

**HOW ONE
WEEKEND
CAN GIVE YOU
EVERYTHING
YOU EVER
WANTED**

GRAHAM ALBANS

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CONTENTS

‘What’s next?’	1
What’s the story?	5
Love	9
Freedom	15
Significance	21
Peace	27
Meaning	33
Happiness	39
Optimism	43
Security	49
What’s your story?	53
What’s next?	57

'WHAT'S NEXT?'

It's the question I'd ask myself every morning.

For over a decade of my life, I climbed the career ladder with 'what's next?'. I got into being a radio producer through my university's student station, but the goal was always to work up. Through constantly asking 'what's next?', I found myself at BBC Radio 2 and eventually became the lead producer of the Breakfast Show, the most listened to radio show in Europe.

If you'd told teenage me – sat in a mate's lounge, filling in job applications, and watching Glastonbury on the telly – that I'd be having a cuppa with McCartney and sharing sandwiches with Sheeran, I think teenage me would have fallen over. All achieved from asking 'what's next?'.

But whatever level was reached, there was always another to reach for.

Maybe you can relate.

The question doesn't just get asked about our professional goals. We ask it about the stuff we own, as we keep levelling up our possessions and property to get a sense of significance. We ask it about our finances, as we look to clear debt or increase our bank balances to get a sense of security. We ask it as we build a family, parenting as best we can for a sense of meaning and happiness. We ask it about our bodies, as we set personal targets to feel better about ourselves. We ask it about our life experiences, as we optimistically look forward to the next holiday or milestone. Maybe we've even asked it about the person we're in a relationship with, as we search for 'the one'.

Nothing seems to be able to fully hold the weight of expectation we place on it. Even when things are going well in our lives, we can lack a deep sense of satisfaction and contentment. So often we're left wanting more.

As I'm sat writing the book you're holding in your hands, my phone pings. It's that same mate I applied for jobs with while watching

Glastonbury on TV. But this time he's actually there. His talent and determination led him to a job working with a global pop superstar. 'I'm losing my drive a little,' he messages. 'Weirdly, headlining Glastonbury doesn't feel like *enough* ...'

'What's next?' I reply.

When do we get to stop asking that question? What are we looking for, with all our goals, relationships and life experiences? What is it that we all really want?

I believe we're all looking for the same fundamental things. We all want to live a contented life, where we feel satisfied. We're searching for love, happiness, freedom, peace. We want meaning, significance. We need hope. If you'll stick with me I'd love to give you at least a flavour of how just one weekend can give you everything you ever wanted.

But first we need to pin down which weekend we're talking about ...

WHAT'S THE STORY?

What are the ingredients of your ideal weekend? Maybe friends, family, food, fun, films, football ... Personally I love getting out on a Saturday morning, watching my son's team, then cooking brunch with my daughter. I love a weekend.

But I've never had a weekend so good it's still talked about in nearly every nation on the planet two millennia later and has changed the lives of an estimated 2.4 billion people alive today, let alone down the centuries.

My brunches are good, but they're not *that* good!

The first Easter weekend was so good, they literally rebranded the opening day 'Good Friday'! Although, when you know the detail of what happened, there's not a lot that was obviously 'good' about it.

Around the age of 33, Jesus was arrested during the night, accused of stirring up trouble by claiming to be the Son of God, equal to God himself. In that particular time and place, this wasn't a claim that would get you a few funny looks and a social media shaming. It was the kind of claim that got you brutally tortured, then hammered to a wooden cross like a piece of butchered meat.

One Friday in spring on a hill outside first-century Jerusalem, that's what happened. Jesus – the one who had spent his life caring for the vulnerable, healing the sick, standing with the oppressed and welcoming the outcast – was battered, beaten, bruised and brutalised, then literally hung out to dry on a rough wooden stake in the ground. And all because he claimed to be God in the flesh.

Evening probably faded into a sleepless night for his first followers, and I can't imagine that Saturday to have been much fun. Devastation,

disappointment, depression and distress would have ruled the day. They thought Jesus would be a hero for their people. But instead they'd seen his torn, dead body wrapped in bandages and placed in a borrowed grave.

On Sunday morning, some of the women in their group went to visit the tomb. But where there had once been a huge boulder over the entrance and armed Roman guards to keep away grave-robbers, the women found Jesus' body gone. Not stolen, or revived, or moved, but *gone*. Jesus wasn't there.

Over the coming hours and days, Jesus turned up in various places to various people. And not as a vision, but physically, in front of groups of eyewitnesses where he'd eat with them and walk with them and let them touch his wounds, because they couldn't quite believe what they were seeing (which, to be fair, is understandable!). Jesus wasn't dead anymore.

Little side note – if all that sounds a bit unbelievable, a bit far-fetched, trust me I totally get it. That's what led me to look into it for myself and find out whether there was a shred of historical, medical or archeological evidence to back up the claims of these events. Was it just

a story, or did it really happen in history? The answer to that question is vital. I'd invite you to look into it further for yourself. One of the best short summaries of the overwhelming amount of evidence available is called *The Case For Easter*, and a copy can be yours by scanning the QR code at the back of this book.

Maybe you're familiar with that Easter story, or maybe it's the first time you've heard it. But either way, what on earth has that weekend got to do with me and you living a life of contentment, full of love, peace, freedom and everything else?

Let's find out.

LOVE

Victoria walked into a sun-soaked school classroom in early spring. She glided across to her desk in what seemed like hazy slow motion, and picked up the single red rose that had been left on it.

It was February 14th, and our teacher had come up with a plan that I'm sure must have seemed sweet at the time ...

Every boy in the class would place their rose on the desk of the girl they liked. If the girl could guess who'd left them a floral favour, they would be paired up for the school Valentine's Disco. Beautiful or brutal? You decide.

My palms were clammy, planted facedown firmly in front of me. My rose was Victoria's rose. My nine-year-old heart was all for her heart.

She picked up the flower by the stem and gently spun it around a couple of times between her fingertips.

This was it. *Say Graham, please say Graham.*

The sun streamed through the window behind her, perfectly backlighting her face as her mouth finally opened to break the silence and whisper the name ...

'Adam.'

Ouch.

That was the first time I experienced the crushing reality that pinning my hopes of happiness on a person could come up short. And it wasn't the last.

We look for love from all kinds of people: our boyfriends and girlfriends, our mates, our families, our spouses. We all want to be loved. We all want to be fully seen and fully known. We want to be fully accepted, even with our flaws and failings.

But to know we're 100% accepted, we need to be 100% honest. And there are things in my life that I can't be fully honest about. At least not with everyone. If you could fully see me – like really, properly know me and my thoughts

– there are things you would find incredibly *unlovely* about me.

Can you relate? We all have things we'd rather keep hidden. Why? Because our fear is that if a person really knew the full extent of those hidden things, they'd reject us. They wouldn't want much to do with us. They would find out things that would put them off ever loving us.

We can hide those things from each other. But we can't hide those things from God.

He fully sees you. He knows you inside out. He sees your every thought. He knows your deepest desires. He knows your history, your past, your secrets. The dark rooms of your heart we shut everyone out of – he knows what's behind those doors.

And yet, he still loves you. Loads.

A well-known line in the Bible says: 'For God so *loved* the world that he gave his one and only Son [Jesus], that whoever believes in him shall not die but have eternal life.'¹

And then we get this line from Jesus: 'There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends.'² Jesus isn't just talking

1 John 3:16, NIV

2 John 15:13

hypothetically. It's the Thursday evening before 'Good' Friday and he knows he's just an hour or two away from being arrested. He knows he will be tortured and killed. He knows he will die on the cross the next day, not only to save his friends but also his enemies. And he's willingly letting it happen.

Why?

All those wrong things we keep hidden. All the things we can't be 100% honest about. Jesus' death on the cross was exactly *because of* all those things. He was taking on himself the punishment for our sin. We may not use the word 'sin' much these days, but the Bible uses it to describe the things we keep locked away in the dark rooms of our hearts.

One of the big themes of Jesus' teaching was the seriousness of sin (more serious than we tend to take it), and that it ultimately deserves the most serious of consequences – eternal death.

God knows every hateful thought, he hears every unloving word, he sees every selfish action. He sees it all and yet, in Jesus, he offers to absorb the cost of our sin instead of making us pay the price. Jesus dies in our place. That's love! Our hidden things mean he should reject

us but instead he offers acceptance. He should condemn us but instead offers friendship.

He doesn't just tolerate you, or put up with you. He doesn't just ignore those things or turn a blind eye to them. He fully sees, and fully knows, and yet fully loves.

And when we accept his love we find it to be permanent. It'll never disappear, disappoint or dissatisfy.

That's a love we all want to find.