

DEFINING MOMENTS

Recognizing the Hour, Laying Aside Distractions, and Moving with the Spirit of
God

A TEACHING BY TOM HARDIMAN

There are moments when the decisions before us carry unusual weight. The issue is not simply whether something is good or bad, but whether it belongs to the assignment and season God has placed before us.

KINGDOM ALLIES

Strengthening people in the assignments God has given them.

Teaching Overview

Description

There are seasons when God places an opportunity before us that requires unusual focus, discernment, and obedience. In *Defining Moments*, Tom Hardiman explores how to recognize those moments, lay aside weights that no longer belong to the next season, and resist the temptation to manufacture through human effort what only the Spirit of God can accomplish. Drawing from Scripture, prophetic pictures, his experience as an Olympian, and the imagery of Niagara Falls, Tom considers how God prepares people to steward power, build Kingdom relationships, restore the wounded, and move in step with His purposes. The goal is not simply to experience something powerful, but to become people who can faithfully carry what God entrusts to us.

Reference Scriptures

Psalms 24:3-4 - Clean hands, a pure heart, and ascending the hill of the Lord.

Isaiah 35:8 - The Highway of Holiness.

Hebrews 12:1-2 - Lay aside every weight and sin; run with endurance; fix our eyes on Jesus.

Zechariah 4:6 - Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit.

Matthew 11:28-30 - Take the yoke of Jesus and learn from Him.

Matthew 13:28-30 - Wisdom in not uprooting wheat with tares.

Nehemiah 4:2 - The question of restoring burned stones.

Ephesians 3:17-19 - Rooted and grounded in love.

Matthew 25:21 - Well done, good and faithful servant.

Anchor Scriptures: Hebrews 12:1-2 and Zechariah 4:6

1. Recognizing a Defining Moment

I used to tell my children that there are probably ten to twenty-five decisions in life that you really want to get right. That does not mean you cannot recover from a poor decision. God is a Redeemer. But there are choices that can alter the course of a life, and sometimes it takes years to recover from decisions made without wisdom, patience, or discernment.

One of my greatest pastoral concerns is that people can become caught in offense, disappointment, distraction, or simply lesser things and never fully move into what God intended for them. Their eternal home may be secure, but they can still miss portions of the assignment for which God placed them on the earth.

That is why defining moments matter. They are moments when the choices in front of us have far-reaching consequences. They require us to become sober about the hour, attentive to the Spirit, and willing to ask whether what occupies our lives actually counts for Kingdom purposes.

Some distractions are not evil or bad. They are simply things that do not count for where God is taking us.

There are times when God calls us to a higher level of focus. The question is not only, *Is this permissible?* The deeper question may be, *Does this belong to my assignment in this season?*

2. The Invitation to Go Higher - and Travel Lighter

Mary Anne was preparing to speak when she came across a prophetic bulletin from 1996 containing a dream from Bob Jones. In the dream, people were traveling in a vehicle on a higher way. They were stopped by an officer who searched for contraband. None was found. But there was trash in the vehicle, and they were told to get rid of it and lighten the load.

What made the picture so significant was that some of the things now considered trash had once been useful. They were containers that had held food. They had served a legitimate purpose. But their purpose was complete, and carrying them further had become unnecessary weight.

Psalms 24 asks who may ascend the hill of the Lord and answers with the picture of clean hands and a pure heart. Isaiah 35 speaks of a Highway of Holiness. Then Hebrews 12 gives us this instruction:

"Let us also lay aside every encumbrance [or weight] and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus..." - Hebrews 12:1-2

Notice that Hebrews distinguishes between **weight** and **sin**. Not everything we need to lay aside is sinful. Some things were useful. Some were right for another season. Some may simply have completed their purpose.

Then came a striking confirmation. Someone shared a dream of driving an 18-wheeler on Highway 35. He was directed into a weigh station and told the truck was too heavy to proceed. He began unloading it until it reached the proper weight. Then a chariot appeared with angels and the invitation came: **"Get on. We're going up."**

The convergence was difficult to miss. Before the invitation to go higher came the instruction to remove excess weight.

There are moments when the invitation to go higher is accompanied by an instruction to travel lighter.

This requires discernment. What has God asked us to carry into the next season? What has already served its purpose? What are we holding simply because it was once useful?

3. An Invitation Still Requires a Response

I learned something about significant opportunities through athletics. In 1972, I had the privilege of walking into the Olympic Stadium with the United States team. It was an extraordinary moment. But I did not arrive there without first going through the Olympic trials.

Fifty-one athletes had received invitations to those trials, but only sixteen would make the team. What surprised me was that some people did not seem to comprehend the magnitude of the opportunity in front of them. They had prepared much of their lives for that moment, yet not everyone approached it with the focus it deserved.

I believe there are spiritual seasons like that. God assembles people with different gifts, backgrounds, and assignments. He creates opportunities that may have been years in preparation. But the invitation itself does not remove the need for our response.

An opportunity can be from God and still require focus, preparation, discipline, and a wholehearted response.

We do not want to become so occupied with lesser things that we fail to recognize the moment God has placed before us.

4. The Power Was Already There

On another occasion, I walked into a church service with no responsibility to speak or lead. I simply came to worship. As I entered, I heard in my spirit the roar of Niagara Falls.

I had gone to college not far from Niagara and had been there many times. The sound and force of the falls are almost impossible to communicate until you stand near them. I remembered the overwhelming volume of water and the sheer power of it, and I sensed the Lord speaking to me about the power of Niagara.

What later captured my attention was this: human beings did not create that power. It had been there long before anyone learned to use it. What changed was that creative people developed systems capable of harnessing and distributing power that already existed.

That became a prophetic picture for me. We do not manufacture the power of God. But God can give His people wisdom and creativity to steward what He releases.

The early electrical pioneers developed systems that could take enormous available power and distribute it so that entire regions could be illuminated. Spiritually, I believe God also joins people with different gifts and insights so that what He releases does not terminate in one person, one meeting, or one ministry.

The power belongs to God. Our responsibility is to become trustworthy stewards of what He releases.

5. Kingdom Relationships and Creative Stewardship

When I considered the people who helped develop electrical systems in that era, I was struck by their creativity - and also by their rivalry. It made me wonder how much more might have been accomplished through cooperation rather than competition.

There is a Kingdom lesson in that. God gives different people different strengths. One person sees something another does not. One carries a gift that complements another. One has relationships, experience, creativity, or wisdom that another needs.

The answer is not gathering everyone around one personality. It is recognizing what God is doing in one another and strengthening each other in the assignments He has given us.

There are things God wants to release that will require relationships strong enough to carry them. New systems may need to be designed. New ways of communicating, equipping, restoring, and sending may emerge. Creativity is not the source of the power; it is part of our stewardship of what God is already doing.

Kingdom relationship asks: What has God placed in you, and how can we strengthen it?

6. Not by Might, Nor by Power

One of the hardest lessons I have had to learn is contained in Zechariah 4:6: *“Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit.”*

I have had times when I believed God had spoken something and then immediately began trying to make it happen. Abraham gives us a sobering biblical example of what can happen when human effort attempts to produce what God has promised to accomplish.

I learned this personally in my relationship with Mary Anne. The first time I saw her, I sensed that she would become my wife. I fell in love before she had quite caught up with that revelation. I began talking to the Lord about the lack of response and considering what I might do to help the process along.

The Lord’s instruction to me was very clear: **“Back off. Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit.”**

That was not what I wanted to hear. Much of what I had accomplished in life had come through effort and determination. Learning to give God space to do what only He could do was another matter.

When I backed off, things moved quickly in God’s timing. Our first date was in November, we became engaged on November 22, and we were married in March.

Sometimes faith is moving. Sometimes faith is waiting. Maturity is learning the difference.

There are things we can influence, and there are things only God can do in another person’s heart, in circumstances, or in timing. We create unnecessary problems when we try to do God’s part for Him.

7. Learning the Yoke of God

Jesus said, *“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me.”* A yoke gives us a picture of moving together. There is a pace, a direction, and a shared movement.

I am still learning the nuances of that yoke. We can pull ahead of God. We can also lag behind Him. Neither is the goal.

There have been times when I initiated things before God was initiating them. I can tell you from experience that it can create relationship problems and cost a great deal. Human effort becomes expensive when we are trying to manufacture what God has not asked us to manufacture.

But the answer is not passivity. If God is moving, we should not drag our feet. The invitation is to become sensitive enough to know His pace.

What is God doing? What is my part? What belongs to Him? What am I supposed to leave alone? And when He moves, am I prepared to move with Him?

This is part of maturity: not merely knowing what God has said, but learning how and when to cooperate with Him.

8. Height Must Be Matched by Depth

As I continued to consider Niagara, the height and depth of the falls became another picture to me. There can be tremendous height in the things of God - worship, revelation, prophetic insight, healing, and encounters with His presence.

But height without depth is dangerous.

God also wants to go deep into our hearts. If He entrusts us with greater power, influence, revelation, or responsibility, then our foundations matter even more. Paul prayed that believers would be *rooted and grounded in love* (Ephesians 3:17).

We should desire the activity of God. But we should desire just as strongly the inward work that makes us safe carriers of what He releases.

The greater the power, the more important the grounding.

Character matters. Love matters. Humility matters. Relationships matter. How we treat people matters. The goal is not simply to experience spiritual power; it is to carry it in a way that reflects the nature of Christ.

9. Learning to Handle Pressure

Another aspect of the Niagara picture concerned pressure. The environment around powerful waters is intense, and it became a picture to me of the environment in which many believers are being formed.

We live in a world of increasing pressure - culturally, relationally, economically, and across nations. The answer is not to pretend pressure does not exist. God wants to form a people who can remain faithful within it.

Pressure can expose what is weak, but it can also develop endurance. When our lives are rooted in God, difficult environments can train us to carry responsibility without losing our peace, our love, or our focus.

The question is not simply whether pressure is coming. The question is what kind of people we are becoming under pressure.

10. Power Is Intended to Be Distributed

Once the power associated with Niagara could be harnessed, it could be distributed. It could illuminate places far beyond the falls themselves.

That is an important Kingdom principle. What God gives us is not meant to terminate with us.

Revelation should strengthen people. Teaching should equip people. Prophetic ministry should help people recognize what God is doing. Healing restores people. Creativity can open pathways for truth to reach cities and nations. Relationships can carry encouragement and strength across cultures and generations.

We should not merely ask, *How much can we experience?* We should also ask, *How faithfully can we steward what God gives us so that others are strengthened?*

God's power is not given to make us impressive. It is given so His purposes can be accomplished and people can be strengthened.

11. The Highest Lift in the Shortest Distance

Near Niagara, the lock systems that lift and lower boats became another prophetic picture for me: the highest lift in the shortest distance.

I have known many people who were once very active in ministry but suffered the slings and arrows that can accompany it. Some became discouraged, wounded, depressed, or sidelined. I believe God desires to establish places where people can be restored and lifted again.

Restoration requires wisdom. You do not rush someone who has been deeply wounded back into responsibility. It is more like nursing someone from intensive care back to health. You pay attention to the condition of the heart. You watch the vital signs. You allow strength to return.

And often the people who have themselves been wounded become some of the most skilled people at helping others heal.

When Nehemiah rebuilt Jerusalem's wall, the question was asked whether the burned stones could be restored. God knows what to do with burned stones.

God does not discard people because they have been through fire. He knows how to restore, reposition, and use what others may have written off.

12. Outposts of Freedom

The Niagara region also became associated historically with routes toward freedom for enslaved people. That became another picture of what Kingdom communities can become: outposts of freedom.

There are people in every region and nation who are bound by things they cannot seem to escape. They need places where they can encounter truth, healing, deliverance, relationship, and the presence of God.

The Church should not merely be a place where people attend meetings. We should become communities through which captives encounter freedom, wounded people experience restoration, and people who have lost their sense of purpose discover that God still has an assignment for their lives.

13. What Comes Down Returns in Worship

The mist rising from great waterfalls gave me another simple picture: what comes down also goes back up.

When God pours out His presence, revelation, healing, or power, the response of His people should be worship, praise, and adoration. We do not receive from God and then build something around ourselves.

Everything begins with Him. Everything depends upon Him. Everything ultimately belongs to Him.

Worship keeps the center where it belongs. It reminds us that the power is His, the assignment is His, the people are His, and the glory is His.

14. Properly Grounded

Every system carrying great power must be properly grounded. That became one of the final cautions in the Niagara picture.

It is possible to become fascinated with power and overlook the structure required to carry it safely. Spiritually, that is a serious mistake.

If God entrusts greater influence, revelation, spiritual authority, or responsibility to us, we must be rooted and grounded in love. Our inner life must be able to support what our public life carries.

We need healthy relationships. We need humility. We need accountability. We need affection for people, not merely fascination with ministry. We need foundations capable of bearing weight.

Power without grounding is dangerous. Kingdom power must be carried by people rooted and grounded in love.

15. Responding to the Defining Moment

So what do we do when we recognize that we are standing in a defining moment?

We pay attention. We refuse to sleep through an opportunity God has placed before us.

We lay aside unnecessary weight. Not only sin, but whatever has completed its purpose and no longer belongs to the assignment ahead.

We refuse to manufacture through human strength what only the Spirit can accomplish.

We learn the yoke of Jesus. We do not run ahead of Him, and we do not drag behind Him.

We deepen our foundations. Height must be matched by depth. Power must be grounded in love.

We build Kingdom relationships. We recognize what God has placed in others and strengthen one another's assignments.

We become restorers. We make room for burned stones, wounded leaders, and people who need to be lifted again.

We become outposts of freedom. What God entrusts to us should result in people being strengthened, healed, equipped, and sent.

And we return everything to God in worship.

The ultimate goal is not to have an impressive ministry or an extraordinary experience. The goal is faithfulness.

My prayer is that when each of us eventually stands before the Lord, we will know that we recognized the moments He gave us. We responded when He called. We released what needed to be released. We carried what He asked us to carry. And we fulfilled the assignment for which He placed us on the earth.

"Well done, good and faithful servant." - Matthew 25:21

Reflection and Application

1. What decisions before me right now may carry greater weight than I have recognized?
2. What am I carrying that may have been useful in a previous season but has completed its purpose?
3. Is there an area where I am trying to produce through self-effort what God has asked me to entrust to His Spirit?
4. Am I running ahead of God, dragging behind Him, or learning His yoke?
5. Where does God need to deepen my foundations so I can safely carry greater responsibility?
6. Who has God placed around me whose assignment I am called to strengthen?
7. Is there someone wounded or sidelined whom God may be inviting me to help restore?
8. How can what God has entrusted to me be distributed so that others are equipped and strengthened?
9. What would wholehearted faithfulness look like in this defining moment?

Closing Prayer

Jesus, thank You for the opportunities You place before us and for the purposes You have established for our lives. Give us discernment in the defining moments. Show us what to carry and what to lay aside. Give us clean hands and pure hearts. Teach us to run with endurance and to keep our eyes fixed on You.

Deliver us from striving and self-effort. Teach us the pace of Your yoke - not ahead of You and not behind You. Give us wisdom to steward what You release, creativity to build what is needed, and Kingdom relationships that strengthen Your purposes in people, churches, cities, and nations.

Root and ground us in love. Make us people who can carry Your power without losing Your heart. Make us restorers of the wounded, outposts of freedom, and faithful stewards of everything You entrust to us.

And when our race is complete, may we hear the words that matter most: **“Well done, good and faithful servant.”** In Jesus’ name, amen.

Editorial Note

This teaching resource was developed from Tom Hardiman’s message “Defining Moments.” It has been organized for enduring study and teaching use rather than presented as a verbatim transcript. Personal stories, prophetic pictures, and theological themes have been retained from the source message; dated conference-specific material has been condensed or omitted.