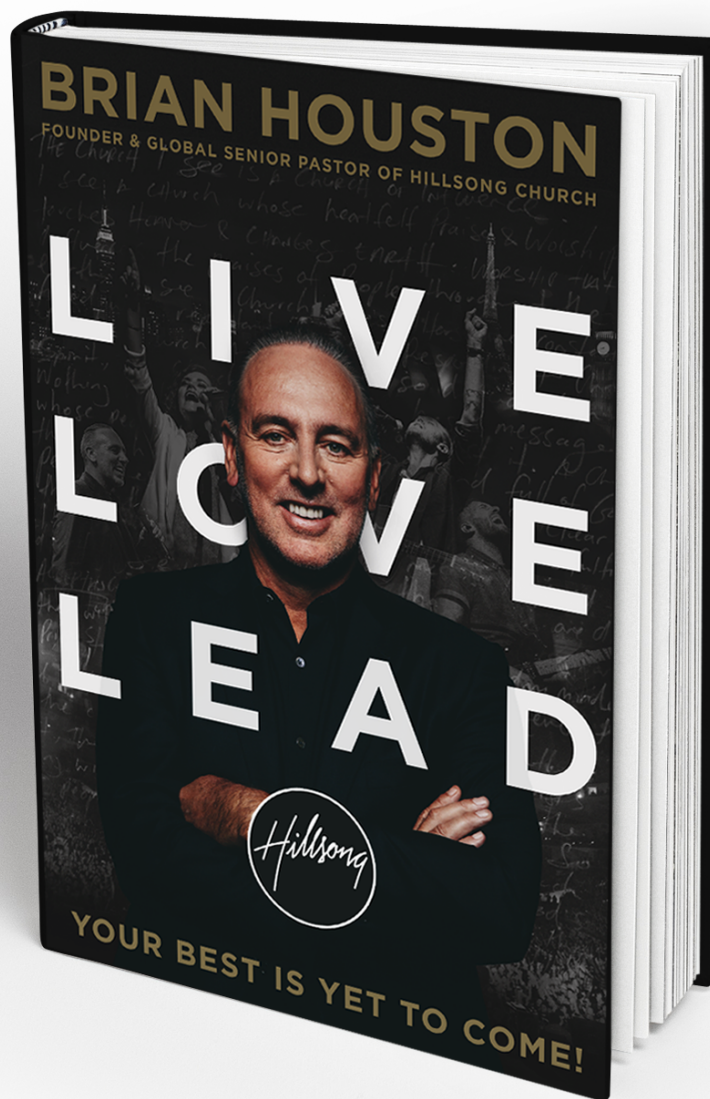
Taya’s story is like so many. A young girl stepped out, God got in the way of her plans, she chose service over convenience, and her life today is a testimony to her faith and the faithfulness of God when we trust him with the unknown details of our lives.

If you want to live, love, and lead like Jesus, then there’s no other place to live but in the faith lane. To discover his plan for your life, you will need to step into the great unknown, risking everything you have. If you get out of the boat and follow the sound of his voice, you will take steps you never thought possible.

You will begin a mystery tour, an excursion to his unspecified destinations. You will come alive with the possibility of relying on God to do what seems impossible. You will find yourself challenged, stretched, tried and tested. You may even walk on water.

This is life in the faith lane!

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LEAD



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