

An Intentional Optimized Life

*Finding Meaning in God's
Plan for Your Life*

by Dustin Vaughn Warncke

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Printed in the United States of America

Distributed and Sold through

Warncke Enterprises

www.dustinsprojects.com

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Dedications

To all of the people who believed I could do anything I set my mind to accomplish and even to those who didn't believe in anything I did and criticized everything... Both groups of people have empowered me to make a significant impact on the world around me in this life.

To Grady Lawrence who passed away unexpectedly during the writing of this book. Thank you for believing in me since my first book published back in 2001 and always looking forward to my next one.

To Dr. Norman Beck, my theology professor at Texas Lutheran University and author of numerous theological books. What an incredible impact you have had on my journey in my writing career. You will forever be an inspiration.

To my close and extended family and friends who taught me so much in my life. You have enhanced my joy and inspired my life in so many ways.

“He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how.”

-Friedrich Nietzsche

“The secret to having it all is to realize that you already do.”

-Sam Crowley

“The ultimate measure of a man is not when he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy...”

-Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

**“Opportunities are never lost;
Someone will take the ones you miss.”**

-Andy Rooney

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, and comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.”

--Theodore Roosevelt: Citizenship in a Republic; Speech
Delivered at Sorbonne, Paris April 23, 1910

A Prayer of Thanksgiving and Empowerment

Thank you, God, for all that I have had, for all that I have now, and for all that I shall have in the future. I realize that is it by your grace and mercy, not by luck or chance, that I am blessed beyond measure. This is a unique day that you have made, and I will rejoice and be glad in it, no matter what odds I face. I pray for your light to shine into the darkness of this world, may I be a beacon of hope in all I do by your will and plan. In Jesus' Holy and Eternal Name, I pray.
Amen.

Acknowledgements

A lot of time has passed since I first wrote and released *There is Power in Living*, my first official paperback book, in 2001. A lot of changes have come in the world and also in my experiences in this world as well as my philosophy. Back in 2015 I had an external hard drive fail and I thought I had lost the manuscripts of my first three paperback books I wrote during my final years as a student at Texas Lutheran University. The cloud-based file backup service I used recovered these files and I was re-inspired to write what you are reading now.

More than 20 years later after that first book I wrote saw the light of day and with numerous blogs, articles, eBooks, videos, podcasts, TV shows, radio appearances and more under my belt, I felt ready to tackle the subject of life and what it means to be a follower of God in Jesus Christ again.

When I went through the process of tackling this project, I worked as a marketing manager for an ecommerce retailer and much of what I did was branding optimization to increase sales conversions. That inspired me to look at how I could optimize my entire life instead of just business processes and the title came to me naturally.

Many thanks and blessings to all of you who have been with me through this journey and those who supported my purpose to provide significance, meaning and purpose to people that read my words. Through all I have been through I feel like one of the things I was put here on earth to do was to write articles, author books, and create other content that encourages others to do what they do best in their journey. My goal is for you to live your best life now.

Who You Really Are

It took many years of discovery, self-discovery, introspection and prayer to come to the realization that we are unique expressions of the Creator who created us. We are expressions of God's love and love is the most powerful force in the world.

Many near death experiencers who have literally died and seen the other side and came back to tell us about it will tell you that God is not a person or thing but an eternal being that is an incredible clearness of forever and that God is literally made up of love.

We are created into this world by love and many have believed over the years that we are governed by two forces: love and fear.

As infants, we are born into our physical world with only two fears: the fear of loud noises and the fear of falling. The rest of the things throughout life that we fear are learned and developed.

That all being the case, one can realize that an infant is an expression of love from God – a creation of love between two people resulting in the creation of life through love. As an adult or even a young person reading this, you are still that gift of love to the world. There will never be another one of you in the history of the world we live in or the universe for that matter. You are as unique as they come and you are loved more than you will ever know.

To further prove that point, I will borrow an illustration from the great motivator Les Brown: You were chosen into existence out of 400 million sperm. 400 million possibilities and God chose you. As the Bible says, you really are fearfully and wonderfully made. Don't miss this. 400 million is a pretty large number which means you, a unique creation of the universe from the power of love, the most powerful force in the universe, are very special.

Another Les Brown thought: "We are all born an original. Most of us die a copy." You are created as an original format with unique DNA and features that only you can possess. You are an amazing creation and should be regarded as incredible. So don't waste your life trying to run

someone else's race. Run your own. Be your own competition. You are an original after all. Never duplicate someone else and don't let someone else duplicate you.

We are all extensions of God in the way children are extensions of parents and, as a result, that makes you extra special. Are you an extension to the bloodline of the one who created the heavens and the earth? Yes, you are. Add to this the simple and indisputable fact that there has never been a moment in the history of the universe that God hasn't loved you for who you are. There has also never been a moment that you have been loved any more or less than you are loved by God, in God's infinite wisdom, right this second. Your kindergarten art is on God's fridge right now. God has always deeply loved you and nothing you have done, do or will do will ever change that.

If you are hurting, God wants healing for you. If you are joyous, God wants to laugh with you. God wants you to live a life of purpose, meaning and significance every day because God wants the best for you. That is a fact. That, my friends, is who you are. And in this life, we are tasked to find who we are and live out that purpose through meaningful interactions with those around us as well as the environment we are in. Don't twist or distort the simplicity of this. Love is the power that should govern your life. Joy should be the currency that counts.

To this point, if people realized that ultimately there is no death (in the spiritual sense), only life that continues and, also, that we are all interconnected to each other – that no one is an island unto themselves– it would be a different world and, I venture to think, a better one at that.

If you get nothing else from this book, know you are loved by a power greater than you – a power that created all of this – and know that you matter and that the world is a better place because you are in it. You make a difference and your life counts for something in the big picture and your life matters greatly in the grand scheme of what you were created to do during your time on earth.

Purpose, Meaning & Significance

In our ever changing world, it seems harder to find peace in times of insanity, and, put simply, have more bandwidth for the things we love and have passion for in life while balancing family, work, and other “daily grind” responsibilities. We see many people who have let go of achieving goals and dreams and, instead, worry more about “getting by” and simply surviving. We see some fifth and sixth generation welfare families, people in massive credit card and student loan debt, and several other discouraging outcomes in life and think, “Is this how we were meant to live?” or “Is this God’s best plan?”

Life presents us with all kinds of problems and we sometimes need the simple answers to save us. God made our salvation plan through Jesus Christ simple so it would not take a rocket scientist to figure it out. So try where you can to keep things simple.

Grow bigger than your problems. Don’t ask for an easier way in life. Instead ask for the tools to play the cards you were dealt better. These tools are most likely already somewhere deep within you. Those that conquer their struggles in life, despite their circumstances, win big in many ways.

Life was not designed to be easy so don’t look for the shortcut or easy way around the issues you face. Go head first into the arena with your problems and conquer your demons in life with a warrior mentality. After all, you have the creator of the universe on your side.

Throughout my life I have mentored many young men that thought they had hopeless lives, thankless jobs and a life path without purpose – all to find out that they were missing the beauty of God’s love and plans for their life by trying to figure out life on their own and not trusting in the plans God had for them.

Over the past several years, I have been through many events which have brought me to my knees and, time and time again, to the glory and power of God’s love, grace and mercy. There is a lesson in simply trusting in God’s plan and where it leads.

Living a life of gratitude and trust in that plan is the secret sauce everyone seems to be looking

for and, although at times it may seem complicated, it is rather simple in its entirety.

My journey with God has taken me to many new places in my faith and I hope that it will do the same thing for you in your life. We all possess the power in our lives to make a difference.

I believe life's purpose, meaning and significance is different for each person. We are each created as unique expressions of God's love and are here on this Earth to let our light shine in the midst of the world's darkness. If nothing else, you can strive to be a beacon of hope to others in their time of need. That's a starting point.

Our purpose can be found in learning to love and have compassion for each other and acquiring and sharing knowledge. Those are two big takeaways from this book so far so don't miss this. You were created to make a difference in the lives of those you are surrounded by and your goal should be to make that impact a positive and game changing one in your own way.

Responsibility and Visualization

One of the things I concentrate on the most in my life is controlling the things you have control over. Accept what is, harvest the best and forget the rest. There is a lesson in every circumstance. Are you learning from that lesson or letting it cripple you? Are you moving forward to the future or held back by your past? By letting yourself be responsible for the outcome of what you are faced with in life, you give yourself more control over what happens in your life more often than not. The truth is that the universe is benevolent and there is a plan and organization to this creation we are in right now. What you do with that knowledge is up to you,

If you take charge of who you are and assume responsibility for *everything* that you do, you can make the changes you need to make to get where you want to be. Remember, keep it simple.

Over the last few years, I have coached several people who say things like:

“I am powerless”
“I feel like I have no control of anything.”
“My situation is hopeless!”

What I tell them is a simple phrase that I learned from Brain Tracy’s seminar, *The Psychology of Achievement* which is, **“YOU are responsible. What are YOU going to do about it?”** Saying these words usually gives us a feeling of ownership and empowerment because, in truth, we are ultimately responsible for our own successes in life. In the same respect, we are also responsible for our own failures, or lack of success, but failure is simply an event, it does not define an individual by any means.

So next time you feel like you are losing control of a situation in your life or someone comes to you to complain about their problems, use the phrase above. You will find that you will be helping the situation greatly. When we claim responsibility, we have greater control. By feeding our minds the positive energy and telling ourselves that we are responsible, we can quickly feel in control and do something about our problems and achieve success much faster.

Many people believe that success simply means being rich or having more of something than everyone else. But that is not the full picture of what success should be in our lives. We must incorporate a full spectrum of the definition if we are truly to be successful in what we do in life. Consider peace of mind, having good health, having purpose in what you do in life and a commitment to new goals, finding personal fulfillment in what you do, having freedom from financial worries, and growing and maintaining positive and loving relationships with others as well as your spiritual relationship with your Higher Power, as wins in life.

Successful people make their dreams and goals part of their everyday lives. They do not sit around and think about their goals without backing up their thoughts with massive action. People who are not very successful may have a wish or two but choose to do nothing about it, which is also a choice. Yet, they continue living with the idea that SOME DAY their aspirations will come true. They somehow hope for a van filled with millions of dollars to drive up to the house, pick them up, and take them off to paradise.

I have some bad news. No one is coming to usher you off to paradise. You have to work for it. There are no shortcuts, no easy buttons, no magic beans or specialty pills that will make things happen. That is not how life works. SOME DAY isn't on the calendar last time I checked.

Sure there are "life hacks" and easier ways to accomplish what you want effectively and efficiently but to really get what you want, you are going to have to rise and grind for it.

Nothing is going to fall at your feet and if it ever does, consider it a stroke of luck, not fate. Ever watch that documentary about how many lottery winners start from broke, get silly rich, and blow it all, only to be broke again? Successes and failures both leave clues on what went right and wrong.

The key to being ultimately successful in life is to not live your life doing the same things, the same ways, the same times, over and over again. If you do this, you only guarantee yourself the same results you have always had in the past.

Philosophy teaches us that every living being desires happiness in life. Since I assume you are a human reading this book, I assume you want happiness and joy in whatever your life's purpose is – just a wild guess here.

It is said that we become what we think about most of the time and the way that translates into the human psyche is through visualization. Decide what you want to be true in your life and devise a plan to get it. That may sound really simple but it is very effective if it's practiced well.

Visualize a work meeting going well before it happens, run through the impact you will have when you are making a presentation, think of the ideal house, car or boat you really want to have. In other words, imagine the future and what you want to happen in it. What do you want to be true? How can you make it so? This is why vision boards are so popular these days as it allows you to map out, in the physical form, what you want. This is putting things of the imagination into physical form.

Before you can do this part though, you really have to define, with great detail, what you want in your life. To quote the late great Zig Ziglar, "If you aim at nothing, you'll hit it every time."

One of the biggest things that hampers a person's desire to succeed in life is their unwillingness to change for the better. This is something that can be and must be overcome for great strides of success to occur. Change, of course, is the only thing that stays constant in life and if you don't make changes, the world will certainly go on changing on you. Be intentional and define exactly what you want to be true.

These Facts Remain

There are a few basic rules that I believe can help us to achieve success within our lives as we grind through the day to day chores, responsibilities and curveballs life throws at us. I refer to these rules as the *Facts of Life*. These are things that I believe are important concepts to consider in living a productive and meaningful life today.

Fact #1: Your life is what you make it. Do not depend on God or anyone else to do all the work for you.

This fact holds a variety of truths that contradict what we are sometimes conditioned to think in our world. You cannot have everything you truly want by sitting around and expecting God to do all of the work for you. It simply does not work that way. Human relationships, of any kind, do not work that way either. It is the truth. Depend on God and, of course, other people that can be counted on for help, but do not expect your life to be a vacation from reality just because you have God or anyone else on your side.

If you do not work for what you want or need, you have no one to blame but yourself if things do not work out the way that you desire. Realistic expectations, hard work, and dedication make success. That is the secret sauce. Stop looking for the magic beans and miracle pills.

Fact #2: Even though people can be rude, inconsiderate, and careless towards you, be the role model and base your actions on value and what is true reality.

Many people will tell you that it is natural to feel negative emotions but it is not. Psychology shows us that we are not predestined to ever feel negative feelings at all. We are taught to feel negatively from the experiences we have in this world. Therefore, responding positively to negative situations will make you a winner more times than not. Since there are plenty of situations that can elicit negativity from us in life, we have plenty of places to practice this principle.

You will feel better about yourself, your life, and your situations if you choose to be a positive person and act in a positive manner over being negative or just simply neutral to a conflicting situation. Remember, we become what we think about. We get back what we put in more

often than not. It's not a perfect process but leading with positivity, grace and mercy in our lives is a key to successful and optimized living.

In being a leader or gaining success in any form, you are going to be putting a bulls-eye on your back. Some people want power and success and, as most of us have seen, some will go to their limits or even past them for these things and more.

Even though there are going to be people who are rude, careless, and flat-out inconsiderate of your feelings, hopes, and dreams, do not think that it is justified to sink to their level. Be who you truly are and let your colors shine. People who are not utilizing their potential and people who take advantage of others surround us everyday. There is no need to let people like this get under your skin.

If you feel that you will be shot down if you tell someone a goal or dream you have, then do yourself a favor—do not tell them. We sometimes forget how much of an influence we have on people and that other people have on our attitude.

Let your life be the prime example of who you are and what you stand for. Let the results of your successes speak for themselves.

Fact #3: Your thoughts govern your actions. Make changes in your thought process and you can make changes in your life.

As we have touched on here, the fact remains that in order to live powerfully, you have to think powerfully and positively. We, as humans, are governed by our thought process. If you fill your mind with garbage, you will begin to think garbage. On the other hand, if you fill your life with positive thoughts, you will get better results in your life.

You have to filter out negative perceptions and find out what really matters to you. Your thoughts govern your perception, which, consequently, govern almost everything you do. The way you think is reflected in the way that you act. If you have a negative attitude about something, you can rest assured that your actions will not be fulfilling to your needs and desires.

Research shows us that the most successful people we know self-talk their way into their success. They tell themselves how well they are going to do at a particular task and visualize it. They imagine that everything they do will result in success. They do not let negativity get in the

way of their feelings. They eat adversity for breakfast and bring spoonfuls of hope to their future tasks.

I have learned how to gear my life towards success through my thoughts and actions in my own life by, even in the worst of situations, not letting negativity play a major role. I try to roll with the punches. Whether I have a flat tire, train wreck of a situation at work, or any other event in the course of my day, I always try to look on the brighter side. I think things such as, "I am going to do the best I can with what I have," and other positive reinforcing statements. Many experts in the field of psychology and business say that repeating statements such as these can help reprogram the mind and spirit:

"I like myself"

"I feel terrific"

"I am successful"

"I believe in doing the best for myself"

These and other positive reinforcing statements are affirmations to yourself that you are going to feel good about life and are great ways to gear your life in the right direction. You have to constantly remember that you are the one who shapes your experiences. It is your attitude and perception that makes what you feel positive or negative in almost every instance in life. Attitude is a choice and sometimes it is all you have on your side when the chips are down to keep your perspective in check.

Fact #4: No one cares about you more than God. The next in line is yourself.

Love yourself first. Only then can you effectively love others. You have to come to this realization in order to assume complete responsibility for yourself and make a difference in your life as well as in the lives of the people you care about and interact with every day.

If you do not care about who you are or what you are doing, do not expect anyone else to do it for you. You have to love yourself and care about what you do if you want to make a difference in your life. Years of talk therapy, seminars, videos, lectures and more have proven this point to me and driven home the truth of the fact that you have never been more loved by God than you are right at this moment. Don't forget that. Love yourself as God loves you: As you are, not as you hope to be. Unconditionally. Not with a set of rules. Look at loving yourself in the way a parent loves a small child – with grace, forgiveness, compassion and understanding.

Fact #5: You are a product of your own system. Your system gains your results.

18 An Intentional Optimized Life

You are a product of many things. If you grew up in America, then you probably learned how to speak English at some point and know what a hamburger and a taxicab look like. You have been influenced and shaped by the things around you. Your system in life, the way that you live and the sum of what you do, gains your results. If you make changes in your system you can, and most likely will, make changes in your life. As Albert Einstein's old adage goes, if you do the same thing over and over, you can almost always expect the same results.

Identify your system. What is your routine? What does it do for you and why? Are you getting the results you want? If not, what can change? Where are the flaws and why are they there? What you must identify is how you can make your life better by improving on different parts of it. Change takes time. You have the power to make or break yourself. You shape a part of what happens to you every minute that you live. Take advantage of that knowledge and live your life with this in mind.

Always Set New Goals

When you go to a grocery store, do you always find the highest quality product at the lowest price? Usually not. You normally have to spend the extra money for the best of the best products in the selection. This also holds true in your efforts towards achieving your goals. You have to put forth the extra effort into your striving for success before you gain the highest quality results. It takes the power of God, the strength of your spirit, willpower, dedication, knowledge, and determination to get the job done.

Also, find immense amounts of love, compassion, and caring in what you do. If you love yourself and also love what you are doing in your life, that's a win in and of itself. Do not tell yourself how much you dislike something or someone. Negative thought processes can destroy so much so fast. Instead, find where things can change and what you can do to change them. We are truly only powerless and hopeless when we allow ourselves to be that way. In many instances, hope is there, although it may seem distant at times.

Our world is filled with people who simply maintain and survive. They do enough just to get by and make it through life but have no real aspirations or goals. Life does not have to work that way for anyone. What fun is there in just surviving? Live life to your potential.

It is said that humans are the only living things on this planet that do not reach their potential. Take a tree for example. It doesn't grow to half its size if it can grow to its full size, does it? A flower doesn't choose not to bloom if that is its intended purpose. We as humans on the other hand... well, that's complicated. We come up with excuses on why things we want to accomplish can't be done and talk ourselves out of moving forward in progress. Choice and free will are both what can make us limitless and hold us back. Choose wisely.

With all of this in mind, it is important for you to understand that it is alright to take sensible risks in life. You almost have to do this if you want to make leaps and bounds of successes in your life. Surveys have shown that many older people feel regret because they didn't take risks. When they were younger, they didn't take the risk of investing money, asking out a future significant other, having that talk with a loved one, and so on. Make the choice to step out in faith in your life; taking reasonable risks where it makes sense. This is one of the best tools to counter the feeling of future regrets. Sometimes you never know the possibilities unless you try.

Understanding Achievement

You do not have to run a race just to be like everyone else. What we all must do is put our lives into perspective and accept ourselves, both the good and the bad, as we are, not as we have to pretend to be, because God accepts us the same way.

Remember that being successful does not have to be all the world has idolized it to be. You do not have to be a millionaire, sports star, or famous actor to consider your life successful. True success depends on whether or not you find joy, purpose, meaning and significance in doing what you want with your professional and personal life. In other words, you should be striving for your best life now. To be all you were created by your Higher Power to be and live life to its fullest extent. Think about that for a moment. Can anyone ask more than that from you? Can they ask more than the fact you did your best to live a good life and make a difference in this world by following God's best plan? I think not.

Ask yourself an important question: What would make God smile about your life right now? What do you want to improve and work on in the future? Remember, there is no finish line. We are all works in progress, flawed as we all are, but there is grace and mercy there to fill in the gaps where we fall short.

No one on this planet has it all figured out and you probably will never have answers to all of your questions about life and why we are here on this third rock from the sun.

In our earthly ways it is hard to make sense of many things. But when we accept what is and live in the now, taking one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time and as it says in the Serenity Prayer, accepting hardships as a pathway to peace, achievement becomes a journey of growth and self-improvement and discovery.

The best thing I learned from my boxing coach when I took boxing lessons a couple of years ago is that you have to adapt and overcome to stay in the game. After all, as Mike Tyson once beautifully said, "Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth." As adults, life has most likely punched you in the mouth once or twice or at least thrown you a few curveballs. How we respond, not react, to a situation is how we can measure our adaptation to what happens to us. Your resiliency says a lot about your character.

Give Yourself Control of the Things You Can Control

You have the power to do many great things but in order to do them, you have to give yourself permission and overcome your obstacles. Usually the bigger the goal, the larger the obstacles to get around, go under, over or through to achieve it. Expect that to be the case for whatever you want to achieve in the future and you will have a greater chance of getting what you want out of life.

You have to believe in yourself, have faith in your Higher Power, and use the resources around you before you can receive and achieve anything lasting in your life. This involves giving yourself control over your dreams and desires. Many people fail to do this and find themselves stuck in a nasty rut. They think that they are not good enough to deserve anything better for themselves and, consequently, never get anything better in return.

Here is the law of cause and effect at work and, along with it, the law of attraction. If you believe positively and give yourself control over getting what you want and need out of life then you will find that you will be much more successful than when you hold yourself back with self-defeating thoughts. Thoughts can indeed manifest into things if we visualize them and it works for both the positive and the negative. Where your focus goes, so there goes your energy and efforts. Give yourself control over what you want to do and don't let anyone take it away from you.

We find many people who blame their problems on stress, medical disorders, or a variety of other things, but many of their pressing issues are simply because of control issues. Yet, by letting ourselves practice self-control in our lives and the various parts of it we have control over, we give ourselves responsibility and, eventually, a new sense of accomplishment and self-worth.

Think of it like this: Short term fixes or quick solutions can many times lead to long term problems. In some cases, it's like putting a bandage strip over a large gaping wound. It may

22 An Intentional Optimized Life

seem to fix the issue for now but you still have a bigger problem later. It works the other way as well. Longer term fixes can be a solution to shorter term problems.

In other words, stop looking for the quick fix. There is no easy button. Life wasn't designed to be easy so the search for shortcuts and hacks for long term success is a fruitless endeavor. Therefore, the lesson here is to embrace the present moment and take your life one day at a time, living intentionally and mindfully.

The Enemy of Doubt

One of the greatest obstacles we face in life in respect to living an optimized life is self-doubt. This can come from our self-talk and internal dialogue that we all have inside our minds. Ponder this for a moment. What if the great minds of our history gave up their innovations because of doubt? What if Mozart simply quit composing because he, or someone else, thought it was not good enough? What if Einstein threw his theories out the window because others constantly doubted him? What about Edison and his inventions? He failed more times than most people try at anything! But he adapted to his circumstances and found what worked, despite the negativity he faced. Many other great minds have done this as well and those are the names history remembers.

You have to overcome your doubt and the criticism that others throw at you. If you want to have the best, you have to take out the trash in your mind and spirit by, once again, getting rid of the negative things that hold you down. I will be the first to tell you that getting rid of all negativity and only keeping positives inside your mind and spirit is nearly impossible with the world we live in today but strive to do your best in doing so. Feed your goals and starve the negative influences.

In my past, I have known many who doubted what I was doing and it was easy for me to want to give up because of their doubt. But I realized that it was their opinion, not mine, that they were looking at when they were in doubt of my abilities. Others opinions of you are none of your business. Run your own race. Be your own champion and define success in gentle terms. Don't be so rigid that life has to be a certain way. It is said that if you really want to make God laugh, tell God your plan. Therefore, true everlasting joy comes from God's best plan for your life, not your own.

God may have a better plan for you and get you in a better place than you intended to get for yourself. Trust in that plan God has for you. While it is important to consider what some people in your life are telling you if they are trying to save you from making a mistake, you don't have to be completely shaped by other people's decisions or influences for your life. This is YOUR time to shine on your own, not theirs. You are the only one that can live the best version of you possible. So go forth and do that. You are the only one that you need to impress at the end of the day. The race you run should be with yourself, not comparing yourself to what countless other people are doing in their lives. This is your time to rise, grind and shine.

At times, it is easy to make generalizations such as, “No one cares about what I am doing” and “Why should I continue trying?” When you let “stinking thinking” take over your psyche, it is a spiral to the bottom, to a set of friends that frequently throw pity parties and talk about how awful they have it. Rise up. Don’t get stuck in that rut. Put trust in your own decisions and know that you are the only one who can accomplish what you personally want.

Many will agree that God is always there for us, but how many times do we fully trust God in all that we do? Many times we do not. Instead, we try to take the full load of our life’s toils and burdens on our own shoulders. We tell ourselves, “Hey, I can handle this! I will show myself and the others around me that I can do it all by myself.” And many assume this role of self-reliance and independence every day. They say, “I can’t trust anyone else, so I guess that I will just have to do this all by myself.”

Realize that God is there to help you always, not just when you need it or want it. Use your faith responsibly. You do not have to do everything yourself. There is most likely a great community of resources in the realm of your existence that can help and guide you. Don’t shut yourself off from this help. When you try to do it all on your own, you are probably going to find yourself complaining about why you cannot do it all by yourself in the first place and eventually approach burn out and loss of desire and passion to do well by doing good.

It is comparable to playing a team sport such as soccer, basketball, or baseball all by yourself against a full team of professionals. You are going to find yourself doing all of the work in offense and defense but probably not win the game in the end. Allow the power of God and other people to help you but don’t live off of the opinions of others. You are unique, special and chosen to make a difference in this world and accomplish great things. Live in that empowerment.

Getting What You Want in Life

"You are never given a wish without also being given the power to make it come true"

Richard Bach, from the book *Illusions*

As there are many ways to be successful in the world and there are also many more ways to be a failure. Most would agree that there are no real "free lunches" out there. You have to pay a price to win and get what you want in life.

I have "sold to eat" most of my adult career in direct sales and marketing career roles. Getting the results I wanted wasn't easy by any means but I learned systems and worked pathways to get the results I wanted. Once you figure out your system, it's a process of rinsing and repeating the steps that achieved the desired result.

Two things I have touched on in this book so far that have landed dream jobs, side hustle wins, relationship successes and other gains in my life are the law of attraction and personal development. When we visualize and ask for what we want and freely accept it as if we already have it and also work daily on ourselves, both personally and professionally, good things come to hunt you down more frequently instead of you having to go chase them into the wild. You attract what you think and feel in life, whether you like it or not. It's a simple fact. Don't like the results? Change your thoughts, feelings and subsequent actions.

Buildings full of books and countless videos, podcasts, articles, blogs and more have been done featuring this spiritual truth. We are made up of energy. To get what you want, you have to use your energy the right way in the right places to make things happen. You don't have to be rich and famous, super sexy or extraordinarily brilliant to be reasonably successful. You also don't have to bulldoze your way through life hurting other people to get what you want.

Assertiveness for your goals is key here but aggressiveness isn't necessary. Play on the offense. Happen to life. Don't let it happen to you. Don't let the world win the battles you face by dumping garbage on you. Be on your toes, not your heels. You are the lead character in the narrative of your story, after all. Don't let anyone else play that role. Be bold and strong. You are more capable than you think.

Believe in your own ability and value. Don't seek this from other people. Be a strong

independent force of the best version of you that you can. Manifest and bring the heat to this mission every day.

Remember, life gives you what you deserve, not what you want or even need. That is the way it was designed to work. You can ultimately only reap what you sow.

Short Term Gain, Long Term Pain

We've talked about the concept of short term pleasure or bandages over big wounds equaling unpleasant long term consequences. We've touched on lottery winners hitting the jackpot and losing it all, ending up in worse shape than when they started. Here's a personal example.

When I worked at a vacation resort my sophomore year of college, I will never forget this one man who walked into our office with a large briefcase and two of his friends. He explained to us, rather openly, that his mother had won a few million dollars from the lottery in the state he resided in and he was touring the country, spending his share of \$50,000, the portion he received of her winnings. The man asked if he could store his money in a lock box in our office. He acquired a safe and stored his money in his room instead.

Now the thing that made this situation so awkward and, at the same time, unfortunate, was that this man had \$50,000 and he told us that he was going to spend every penny of it until he was back to where he was before his mother gave the money to him. He paid for everything in cash and was not afraid to let other people know what he was doing, squandering away every last dime like a drunken sailor..

Years later we have documentaries about lottery winners that won big and then lost it all – with the money running through their hands like water – all because they didn't have discipline and any sort of plan for their stroke of good luck. In some cases, winning the lottery like this has ruined people's lives instead of making their future lives better.

They think and say things like, "Why save money or any other resource if you can enjoy it now and have fun with it?" Many sociologists have discovered that this is one of the main principles that people who live in poverty base their actions upon and it is a shortcut to being broke with no plan.

After all, it is said that broke, desperate and stupid are three brothers that live together. We see many Americans get into and stay in poverty situations and Jesus' recorded words were that the poor would always be among us. This has proven to be true.

Many people think they will find security and freedom in money but it is simply a finite resource that must be taken care of responsibly or it will indeed flee into nothingness. Money lacks morality. Like a computer, money only does what you give it power to do. Nothing more. It is said that money is a great slave and a horrible master. There is a lot of implied truth in those words.

As humans, many times we want immediate gratification for what we win or earn for ourselves. Would it have been wiser for the man that had the \$50,000 to save the money for a rainy day or do something better with it, like invest it in the future, instead of simply squandering it all on himself? As the song from the movie *Crazy Heart* goes, it's funny how falling feels like flying...for a little while.

Remember, life doesn't give you what you want or even need, life gives you what you deserve. There is a lesson in every situation and circumstance.

Look at the long game – the marathon, not the sprint. Don't get caught up in the hype of what the media tells you is popular and trendsetting. Run the long term grind for what you want and save and invest your resources along the way. Many fools squander everything they have and then can't help anyone, not even themselves, in the future.

Proverbs 28:20 says that "He who hastens to be rich will not go unpunished." There are gobs of truth to this statement and I have seen the outcome of the "get rich quick" mentality time and time again. It's not glorious.

My point here is that there is no shortcut, no greased slide to the sweet spot below. It is worth the cost of the time it takes to do it the right way.

We all know that few real success stories happen overnight and, for the times that they do, they are usually short lived. The long game is also where we grow the most and where changes last.

Consider good barbecue like we have here in Texas and around the southern United States. It is most successfully made "low and slow" with low heat and slow cooking time. Rush the process and your dog might not even eat the resulting food you produce. Success is a process. Don't forget to enjoy the feast of the journey. You and your efforts are worth it after all.

Imagine the Cup Already Broken

Along with accepting reality as it is, not as we would have it, keeping the philosophy of impermanence in your mind and heart can also aid in a meaningful and fulfilling life. Take an object like a coffee cup and realize that one day it was created and one day it will no longer be in existence in that form you see it in now. Imagine it already broken into pieces. Eastern philosophy says that everything that is created must eventually be destroyed and looking at the ever-changing world like this helps us let go of attachment to material things and focus more on what really matters in life.

Another look at this life view is to recognize that when you buy something new, it is only new the first day. After one day, it becomes used. That is why you will probably never see me buy a new vehicle. It isn't because I can't afford it. Sure you can keep something in good shape and looking like new and I encourage this but keeping something new and perfect is an illusion we are sold in this world. It's only new for one day after all.

Consider letting go of your attachments to things and people in this way. Love people as they are and use things for what they are, not as illusions we get sold of what they could and should be in your mind.

The full version of the *Serenity Prayer* has a lot of meaningful statements in it. It is a prayer that is spoken, although many times abbreviated, at Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and one of the key parts that hits home with me is "Living one day at a time, Enjoying one moment at a time" and "Taking this sinful world, as Jesus did, as it is, Not as I would have it". These are statements I try to live by to live a more fulfilling, purposeful life every day.

The one truth of life I have found quite meaningful is that all you really have is the present, now, what is.

The past is gone and, though remembered, must be left behind us. The future is ahead but it isn't here yet. All you really have is today, the present, and even this exact moment in time that you and I are sharing in these written words. Tomorrow is never guaranteed.

Living with mindfulness of the present moment in time, what IS right now, is sometimes challenging in a world that sells us illusions that we need more to be “complete” but the truth is that you are already complete. You are a wonderfully made creation that is here on earth to make a difference in the lives you share in around you. Don’t miss that.

There will never be another moment of time like this. Every day is a day of unique opportunity to make the world around you a better place if you recognize that as so. Most of the time in reality though, we are daydreaming of what will be or reliving what was. That is just our evolved human nature. Live intentionally in what is, the present moment, right now and enjoy this immensely. After all, there'll never be another day like this again.

Life is a Symphony

One of the main points I want to drive home in this book is that life is worth living well and it is up to you to make the most of the cards you were dealt – the circumstance you were born into and the life you have now as a result. I certainly cannot heal your past or promise what will happen in your future. As my grandfather Kermith “Fadder” Warncke, would often say: You can’t un-ring a bell. What has happened to you cannot be undone. What you do with what happens to you now and in the future is your choice. Choose wisely.

Since his early grade school years, I have reminded my son Jackson to “make good choices” with his circumstances so many times that his teachers at school would echo my statements to him every time he chose unwisely. That is one thing we have in life no matter our circumstances: free will and choice.

Most would agree that what you choose in your attitude and perspective in life says a lot about you as a person. Are you someone that people look forward to being around or someone that people avoid like the plague? Do you bring hope and love in your interactions with yourself and others or drag around the same old negative story about “same crap, different day”? I am not saying you have to be positive all of the time. Most everyone has good and bad days. What I am saying is that your introspection and outlook on life is many times very contagious. But, again, this is your choice and only your choice. Make good choices in what you feed your mind and body because the diet of which you feed yourself will also feed your interactions with those around you. They deserve a positive shot in the arm.

I have a musical background. In fact I was classically trained from middle school through college and have a bachelor's degree in secondary music education. Music was my major at Texas Lutheran University when I graduated in 2002, a year after I published my first book, *There is Power in Living*. One thing other motivational speakers and personal development authors have made the comparison to is life being like a symphony. You don't enjoy or even appreciate the high positive sections of a piece of music without going through the low sad sections. Together they are an artform, each to be appreciated in their own way.

So many times our world thinks there is an easy cure or quick fix on the horizon when true change takes far more time. Think of the microwave versus the crockpot and the quality of food

each produces. Both have properties of heating and cooking food but would you make barbecue with a microwave? No!

Happiness is temporary. We ride it like a rollercoaster. For instance, after you buy something, start a new relationship or try a new hobby and the newness wears off, you will likely find yourself not as happy as you were at the beginning. This is normal and has probably happened to all of us that have lived for any length of time. Joy, however, should be the ultimate goal. To feel everlasting joy in all circumstances, not the thrill of happiness, is what I measure the quality of one's life by, along with the positive impact one has on those they touch with their lives. Remember, all of this is temporary. 100 years from now, your problems will not matter. What will matter is the impact you had on this world with your life.

We are sold the lie that we need "stuff" to make us happy. Many theologians and other spiritual teachers refer to this as the "God Shaped Hole" we try to fill with things. Our world likes to sell happiness in stuff we acquire to fill a need it sells us. We must acquire "stuff" to make us happy? Seriously? Do you think that is one of God's best plans?

One theologian I heard commenting on this illusion made the point that our world is full of "functional saviors" and these are idols that are worshiped in various ways by our human nature and need for more. Just look at any magazine cover or social media ad and you will get the point. "I want to be like them and have EVERYTHING they have!" Again, illusions like these penetrate our minds with the idea that something is missing in our lives, that we are somehow not complete if we do not own or accomplish whatever it is that is being sold.

The need to have more and more drives us to the point that our life becomes a race for the next accomplishment and high of having that next big thing. Many people I see chasing that "next big thing" find themselves in perpetual crisis. They never give an introspective look at the value and quality of whatever it is they are chasing and what it will add to their life in the long run. "Shiny Object Syndrome" is a real thing and we are a nation full of striped bass and raccoons chasing after things without examining the meaning behind them and the value they hold for us.

Now I am certainly not saying you shouldn't have nice things and set short term and long term goals. What I am saying is don't let your goals and "things" you acquire own your soul. You are far too important to be shallow and have a meaningless existence centered on only yourself and your stuff. I write all of this as a way to suggest you slow down and examine what really matters in your symphony of life.

Do you really desire what you have after you possess that which you desire? Was it the desire that was driving you satisfied once you found or possessed the thing you were after? These are important questions to ask ourselves or we will end up playing the famous game, "I'll be happy when I..."

It is said that he who lives by the crystal ball eats glass and I cannot tell what your future will look like. I can tell you that there will probably be some good times and some hard times but the hills aren't as great without the valleys and life lessons aren't taught and learned from everything being perfect. It will never be perfect. So embrace what is, as it is, where it is, and play the game of life well by making good choices with your free will.

The Child-Like Innocence of Trusting in Faith

Ah, the innocence and bright outlook on life of a small child. When we are born into this world, we come complete. Just look at a newborn infant. It's as close as we get to perfection before this world of ours jades us. As we grow older into adulthood, we can easily become cynical and have spiritually hardened hearts. But, also with aging, we gain resilience and fortitude to weather the storms of life and grow past our limitations in the process.

When we watch many people grow older, we find that when many of the harsh realities of life set in, so do bad attitudes, negative criticisms directed at ourselves or others, and other hindering setbacks to living well.

Like you, I have won and lost. I have had things that have gone extremely well mixed with tragic regrets of things that didn't. It's the story of our lives. Through all of it, it's important for us to know that God wants us to be like children, in the respect that we should remember to always be loving, caring, and accepting to ourselves as well as to the others around us. To make this point, I would like to use one of my favorite bible verses which is Mark 10:14-16 (NIV) where we hear Jesus saying:

"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

In this Bible verse, I believe that Jesus was making the point that children, because of their innocence and openness, hold a great key to life. During the time of Jesus' life, children were regarded as some of the least of these in society compared to how we view kids today. In this text, Jesus is saying that peace, love, and joy are simple in themselves and should be left that way. Children can do this much easier than adults due to their experience of the world as it is, not as they would have it.

One of the first steps Jesus teaches us in the Bible is to ask and receive, to seek and we shall find. Yet, what do we do as adults? We have to make it complicated!

We are almost always taught by society when we grow to become adults to become less dream-oriented and more work-oriented when there should be a good balance of both in our lives.

Research has shown that extremely successful people are constantly looking for new ways to grow and achieve and live their lives with compassion and love and all of the other great feelings they allow themselves to have, despite their problems...much like little children!

Ask a young child to dance or sing and then go ask a teenager or young adult to do the same. There will be a big difference in the results. We are taught we can't or shouldn't do things we love by the world around us because of the judgement of other people.

What you visualize yourself becoming, paired with the right thoughts and actions, is what you will ultimately become in life. If you see yourself in a positive light and give yourself positive feedback, you will find yourself being happier, healthier, and overall living a successfully optimized life.

Yet, how many times do we see ourselves more worried about making more money and having more luxuries than truly examining whether or not we are happy? Both success and happiness, like beauty, are only truly relevant in the eye of the one who beholds them.

One of the keys I have learned in fulfilling my desires is writing down exactly what I want to have, in great detail, on a sticky note and writing "THANK YOU" on the same note. It is as if you are thanking the universe (All That Is: God) that you have already received it. This is sending a message of the "ask" out to whatever it is you want and thanking God for giving it to you as if you already have it in your possession.

Now, this doesn't just work for material possessions but can also work for relationships and other non-tangibles in your life. You have to be very descriptive or you may not get what you intended in return. This is trusting God, with child-like faith, to make the desires of your heart a reality. While I can't guarantee this will work every time for what you want, I can tell you it has worked more often than not for me.

Many people go through life and never get what they want because they never ask for it. The Bible is clear about this spiritual truth. According to Matthew 7:7-8 (NIV), Jesus is recorded as stating: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be

opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”

Now this is a common Bible verse and you may have heard it many times throughout your life but how many times have you really asked for what you wanted in prayer and wrote down on paper what you wanted, thanking God for it, and believed you had already received it?

Unlike setting goals, where you write them down and look at them every day to keep you on track, the key here in writing down what you want and thanking God for it as though you already have it is a little different. After you write down what you want and write “Thank You” on the desire, fold it up and put it somewhere you will remember it but that you won’t revisit until that which you asked for comes to you. This is like planting a seed, in child-like faith, trusting in God’s perfect plan that it will sprout and grow on its own.

I must add here that you must be specific about what you want. There are some not-so-funny stories of people being vague about what they ask for and getting something similar but not quite what they asked for in return. One story was of a woman who asked for piles of money and, a year later she found herself counting piles of money - as a bank teller. She wasn’t specific on it being HER money and the universe sent her what it thought she meant accordingly.

Remember, ask and ask well. God has many great things waiting for you and if you don’t get exactly what you are looking for, God probably has something better planned for your future. The point of all of this is to trust God as a child trusts God – with faith, hope and love in your heart.

Making the Best of the Cards You Were Dealt

This chapter's title is an old saying from my father's side of the family. We really owe it to ourselves in life to make the best of the circumstances we were given, or, in other terms, the cards we were dealt. In this lifetime what cards we were dealt can be what family we were born into and the way we were raised as children. No one has had a perfect life. No matter how good anyone has it, life has been and will be difficult at times. The point of it all is to play well the hand of cards you have to win your success in the game.

No one can tell you how far you can go, how many miles you can run, how many mountains you can climb, or how many bridges you can build and cross in your life. Human choice and our free will as humans is one of the most powerful elements in our world. Potential is the power that we are all given, although we see it poorly used many times in life. Imagine how much time that people spend watching countless hours of mindless and meaningless videos and TV instead of doing something productive and proactive with their lives. Now I am not saying we shouldn't have any "down time" but binge watching and couch surfing for hours on end, day after day, is different. What kind of world would we live in if everyone worked hard to achieve lasting and meaningful goals in their lives? This is the reason that discovering the power in living and optimizing our reality is so important. In order to get optimal results, one must first give adequate planning and effort

The point of this story is that we cannot sit around and expect good things to happen to us. We have to get out and make lasting changes by achieving lasting success in our lives. Again, if you do the bare minimum in effort, don't expect much in return.

God wants us to live a life with productivity. The bible clearly says if you don't work, you don't eat. The book of Proverbs is full of King Solomon's writing about an active person versus a lazy person and what each plan for life yields as well as what the wise man does versus what the foolish man squanders.

I like the verse Jeremiah 29:11 because it states: "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

You have to identify in order to receive. When you want anything out of life, you have to be specific about it. You have to be able to directly identify what you want in order to receive it. While this idea seems simple, it can be difficult to carry out.

It is hard to hit a home run in the game of baseball with a blindfold over your eyes. In the same respect, many people are constantly swinging into thin air for what they want, but are never able to get it. They are in the “ballpark” range of hitting the ball, but have not centered in on it. Because they are not specific enough about what they want to do with their visualization of that goal, it doesn’t become a reality. This is another one of the major reasons people fail in life.

So many folks just say, “I want a car, but I don’t care how I get it or what kind I get,” and find themselves wondering why they end up driving something they would not catch themselves dead in on a normal day. You have to be able to name exactly what you want in life or otherwise you are practicing wishful thinking and daydreaming.

I once heard a famous motivational speaker give a speech about this subject. He conceptualized this point by asking the audience which person had further to go in achieving his goal: a man who wanted a \$150,000 house with around \$20,000 dollars in the bank, or the man with the same dream that had \$200 in the bank who hires a contractor and has plans and blueprints ready to go. The man with the contractor and \$200 dollars will probably get his house faster and more efficiently than the other man because he knows exactly what he wants. This is why he hired the contractor in the first place – to execute his plan. He already has a specific idea of what he wants and what he will have to do to get it.

When you begin thinking about this analogy, it can be applied to your life in almost any circumstance. When you know what you want, you will almost always get it faster than if you are unsure and vague. It is crucial for you to research, poke, prod, and investigate decisions if you have questions about things. Do not be afraid. Be fearless in all ways. Living optimally, intentionally and purposefully means that you have to give yourself permission to be strong, able, and educated in the decisions that you make and responsible enough to follow through on what you decide. Even many of the most successful people in our world have lost countless amounts of time, money, and other resources from poor investigation.

Also, do not be afraid to be decisive. This, again, relates to being confident in what you do in life. Do not wait forever to make a decision, especially a major one. Develop the discipline to act on your own intellect, not mere impulse. When we are indecisive in our thinking, it is very

easy to lose potential in our actions and other resources. Many of our possibilities in life may be wide open, but we have to be assertive with what we want and also have the knowledge to get what we want. If you do not take action, you will never know the possibilities. But make sure you act in sensible, well-thought out ways. Refrain from eating, shopping, spending, or doing anything else on impulse alone. You will save time, money, and so much more if you live mindful of what you are doing.

The best way to get what you want out of your life is to base what you think, do, and believe on truth. By basing your life on truth, your thoughts, and actions will be better based on rationality. Get away from people and things that are going to stop you from achieving what you want in your life. Sometimes just the strain of an unhappy relationship, bad job, or other major stressors can keep you from reaching your potential in life. Run the race of life strong! Go hard in the pursuit of your goals.

Keep your mind occupied and have a project or two to work on set aside for when you get bored. When you do this, you will begin to find your life filled with productivity and enlightenment if you choose things to work on that align with your passions and interests.

Just as you are responsible for your job, family, and other obligations as a productive adult, you are also responsible for where you go in life and for how you feel. Take advantage of this and you will find yourself doing more to improve and optimize your life and the world around you. This will cause you to also feel better about yourself and your world view.

As the vintage song goes, "Accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative, and don't mess with Mr. In Between." In whatever you are targeting to change or improve in your life, you have to give up the things that are meaningless to your success in your life in order to get where you want to be.

The sad part about many of the people in our world today is that they live by philosophy that what they don't know can't hurt them. This is so untrue in so many different ways. We hurt ourselves when we say things like:

"Oh, I didn't know that I cheated on my taxes."

"I didn't see the stop sign at the corner."

"I was speeding? Where is the speed limit posted around here?"

Yes, you may dodge the government, the law enforcement officers that find you at the worst times, or anyone else that you purposely want to evade, but truthfully, anyone living by this principle is living in Wonderland. You will gain very little when you do not know the full picture of your life and what effect you have on the world around you. You will have trouble making your life better if you do not know the effect of what you are doing and even more trouble when you ignore issues that need to be addressed. Eventually everything has a consequence or reckoning.

When you ignore your problems and discard the things you would rather not deal with, you will find them sneaking up on you at the worst moments. People get divorced every day because they did not address the problems they were having with each other until the tension broke and they could not handle it anymore.

Many people find themselves very unhappy every day because they do not acknowledge that they find problems with their job, co-workers, or a variety of other things in life. Furthermore, they do not do anything about them if and when they ever do acknowledge that the problems are there.

How many times have we heard about the “moment of sobriety” an alcoholic or drug addict has when they hit rock bottom after their second or third DUI offense? When the truth is, they drove intoxicated many times before they were ever caught. If you think you are getting away with unhealthy and unsafe behaviors, you are probably fooling fewer people than you think.

The point here is to live intentionally with acknowledgement of problems when they arise, not ignorance or apathy. You owe yourself your best opportunity at a most excellent life every day you live.

Positive or Negative Decisions and Consequences

James Jordan, in his book *The Musician's Soul*, states an important point about negative thoughts and feelings. His work states that many times when we feel negatively about an issue, we can fall into "mimetic processing." This is in effect, what we can also call a cause and effect situation. We have two choices: negative or positive.

When we try our hand at something and it does not work out, we can choose to be angry, frustrated and upset, letting a negative mindset take place or treat the situation with acceptance and love.

The path of anger can lead us to self-mutilation where we begin to beat ourselves up, mistrust others, mistrust ourselves, and do other harmful things.

If we choose to react with acceptance and love, we can become more accepting of ourselves, trusting of other people, and begin to treat things with care.

Jordan's work brings up the point that you choose the way that you feel at almost any given time. You decide how you respond to things and whether or not you are going to let a situation snowball out of control into a negative situation or, instead, learn to live with it and use it in a proactive way to change things.

In life you don't need to look hard to find people who constantly resist the things in their lives that pose them a problem. Instead they should be willing to change their outlooks and attitudes for the better and accept their situations as they are, not as they would have them. I find this in marriages, careers, relationships, and numerous other places.

The best way to combat negativity and resistance in life is to learn how to be more tolerant, loving, and accepting. The change may be hard at first but it pays dividends down the road.

What I tell most people who want to change directions or shift their lives into a higher gear is that you have to understand that this must happen gradually. Change takes time. Change in the

human condition is not something that happens overnight nor should it be something that is forced that way. It is important to understand that gaining success, as with many things, is a process that must be given time. In the same analogy of driving a car, if we turn to change too fast, we might flip our car, and revert back to our old habits. But, if we turn too slowly, we may underestimate where our goals are and, though we turn and change direction, we miss our goals completely.

In my own life, I have developed the mental phrase that I say over and over to myself which is, "I'm going to take the bull by the horns," whenever I face a difficult problem or challenging situation. Now while there may not be an angry bull staring me down in the middle of a crowded stadium, I imagine that there is and that that bull represents my problem or challenge. I tell myself that I will not let this problem or challenge defeat me or even threaten me. Instead, I will take charge and try my best to find a way over, under, around or through whatever the problem or challenge is that might be facing me.

What I am doing with this statement is telling myself that the bull, my problem or challenge, is present and that I am going to take full responsibility by taking charge and rectifying the situation to the best of my ability, head on.

I will not run or try to dodge my problem or challenge, but, instead, take care of what I can to fix the problem or gear the challenge in the direction of my success.

So next time you find yourself faced with a major problem or challenge in your life say, "I am strong and responsible. I will take my bull by the horns." By doing this, you are affirming to yourself your responsibility and taking control of that which you can control, instead of running the other direction. When you begin to face your problems and challenges this way, you will find numerous doors opening for you and your life working better.

Be Prepared... It's Going to Rain!

In goal achievement there is what I call the “24 hour clause” which states that with every major goal that you set in your life, you are almost always going to find an obstacle in the way of being able to achieve it within the first day. The way to beat the odds of this clause is to expect that you will find opposition to achieving your goals and be ready to overcome that opposition, whatever it is.

Being prepared is half of the battle of being successful. We find so many people giving up because they set out to do something thinking it will be easy only to be disappointed. We all know that there are few things in life that are truly easy. Therefore, it is wise to expect issues to arise and obstacles to present themselves. By being aware of the circumstances of life, that things will not always work the way we want them to, we can better adjust our expectations.

It is said that there is no reality, only perception. You are the only one who can decide how you let everything you encounter affect you. When we learn how to deal with our problems in the way we perceive them and “filter” the negative energy that can potentially slow us down, we can live healthier and think clearer.

You are ultimately the one who decides what news is good or bad and what results are favorable or not. The challenge is to not let your problems affect who you are and what you do in life. Worrying about your problems cannot make you any more successful. Take your bull by the horns.

Viktor Frankl states a valid point about this in his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*. Frankl was one of the millions of Jews placed in the concentration camps designed by Hitler's Nazi Party. During all of this suffering, Frankl, a renowned psychologist, naturally watched the people's reactions to the horrible treatment around him. He realized that no matter how bad the Nazis treated him, they could not take away his ability to feel joy.

The Nazi soldiers could control his life but not his feelings and his attitude. That, he insists, was in his control.

While we may not be in near danger of losing our lives due to persecution, we can still be hurt by what we let affect our perception of life and the world around us.

We sometimes find ourselves seeing self-pity as somehow more satisfying than working towards something better. If we allow it, the media's bad news, our friend's criticism, and our own degradation via negative self-talk can lead us down the road of sadness and pain. Since our attitudes are governed by our perceptions, we can begin to change once we are able to recognize that we are the ones who have to give motivation and love to ourselves.

You must remember that at all times you have the power in your life to make things better and you need to love yourself first. You can listen to your friends, family, or even the radio or television for guidance but the truth is what really matters in your life is what you have inside of you right now. It is with your soul and with the spirit of God within you where you can find the road to making your life more joyous and efficient.

A while back, I became moved and inspired by these following words of Charles Swindoll. I hope that the same will happen to you.

“The longer I live the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness, or skill. It will make or break a company... a church... a home. The remarkable thing is we have a choice everyday regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past... we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing that we can do is to play on the one string we have and that is our attitude... I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it. And so it is with you... we are in charge of our attitudes.”

Understanding and Realizing Your Expectations

One of the main reasons our expectations don't always go exactly the way that we want them to is because of the fact that so many things change in life. Things change everyday, so much that it seems that change is the only thing that is sure to remain the same. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that we treat everything that we encounter, including our own goals and dreams, with realistic expectations and the understanding that things can and will change. Sometimes change happens rapidly and unexpectedly, when we least expect circumstances to do so.

It is always important to understand why you are doing what you are doing. In a fast paced and money-minded society, it is of true importance to examine and re-examine why things are the way that they are in your life. Get to the foundations of why you believe what you believe. Make sure that you are basing your actions on truth, love, morality, and values. Understand why you are doing what you are doing and re-evaluate your actions accordingly. You owe it to yourself and your personal success to take this important measure.

I have noticed over the years that many things that have happened to me have affected the way that I view life and it's brevity. They made me appreciate my life much more and helped me understand my expectations for the future. There are three very traumatic events which occurred while I was in high school which I will never forget. It was during these three events in my life that I realized that life was short and could be taken away at any time and, most of all, that I was not immortal.

The first of these events happened when I was in high school working for a bagged ice delivery company. It was a blistering hot Texas summer day and I was on an ice delivery route with a coworker. Our truck had started making some strange noises and had some brake problems but we ignored them for most of the day until, at the beginning of the afternoon of this day, we were coming down a steep incline and lost control of our large truck. The brakes went out. Our truck hit the concrete bridge at the fourth crossing of River Road in New Braunfels and tore through the trees, rolling down a steep hill one and a half times until we finally came to an

unstable stop. I slowly turned toward my delivery partner and asked whether he was alive and safe. The ice truck was now lying on its passenger's side. The engine was on fire and the four pallets of ice we were getting ready to deliver were all destroyed, mangled outside on the hot summer ground. Three tourists who were tubing down the river that day came and helped us out of the truck. As we emerged from this total disaster, we were bleeding and bruised, still startled from the events that had just occurred, but thankful to still be alive. We had miraculously survived thanks to our seat belts and the grace and mercy of God and I didn't see this event as anything but a miracle.

In less than five seconds we had accumulated an excess of \$45,000 worth of damage. This accident was a milestone in my life. I was 17 years old, a sophomore in high school on summer break. I was rebellious and confused about the world around me. Up until this point, I never understood how beautiful life really was. I was very confused at this point in my life, but that day, everything seemed clearer to me. God spoke to me in a very noticeable way. Seeing my young life pass before my eyes, I have never looked at my life the same way again.

Ironically, the day before this accident, a friend of mine also had a car accident but she was not as lucky as I was. She was driving her friend's truck home from Mexico without a valid driver's license. She was 15. No one in the truck was wearing their seat belts because everyone was asleep, some in the bed of the truck, others in the truck's extended cab. She attempted to stay awake as she drove but ended up falling asleep at the wheel somewhere between the Texas and Mexico border. The truck ran off of the road and wrapped around a tree. Everyone in the truck was pronounced dead upon the arrival of emergency services. It was a tragedy that hit me harder than any other in the past, except for my own wreck that nearly took my life that same week. I will never forget Kelly Kessler or her smile and zest for life. She left footprints in my heart and was, in my view at least, gone too soon.

A few months after these tragedies, another horrible accident occurred involving two of my high school classmates. It was during my high school's spring break week when two of my friends decided to take a trip across my hometown one night. They came to a railroad crossing on the road. The driver saw a train coming down the tracks towards the crossing but believed that he could beat it. Little did he know that the train was not a slow freight train but, instead, a fast-moving passenger train. Almost 200 people were onboard. He was caught between the two crossing arms of the track and the train hit his car because it could not slow down in enough time to stop before hitting his vehicle. Adam's car was torn in half and he was found, still strapped in the driver seat. My other friend, Romina, was thrown several feet away from the car and could only be identified by her dental records because she was so disfigured by the

wreck. She was one of the most beautiful women I had known at the time. Along with Romina was her cousin from Mexico who was also killed. She was survived by a two year old child who was left in her home country.

These three stories were real and life changing for me. After each of them occurred, I was saddened, wondering why God would let such a thing happen to myself or to my friends involved in the car accidents. Yet, in any case, I had to move on.

The reason that I presented these stories was not to preach at you about how to be safe and why you should not do certain things in life. My hope is that you are already armed with the common sense to know that you should not let a problem with your brakes on your vehicle slide; not drive home while you are about to fall asleep at the wheel, and not cross train tracks in an effort to beat an oncoming train. What I wanted to show you is that death is a product of everyday life and we are not immortal to what surrounds us. Life is short and there may not be as much time as you think there is to procrastinate and put things off for a little longer. The time is now, as now is all we truly have.

In this same respect, many people I know have many great gifts and talents but abuse them or don't use them at all. They don't realize their gift's full potential, or simply flaunt them in front of other people in an effort to show off.

We are not merely alive just to exist but to expand and grow. I know many who are in their 30's, 40's, 50's, and even older who still have no clue what they want or truly need out of life because they are not specific and definite with their goals.

Keeping It Simple

Many times in an effort to stay ahead, we find ourselves needlessly complicating and overanalyzing the true meaning and purpose of life. Indeed, many things are confusing and frustrating. Many of us have busy schedules and workloads to look after. Yet it is the simplicity that keeps us whole and a part of the true power and meaning of life.

A topic that we seem to forget in our personal lives is the fact that stress can pull us away from our true self. To relate to this, imagine placing a cookie in a large glass of milk. The cookie may stay atop the milk for a short while but within minutes it will sink to the bottom. This is an example of what happens to our own spirits when we let the stress of the world take over our lives. We stay on top of what we are doing but the load soon gets too heavy and overtakes us and we sink. Therefore, it is very important that you find ways to return to the natural tranquility and peace in your life. If you don't, you will find that you will become less of yourself and more of what the stress of the things in your life demand of you.

One day I was discussing the role of being a father to one of my colleagues in music who had just recently had a baby with his wife. He told me that before the baby was born he discovered that there was way too much clutter in his life. So he took a couple of weeks to simplify his life. He began to donate things that he did not use anymore to local charities, fundraisers, and other organizations. He threw away the garbage in his garage and any other place that he could find it.

What he found, when he did all of this, was that he had too many useless things in his life and that he wanted to keep things simple for his child when he was born. This man taught me a valuable lesson which was that so many of us live with too much clutter in our lives, both mentally and physically. Face it, if you are not in control of what you are doing in your life, someone, or something else is.

Concentrate on creating value in your life through who you are and what you do. It is a good idea to live your life with an emphasis on direction, not just speed. By living with direction, you have a better chance of getting what you want, even if it doesn't come right away. If you live your life with an emphasis on speed, who knows where you will end up? You could be going in circles for all you know. Therefore, it is crucial to live with purpose and direction in everything you do.

It greatly upsets me when people tell me that they have stopped trying and cannot continue living in a meaningful way because their life is hopeless. I simply reply with a phrase that my mother told me when I was just a little boy which is, "Your life is what you make it." You cannot win a losing battle with your problems unless you are armed and trained to fight them with the right tools. You can gain the upper hand in many challenges you face in life when you allow yourself to have control over the things of which you have control.

No one ever said that life would be fair, but one fact will remain the same as long as humanity continues to exist: There always will be problems and struggles somehow and somewhere in our lives. There will always be burdens to carry. But we are never alone. We have a greater chance at achievement in our lives when we accept these challenges. We can choose to ride with the wind, roll with the punches, and do what we can with what we have to be our best.

Be flexible and know that God is always working with you. We are reminded of this in Romans 8:28-29: *"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."*

In even the most trying times, we can never let go of the promises that we have been given by God. No matter what happens in our lives, we all must persevere, because God is still with us. We must always remember that God loves our lives, and in order for God to have a lasting impact on our lives, we must trust God in all ways, through everything we do.

I once read a story about a man who watched a butterfly hatch out of its cocoon. He saw the butterfly struggling to escape from the enclosure it had lived in for so long; the same structure it had used to transform itself into a beautiful creature.

He decided gently to help the creature free itself. Within moments of doing this, the butterfly died. Watching this beautiful, yet lifeless body, the man was astonished. He was simply trying to make life easier for this struggling creature. What had he done wrong?

In all actuality, the butterfly needed the struggle to get out of its cocoon to build its muscles and get blood into its wings so it could fly. The process was designed that way for a reason. This shows us that some of the struggles we face are sometimes needed in our lives to strengthen our faith in God.

We find many people who worry their lives away. In my distant past, I would almost be comforted by the fact that I had figured out just about every worst possible outcome for any situation I was about to face because I consistently worried about things in the future. This, again, is not healthy for us to do. While having concerns about the things we face in life are to be expected, it is not wise to waste away your life trying to figure out what might have been or plotting the worst that could possibly happen in every situation. That does not do anyone any favors.

I love the way that Jesus explains to us that worrying cannot help us at all. In Matthew 6:25, Jesus states, *“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow nor reap nor store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.”*

When we worry about the things we cannot change, we make our lives more complicated and the situations we face even more complex. Jesus continues to tell us about worrying in Matthew 6:27 by stating, *“Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?”* Out of all of Jesus’ teachings, this verse is one of my favorites. It is so evident and true to our everyday lives, but how trusting are we of this principle? We must hold onto the fact that God does have a plan for our lives and where we are headed.

While it is wise to evaluate possible outcomes, including worst case scenarios, at times with large investments of your resources in the future, it is not wise to let worrying overpower your mind.

Life has taught me that without the struggle, like the analogy of the butterfly, we cannot be strong or beautiful creatures. Most of all, without our trials and the mysteries of life, we would never wonder or be amazed at the awesome power of God. Therefore, conquer your fears with faith and truth.

Without the burning fire of our many problems, there is no fire of hope, strength, or faith. Without the struggles we face, we would not have the ability to live happily, and, like the butterfly, never have the chance to fly.

Imagine Attending Your Own Funeral

One of the best ways to gain inner peace in this life is to come to terms with impermanence, the fact that everything can and will change in life. This is the only thing that is assured to stay the same. In the spiritual sense, God is the only constant. This world is in a constant state of flux and, as the Buddha once said, you can't bathe in the same river twice. The river is always changing.

Also, coming to terms with our own mortality can bring peace and understanding of what is. As humans, none of us have made it out of this world alive. As the Bible says, from dust we come and to dust we shall return. It is what happens between the start of the sentence and the ending period of our lives that counts the most, the space in between.

In the journey to his enlightenment, the Buddha discovered three human conditions we all face and these are universal truths: old age, sickness and death. Few can argue with the fact that we all face these the longer we live. Our world would be a better place if people came to better terms with these facts of the way things are and processed them internally.

Imagine sitting at your own funeral, your remains up near the altar of the church. You, sitting in a middle to back church pew. What is said about you during the eulogy that is read? Who stands up and says something about the legacy you left behind, the lives you touched, the impact you made. Many eastern cultures do the exercise of coming to term with one's death so they can live a more meaningful life. In the same way, I bring this idea to you. Make a bigger difference now realizing that your life is impermanent and you will not be here forever on this earth in the physical sense.

Recently, I was watching one of those "90 facts I've Learned in 90 years" type of videos on social media and one of the bits of advice was to write your own eulogy and funeral wishes – what you want said about you after you are gone. I found this to be a very powerful and meaningful exercise in dealing with the fact that one day, hopefully a long time from now, I will not be here.

I encourage you to do likewise. This is not a morbid exercise I am suggesting, only a way to come to terms with life and its precious and brief nature. This helped me realize all I have done, am doing, and plan to do to change the world for the better in my own way for the time I am here. I have encountered many people who don't take their own mortality seriously until they have a health scare or another serious and life threatening event occurs. Coming to terms with what is, again, can make the time we do have left in this world more powerful and meaningful in many ways.

Your “NEW NORMAL”

It is certain that life will throw you a curveball. A job change, a natural disaster, a death of a friend or family member, or any other new change in your life can and will happen and things will never be the same. It is said, due to the changes that occur, you really can't bathe in the same river twice and the fact is still that change will be the only thing that will remain the same in life. Expect it.

When the tragedy of a loss or disaster occurs in your life or, on the other hand, a new opportunity arises, keep in mind that there is no going back to "normal." You will need to experience a "New Normal" in your life and embrace that change. After all, trying to get back to old normal is a futile effort. Be adaptable and take life as it is, not as you might want to have it.

In the ELCA Lutheran church during the communion part of our worship service we say, "Come as you are, not as you have to pretend to be." We do this because God accepts us where and how we are, not as God hopes us to be. Accept yourself and your circumstances as they are in the same way.

There are three things you can do to make a New Normal transition a better circumstance in your life:

Accept It: Things will indeed be what they will be in life. The joy in this is the fact that things usually have a way of working themselves out. Don't fight this. Know that people are imperfect and expect them to let you down at times. Expect things to go wrong at times and don't expect perfection from imperfect sources. The saying that "It Is What It Is" rings true here. Take life as it comes. Accept what is.

Harvest the Best: There is a lesson in every circumstance. Are you learning from it or letting it ruin your joy? What are you letting your life and situations you encounter teach you? Look for what you can learn from what happens to you and gather the resources to improve your life.

Forget the Rest: Let go of the things that don't serve you well. If it doesn't make you wiser, stronger and overall better in some way, let go of it. So much pain and suffering in life is caused by holding onto past experiences that serve no future value and goodness. While it is important

to examine and learn from what happens to you, it is also important to not let it ruin your future.

Live a Life of Simplicity and Joy

Life can and will get complicated. There are no ways around that sometimes. The goal with this being the case is to keep things in perspective and keep your joy and simple things in life first. We live in a world that is caught up in marketing a lifestyle that is flashy and sexy, when in reality these things are fleeting. What is the real purpose behind many of the things we place value in? As Solomon said in Ecclesiastes, it is vanity and chasing the wind to strive for the things "under the sun" in this world. Eventually everything will fade over time due to change.

What I am saying here is that vanity is a fleeting reality. It holds what we think we want just out of reach, like a carrot on a stick, and demands of us to strive for things that may be unattainable or may not bring us that much joy once we have them. Consider our social media empires and the life they sell us that we "should" be living. Lives of wealth and fame and influence. But where is the meaning in that? It's a mile wide and an inch deep.

When you consider for a moment what the Buddha discovered in his lifetime, over 2500 years ago, as a prince who had it all. He left the castle one day and, as the legend is told, was shocked to see old age, sickness and death. These three human conditions affect us all. We cannot escape them but many try to do just that everyday.

It may be crude of me to say that we all will get old, we all will get sick and, eventually, we all will die. However, in saying that, we strip away the vanity and chasing the wind and see the harsh realities of life. Then we can better accept them instead of those sometimes harsh realities chasing us down. You see, when we come to terms with 'what is' in life, there is not much that can hold us back from being the best version of ourselves we can be with the time we do have to make a difference.

With all of the complications life can throw at us, strive to live a life of simplicity and happiness. Don't try to be more than you are. The world will fade away one day along with all of its worldly vanity. Your spirit, on the other hand, is eternal, and will live on long after the followers, shares and likes are gone. All that really matters in the end is if you mattered to the Creator that made you. Think about that. Are you living God's best plan for your life right now?

This is one of the questions I ask myself and others in my own journey, "Is this God's BEST plan for me right now?"

Decisions, Decisions...

There is an old story on success that goes something like this: Three frogs sat on a log and two decided to jump. How many frogs are left? Three! They decided. That doesn't mean they did anything. How important is this truth in life? Your decisiveness has to be connected with massive action. The road of life is covered with flat squirrels that didn't get this concept through their head before it was too late for them as they were crossing the road. Don't be a flat squirrel.

The choice to go forward and gain personal success can only be made by you. A lack of responsibility is one of the main reasons people do not gain success in life. We find people who want to shoot for the stars in their lives but have no real plan to get it.

Once you have the goals you want to achieve figured out, it is your responsibility to follow through with the proper care and maintenance they require. Don't sit on the sidelines. Play to win. Run your race well. Don't tiptoe through life only to arrive safely at your grave. Be bold. Challenge yourself!

Inspiration for the Hard Times

One of my favorite Bible verses is 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

Our family has been going through a lot of trials lately and I share this to say that, no matter how rough the road, we are never truly alone.

God is with us and everything will work out in his perfect plan. I have heard that "perfect plan" phrase for years and at times it is hard to believe in a perfect plan in the middle of a crisis. But I know we are all here for a purpose. Our actions are ripples through the lives of others like a drop of water in a still pond. The choice of those actions rests with us.

I resonate with the part of the Serenity Prayer that states "Accepting Hardships as a Pathway to Peace." There is always a lesson in the hard times. Every experience can teach us something if we stop to reflect and learn from the lesson, seeking wisdom in all things. After all, it's not what happens to you but what you do with what happens to you - the response or reaction.

I have authored several books, produced numerous outdoor TV shows, written for the Texas' largest outdoor magazine, sold millions of dollars in live exotics, and much more in just the past several years. All this from a city boy with a music degree from a Lutheran college. But in reflecting on all of these things, being a good husband, son and father are among my proudest accomplishments so far. It's the little things.

Family first. Not fame and fortune. All of that is fleeting and will eventually be spent and forgotten. All things shall pass, eventually. The good and the bad. Impermanence. God's love is real, ever present, and never fails to amaze me in the midst of it all.

Be thankful, no matter what happens. Love deeply, give abundantly, choose your responses to what happens to you carefully. Don't miss the best times of your life when things seem at their worst.

I Had a Dream

As I ride off into the sunset with this project I want to leave you with a spiritually transformative experience I had back in my youth around the age of 15 years old. I was new to faith building back then and questioned my salvation in Christ and many other things about God. A dream I had that night is as clear today, over 25 years later, as it was back then.

My dream was a vision of Jesus the Christ in his brilliance and glory dressed in a white robe and surrounded by wildlife - animals both big and small. The words he said to me were few but were life changing: "I am neither ahead of you, nor behind you."

When I woke up from this experience, I had a feeling of peace and love that still is indescribable. A peace that goes beyond all human understanding. At first I was confused. What did Jesus mean? He was saying he was with me - always. The songs "Jesus Love Me" and "Jesus Loves the Little Children" don't hold a candle to the truth of his love for us and God's forgiveness is bigger than any sin you can imagine.

I have had similar experiences with The Christ throughout my life but this first experience early in my Christian faith will forever be etched on my soul. God loves you more than you could ever love yourself or anyone in this world.

There are two life after death or near death experiences I bring up when I speak at events. In one case, a woman purposely overdosed on medication in an effort to end her life. On the other side she was met by an angel who told her that life was not supposed to be easy and our walk through life was difficult at times to help us grow and learn.

In another after life experience brought on by a suicide attempt by an atheist woman with no faith in a higher power whatsoever, she encountered The Christ. He communicated a simple phrase: "Don't waste your life thinking you're not loved."

Be the Change

As long as you are still breathing and your heart is beating, you still have a purpose and the challenge I set before you is to make a difference in a positive way by impacting the world around you. There are people that are helpless and hopeless walking aimlessly through life right now. Some are even close to you, and could use some encouragement and spoonfuls of your hope and love. There are misguided children who are at risk of going down a path of failure and charities that need funding to keep going. There are ministries that need reliable volunteers like the two I have served over the years: Cross Water Outfitters (a Christian fishing ministry serving our military) and Camp Agape (a grief camp for children 7-12 who have lost a loved one close to them).

My point in all of this is that there is work to be done here. This life wasn't created simply so we could fulfill all of our dreams and live out all of our passions. There is a deeper meaning in the giving of our time and resources to the ones in need around us. Sure there are plenty of other people with big hearts and mighty checkbooks that do some heavy lifting in these areas, but what about your contribution? As another near death experiencer was once asked on the other side of life by Jesus, "What have you done for your fellow man?"

Just before my son Jackson was born in 2009, I hosted a few high school students on a bus trip from Texas to New Orleans, Louisiana for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America's youth gathering entitled Jesus, Justice and Jazz. There were so many great things about this event, but the part that drove the most meaning home for me at this gathering was the empowerment of service that the leadership and guest speakers at the event gave to the youth that attended.

The most popular shirt worn at the service projects hosted in the local communities in this event simply had the words "Be the Change" which was reminiscent of the famous quote by Mahatma Gandhi, "Be the change you want to see in the world." As we say in the sales profession, "It's hard to be nervous when your heart is on service."

Service to others is one of the very true gifts we can give. It takes the spotlight off of our own problems and worries and gives us meaning and purpose. Sure people could say they don't have any time to serve the local food bank but find they have plenty of time to binge watch a new season of their favorite TV series on demand. Or they could say they don't have any money to give but find a way to get out their credit card and impulse buy meaningless and worthless items shopping online.

Friends, at some point we have to take responsibility and give abundantly of ourselves and our resources to something bigger than ourselves, not just simply serve our own needs and desires. Mahatma Gandhi also once famously said, “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”

That is what I encourage you to do with your life. Do good by living well and improving the life of someone you can touch and have an impact upon in a meaningful and significant way. You don’t have to look far or try very hard to find someone in need of the difference you can make or a non-profit organization that can use your help.

Grow bigger than your problems and see the lessons that are being taught by them. Be part of something bigger than you are. Grow to be the best version of yourself so that you will look back one day, somewhere deep in your future, and realize the person you have grown to be in the process of life. Remember, the question to ask is not how much a job pays or what something or someone can do for you in life. The question to ask is what you are becoming in the process of all of this living you are doing. After all, it is said that it is not the years of your life but the life in your years that really counts.

Remember, you are deeply loved in this world and by the Creator of the universe. If God had a refrigerator, you can be assured that your photos and your finger paintings from kindergarten would be plastered all over the front of it by holy magnets. You are beloved more than you will ever know. God is holding you in the palm of his hand and will never let you go.

Knowing all of this, keep in mind that you have limited time here and when you move on past this life, there is more than you can ever imagine waiting for you on the other side. But while you’re here, make every day count because you count for a purpose everyday. May you learn the lessons of your past and may they teach and inspire you to the promises of your future. God bless you, my friend.

11 Tips for Healthy and Empowered Daily Living

Life is a gift; don't abuse it. Remember that you have only one chance to live. So live your life to the fullest extent and you will be thankful when you are older. Always be confident about who you are and never forget what you are capable of doing. Live with passion and never forget how important you are to the lives you touch everyday...

-Dustin Vaughn Warncke

1. Live with Purpose and Meaning

Make sure that you have a clearly defined direction and game plan set in your life. Have a purpose and meaning for every single major task you do in your personal and professional life.

2. Eat Well and Exercise Frequently

We all know we should eat well so I will not go too far into the nutritional details of what you should be putting into your body. When there are fresh healthy meal choices and less healthy processed food choices around you, choose wisely. Just like the fact that what we think about is what we become, what you eat is what you also shall become. Try to mix fresh and healthy into your life and your body, mind and spirit will most likely be clearer and more energetic as a result.

Make it a point to develop an exercise plan in your weekly routine if you do not already have one. You may want to consult with your doctor if you have any questions about the kind of exercise you may need or how much you should exercise in a week. It is usually recommended to do cardiovascular exercise for 20-60 minutes, three times a week. It is also recommended to do some kind of resistance training weekly, such as lifting weights, even if you don't wish to become a shredded out body builder. Both cardio and resistance workouts help the body burn calories, get rid of impurities, and bring the body into an overall healthy state of being. The stress relief I gain from going to the gym 3-5 times a week is immeasurable as well. Some people never get to know this kind of joy.

3. Concentrate on What Matters. Eliminate What is Holding You Back.

Learn to take out the trash in your mind, body, and soul. Keep away from things that will bring you away from achieving lasting success in your life. This may sound simple but don't miss it. Live to the best of your abilities by concentrating on what matters in your life and developing a direction, focus, and plan of action for attaining and keeping the first things first.

Remember that direction is more important than speed. If you concentrate only on how fast you are going towards a goal in your life, who knows where you might end up?

4. Manage Your Time Effectively and Efficiently

Concentrate on priorities and develop a sense of urgency with them. If you get side tracked, constantly tell yourself things such as, "I've got to get back to this task. I will finish this project by its deadline." Schedule your time by the hour or quarter hour and become an efficiency pro. You can always earn back money you lose in many circumstances but you really can't get back time you waste or lose to something else. Time is a precious commodity. Don't squander it.

5. Conquer Your Stress

For stress management, learn simple ways to simplify your personal and professional life. Keep a positive perspective. Try not to make mountains out of ant hills. Remember, take life one day at a time and enjoy one moment at a time. The present is all you really have to live in so live in the moment, mindful of the now.

With the new technologies of our times, look for ways to simplify the time you spend on tasks that you must do every week or month, especially the less desirable things. Also, where it can be done, take advantage of automating those less desirable activities.

Don't take on more than you can handle. Learn to share your responsibilities and better manage your life. Make time in your days to engage in meaningful and practical activities that you enjoy.

6. Live with Peace and Calm

Give yourself time to be alone in silence and let your mind go to work to help you live a better life. Spend time meditating and clearing your mind. Our souls were designed to live in peace and calm. The world we live in today has made doing this more difficult than ever before. Stress factors are everywhere, even in places we escape to like movies and music. There are more distractions and "rabbit holes" we can venture into than ever that can steal our time. The problem with distractions is they can steal our peace and joy as well. Guard your time and cherish it well.

Mother Teresa once said, “We have not come into the world to be a number; we have been created for a purpose, for great things: To love and be loved.” Remember love in all you do. Love is the most powerful emotion in the universe.

7. Never stop the process of learning and setting goals for yourself

There are always better ways to do things in life. Make it a mission to always keep looking for these better ways to improve - especially in the most trying of times. Always keep an open-minded view about the world around you and the people in it and never forget that we are all creatures created to continually grow in new ways and to learn new things. Find the beauty, meaning, purpose, power, and love for what you do and never lose the hope and faith around the fact that God loves you.

8. You teach others how to treat you

We ultimately hold the key to the way that others choose to treat us. We don't want to become totalitarian dictators nor do we want to be complete pushovers because each of these positions offer several disadvantages. Teach other people the way that you want to be treated by being assertive with what you want and basing your actions on truth and value, even when a situation tempts you to do otherwise. While compromise is important, being a pushover or putting up with someone else's garbage isn't. Enough is enough. Take charge of the quality of your relationships.

9. Discover what you want

Define what makes you do what you are doing right now. If you enjoy sports, music, writing, or any other activities, get involved in them. Do not just stand on the sidelines of life; get in the game. True dreamers are doers.

Find your passion and live in it. Even if there is nothing that you find passion for right now, you can find at least a few things that you like and develop a passion for them.

We all know way too many people who know what they want but have no strategy to get it and only find themselves complaining to others about all they don't have. Everyone is important and has a meaning and purpose in life. Play the game to win every day.

9. Understand that success is a process

Success, as with many things in life, is a process. And very few things that are worthwhile, long-term and beneficial, actually happen overnight. Success takes time and things do not always

happen the way that you may have imagined or planned for them to happen. It is not a curse to humanity, it is just the way that life works.

Enjoy the journey and get fully involved. Find a passion for what you do and hold on to it. Do what you must to stay on fire for what you are doing. People travel for miles to watch other people burn the fires of their passions.

This thought process can be applied to so many things in life: building a house, starting a business, and a variety of other things. When we learn to embrace the process, we can also begin to learn to enjoy the results more.

10. Find significance and meaning in everything that you choose to do

It is not only important to be successful in discovering what you want, but you also have to empower yourself with the ability to do better and be better with what you are doing. Success is a continuous process. It is a ball that you start rolling and must keep in motion.

You have to understand and appreciate the fact that success is a process but also know that it is a process that never ends. There is no destination in life, it's all a journey. People who do what they love and love what they do usually do not get tired or burnt out on doing what they do.

If you want to kill every trace of passion, romance, and love for your life, do everything for money and nothing else. If you want to keep passion, romance, and love, find several other reasons for living your life and making a difference by empowering others around you to do the same.

11. Live your life rejecting fear and unhappiness

It is human nature to be imperfect and, even though our society sometimes puts on the face that there are some people who have it all together and don't make mistakes, everyone has their own faults.

Everything that you will do in life will not always be 100% perfect or fair. That is just the way of the world. Yet, as I have stated here a few times, you have to push away the tendency to feel negatively about the world around you. This is often very difficult if you are used to feeling sorry for yourself or feeling that nothing will ever go your way. Begin to find good things to grow from and be grateful for in virtually every situation you face.

When you do this, you will find yourself wasting less time. When you learn many things from

each situation you find yourself in, whether it be good or bad, you will also see yourself grow even more. By rejecting the onset of negative feelings or, if that is impossible, accepting and processing them, you set yourself up for peace of mind and an empowering optimized life.

The most successful people in life may not have everything in their lives together, and no one does in reality. But they have a direction that they have chosen and have worked diligently in being the best version of themselves.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dustin Vaughn Warncke has served as a motivational speaker, devotional leader and master teacher, working with numerous individuals, small businesses, and organizations helping them achieve their goals and turn their dreams into reality. He earned a bachelor's degree from Texas Lutheran University in 2002. Go Bulldogs!

He has hosted hundreds of YouTube videos and TV shows as well as bi-weekly podcasts and authored paperback books, eBooks, blogs and feature articles for regional and national print and online publications.

Dustin's goal in all he does is to inspire others to do great things in life and serve others while living with love, joy, purpose, meaning and significance.

See Dustin's other books, articles, blogs, videos, outdoor TV show productions, and podcasts at www.dustinsprojects.com.