

Larry Walters was a 33 year-old truck driver living in California. On a warm July morning in 1982 he visited his local army surplus store and bought 42 huge weather balloons.

With the help of friends, he filled those balloons with helium and attached them to a lawn chair. He grabbed a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, a six pack of beer, and a pellet gun, to pop the balloons when he was ready to land. Then he took his seat and cut the ropes holding him to earth.

Larry thought the balloons would lift him 30 metres off the ground. Instead, they catapulted him nearly 5 km into the atmosphere, right into the middle of the air traffic pattern at Los Angeles International Airport. But he was too frightened to shoot any of the balloons, so he stayed airborne for more than two hours forcing the airport to shut down its runways.

When he finally descended, the balloons caught on a power line, causing a 20 minute power cut in the area. But he eventually managed to climb to the ground, where he was promptly arrested.

When he was asked by reporters why he had done this, he replied, "You can't just sit there. You've got to do something."

And in a way that is true. Yes, we can't just sit there. We've got to do something with our lives. But that doesn't mean that anything will do. That doesn't mean that we should follow every idea that pops into our heads – or we might find ourselves in the same mess that Larry did.

So what should we do with our lives? Well, when Noah and his family stepped out of the ark after the flood, they entered into a brand new world. But God didn't just want them to sit there and observe it. Neither did he just send them out to make it up as they went along. Instead, he had a plan and a purpose for their lives. Genesis 9:1-17: "Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. ²The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands. ³Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.

⁴"But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. ⁵And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man.

⁶"Whoever sheds the blood of man,
by man shall his blood be shed;
for in the image of God
has God made man.

⁷As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it."

⁸Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: ⁹"I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you ¹⁰and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. ¹¹I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth."

¹²And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: ¹³I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, ¹⁵I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. ¹⁶Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth."

¹⁷So God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth."

1. Accept God's Plan

Throughout the early chapters of Genesis, we've seen that God loves to bless:

- On day 5 of the creation week, God blessed the sea creatures and birds.
- On day 6, he blessed humanity.
- On day 7, he blessed the 7th day and made it holy.

And here again "God blessed Noah and his sons." Genesis 9:1. He put his divine favour on them, showering upon them his goodness and filling their lives with his wonderful gifts.

And this is what God wants to do in our lives. We've been called to receive God's blessing. John wrote about Jesus at the beginning of his gospel, that "From the fulness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another." John 1:16

a) As A Gift of Grace

But as this verse emphasises, this is not because we deserve it, have earned it, or have worked for it. Rather this comes to us because of God's amazing grace, his outrageous, generous and undeserved favour.

Noah and his sons had worked hard over the past number of years, serving God in building this boat and looking after all these animals. But this renewed blessing was a gift from God. They didn't deserve it, they could never have earned it and they could never pay it back. As we'll see next week, they were a far from perfect family. All they were called to do was accept it – through faith.

And that is the same for us. **"It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no-one can boast."** Ephesians 2:8–9 If we've trusted in Jesus and his sacrificial death for us, then the Bible says that we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ. We've been completely forgiven, declared righteous in God's sight, released from guilt, adopted into God's family and sealed with the Holy Spirit. And all of these blessings come to us as a free gift of God's grace.

2. Live Out God's Purpose

So God doesn't bless us because we've done something. But God does bless us, so that we can go and do something. God had a very clear purpose for Noah and his family: **"Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth."** Genesis 9:1

Hopefully these words remind us of something we've read before in Genesis. On Day 6 of the creation week, God made human beings, and he blessed them and said to them: **"Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it."** Genesis 1:28

Now Noah and his family were living in a renewed world, and so it was as if God was bringing Noah and his family back to the start, back to his original purpose for humanity.

a) To Build God's Kingdom

He wanted them to **"increase in number and fill the earth."** Genesis 9:1 The world is huge and there were only 8 people on the earth at this time. And so God wanted them to have a family and fill the world that he had provided for them.

And God still wants his community of people to grow. Our commission from Jesus is to **"Go and make disciples of all nations."** Matthew 28:19 This is a key purpose in our lives. God wants us to be active in sharing our faith, introducing people to Jesus and encouraging them to place their faith in him.

This is God's heart because he loves the world and **"Wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."** 1 Timothy 2:4

b) To Serve in God's Kingdom

But the phrase **"Be fruitful."** Genesis 9:1, means more than just having kids. Yes, this word has the idea of procreation. But it also has the idea of production. We have been designed, created and called to be productive in our work.

In chapter 2 of Genesis we saw this being re-enforced when Adam was placed in the Garden of Eden, **"To work it and take care of it."** Genesis 2:15 In that paradise, man was given the privilege of service, of meaningful and satisfying work, contributing to God's world and to the common good.

But we saw in Genesis 3 that sin messed this up. It turned privileged service into **"painful toil."** Genesis 3:17. It would become difficult, exhausting and frustrating.

But under God's blessing, work could again become fruitful. By God's grace, Noah and his family were called again to work in a way that was meaningful, productive and rewarding.

And this is our calling too. Jesus said: **"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."** John 15:5 Through the indwelling presence of Christ, we can be fruitful in every aspect of our lives. With Jesus' power, we have been uniquely equipped and empowered to serve him effectively not only in our church, in our work, in our family life, in our community and in our world.

3. Depend on God's Provision

And as we do this, we can depend on God's provision. Initially mankind had been vegetarian, as God had said, **"I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for**

food.” Genesis 1:29

But the entrance of sin into the world had made that dependence on plants for food difficult and challenging. “It will produce thorns and thistles for you.” Genesis 3:18

a) For Food

But now things were going to change for Noah and his descendants. God said to them, “Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.” Genesis 9:3

The passage doesn’t explain why this change was necessary. Maybe it was because the post-flood world made a vegetarian lifestyle impossible. But it does perhaps explain why the relationship between human beings and animals changed: “The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth.” Genesis 9:2 Animals would now fear human beings because they would now be a threat to their life.

Not that this command was given to encourage an abusive attitude to animals. Human beings were still called to respect the life of the animal by refusing to eat the blood: “But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it.” Genesis 9:4. Blood symbolized the life of the animal, and so belonged to God alone, the giver of life.

b) For all Our Needs

But whatever else was going on, clearly this is God making sure that Noah and his family were provided for in this new world. God was looking after his people.

And God continues to encourage us who have trusted in Jesus to depend on his provision for our lives. Jesus taught his disciples to daily ask God for our everyday needs to be met, praying “Give us today our daily bread.” Matthew 6:11.

He also assured them that we don’t need to worry about our practical needs because “Your heavenly Father knows that you need them.” Matthew 6:32

But we can cultivate this attitude of dependence for more than just our practical and material needs. The apostle Paul wrote: “And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:19 Whatever needs we have, whatever issues we face, we can know that God is able to supply what we need.

God’s care for his children is passionate. His resources in Christ are abundant. And so we don’t need to worry about anything. We don’t need to live as if everything depended on what we can get, what we can earn, what we can supply. Instead, we can ask God for what we need each day, and depend on what he provides, knowing that he will give us everything that we need.

4. Respect God’s Protection

That’s because we are precious in God’s sight. And God reminded Noah of this truth when he continued: “And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting.” Genesis 9:5. The blood of animals wasn’t eaten to show respect for animal life. More importantly, the blood of humans was not to be spilled, to show respect for human life.

And so if an animal killed someone, it should be killed. The Law of Moses stated that “If a bull gores a man or a woman to death, the bull must be stoned to death, and its meat must not be eaten.” Exodus 21:28

a) Of His Image Bearers

And if another person killed a human being, then they should be killed: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.” Genesis 9:6

In the flood, thousands of people died. But this did not mean that human life was cheap and taking a life was a trivial matter. Human beings are made in the image of God. They have been made to uniquely resemble God, reflecting his character and representing him in the world. For this reason, human life is sacred in God’s sight and those who desecrate it have lost their right to life itself.

This was emphasized in the law given to Moses: “If anyone takes the life of a human being, he must be put to death.” Leviticus 24:17

However, I don’t think this necessarily means we should be supporters of the death penalty today. The Bible declares that “Mercy triumphs over judgment!” James 2:13 And in the Bible God himself showed that mercy to some who were guilty of

murder –like Moses, David, Paul.

But whatever we think about the punishment, we need to certainly agree about the seriousness of the crime. All human life is sacred in God's sight – however small they are, whatever the circumstances of their conception, whatever illnesses or limitations they are suffering, however inconvenient or costly their care. As God's people we need to do all that we can to value the life of every human being and care for them.

5. Trust in God's Promises

And God promised to do just that for Noah and his descendants. He repeated his covenant promise that **"Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth."** Genesis 9:11 Yes there will be local floods that will devastate certain areas and cause loss of life. But God promised here that he would never again destroy the earth and wipe out humanity with a flood.

And as a sign of this covenant promise, God gave the rainbow. **"Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind."** Genesis 9:14-15

This doesn't mean that a rainbow had never been seen before. But it means that now it was given new meaning. It was a reminder to everyone who saw, and to God himself, that he had promised never to send another worldwide flood.

And this promise still stands today. I know that LGBT groups have claimed the rainbow as their sign – but it still is a reminder of God's promise, that no matter how sinful mankind gets, God will not send a flood to destroy the earth. Life on this planet will continue until God's final day of judgement when he will destroy the earth by fire and make a new heaven and a new earth.

a) He is Faithful to His People

But of course, we have so many more promises than just this one. The Bible is full of God's promises, over 7,500 according to one person's reckoning.

Promises of:

- God's Salvation: **"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved."** Acts 16:31
- Our Standing before God: **"There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."** Romans 8:1
- Our Security: **"I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no-one can snatch them out of my hand."** John 10:28
- God's Spirit within us: **"Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit."** Ephesians 1:13
- Our Sure and Certain Hope of Heaven: Jesus said: **"I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."** John 14:3

And if we have put our faith in Jesus as the forgiver of our sins and the leader of our lives, then we can take these promises for ourselves: **"For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ."** 2 Corinthians 1:20

God is faithful to his promises. For thousands of years God has kept his covenant promise made to Noah not to send another worldwide flood. And we can trust that he will keep every single one that he has made to us.

Conclusion

So, yes, you can't just sit there. We have to do something with our lives. But we don't need to be like Larry Walters and just do anything.

Instead, we can live a life that is filled with goodness, direction, abundance, security and certainty. Through faith in Jesus, we can:

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| • Accept God's Plan | – to bless us |
| • Live out God's Purpose | – for us to build, and serve in, his kingdom |
| • Depend on God's Provision | – for all our needs |
| • Respect God's Protection | – of our lives as God's image bearers |
| • Trust in God's Promises | – because he is faithful to his people. |

So I pray that we won't just sit there, but that we will live out the life that God has prepared for us.