

Empowering Resilience

*Putting Out Life's Fires
and Winning One Day at a
Time*

**by Dustin Vaughn
Warncke**

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Dedications

To my son Jackson Warncke,

Being your Dad is the best thing I have done in my entire life. You are such a blessing to me.

To Meagan,

Thank you for your love and support over many years of writing books and so much more.

To My Mom and Stepdad Michael,

For always being an incredible source of support and sharing great wisdom and guidance with me.

To My Dad,

For showing me the reality of what is and loving me deeply as your only child.

To the Rev. Dr. Lee Witting,

For the inspiration, encouragement, and all I have learned from your NDE Radio podcast and over 400 shows.

To Lilia Samoilo,

For validating my efforts in trying to change the world one person at a time and living an empowered, spiritual life.

To the Rev. Dr. Norman A. Beck,

For inspiring me all of these years later to keep writing with the fire you lit in my soul during my Texas Lutheran University days and the first book I wrote back then, with you as my professor.

Quotes to Live By

“Lack of direction, not lack of time, is the problem. We all have 24-hour days.”

- Zig Ziglar

“Make improvements, not excuses. Seek respect, not attention.”

- Roy T. Bennett, *The Light in the Heart*

“If there's a single lesson that life teaches us, it's that wishing doesn't make it so.”

- Lev Grossman, *The Magicians*

“Learn as if you will live forever, live like you will die tomorrow.”

- Mahatma Gandhi

“You are not a drop in the ocean; you are the entire ocean in a drop.”

-Rumi

“Don't wish it was easier, wish you were better. Don't wish for less problems, wish for more skills. Don't wish for less challenge, wish for more wisdom.”

- Jim Rohn

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.”

Isaiah 43:2

Introduction

There's Always a Fire

The idea for this book came from a work situation for an e-commerce retailer that I started working for in 2021 after losing a job in late 2020, where I gained the knowledge and experience to sell and market products online.

I can see God's imprint on my life. Looking back, I realize that one experience, although painful and hard at times, grew me into a better person and gave me the tools I needed for the next adventure God had planned for me. I have learned throughout my life that God's plan never fails, but in order for things to come to fruition, we must submit to God's will and entire plan for our lives. Whether it is career, relationships, or any other area of our lives, listening to God's message of love and hope is paramount on achieving lasting success and meaningful experiences through life's journey.

Through every battle and trial we face, we should be asking, "What am I learning in this process? What is

the message God wants me to hear? Where is the lesson in this right now?"

If it hadn't been for a 3D archery tournament in 2011 where I bid on and won a bowfishing trip to meet Marty McIntyre with *GARQUEST Bowfishing Adventures*, I would never have met Mac & Prowler (Randy McMillian and Bill Henson), where I went to SHOT SHOW, an outdoor industry trade show, in 2012 and 2013, and met Chester Moore, Editor-in-Chief of *Texas Fish & Game Magazine (TF&G)*, Texas' largest regional outdoor magazine, and among few independent magazine publishers left in the U.S.A. My relationship with Chester started my outdoor writing and editing career part time, and my relationship with Marty and Mac & Prowler started my video and TV show production career. My job in school fundraising ended in 2015, when I realized I could no longer viably survive in my defined sales territory. So, I left to go sell office supplies for 10 months at a job I bitterly disliked, full of cold calls and corporate office visits. Little did I know, God was leading me to work for the owners of *Texas Fish & Game Magazine* full-time with my past sales experience as an advertising representative, and later promoted me to the title of Associate Publisher. After four years there, one of my *TF&G* clients, a knife sharpener manufacturer, hired me on as a marketing manager, and I left *TF&G* on very good terms.

After 11 months at this new job, I was devastated to be laid off after my position was outsourced, and I

was told there was no other opportunity for a job there. It was only later that I realized that the online sales channel I started on Amazon at that company would give me the experience to be where I was, next led to a larger and very prominent ecommerce company that was a top ranked producer on the most prominent ecommerce platforms. Everything led to something new and better.

You see, God was writing a symphony through my life, and only when I realized that one thing was destined to lead to another as long as I stayed in faith and let God have control, I realized everything was going to be just fine.

At the newest job, one day I needed to take off of work for a family emergency. My mother contracted COVID-19 and had some serious health complications in the recovery phase. This was a very serious matter, and I hesitated taking personal time off from work at first, realizing we just had a proverbial disaster on one of our online stores going offline due to an application our development team created. I told our operations director I wanted to see through resolving the issue we had remotely, and her response stuck with me: "Dustin, there will always be a fire to put out. You will always have a problem or crisis to deal with. That is life. Go be with your family! We got this..."

She was right. There's always a fire in our lives, and I look at this in two ways: There is always a fire of hope

that burns within us that the world tries to put out in many people's lives. There is also usually always a fire in the way of a crisis we or someone we are very close to is coming into, going through, or coming out of, through the flames of the multitude of problems we face.

One fire, the fire of hope; we must always keep lit and burning bright. Keep that fire of desire to do better and grow through the fires of crisis burning bright, and know that life wasn't designed to be easy. There are no free lunches in this world. There is not a slide to a sweet spot anywhere. There are always problems we face with health, relationships, work, family, and the list go on. Don't run away from your problems, get in front of them and deal with them directly. You are stronger than you think you are, so live in that empowerment and resilience as you blaze new trails into your future. You have never been more loved by God than you are right now.

The purpose of this book is to help you gain more resilience and true grit in life, and to be stronger in your faith, and live a life of meaning, significance, and purpose in all you do. All I try to do through the books I write is to give spoonfuls of hope, and my prayer is that you will, in turn, spread hope abundantly in return in your own life. I want to light the fire of hope in your soul right now if it is not already lit and grow it bigger and brighter if it is dim.

After all, you can only attract into your life that which you reflect through your thinking and actions. But I see countless people that create dumpster fires of situations in their lives that flare up, sometimes out of control, because they do not understand this truth.

I try to think of life as a stage play, and myself as the star of the show. What actions are you building into your play to help yourself and others, or are you, instead, fanning the flames of some fires that need to be put out? Introspection like this is the key to finding your inner peace. What we focus on is what we ultimately become. You have the freedom of choice. You must choose wisely.

So, I invite you to live each day with intention and get what you want and need from life, and God's promises, and will for your life. Never give up hope, even when it seems like things are hopeless. You are loved and supported by the Creator of the Universe that molded and formed you.

One of my favorite Bible verses comes from Psalms 139:13-18 (NIV)

13 *For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.*

14 *I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful; I know that full well.*

15 *My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.*

16 *Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”*

You are an amazing creation that was put here for a purpose and significance. Don't miss how awesome you are. Dare to be a blessing to someone in a hardship. Be the source of what you need in life by giving away that which you need the most. Thank you for taking this journey with me through this book.

Dustin Vaughn Warncke

Chapter 1

Everything Will Be Okay...

In my many years of studying near death experiences, and in having close calls with death and spiritually transformative experiences of my own, including a visitation from Jesus Christ himself when I was 15 years old, I find that there is a true organization of our Universe. God really does have a plan for your life though it might not seem clear or evident at times.

Good times come and go, but so do the hard times. The main point I have found through this life of experiencing the ebb and flow of taking life as it comes is that everything has a lesson and, in some deep way, everything has its place and purpose through the time we experience it. The message many have brought back from heaven after a near death experience is that everything is going to alright, no matter how rough a situation becomes, and, in a sometimes strange way, everything is as it should be.

To be open and honest with you, my friends, I haven't always believed this. I've lived too many years to count of my late childhood and adult life riddled with anxiety and stress that things wouldn't be alright – that I wouldn't be okay. I think that is one reason I became such an overachiever, and so overambitious at such a young age. I wanted to ensure that I wouldn't be pushing a rickety old shopping cart down South Congress Avenue in the middle of downtown Austin, Texas, one day, wearing tattered clothes, as a homeless person. That fear was real. I am not sure where it came from, but it motivated me in unhealthy ways for more years than I care to remember.

I was diagnosed with congestive heart failure in 2016 and had a defibrillator implanted in 2021. The doctor testing it set my heart into a troubled heart rhythm (arrhythmia) and couldn't bring me back out of it.

During this time, I believe I had a “veiled near death experience”. In other words, I visited the other side, Heaven, but don't remember much about the experience after this happened. I saw a vision of Jesus Christ once I came out of the sedation from this experience, and that vision is as real today as it was back then. This encounter awakened me into a new chance at life with a fire in my spirit and passion in my soul, like a new lease on the future. I know this was real because I have had this same feeling of a peace that goes beyond all human understanding, and the fire of hope that I felt every time I have had a Spiritually Transformative Experience (STE), or

visitation from Jesus Christ himself, which has happened several times in my life - the divine peace that things were going to be alright. That peace can only come from the Source of all that was, is and ever will be.

It was also after this encounter when I came to the realization that I had a good family support system, and realized that I must make peace with myself, and that no matter what happened to me, I would survive, and that everything would be in God's perfect plan for my life. It didn't happen overnight, but that anxiety that I held onto for so many years, the fear that things were going to get worse and somehow never get better, finally melted away, and it was replaced by peace that comes only from God.

You see, I finally recognized that God's plan was better than my fears, and that the impending doom I was imagining was potentially coming one day in my life was all my own prison cell that I had locked myself in. I came to a beautiful understanding that everything was going to be alright in its own way through its own time, in its own place. God would give me the lessons I needed when I needed them and put the people and resources at my reach when it was time for them. I let go. I learned that the Universe, anyone, or anything in it, was not out to get me. I concluded that God had a plan for my experiences, and that free will was my choice. And, loving myself was the answer to fade away my fears.

It is said that fear is a liar, and a tool of the enemy. In my sales and marketing eBook, *Hardcore Sales and Marketing*, which I wrote some time ago, I warned about the “Disease to Please” and, even worse, the “Disease of More.” And, I don’t just mean money and possessions. What happens too many times is that we get caught up in a struggle of trying to please others while neglecting ourselves and our own needs, and trying to accomplish, own, and become more than what is practical or reasonable by any stretch of the imagination.

I was the poster child of depression and anxiety, as well as over ambition, and burning the candle at both ends. I have overcome both sets of issues over the years. I don’t say this to discredit my authority on living an intentional and meaningful life. On the contrary, I think it qualifies me to do this task well. I have been through some major trials...some that almost took me out of the game of life for good, well before my time here was through. But, I have learned the great lessons in the process that we are human and not superheroes, and that we must rest and “sharpen our saws” if we are to keep our edge in life instead of toiling away without rest.

I don’t know everything about God, but what I have learned over the years is that God wants us to live our best lives for God’s glory and be at peace with all that is. This resides somewhere in the middle of the spectrum of meditating in utter silence and accomplishing great things with massive action, all

while balancing joy and harmony with our spiritual, mental, and physical wellbeing. I can't say I have this all figured out, but I constantly ask, "Is this God's best plan?," and, "Where is the lesson in this situation?" Of importance as well, "Is this helping or hurting me and my situation going into the future?"

No matter what odds you may have faced, are facing right now, or will face in the future, live with the resolve that everything is as it should be, even when it seems like it isn't, and that everything is going to okay. Remember, you are loved so deeply, more than you will ever know, by your Creator, and God will always love you. Nothing you can do will ever change that. You were chosen to live this life out of many other possibilities. You are an extraordinary individual capable of great things.

If you listen to NDE Radio (Near Death Experience Radio), a podcast about Near Death, Pre-Birth, Shared Death, and Spiritually Transformative Experiences, you will hear some interviews about our lives having a "soul contract" before we enter this world as babies. We are born in this world without memories of this most of the time, but some people have experiences that show them what they "signed up" for in this life experience. In this soul contract, you made choices about your life, your gender, where you would live, who your parents would be, etc. Now this may be contrary to what we are taught in the Christian religious teachings, but I believe there are enough

independent testimonials of pre-birth soul contracts to support this theory.

This all being said, keep in mind that you have free will in your choices in this world as you live this life, and that you signed up to be here. Endure your trials and crises bravely. Take the proverbial stairs, not the escalator or elevator through this life's battles. There is no easy button here, but endurance with hope and love will carry you better than resorting to shortcuts to making things easier.

If all of this is true, if you really are fearfully and wonderfully made, it is time, if not already, to live in the purpose and empowerment that you matter and see the difference you can and do make in the world around you. It is sad to see how many people "opt out of life" either mentally, just going through the motions, or physically, via suicide, because their coping mechanisms are overcome by their hopelessness. We saw a lot of NDEs and STEs come out of the COVID-19 pandemic. As difficult as this pandemic was, those that stayed in the game and fought the battle with the depression and anxiety of being isolated, came out looking for hope and a brighter future. Remember, when you are under fire, you are being spiritually refined. Don't miss that. You matter! And you are amazing!

Chapter 2

Remember Your Blessings

It is hard to fathom the fact that some awful things happened in this world less than 100 years ago, and how far we have come in our technological and civilization advances of our modern times. I study history and have a special fascination for some reason with Russian history because of its depth and complexity with what the people in Russia's history have endured over the years. While I live here in the United States, studying world history and cultures of other countries has always brought me a sense of understanding of how good I have it in the time and place I live now. I try to never forget history and what our ancestors went through for our lives to be possible today, and what they endured to make our lives better.

In the early 1920s, Russia endured one of the worst famines in the history of the world. Approximately 5 million people died purely from starvation. The Russian Revolution and several years of a Russian Civil War created a perfect storm that drove the

people of Russia to a level of depravity and awfulness that we can't even imagine today. The people were so hungry that they sometimes resorted to cannibalism.

In the 1930s, a new dictator named Joseph Stalin was in power... and not to be outdone by his predecessor, Vladimir Lenin, he oversaw the Great Famine of Soviet Ukraine. It is estimated that well over 3 million people died from a completely man-made famine that can be described as a failed communist experiment by some, and an act of genocide by others.

After this, there was Nazi Germany and millions of Jews were herded into concentration camps and killed. People who were living a normal life one moment were seeing their family members die weeks later. Families were torn apart, and things would never be the same again for the millions of people that World War II affected.

These were tough situations, and there are still photos online, readily available, of the history lesson of how bad things really were. This wasn't a movie or TV show like we would see streamed on our screens today. It was reality in its truest form, as harsh and difficult as it might be to understand or imagine in today's world.

I bring these past historical events to you today for perspective - nothing more, nothing less. Let's face it, if we don't learn from history, we are sure to repeat it.

The point here is to live in the gratitude and thanksgiving for what you have and step out in faith for what you are trying to achieve in your life. We are in the Golden Age right now of our time in many ways. Don't let life get you down. Get in front of your problems and face them down.

If you were sitting at a table across from a Holocaust survivor or someone who survived the Russian or Ukrainian famine or the other horrors of a revolution or world war, you could be assured they would tell you to not take what you have for granted and to live each day to the fullest. After all, you probably have a much better opportunity to do well for yourself in our time we live in today than they could ever have dreamed of having. Don't miss this.

The point of this history lesson is that overall, things are never as bad as they seem in the world we live in today, although there are still wars and other perils people face daily. It's hard to argue that things are pretty darn good. Live in this truth. Don't look at the world through the lens that everything and everyone has dissolved into a giant train wreck or dumpster fire. Some things indeed have. I am not avoiding that reality. I am only giving perspective. If you are reading this right now, you probably live in a good time, and there is always hope for better days ahead. Peace can only prevail when people love themselves and each other.

God is literally made up of love. It is the strongest emotion and power in the Universe. Don't miss the best days of your life when things sometimes seem at their worst. Our ancestors would have given almost anything to have what we have in our world today, and what you have in your home, office, school or other place you work or play. Perspective, again, is a great teacher.

So here's the question: How do you see the world? Is it a dumpster fire of problems, or filled with hope for better days and gratitude and thankfulness for what you have, had, and will have in the future? What are your insights and plans for making your corner of the world better for you and for those around you? You can only control the controllables. Make every day, every effort, every instance to make a difference count with love, peace, ease, and an empowering resolve. Count your blessings. Be thankful and grateful for where you are and where you are going. My suggestion is not to just find several things to be grateful for but to **JUST BE GRATEFUL!**

Chapter 3

The Greatest of These is Love

The powerful words of 1 Corinthians 1-13 are among one of the most memorable of what the Apostle Paul wrote during his life and career in growing the early Christian church. When I married my wife right after I graduated college back in 2003, one of our mutual friends read this scripture verse during our wedding ceremony, and it stuck with me ever since.

[3] “If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.”

These are such powerful words. Without love, there is a great void and something crucial is missing. The scripture continues:

[4] “Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; [5] it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or

resentful; [6] it does not rejoice at wrong but rejoices in the right. [7] Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.[8] Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.”

I have a friend, Steve Gardipee, who fought in two combat tours in the Vietnam War and went down in 5 helicopter crashes as a scout pilot. Although I had no idea that filming his story and putting it on YouTube in 2014 (*Life After Death Experience (NDE) with Steve Gardipee, Vietnam War Story*), would become one of the most impactful videos I would have done in my life in my media work thus far. It turned out to be an amazing experience for so many.

You see, Steve was shot down in a scout helicopter in Vietnam on a recon scouting mission and died behind enemy lines in the middle of a very hostile enemy base camp environment. His story was one of true heroism, and you can see God’s hand and will for him to survive to tell his story, as Steve experienced God after he passed away, and could only explain that God our Father was “an incredible clearness,” and that God was “literally made up of LOVE”. This follows what we are taught in the Bible and in our church - that God is Love. Until I met Steve and heard his amazing story, which now has over 1.8 million views on YouTube, I didn’t understand it as well.

God had one feeling he experienced in heaven and that was that God wants to love and be loved in return. Think about it: we are created by the love between two people and love binds us together to the most important things in our lives.

Love is the most powerful force in the Universe. It unites us, brings hope, compassion, faith and so much more to our hurting world. Love connects us together to family, friends and other relationships in strong and meaningful ways. Love is the answer, and gives us meaning, purpose and significance in all we do. Keep love in your heart and at the foundation of who you are in Christ.

God loves you more than you will ever know or can even imagine. God is crazy about you and wants the very best for you through God's foundation of love in Christ. Just look at Christ's overall life and ministry. It was all about LOVE. In remembering this, I encourage you to examine love from within yourself and the love you project in your life to others you encounter in your life's journey, as it doesn't get any better than living a life of gratitude and trust through the greatest feeling imaginable - the love God has for YOU!

Chapter 4

Stepping Off the Rusty Old Nail

One of the great podcasters of our time, Sam Crowley, and his show for big dreamers and entrepreneurs, *Every Day is Saturday*, makes a great example on his show of how many people's foot is stuck on a proverbial old rusty nail in their life with their job, marriage, family situation, or other circumstance.

In this imaginary scenario, we are in a situation that is uncomfortable, but we find comfort in the dull painfulness of where we are, and fear of changing anything, as it might potentially be scary. We fear the unknown. Our foot has been on the rusty nail for a long time. We are in pain, but stepping off the rusty nail, making a change for possible improvement in the future, we know, will be more painful. We also know it is inevitable and necessary, but it is more comfortable to suffer a dull aching pain that comes with leaving our foot where it is, on the nail.

What I am illustrating here is the fear of a major life change versus the muted ache of staying where you are. Yes, I know it is scary. Yes, things can always be worse with change. But remember, fear is a liar. The only thing you are born fearing is the fear of loud noises, and the fear falling. The rest is all learned from our respective environments, and that conditions us to fear the unexpected, the unknown, and the things we can't necessarily understand. This is the challenge our life presents in toxic relationships, workplaces that abuse us, marriages that drain our emotional well-being, and the list goes on.

While I would never recommend quitting a job, ending a friendship, or filing for divorce to anyone without first thinking through a plan or scenarios for what to do in the future, keep in mind that stepping off the old rusty nail is part of your growth process, and you are in this life experience to grow. The old rusty nail represents a bad situation and presents an infection that can spread into other areas of your life. Stepping off the old rusty nail represents an opportunity to heal, not to spread infection further, and improve your growth into better things. The issue standing between you and change is usually the fear of what might happen without that relationship, workplace, marriage, or the security it represents.

This is your opportunity to be bold in your life. Fight the fear, move forward, and don't look back in regret if something represents stepping off the nail in your life. Remember that most of the things you fear in your

decision making never come to fruition. There are better days ahead. In fact, I dare say, your best days of your life are still ahead of you, and they exist on the other side of that fear of the change and stepping off the nail.

I want you to consider the other side of the fear of change. What are your possibilities? What can you do with your foot off the nail? What can you accomplish without that dull aching pain? The possibilities are there. Hope is always there in the future of what might be.

Getting past the fear of change is hard but I would dare say most of the time it is well worth lifting your foot off the nail in your life and moving on. Don't miss the best days, months, and years of your life thinking you can't make a change for the better and step off that old rusty nail in your life for good.

Chapter 5

Getting What You Need and Want

Much has been written about manifestation and the Law of Attraction and Intention. I am not here to reinvent the wheel – only give you a method of helping you get what you want and need in life based on what has worked for me time and time again. When you set a goal or intention of what you want in life, it is critically important that you write it down. If you don't write EXACTLY what you want down on paper in printed form, all you really have is a good idea mixed with a good wish or faint hope.

Writing your goals down daily helps your brain submit actions into achieving those things, and your mind goes to work planning out a way to get them. Zig Ziglar is quoted as saying, "If you aim at nothing, you will hit it every time." Be intentional with what you want out of life, and, if the timing is right and your goals are aligned with your actions, you will be closer

to achieving what you set your mind to doing versus hoping something MIGHT happen that you wish for.

Again, hoping and waiting for something you don't write down is a simple wish for something that may or may not happen. Intention and diligence are how things become manifested. If you want to hit what you are aiming at, you have to aim with rifle-like precision, not scatter like the blast of a shotgun. Both achieve impact but if you are not defined in your goals about what you want out of life, who knows what you will get?

Write your goals down every day and write them down physically on paper with a pen. This physical action solidifies in physical form what you want to achieve. Sure, you can type them digitally, but there is something about writing them down that makes a bigger impact to your mind and making what you want a reality. Doing it this way daily refocuses your mind to making progress on achieving what you want every day. Never stop setting goals and making progress. Your time here on Earth is limited. Many people waste their time on hopes and dreams they never accomplish because they don't write down daily and make a plan to achieve them. Make every day count towards setting goals and achieving what you want out of your future.

Why Have Life Goals?

Why set goals in the first place? Goals are measures of accomplishment in the sense of adding meaning and purpose to your life. Goals have immense value if they are approached in the right frame of mind and can help our personal development and growth process in this reality. That all being said, goals are not a punishment system. The purpose of having goals is to set intentions for positive results. So don't beat yourself up if you don't achieve everything you strive after.

There are three steps I will define here for goal achievement, and they must be approached carefully and mindfully.

1) Define what your long-term and short-term goals are, and how you are going to achieve them.

Determine what price you are willing to pay to get what you want. It is said that you can't manage what you don't measure, and this is such a huge takeaway when it comes to goal setting. Analyze what is working and what is not working in your life. Ask yourself questions such as:

“Am I happy where I am right now?”

“What could I do to make my life better?”

“Is what I am doing pleasing to what my desires truthfully are or just what others expect me to do?”

“Do I like myself and what I am doing with my life?”

“Do I accept responsibility for what I do in my life?”

“Does the fear of failing stop me from taking risks?”

“Do I expect the best from what I am doing in life?”

“Do I believe in challenge and growth as a means towards being the best that I can be?”

“Do I fill my life with people and things that help me get what I want?”

“Where are my greatest abilities and interests in my life?”

“When I encounter obstacles or setbacks in what I do in life, do I look for hidden benefits or insights?”

“Do I use my time effectively and efficiently?”

“Do I believe in and foster my own creativity?”

“Do I try to stay positive and think positively most of the time in my life?”

Do this for both your short-term and long-term goals. Remember that you cannot find true happiness in your life if you factor money and material possessions as the only things that can make you happy and bring you joy. People who solely do this are some of the unhappiest people we know in this world.

Now that you have established what you want and examined who you are, it is time to look at the big picture. Define what your main interests and beliefs are as a human. What are you willing to do in your life in the future to get to get your goals and dreams accomplished? How long will it take you? While you do this, understand that you are only human and can only do so much in a day. Therefore, it is not wise to want to do something by yourself when you might need other people to help you with. Consider an accountability partner.

Find the strong and weak points of who you are as a person and assess the ways you can improve. Write them down and read them back to yourself.

Determine what it will cost in terms of time, money, and other resources to get what you want. Ask yourself questions such as whether or not your goals are realistic, but challenging enough in nature, and if you believe that you have the power and ability to conquer them.

Many people lack confidence, and this robs them of attaining what they want and need out of life. One thing to remember here is something I learned from Jim Rohn: Life doesn't give you what you want or even what you need. Life gives you what you deserve.

You wouldn't expect a plant to grow if you didn't plant the seed and cultivate the ground it's planted in, let alone water it and give it the time it needs. Such is the lesson with goals and potential.

The sad thing is that many people overlook this step, take a blind shot in the dark, and usually end up back where they started before they even set out to achieve their goal in the first place. Write down what you want. Examine it well. Do research if necessary. Make a plan to win.

Some of the most successful people I know wrote their goals down, continue to write new goals for themselves, and look at them every day. When you write your goals down, you are telling yourself what you truly desire in life. You are giving yourself the power to want better for yourself, whatever that may mean.

Sadly, many people never get far enough in their lives to understand who they are and what they really want. They aimlessly go through life hoping they find out what works best for them, but never find it. It does not have to work the same way for you. When you are in

control of your life, you can keep control of a majority of what happens. Also, begin to feed yourself positive energy about your goal. If you believe that what you want can exist in some form or another, you have the power and ability in your life to make it come true. Keep all of this information to yourself at first. Do not let people who might try to say something negative about what you aspire to do in your life stop you from achievement. Also, set a deadline of some sort—a finishing point for your goals. You will have a better chance of being successful at something if you have a limit of time to work within.

2) Implementation: Devise a plan to achieve your goal and start working for it.

When you make the decision to achieve a goal, it is just that, your decision. It is your responsibility to take care of achieving it; no one else is going to do it for you simply because no one else has that innate ability. It's not important to them like it is for you.

Make sure that you make time for your goals and space out the time that it is going to take to achieve them. Once again, you need to determine the price that it will take to get what you want out of life. Where are your resources? What kind of time and money is what you want going to cost you? Take small "baby steps" if necessary to get where you need to be. Sometimes, breaking larger goals into smaller mini-goals is key.

3) Evaluate whether or not your quest for success was a win or failure.

When we achieve, many times we will give ourselves too much praise, and when we do not do so well, sometimes too much criticism. We must evaluate our actions here by putting things into their true perspectives and, also, make sure that we do not blow things out of proportion. This will help us see where we succeeded, and where we can improve for achieving our next set of goals.

There is no need to say things such as, “I am not good enough for this, I always mess things up,” and other self-defeating statements when we are not successful at something. This thinking isn’t helpful. Beating oneself up and throwing a pity party doesn’t help the situation. This life is a journey, not a destination. Don’t be self-defeating. The purpose of goals is to set the direction.

When we begin to get comfortable with both success and failure, we can get used to seeing what is going to work and not work in our lives. This is why evaluation is so important. We have to be able to see that failure can be an option without the world coming to an end. Most true successes in life come after a period of some, if not many, failures.

Thomas Edison, one of the greatest inventors in history, had more failures when he began inventing things than most people have in their entire lives, but

he became very successful because he evaluated why he was failing, and found ways to overcome. He used his failures to help him gain his successes. Every time he did fail, he saw it as a way to not do things that way again, and then tried something new. We must constantly do the same thing when we try to improve our own lives.

Now, all this being said, most people get goal setting all wrong. As I titled a chapter in my last book, "*An Intentional Optimized Life*," direction is more important than speed. Many times, people beat themselves up when they don't achieve their goals and aspirations. I want you to feel good either way with your intentionality in setting direction, not whether or not you actually achieve what you are setting out to accomplish. This may sound contradictory to what I just stated, but keep in mind that I want you to be the star of the show, the champion of your life. At the end of the day, you're a winner in my book, not a loser.

A goal is simply a means to an end. Remember, it's about the journey that counts. Invest in the process, not only the end result. The question to ask yourself is, "What am I becoming in the process of achieving this success?" That, my friends, is where the rubber meets the road. It's the secret sauce of any true success.

Sure, many books, podcasts, articles, blogs and more have been written and recorded about goal setting. I am not saying setting goals is not important. It is. But

the direction goals set is far more important to getting you where you want to be in life than the actual goal itself. With solid direction, you will eventually end up where you want to be. It is said that if you want to make God laugh, tell him your plan. Since change is inevitable, be flexible. Don't beat yourself up because you set too high of a goal for yourself and don't reasonably attain it. Be kind to yourself. After all, God's plan is better than your plan at the end of the day. Extend to yourself the same grace and mercy you most likely would extend others if they failed you if you do not meet all of your own expectations. The joy in life comes in the process of the journey. Live in that joy and peace.

Chapter 6

Manifestation of Your Desires

Manifesting a desire, in my opinion at least, is different than setting a goal. In manifesting, you are telling God about what you want to have in your life, and, as such, you are physically directing that manifestation to become reality. If you believe and conceive, with intention (positive or negative), you are more likely to get something to manifest than just daydreaming. Remember, thoughts can become things in reality, if they are backed with intention, so guard your thoughts carefully, and keep hope alive in your mind.

The problem I see in many people is the negative thoughts, or “stinking thinking”, that draws in, with intention, negative outcomes to potentially positive situations and circumstances.

Much like goal setting, this all starts with writing down what you want first. Charlton Heston portrayed Moses in Cecil B. DeMille's 1956 classic, *The Ten Commandments*. A famous quote throughout the

movie is, "So let it be written, so let it be done." There is a special meaning in this movie about that phrase as it relates to God's commandments that Moses received, but I also think there is something powerful about this statement. What we think and write down can become reality with the right intention behind it.

Now, just try what I am suggesting with something simple. Write down what you want, very specifically, on a notepad, sticky note, or piece of paper, and write "THANK YOU" below it. I must reiterate that you have to be deliberate and specific. If you are wanting a truck, you must choose the year, model, color, body style, and other features in great detail. Now take that piece of paper and fold it, and put it somewhere safe, but NOT somewhere you will look at it every day. By doing this - stating exactly what you want in great detail, writing it down, and putting it away, you are signaling the power of the Universe to send it to you. What you want really wants you, too. What you are meant for is meant to be yours, but you have to be detailed and descriptive for that to be so. Trust me on this. Remember, "So let it be written, so let it be done."

Now this might sound hokey at first. Yes, I too, have watched the movies and read the books about the Law of Attraction, but what I am suggesting here is taking it a step further. Keep in mind in all of this that what you think about is what you will ultimately become most of the time. If you think you are a failure, with intention, the Universe has no other

choice but to give you more failure. But if you feed your mind success and winning for a mental diet, your life will have a better opportunity for hope and more opportunity.

In the same way, what you write down with purpose becomes what you will have. Choose wisely and the choice is ultimately yours. Also remember, by not choosing positive or negative, you have also chosen and who knows what you will get. Don't miss this important tool in getting what you want out of life.

God, How Can I Serve You?

What a lot of people miss is that they ask God (AKA the Universe, Spirit) for what they want without offering anything in return. The late Dr. Wayne Dyer made the point that if you only ask for what you want and have a neediness and wanting in the asking without offering service behind it in return, the Universe can only give you more wanting. That is why, with goal setting and manifestation, you must also ask God with intention, "How may I serve you?" When you are in service to other people, organizations, or other areas of your life, not just yourself, you become less about you and more about the greater good. In return, God will likely serve your needs and wants as well.

This goes back to what John F. Kennedy said in his famous speech. "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country..." Ask not

what God can give you but ask what you can give to God. And you, in return, become the source of what you want and need.

As a co-creator with God, it is important to realize that you can become the source of what you want and need in life by one action: Giving of that what you want or need the most. I learned this from Neale Donald Walsh, author of the *Conversations with God* book series, and many other books and videos, and even a movie. Since God is with you and in you, and you are part of God's love as an expression of God, you are part of the laws of the Universe and the energy of those laws.

Now, I am not one who believes if you just hope and wish for something, it will come to you, but if you take the right steps and actions to what you put out in the Universe, it is sure to return to you in some form or another through the power of energy and focusing on that energy.

Again, this is why it is important to carefully guard your thoughts and goals, as thoughts can become things in physical reality, through the power of manifestation. What you fear or what you desire the most can and will come to pass if you will it to be, and there are examples of what we sow and reap in many places throughout the Bible.

If you have read much of my writing, you know that I do not claim to be a biblical scholar, but I do believe

one important theme of the Bible that is tactical and practical, and many followers of the Good Book don't follow is in Matthew 7:7 where Jesus tells us "Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you." (NIV)

Many of us do ask through intercessory prayers at church or in our own way. God is always with us and is always listening, but many people don't know how to ask God, and what actions to take after asking.

If what you are needing or wanting is money, the best thing you can do is to give away money you have to a cause or person in need who is less fortunate than you. That is sending God the signal that you are the source of creating opportunity for someone else, and, just as sure as God makes little green apples, that resource will be returned unto you. I am in no way saying to give to receive. That is the wrong energy to put out there. What I am suggesting is to give away what you are desiring or needing in your life. This works because God is the ultimate giver, and, as I am sure you have heard said: You can't outgive God.

Manifesting works through energy and focus. By the way the Universe works, that which you give away will come back to you in multitudes if you do it with the right reason. If you give away love because you need love, that love will be returned to you again. If you give away hope in a hopeless situation, then hope is exactly what you will receive in your future. Simply be the source of creation. Give away what you are

needing the most, and watch it return to you in multitudes. Simply: Be the Source.

Chapter 7

Money, “Stuff” and Values

We live in a world of microwaves, when long term success requires a slow cooker, and is a journey and ongoing process, not a destination or end point. Your days are numbered on Earth, but don't take that in a bad way. That being the case, make every day count. You don't know how long you have. Our society, on the other hand, thinks of success as a microwave, not a slow cooker, and we see people striving to get rich quick and get famous fast but, like the difference in cooking with a slow cooker versus a microwave, we end up with different results.

Our young people in generations of the past wanted to be astronauts or basketball players when they grew up. The youth of today, if you ask many of them, just want to be super rich and insta-famous for no other reason than to be rich and famous. This is due largely in part to the shift in our culture, and what we see value in as a modern society.

Social media has certainly come with its biases, and we are surrounded by “influencers” that are spread a mile wide and an inch deep as a result. Where is the true value and meaning in men’s body builder muscles and bikini-clad “insta-models” anyway? Now, I have a decent following of my content, and I have nothing against having a large following or looking like a super-hot woman or stud muffin hunk.

Through our technology, we can have a lasting impact on the world more than ever, but we have seemed to grow as a culture to love things and use people as a result instead of the opposite of loving people and using things.

To that point, we find people neck deep in student loans, credit cards, mortgages and car payments, that feel hopeless when they look at all of their debt, only to keep up appearances to impress people they don’t even know or like.

The older I get, the less having new and expensive possessions matters to me. I find more value in the experiences I have in my life, and the relationships I nurture with others around me as well as the work I do to help the greater good in my life.

Everything within the last several years in our world has come online and on demand. We are a nation of “access” more than “ownership” in what we read, view, and listen to these days. The way we shop online, watch TV and movies, and a multitude of other

things has all become simpler and more on our own on demand terms than ever before.

That all being said, the one thing that penetrates this on-demand theme is that many things have become disposable and replaceable. I will go as far as to say that I see humans treating other humans this way as well, and it is true. Just look around for a moment.

In a world where we can replace things we use so easily, and a world that sells us the idea that new is always better, I have a saying I borrowed from a survivor of the Great Depression of the past century:

“Use it up, Wear it Out, Make it Do or Do Without”.

During some of the harder times our ancestors went through, a person didn't have fast food and coffee shops on every corner. You had to work hard to even eat on some days, and this made for true grit inside the people that went through that time in history. Both of my grandfathers never threw away things they could reuse or repurpose, as they never knew when they might need them again.

As generations have grown up since the decades since that period of history when the stock market crashed and people struggled to make a living as dirt poor farmers and sharecroppers, we seem to forget what history taught us about valuing precious resources. We tend to take things like running water, electricity, heating and air conditioning for granted, as

we have most likely always had these things in our lifetime.

When we visit outside of our normal comfort zones to other parts of the world, we see that around a billion people slept on a dirt floor last night. It is said that 1 out of every 7 people in this world struggles to eat every day, while others more fortunate with food availability still have food scarcity at times.

I bring up these facts because comparison is the thief of joy, and most of us can be found comparing ourselves to what we lack in comparison to what other people we admire already have. We seem to compare ourselves only to people who have more than we personally have. Envy is a waste of time. Chances are you already have all you need to live a reasonably joyful life. But joy, my friends, is a personal choice you have to make, and we know this is an “inside job” that must come from within your soul, not from external things.

Gratitude, being thankful in all circumstances, is a powerful tool for an empowered and optimized life. Being thankful for all that you already had, have, and shall have in the future is a powerful way to fight back greed and envy. An attitude of gratitude is key here. I'll queue up one of my favorite verses again, as I did in my last book.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 says: *“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”*

That means ALL circumstances, not just the good ones. That means life hasn't been and won't always be easy, simple or fair. Paul wrote many of his letters in jail, or other kinds of captivity for spreading the message of Christ and the Good News of the Gospel. Of all of the famous people in the world, Paul had a lot of tough circumstances in his journey after an experience with Jesus on the road to Damascus. And compared to you and I, in the times and places we live in these days, he had a lot of things to not be thankful for in his circumstances, but he found joy in the midst of his difficulties, anyway. He still counted his blessings and pursued spreading the Gospel message to the world regardless of tough times. There is a lesson in that life story alone.

Now, back to loving people and using things. You will find me piling my clothes and other things I use every day which have been torn or have holes or other defects in them so I can repair or repurpose them, or even donate them if they are in better shape, with no blemishes, if I don't want them anymore. Old t-shirts are repurposed into cleaning or workshop rags, or gun cleaning patches. Not much that I have goes to waste if I can help it, and that was just the way I was raised.

I do not buy new and trendy items, or upgrade to newer and bigger houses or fancier vehicles, but, not because I can't afford them. I most certainly can afford far more than I have. It just goes back to my value system. I do not find value in financing something I already possess to impress anyone, including myself. Although some people believe they have "arrived" at a certain point in life, and they believe they deserve these things, I like thinking of the way that Jesus, the Buddha, and the prophet Mohammed lived during their spiritual teaching days, in their respective eras. They were humble leaders, and grateful for each passing day, and what it brought in both challenges and opportunities. Three great spiritual teachers and masters of spiritual truths can't be wrong. They were not flashy or boastful. They cared about the greater good and making a difference in the world around them.

The point of all of this is to make more of what you have go further instead of disposing of everything once you have had your use of it. Get some extra mileage out of the things you have not just to save money, but to extend the value of things. And don't forget, as The Minimalists guys likes to say at the end of their podcasts, to "love people and use things - because the opposite never works."

Another takeaway from this is to seek meaning and purpose in relationships and experiences, by not impulsing on worthless "stuff" that will inevitably result in more clutter, and even more regret when the credit

card statement shows up. You don't have to spend like a drunken sailor to be happy in life. Stuff cannot bring you joy for long, after all. Remember, again, the simple fact that joy comes from within.

We need to put more value in people, not things. We need to deepen our life's purpose and realign our desires on what we really need and want to accomplish in our lives, not what the culture around us sells us as the most marketed to modern society in the history of the world.

True value comes from loving people, learning new things, and serving others in need with the resources we have available to us. There are countless opportunities to practice these three activities without looking very hard at all.

As I have realized in my own journey, my hope is that everyone will gain rest in the simple but profound realization that we are enough in God's eyes, and that there is nothing more to prove. Rest in the achievement of your past accomplishments and successes, as well as the gratitude for what you have had, have, and shall have. Recognize in God's peace that you are important, but this world is impermanent, and this life in the physical form is brief and fleeting.

Remember, it doesn't matter how much money, knowledge or material things you have if you squander it all on yourself, and don't care about the needs of others. Zig Ziglar once said, "People don't

care how much you know until they know how much you care.” No man is an island. We are all connected in community in this world in a deep way. We are an ocean of souls. And, in the drop of water of that ocean exists the sea of everyone in it, and that includes you, a special and divine creation. I have known more than a few suicidal millionaires. Money is not the answer to everything. Happiness comes in giving, not in the receiving and possessing.

Joy is found in releasing and letting go, not trying to hold on to everything you can put your hands on. Live in the state of appreciation of the world around you, not just the pursuit of the accumulation of more. Remember, all of this “stuff” in this world, even this very book, in whatever form you are reading or listening to it, will fade away one day. The soul will be all that is left 100 years from now. The lives that you touched will matter then, not all your stuff. Live in that gratitude - that you are enough, and you already have all you need, and then rest in God’s peace that all is well.

Chapter 8

Is This Helping or Hurting?

One question that is helpful to ask in any given situation is the following: “Is what I am doing helping or hurting the relationship, circumstance, or situation?” I think back on my own life on how much heartache and anxiety I would have avoided if I had just asked this question before making a major response or decision.

What many people miss is that sometimes it is okay to fold your cards on the proverbial table and walk away from a situation if the situation warrants it. Sometimes it is worth staying in the fight, but not always.

One thing is for sure: Life is going to present you with new challenges. You are likely going to be tested many more times in this life. What are you made of internally in the spiritual sense? That’s the question I want to ask you. I ask this because the true answer will be what comes out of you when life “squeezes” all

you are as a person through stress and heartache and tests your wit and grit.

What you are made of internally: Spiritually, Mentally and Physically, will come out of you when you are squeezed in times of trial. What counts the most in those times of difficulty is your inner resolve - your resilience, to push forward and make decisions and changes to better your situation or circumstance.

One of the devotions I give twice a year and have done so for many years at the time I wrote this book is called "The New Normal." There is a short chapter I wrote in my last book, *An Intentional Optimized Life*, that covers the three steps to handle any situation. I will cover this here again:

1) Accept It: It is what it is. Control the situation or the situation might control you, but you can only control what you have control over. Live in the present of what is, not what you might like to happen, or hope would have happened.

2) Harvest the Best: You have many choices to make in your life. The question I have asked a few times now is, "Are you learning the lesson(s) being taught during difficult times of your life?" There is a lesson being taught in every circumstance. Are you learning what is being taught, or are you bulldozing through the situation, and being unteachable? Never forget that life is a great teacher. Are you a good student?

3) Forget and Forgive the Rest: Most of us can understand and relate to difficult situations and the lessons we learn from them, but are you letting go of what isn't helpful or beneficial to your life? A dog can even understand a closed fist of anger, and holding on to something, versus an open hand of peace (representing letting go). Part of our healing process is letting go, forgiving and forgetting the things we sometimes want to hold on to, but really shouldn't. Remember from my last book, life is a beautiful symphony. You can't enjoy the happy high notes without the low sad notes. Both are part of the plan. Letting go of what has hurt you and isn't beneficial to you anymore is part of the healing process in life. Don't miss this.

So, with all of this being written, let me ask you. Is what you are doing helping or hurting your life, your opinion of yourself, and your view of the world you live in? This book and the last one I wrote are written in a way to help you search your soul. The old saying, "Let Go and Let God" may sound cliché but there is a lot of truth to that phrase.

I have presented "The New Normal" devotion to numerous soldiers stationed at Fort Hood, where I live here in Texas, over the years with a fishing ministry I belong to, Cross Water Outfitters. Many of these soldiers have been through hardships most of us can't even fathom with their service to the military and combat overseas. The goal for me is simple: You matter, you are important, and you make a difference

in this world, no matter what hardships you might face. The same is true for you, even if you never served in our Armed Forces. This whole book is dedicated to the new normals that you have faced, are facing right now, and will face in the future. Keep the fire of hope alive, and never give up.

The other devotion we cover at these soldier events is “Keep it Simple”, where we talk about the simplicity of the Gospel message and its relation to how we jug fish for catfish on Lake Belton, a popular central Texas lake. One recent devotion is “The Greatest Commandment”, which covers Jesus’ new commandment he gave his disciples, to love others as we love ourselves. This book touches on the content of both of these other devotions as well.

You can see The New Normal devotion in its entirety from yours truly if you just visit my website at www.dustinsprojects.com. I promise you that it is a devotion you won’t soon forget!

Chapter 9

Handling the Stress Life Delivers

Although we have more modern conveniences in this world than ever before, stress is still a tremendous factor in our lives. There are bills to pay, family and friendship issues, and other causes of this stress. One of the key features I have learned about stress is that it is many times caused by trying to control what cannot be controlled. Remember, you can only do what you can do in a given situation. The Universe is benevolent. God is on your side, not out to get you, Though the odds you may face may be overwhelming at times, keep in mind that God wants peace, ease, and joy in your life; not for you to struggle unnecessarily. This is a lesson I have had to learn in my own life, as, at times, I have been through tremendous amounts of stress and pressure from the external forces of many situations.

If other people or situations are controlling your resources beyond your control or means, you must make an effort to harvest the best, cut loose what doesn't matter anymore, and control that which you are able to control. Leave the rest up to God.

When we have a purpose and meaning to who we are and what we do, we have a better chance at solving our problems, and avoiding becoming overwhelmed by depression, stress, and anxiety. I have helped many people avoid burnout in their lives by inviting them to keep first things first and not to major in the minor things in their present reality. Many times in our lives, we must deal with "what is" in a situation and not try to control things to the degree you would like to have them.

Below, I have outlined some tips for managing stress and controlling the resources you do have control over in your life.

1) Lighten Your Load.

Focus on eliminating the things that do not matter in your life and concentrate on the things that do. Don't work harder than you know you are able to work. Through the years, I have seen so many people live needlessly complicated lives trying to solve more problems they created versus what they originally started out with, by not stepping back and assessing the situation. Step back and look at where you are at and assess what you can control. What can you

eliminate in an effort to lighten your burdens in life? I personally know I have a tendency to be overcommitted, so, when I begin to realize I have too much on my proverbial plate, I step back and see what I can step away from, and delegate elsewhere.

2) Know your resources and know when and how to use them.

I see countless people spend all of their physical, spiritual, and mental energy just trying to make it through another day. Yet, conservation is the key element in today's busy and toilsome world. There are no magic beans that can make you superhuman without dire consequences in the end.

I have seen people use everything imaginable to do more or be more, and most of the time it only makes matters worse. Aside from the emotional, physical, and spiritual resources, there are also support systems you can identify in your life. These can be a circle of friends, a church, your partner or spouse, or any other system that is reliable, and able to help in times of need. There are times when it is okay to lean on these resources.

There are no superman or wonder woman characters out there in the real world. It is easy for all of us to believe that we can carry the whole world on our shoulders but, when we do this, we just end up drained, and heading towards the end of our resources. God gave us each other so we can

depend on each other through community, not so we could try to do everything on our own. I have learned the hard way that life is too difficult to try to do everything solo, as a Lone Ranger. God made us to have community with each other, and be a part of something bigger than ourselves. Don't miss this.

3) Slow down.

You are probably familiar with the phrase, "Do it right the first time." This holds true, especially, when we are at work. If you do things too fast, haste will make waste more often than not. You will overlook something and cause yourself even more stress and turmoil if you do not take time to do things right.

4) Understand that everything in life is a process.

You cannot accomplish everything that you want all in one day or, many times, all by yourself. Everything is a process and requires steady progress. People who jump the gun and try to do everything by themselves, or just try to do everything too fast often, find themselves burnt out and unhappy. Take into account where you are, and re-evaluate your success so far, as well as your progress plan in the future.

Remember, success is a journey, not a destination. If you expel too much of your energy too fast, you will be left with nothing in a short amount of time.

5) Never be afraid to ask for help when you need it.

Teamwork accomplishes much more in many cases that many ever give it credit for. If any factors whatsoever have stood in the way of your willingness to ask for help, dismiss them. It is very easy to believe that we can handle the whole load by ourselves, but it is by no means practical or helpful.

6) Outline workload boundaries.

Life is hard enough as it is! You do not have to pile on more! I found myself doing this several times in my own life because everyone wanted me in their organization but did not understand the load of other work (including writing books), that I did in addition to having membership and leadership in their group.

There also comes a time when you must re-evaluate WHY you are doing what you are doing. We are all human, and need downtime to spend with our loved ones, and to have some time for ourselves. Even Superman, during his fictional life, had to live a calm and reserved life away from being a superhero. Even he, the invincible man, needed rest and calm in his life. In a spiritual sense, even God rested on the 7th day, after creating all that is in the Universe. This goes to show that life is not just about making the grade or, as our society judges many things, having the most money or fame. It is about treating yourself and the people around you the right way.

People go to extremes in both of these directions, either by not having enough time for themselves, and too much time for others, or vice versa. There has to be balance and sanity in life.

7) Take control of your life.

Are you doing what brings you happiness? I think that our society has twisted around the standard of happiness being directly related to the size of one's house, vehicle, social media following, or bank account. I do not perceive that it works that way in Heaven, and I know that it does not work here on earth. Yet, nevertheless, it is the struggle to keep up with the worldly standards. The point I am making here is that life is too short to not find happiness and inner peace.

It is very important to constantly re-examine why you do what you do, and if it makes you happy in life. Examine your "WHY," as the "WHY" is a tell-tale sign if something is deemed worthy of pursuing further. Having money and any other material success in life means nothing if you are buried in an early grave. Consider the totality of your life and what you have, and also why you do what you do.

In relation to the tips that I have mentioned here, I must also say that I think that many times we are our own worst critics and, because of this, we become our own worst enemies. Much research has been done on suicide being related to people's negative

perceptions of themselves and hopelessness taking over coping mechanisms. It is already a factor that should concern us. Now I can say that I have been far too self-critical, demanding too much out of myself at once, and expecting perfect results all of the time in many areas of my life over the years. Though society expects such things out of us, it is not humanly possible to give 110% of ourselves to our job, spouse, family, or anything else all the time. It is not practical to think this way, but so many people in our world do this.

The Path to Serenity and Peace

Much of my last book, *An Intentional Optimized Life*, was based around the full Serenity Prayer. In many Alcoholics Anonymous and other 12-step program meetings, the first part of this prayer is recited at the end of every meeting. If you have never looked up the full prayer, here it is:

*God, grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change;
Courage to change the things I can;
And wisdom to know the difference.
Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time;
Accepting hardships as the pathway to
peace;
Taking, as He did, this sinful world
As it is, not as I would have it;
Trusting that He will make things right
If I surrender to His Will;
So that I may be reasonably happy in this
life
And supremely happy with Him
Forever and ever in the next.
Amen.*

A big takeaway from this prayer is to enjoy life one moment at a time. If life becomes too much to handle at times, concentrate on getting through those hard moments, as they come and enjoy the lessons they teach. Look at your hardships as a pathway to something better down the road, and remember, the goal of life is not perfection.

This prayer is very much an acceptance of the way things are, not as you would have them. The serenity comes from accepting the things you cannot change and gaining the courage to change the things you are able to control.

Be *reasonably* happy. Be content with yourself and accept yourself for who you really are. This life is a test. Keep going through the hard times and endure them. Remember, life is too short not to be reasonably happy with what you had, have and shall have. Don't waste time trying to be perfect or have all of the stars align in the galaxy so you can "arrive" at some destination. That is a losing battle. This life, this human experience, is all a big journey. We never know the time in our lives when we reach the ultimate finish line, when this life is over. Therefore, live in the peace of acceptance and grace in your life right now!

Meditation Heals the Soul

I invite you to find about half an hour to an hour, if not more, in your schedule to sit silently, without interruptions. This means that no phones should be

answered, no notes should be written, and no other activities should be engaged in. What you do in this time is to concentrate on relaxing into a state of inner peace and serenity. The first 20 minutes of this will be the most difficult, because you will have strong urges to get up and do something, but it is important to resist.

After a short period of time, your mind will begin to fill with new ideas and innovations; things you have never thought of before. These things will usually be helpful to you and your situation in life, whatever that is. Doing this will help you process and tune out the negative energies in your life, and help you clear your mind, and concentrate on what really matters.

It is said that God's language is peace and silence, and God talks to us, spiritually speaking, many times, but it is only when we listen deeply and intently for God's wisdom and direction that we hear God's voice.

Another variation of this type of meditation is to sit silently and count backwards from 100 or another large number until you reach a state of calmness and tranquility. Once again, this stimulates the mind to do great things, helps you release stress, allowing you to clear your mind of negativity.

If there is a question you would like your mind to help you answer, or a problem that you have trouble facing, ask this to yourself before you begin this exercise. Some psychologists have even learned to

use this method of letting your subconscious and what is referred to as the “super-conscious” mind work while you sleep. In any case, this method works to a great extent when you allow it to do so.

Many people will say, “I don’t have time for meditation or silent alone time in my life.” Yet, if you want to achieve greater things in your life, it should be a priority, even when you are at your busiest. Find time to do this in your week and you will find your life improving from the relaxation, mental rejuvenation, and new ideas that you receive.

I have been able to solve several problems in my life, and find success in many different areas, simply by giving myself time to do this. Many extraordinarily successful people have used this method to their advantage, and I invite you to do the same. You can call this practice meditation, sitting at peace, etc. Just tune out the world for a little while and be at peace. It is said that if you don’t have 30 minutes to do this in a day, you should schedule an hour.

Chapter 10

True Grind

A governing factor in our lives is our ability to respond to the situations that come up in life in a positive, or at least constructive way. Many times, even when little problems occur, we end up bending ourselves all out of shape and believing that life is a tragedy. In view of this, we must remember that life is not a disaster or emergency. Things are not all bad or all good at any one time in life. There is always a balance between positive and negative issues, and an important part of keeping away from getting stressed out is to realize that life will never be perfect.

When you accept and live in this truth, you will find that your awareness about the things that happen in the future will increase, and your fears of what you will do when the unexpected does happen will decrease. All of this is possible when we learn that we should sometimes expect the unexpected and roll with the punches life throws us.

Time Management

We have already discussed that you have to concentrate on what matters and eliminate what doesn't. Doing much of this relates to how you decide

to manage your time. Think for a moment of spending your time the same way that you think of spending money. Both are very important, and we must learn how to manage them in almost the same way. You can invest your time, spend it on things that matter to you, manage it, or simply waste it—just blow it. Many people have mastered this last approach. Some even have wasting their time down to a science. You can spend your time wisely on something that is going to last, or on something that is sure to depreciate in value and diminishing returns.

In the long and short scope of life, time management is the crucial key to your success. Just as we spend an excess of money we know we will never see again on something like a car that is sure to depreciate the moment we drive it off of the car dealer's lot, we do the same thing with our time. You lose time in your life by simply wasting it or not properly managing it, and, like money, after it is gone, you will never see it again. Time is the only precious resource you cannot replace.

On the other hand, when we productively use and invest our time in things that give us enjoyment and prosperity in the long-term, it will provide us years of future enjoyment.

Take a simple inventory and identify your time wasters. Look for the things that are dragging down your life and resources. Work to eliminate the things you can do without. Doing this may seem simple, but

it is surprising how many people needlessly complicate their lives by spending their time on unnecessary junk and time vampires.

It is wise to learn how to prioritize your priorities and consolidate what you can. In other words, simplify your life in a logical and well-planned way. Look for ways to automate your many tasks and responsibilities.

We want to make everything work both effectively and efficiently in our lives. We expect this same service from other people we deal with, especially those doing a service or selling a product to us. We should make sure that we are expecting the same of ourselves by constantly working to make our lives as effective and efficient as we can. Concentrate on priorities and develop a sense of urgency with them. Sort your to-do list into three sections and label them: A, B, and C.

The "A" pile is the most important. These are the things that you must do or face serious consequences if you neglect them. The "B" pile is the second most important set of things to do. You can do these things today or tomorrow, depending on time constraints, but no one will die if they do not get done. Pile "C" is the least important. You will do these tasks if you have time after finishing the other things before them.

Make sure that you concentrate on the tasks in order of importance. If you get sidetracked, constantly tell

yourself things such as, “I’ve got to get back to work. I will finish this project by its deadline,” and work towards finishing that task. By creating a sense of urgency in our mind about things that we normally use the fine art of procrastination on, we give ourselves the tools to focus and concentrate our energy in the direction of our successes. By positively talking our way into doing even the most unpleasant task we are required to do, we give ourselves a better chance at doing the best job possible and tackling it out of the way.

Financial Management

Managing money, for many people, is a problem that has many severe consequences. We live in the age of debt consolidation companies, bankruptcy lawyers, and other people and products that show the alarming number of people who are over their heads in bills. While many people are in debt because of hard circumstances, many others are in debt because of control problems with their lives.

A large misconception that many people have with finances is that they have to keep up with everyone else. Most of the people caught in this race usually find themselves unhappily drowning in unpaid bills. It is said that comparison is the thief of joy. Once again, nothing material can make you happy unless you are already happy. That is a law of human nature.

One of the best ways I have found for successful financial management is simply living below your means. This is also a recommendation handed down by many financial advisors. By not living slightly above or even at your financial restraints, you will be better able to conserve and save money and other resources and have a better sense of financial security in the future.

To actively and correctly do this, you must identify your key interests, and, like time, determine how much money and other resources you are spending on them. If you are doing too much, find ways to minimize and conserve. Remember, conservation is better than frustration.

Also, do not fear the power of bargaining shopping. Before you make a large purchase, make sure you are getting the best price. It is a good idea to save at least 10% of every paycheck, and charitably give another 10% of income you receive before you begin spending for the month.

Get real with the truth of your financial situation and make down-to-earth decisions. Think carefully before you spend, and exercise thought and control over every one of your actions. Impulse shopping ads, flash deal sales, and other things like them are popular in our society for a good reason, and we know that it is because people will support it and pay handsomely for things they don't even need to impress people they don't even like. Part of living a

pro-active and successful life is the constant evaluation of what you do, and that means not falling into a trap of buying unnecessary things to clutter up your life.

Chapter 11

“Don’t Sweat the Small Stuff” in Your Life

You have probably heard the phrase, “Don’t sweat the small stuff, and it’s all small stuff” before. Richard Carlson and his wife have a great series of books out with this title, and I highly recommend them for life management guides. It is a phrase we often hear, but readily forget. Many of the things that cause you stress in your life can be identified as “small stuff.” Learn how to identify the small stuff in your life that is causing you stress, and not to let yourself become bent out of shape because of it. Also, remember the powerful importance and impact that you have on those around you. If you were not important, chances are you would not exist. We are all created for individual reasons. As humans, we all maintain a connection with, and are a part of the wholeness of God. When you let the “small stuff” get in the way of doing what you enjoy and are called to do in your life, you are also letting your problems get in the way of

your relationship with God, which is, of course, a very unhealthy thing to let happen.

As I discussed earlier in this book, it is important for you not to blow your problems out of proportion. We do this many times simply to gain the attention of others, but it usually never does anyone any bit of good. It is said that 90% of people don't care about your problems and the other 10% are glad you have them!

As humans, we are naturally concerned about our own well-being, and generally concern ourselves less with the problems of other people around us. Because of this, we sometimes make our problems much larger in our minds than they really are.

When a traumatic event causes stress in our lives, we are sometimes quick to think, "I am all alone here," or "No one really cares about me." Though these generalizations seem justifiable at first, they can lead us down the road of depression and anxiety very quickly. Learning to place things into perspective is a simple and excellent way to combat this.

Success depends on your individual effort to do your absolute best in life. Do not let people who will cause you more stress than a situation is even worth, take up your time. By instilling a sense of unshakable confidence and the feeling and thought that no matter what the outcome, you will still be loved by yourself

and other people, you give yourself numerous chances at doing and being your best.

Finding Your Outlets

A great way to deal with all of the daily stress that you deal with in your life is to keep a daily journal of events. Many psychologists have proven that this is a therapeutic way to release your stress from the daily toils of life. You can do this by writing down your thoughts, ideas, problems, and the other issues that you are facing in your life in a notebook or diary.

When you do this, you make a new gateway in your life. You give yourself the ability to help yourself by understanding your feelings and emotions. Just as you write down your goals so that you can better understand them, you can also help yourself to release stress from your life at the same time when you keep a journal of events.

Concentrate on finding positive outlets for stress. These outlets can be a variety of things, but you must find what works for you in your life. Get a gym membership, take weekly yoga classes, do breathing and meditation exercises, or look for other ways to recharge your mind, body, and spirit. The best way to eliminate chronic stress disorders and burnout in any capacity is to simply keep those possibilities from arriving. Fill your life with positive factors and learn to always grow and learn.

Chapter 12

Stress Management

We all have the epidemic of stress in our lives to some degree. We can get it from a variety of places. It could be from the long line in the summer heat at the gas station or the computer going down just before you were getting ready to do your taxes. We are also seeing many health problems being attributed to stress.

Yet, all of our stress, in almost any case, can be attributed to one major cause: the inability of the human mind to handle and solve problems, and have control over a situation. Because of this, it is crucial that we learn how to properly manage our stress in meaningful and practical ways throughout our lives.

One of the most important aspects in stress management is finding positive outlets for your negative energy. For every problem we have, God gives us either a solution or way to deal with it somewhere nearby. Even in the most desperate times, hope still exists somewhere, and we must keep

our eyes open to that fact. Like a logical math equation, for as many problems that exist, there are an equal number of solutions available, as well. While God allows obstacles to be placed in our lives, God also gives us many opportunities to release our negative energy and fill our lives with positive elements in order to solve our problems.

I once had a job as a telephone operator at a vacation resort in my hometown of New Braunfels, Texas, when I was still in college. People would sometimes call and wait on hold for up to 45 minutes to make reservations at the resort, especially at the first of every month. Back then, we had a combination of long-distance phone call charges since the resort didn't have a toll-free phone number. These compounded factors cost people both time and money.

As a telephone operator, I had the fun job of listening to people complain about how much time they were spending on waiting for a reservation operator to take their call, as well as listening to a variety of other problems. I remember that on some of my busiest days, I would be stressed out to the point of exhaustion with calls.

For some problems, I would go to the reservations manager, who we will call Karen, in an antsy and anxious state. Every time she saw me coming, she looked at me, smiled, and said with no hint of anxiety, "Dustin, this is only a job. These problems you are

encountering are the company's problems, not necessarily yours. Are you getting paid to be stressed out? No. Do the best that you can but don't stress yourself out about everything here. We all have plenty of other things to worry about after we get home."

Karen helped me realize something very important, and that is that we sometimes stress and strain over things that we have no control over. The things that I was getting my stomach in knots over were not my own problems, but that of the company. Although it was my responsibility to take care of certain tasks of my job, I was not getting paid extra for stressing myself out over the issues I was facing.

Karen also led by great example of work habits, and she constantly practiced good life skills at her job. She never became irate or irritable, even when there were countless customers on hold for the reservations department, and customers screaming at her through her telephone headset. She would not let anything that was work related get under her skin and irritate her. She merely accepted the situation and dealt with it the best that she could with what resources she had.

We must realize, in this same respect, that the world is not going to an end simply because we do not get everything accomplished all at once in both our personal and professional lives.

The Thief of Joy: I'll Be Happy After...

We see many people saying things such as:

“I'll be happy after I sell the house.”

“I'll be happy after I buy that new car.”

“I'll be happy after I leave this job.”

**“I will be happy after the kids get out of the house
and go off to college.”**

The list goes on and on. When we continue to think that one thing, or many, can bring us all the happiness that we have been missing, we instead trap ourselves into a cycle that becomes a rut. Many people think that a new car will help them be happy. After they get the car, they still are unhappy, and think maybe a house would make them happy. Then they find they still are unhappy and think maybe getting married will make them happy. Then, having kids. But, then the marriage may not work out. Maybe they will be happy when they get a divorce? What about the kids? Maybe they will be happy after the kids are out of the house and off to college? The cycle can last all of their lives and they still may never find happiness.

It is interesting to find this cycle of unhappiness in movie and music stars, millionaires, billionaires, and other people's lives. The main problem that most everyone who finds themselves in a trap like this

faces is that they don't have a love, appreciation, or respect for themselves first. Without having these feelings for ourselves first, it is easy to think that external things will bring us happiness. But remember, true joy and happiness originates from the soul.

True happiness and inner peace must begin from the inside. Material success, such as being wealthy and having nice possessions can only bring happiness after you are already happy. Concentrate on finding what you like to do in your life and being happy with that first before you concentrate on gaining material wealth.

Maintaining a State of Joy

For many people, happiness comes and goes like the change of the weather. We all know of people who are happy one moment, but sad or angry the next. They can never seem to find a middle ground. But contentment is not hard to find, and it shouldn't be difficult. But happiness can indeed be fleeting. Joy is more everlasting, and what we should be after. True joy stems from the ability to feel in control of that which we have control, and fulfilled about who we are, and what we are doing in our lives.

In Eastern cultures, many people find peace and joy in meditation and prayer to please the soul's desire, and to search for meaning. Many people in Eastern religions typically concentrate less on material

possessions because of this. They are more concerned with the soul, and from growing from the inside out. In Western cultures, many people find delight with material possessions, but often concentrate less on pleasing the desires of their soul.

Many of us fall in the middle, between these two cultural mediums. We want to have a fulfilling lifestyle that incorporates God and spiritual fulfillment, but still have nice material possessions at the same time. We can start understanding what truly makes us happy by understanding our goals and dreams when we were children. Take a moment to ponder this. When you were a child, just about everything was possible. You saw trees and climbed them without really pondering if it were possible or not. You knew that it was possible, and that you were going to do it. For many people, as children, fears and anxieties were not as prominent in life as they are in adulthood. We did not analyze, only to paralyze our situation by sitting there and evaluating all of the risks of climbing the trees or doing anything else like that.

As children, we had a purpose and meaning for what we did, and we usually did not let very many things get in the way of our success in that pursuit. As adults, we can agree that many of our priorities have changed, and one of our biggest needs is to feel secure.

One of the easiest ways that people eliminate joy from their lives is by simply doing what they believe

will gain them happiness without examining what they are doing first. People will many times do what simply “works” without ever examining whether or not they are happy doing it. This can happen with a job or career choice, buying a product or service, or by doing a variety of other things. Many people just work at a job because the pay is good, buy a product or service just because it seems that everyone else already has it, or do things for irrational reasons that waste unnecessary amounts of time, money, and energy.

One of the easiest ways to kill passion and romance in your life is to do everything for money. The best way to combat doing everything in your life solely for money or anything else is to find several reasons “why” you are doing what you are doing. **Your WHY.** This will help you ensure happiness and joy in your life. Base the actions of your life on the right reasons, and be sure to clearly and accurately identify what those reasons are, and WHY. What is important to you? What would you do all day long if you did not have a job, or if you never had to concern yourself with paying bills or money again? Concentrate your time on doing what you enjoy. Remember that money is not everything. It cannot buy your happiness. It is only one of the things that can help you better your situation in some cases. Again, true joy comes from within.

It is also very wise to learn how to not make the same mistakes over and over again. This will greatly help

you to maintain happiness and inner peace and joy in your life. You may be familiar with the saying “Learn from others’ mistakes. You don’t have enough time in your life to make them all yourself!” You can be one of your best educators, so never ever let yourself stop learning from yourself or the others around you. Since many people make many mistakes every day, we all have plenty to learn from each other, and since we are not perfect ourselves, we have plenty to learn from our own trials and errors. The important thing to learn is that life is an ongoing process. Treat it as such. Learn to live a full and complete life, and constantly keep your life in motion. Make the best use of every moment.

The Joy of Tranquility

For a while in my own life, there were very few times where I experienced the beauty of peace and quiet. In fact, most of the time, I never realized peace and quiet to be a beautiful thing at all. It was only when I learned meditation techniques and the introspective practices of other religions and relaxation techniques, that I was able to tune in what mattered and discard the things that were getting in the way of my inner peace.

So many times in life we get caught up in noise and disruption. The unexpected events that always seem to occur at the most unexpected times don’t seem to help this either. But, as we have all experienced, life is full of noise, disruptions, unexpected tragedies, and

other distractions that take us far away from our true selves. If you want proof of this, think of your own life and the feelings that seem to come about when stress, frustration, hurt, or other negative energies rear their ugly heads. It is not a pretty picture for anyone. We sometimes find ourselves so bent out of shape that we do not even recognize who we are or what we are doing.

Combined with all of this, we are almost trained to think that we have to have some sort of noise in our lives. The television, music or podcasts on our mobile device, or vehicle's radio always have to be on. We always have to be on the phone with someone, and so on. Consequently, our original quiet and peaceful nature in the world is disrupted and is sometimes never rediscovered. For, you see, we are naturally peaceful. That is the way that we enter this world. We may come out of the womb kicking and screaming at the doctor who has his hands all over our slimy newborn bodies, but we usually do not have to worry about paying the hospital bill yet. That all comes later in life with the many other problems and pressures we face.

It is only when we let our problems overpower us that we begin to think and act like someone we are not, or, for sure, someone that we do not want to be. We must individually find ways to return to the tranquility of our natural states. Buddhism and Hinduism, for example, both have this principle of understanding the

power and beauty of peace and quiet, and it is very evident in their guiding principles.

The principle that Buddhism teaches is that life is always changing. Impermanence is constant. This is also a fact that we tend to forget. People change, the world changes, life changes, new normals appear, and we must be aware of this to keep our focus on what is important.

One of the best ways to discover tranquility is to be able to discover the beauty of simplicity. By this, what I mean is that we should experience our lives, not just live them, one day at a time. We must understand that we are not created so that we may sit in cubicles all day just to rush to a coffee break, a lunch break, off to the house to make dinner, and wake up to do it all again the next day.

Life is not an emergency affair, although many people insist on treating it as such. Your hair really isn't on fire! Once again, it is important to concentrate on the journey through life and enjoy every day, living it to the fullest of our capability, not just the destination of what and where success brings us.

Accepting things as they are and not overreacting when life throws you a curveball are extremely important. Be responsive, not reactive. By simply taking things one step at a time and accepting things at face value, for what they really are, you give yourself time to actually enjoy life. Serenity can only

come when and if you ask it to come into your life. Chaos is just a second away, on the other hand, and if you wish for it to be in your life, you can find it everywhere. So, if tranquility doesn't work well for you, you can always easily find noise and distraction again.

As we have discovered in an earlier chapter, meditation and prayer are the best ways to tune out the negative, bring back the positive, and find renewal and rediscovery in life. To become a more peaceful person, it is important to get in touch with your spiritual side. This part of life does not require tons of thought or work. It is merely a reflection on what you have done and wish to do in life. It is an examination of your feelings and emotions. And last, it is an introspective measure of your future.

Another way to find peace in tranquility is through finding a way to express your emotions. In a way, writing is a meditation for me, and that is, I imagine, why I do so much of it. It requires complete attention and concentration. When I write, the whole world gets tuned out, and I concentrate solely on my task at hand. It is a great way for me to relieve stress and help other people at the same time.

Make time for relaxation and stress releasing. You have no doubt heard experts say to make time to do things you enjoy and have a passion for, like enjoying nature, hiking, reading, writing, etc. Reconnect to that

which brings you purpose, meaning, and significance in your life.

Chapter 13

If You Don't Know, You Can't Make It Happen

A saying that I frequently use is, "If you don't know, it won't happen. If you do know, you have the power to make it happen." Knowledge really is power, to quote the famous phrase we have all heard before.

Moreover, what you don't know can hurt you. I have learned this in many areas of my life – and some of them have been quite painful situations. In other words, if you do not have the awareness to make your life better, you will have critical problems improving it. But when you do, it is much easier and efficient to get what you want out of your life.

I am constantly reminded that we are living in an increasingly irrational world. Just look at what has become headline news in over the past few decades: family violence, divorce, teen pregnancy, school violence, and many other plaguing problems. They are not hard to find. Yet, we cannot point our fingers

at violence in the movies and music, school systems, or anything else without considering a main source of human behavior: Life education!

You cannot expect to do any better for yourself without first having the skills to live productively and positively by making good choices for your future. Here again, if you don't have the knowledge to live an optimal life, you don't have the ability to do much about decisions you make in the future.

As we have covered, in a multitude of ways, you will always get back out of life what you put into it in some form or another. To magnify this point even more, think about this: What if you had a doctor who was ill every time you went to visit him? What if your dentist had no teeth in his mouth because they all fell out from improper dental hygiene? What if you had an attorney who could not keep out of jail or an accountant who was constantly in debt with title loans or payday lenders? Would you trust these people? The reason that I use these cases to make my point is that you have individual expectations of your doctor, dentist, attorney, and accountant. If they cannot take care of themselves, how can they even consider taking care of you?

Flip the side of the coin now. If you cannot trust and take care of yourself, can people trust you? Can you even trust yourself? How can you take care of others? It makes sense to learn how to constantly love and respect ourselves from within our own minds and

spirits and not go searching for love in places we will never find it.

I suffered from severe depression, and in 2013, I fought a battle with this mental illness, which I will never forget. If anyone tells you that severe depression is not life threatening, I have some news. It most certainly is. I had a relapse when the medication I was on for treating this disorder simply stopped working one day.

For about 6 months, nothing I tried worked. I started seeing a psychiatrist who I believe saved my life by working with me on finding the right medication and guiding me to the right therapist. The psychiatrist made the point to me that he could help me, through the aid of modern medicine, to treat depression, but that the opposite of depression isn't happiness or joy. It is depression (sadness and hopelessness) versus non-depression. This is where I truly learned to be happy and joyous again – a turning point in my life. I had to relearn joy and inner peace after so many months of helplessness and hopelessness to be able to discover myself again. By the grace of God's love and mercy, I am still here fighting the good fight.

I wrote two eBooks in 2013 during this struggle on outdoor subjects. They gave me a reason to wake up every day – a purpose and meaning in the midst of my tremendous hopelessness and pain. That was a deep valley for me, but I found myself finding significance in writing something that could potentially

help others in my field of experience and engage in something bigger than myself. These two projects led me to a path of significance during a time of tremendous pain, and what felt like physical grief emotions to me, which manifested as depression. By being the source of hope through my writing, eventually, hope returned to me again.

Always remember to equip yourself with knowledge, for it is really a powerful tool. Read your Bible, go to worship services, keep the faith, stand on God's promises. If you are going through hardships, know that they are a pathway to peace, and accept the lessons life is teaching you. Know that you are worth it, and you are deeply loved. Furnish yourself with data and serve those around you proficiently with what you are learning. You got this. You are a champion in God's eyes.

Chapter 14

True Well-Being

A great deal of medical research shows that if the mind is not healthy and is bogged down with negative feelings and insecurities, the body will not be well either. It is a given situation of balance. One cannot sustain health without the other. For more on this information, I recommend Dr. Bernie Siegel's books such as *Love, Medicine and Miracles*.

Through being a surgeon, Dr. Siegel began to understand his patients and their conditions of cancer and other terminal diseases on which he had to operate. While many other doctors dismissed cases of patients who beat the odds of their cancer, Dr. Siegel wanted to study why those patients healed and learn why they did it, and also how he could apply that to everyone who wanted to heal.

He made a transformation in his life and practice by becoming more compassionate, loving, caring, and understanding towards his patients as a medical doctor. He moved his desk against the wall in his office so he could talk face to face with his patients without a barrier in the middle. He had his patients begin to call him by his first name, Bernie, instead of

the traditional "Dr. Siegel," because he wanted to relate to them as humans, not just as patients. There was no separation in the humanity exchange at that point. He also shaved his head as a spiritual and humane expression to the world. During this transformation he started Exceptional Cancer Patients, an organization for patients with cancer who wanted to beat the odds and live by incorporating their own ideas about the therapy they received for their conditions. This organization presented a method which not only used medicine, but also personal growth, change, and healing.

Dr. Siegel's patients who decided to take part of the program found themselves in control of their own health, and also learned how to become their own medical experts. By feeling empowered and in control, a majority of Dr. Siegel's patients began to heal and beat the odds of their cancer because they wanted to fight their terminal conditions instead of letting themselves simply die. I highly recommend Dr. Siegel's works because they present the concept that hope is never lost when one believes in the power of living and surviving the odds of a situation.

Once we consider that we are three parts of a whole: Mental, Physical and Spiritual, we can find the balance of loving our "inner self" and better balance these three parts of our lives. Remember, if one of our elements is out of balance, the other two are bound to eventually suffer some sort of negative consequence.

Be aware of your mental, physical and spiritual states
and keep hope alive.

Chapter 15

The Ammunition of Potential

It is wise to know that potential cannot be destroyed as long as we are alive. We always have it inside of us. The catch here is that it is very fragile and must be utilized in the right way. It is said that success is never owned, it is rented... and the rent is due every day.

This holds true in every aspect of life. You may think that you have to go elsewhere to get the things that you need to be successful, but the truth is that they are already inside of you. You possess the keys to your success, and God provides you with the doors of opportunity. The question is, are you aware? Are you paying attention here?

We are surrounded by people just trying to get by with excuses such as:

“It’s too late for me.”

“Will anything go right today?”

“Why does it have to be me this happens to!”

“I can’t do anything about it!”

“No one is going to give me any slack; so why even try?”

These statements and many like them are self-defeating. A life law that is important to learn is the one of cause and effect. Most things with true success do not happen by mere accident, although many believe that they do.

Successful people are not necessarily lucky or privileged individuals, although we find many people thinking that this is true. Sure, trust fund babies may look successful because they were given money, but I’m talking about creating a successful life here, not inheriting a silver spoon. I often tell my son that if I don’t teach him how to handle money and create success on his own, when I’m gone one day, the lack of that education could ruin his life. We must be intentional with educating the next generation to generate their own success stories.

Learn to reprogram your mind against negative thoughts and emotions. Add self-confidence and optimism to your mental diet, and you will notice almost immediate changes in your life. Again, we become what we think about most of the time.

By instilling confidence and commitment in whatever you want in your life, you are more likely to get to your results quicker and more efficiently. Positive attitudes

are what people are attracted to and, what demands the most respect and rewards in life.

As we have discovered a few times in this book, just about every action you put forth into the Universe in life has some sort of a consequence. Many theorists and great minds of the past and present have found that human potential is virtually limitless, but the general population doesn't utilize the full throttle of it. In fact, some studies show that the average human uses less than 10% of his potential throughout his entire life. Some studies even show that a very small percentage of the general population even set goals.

The first consideration needed to understand this concept is the fact that everything is governed by the concept of energy. What you put into your life you will get back out of it to the same exact degree if not greater. What you do unto others, you almost always do unto yourself. The Golden Rule is a life law.

Your attitude is almost always going to show through your actions. Therefore, what you think and how you act can and will demand a consequence of some kind because you live through the power of energy. If you allow positive energy to be present in your life most of the time, you will be most likely to gain positive results. The key here is to work harder and smarter than you have before. Since, there will always be competition for jobs, money, and other resources in our lives, this is not a hard concept to grasp. You

have to constantly do better if you want to get on top of your priorities in life and stay there.

Proverbs 14:23 tells us, “*All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty.*” If you are not able to walk your talk, you are only letting yourself down. In its simplest terms, King Solomon is saying: “**Don’t Work for It, Don’t Get It**” in this verse and he’s right.

How many people look for the easy button, the quick fix, or the magic beans. A good plan and hard work make luck. Don’t expect what you want to come to you without going to work for it. Rise and grind but do so with a plan and purpose behind your actions.

When we learn how to live with love always in our lives and treat everything that we encounter with this concept, when we approach situations in life with loving hearts, we can make many great things happen. When we learn that people need love and compassion in life and that when we give those things, and we give from the heart, we become better people from the inside out. I have used this guiding principle in thousands of places and situations in my life, even in times when certain work or family situations seemed hopeless, and I have never seen this fail. Live with love and you will live with a passion to do greater and lasting things in your life.

Finding Meaning in Your Asking

When we are not successful, we sometimes automatically believe that nothing is working out for us, and a negative snowballing effect begins to happen. We, in effect, start the ball rolling in the wrong direction, and keep it going in that same direction when we feed our anger and frustration with even more negative emotions. This "snowball" of problems gets bigger and bigger until it is simply unmanageable.

We have to treat every day of our lives like it is the most special, and live every day with the right attitude and focus in mind. Living powerfully requires that we give our best to be our best, and that we must never let the wheel of success stop turning after we start it in motion in the right direction - a positive snowball.

You can always be better at what you do. As with all things, your attitude determines how far you can go or, in other words, your altitude. In fact, a well-known saying in the personal growth space is, "Your attitude determines your altitude." I have undergone some very trying times in my life and have pulled through them because I have kept hope alive that things would get better, even when they were at what seemed to be rock bottom. The more positive your attitude, the greater the chance of your success in what you do in life.

Over the many years I have studied personal development, I've noticed many undiscovered potentials when I started doing motivational speeches, seminars, book signings, and other events. People would come up to me and say, "Wow! How did you write your books and start your own company? I could never do what you did in my lifetime." Yet, the truth was that the only thing truly limiting these people was their own thought process.

Dreams can and will be realized once we allow ourselves to believe in possibility. Many years ago, I would have never seen myself doing what I am doing now, but I would not have it any other way. Starting my own business, finishing a college degree, finding a place in the career world, and becoming an author were things that took a tremendous amount of time, work, and dedication, but they were all things I wanted.

A great friend of my, Jacob J. Dell, who helped me start my first business back in my college days, once told me, "If you really want something enough in life, you will learn the price of being successful at obtaining it, and stop at nothing to pay it."

We must learn to focus our lives, and acknowledge what our true goals and life dreams are if we are ever to have them in reality. If you are not satisfied with where you are or what you are doing in life, you must allow yourself the freedom and ability to change. The

great author Mark Twain once said, “If everybody was satisfied with himself, there would be no heroes.”

The key here is to never stop learning and striving to be your best. Life, in its infinite mystery, is a process after all – a journey, not a destination. We see so many people tiptoe through life only to arrive safely at the site of their grave, and there are millions of graves that have the sound of an unheard symphony that was never played because the people that could have played them never took that chance or pushed past their fears and circumstances toward their goals. This is a tragedy in many ways.

You have the ability to make things in life happen the way that you want them to materialize when you have a high concept of yourself and gear your actions toward that positive self-concept. Life doesn't give you what is fair all of the time, but the ability to push past this is empowering resilience. So be brave. Be bold.

Chapter 16

The Pathway to Peace

To find a true sense of happiness and inner peace in your life, it is important that you begin to look at the things that can potentially slow you down from being the best you can be. It is important to realize how and why the influences in your life play such an important role in who you ultimately become. For example, many cigarette smokers have a great deal of trouble quitting smoking if their friends and family also smoke, because the temptation to smoke is strong via influence. Overeating, alcoholism, and many other disorders can be attributed to the power of influence that we have over each other, and that others have over us.

As we've discussed in this book, it is difficult, if not virtually impossible, to love other people well if you cannot love yourself first. We see people who wholeheartedly believe that they are not good enough on the outside or inside and abuse themselves in the effort of trying to make themselves feel and look better. This is a cause of eating disorders, substance

abuse, and other health-endangering problems. By understanding where your potential success-hampers are in life, and ways to get away from or around them when appropriate, you leave yourself a much greater sense of control in your life, and a better chance at success. Learn to love yourself in the present, where you are right now.

We must remember that by telling ourselves that we are not good enough for the approval of other people, ourselves, or even God, we sell ourselves short on who we are, and the degree of our potential phenomenally drops. We lose the ability of thinking positively and confidently about the things we can do in the world around us. So, the basis for understanding the point here is that we must learn how to love before we can go forward in our quest to do greater things in our lives. As I have mentioned, the influence that you can have on other people and people can have on you is very powerful. After establishing the foundation of love with yourself and for God, reestablish loving relationships with your family and friends, and also make new relationships with other people in your life. The benefits of this can only be completely worthwhile if the previous steps are achieved.

A problem that we face many times is that we look for love in all the wrong places and never find it. We expect love and acceptance from people that have previously rejected us. We want to try to impress them by showing them how good we are at

something, how nice we look, or a variety of other factors to boost our damaged self-esteem. When we do this, we find ourselves in a cycle of constantly trying to change the way we look, act, feel, and think in an attempt to impress those around us. Sadly, this does not accomplish much at all. When we do things to gain the acceptance of the people we are not getting love from, we become trapped in a rut of constantly trying to do better for those people instead of the people who really care about us. By doing this we deny ourselves many different things.

Many times, people who do not wish to love you are not capable of loving you as you are in the first place. Therefore, do not get angry with yourself because of the negative perceptions people may place in your way. In the place of searching for other people's acceptance, find acceptance in the people who do love you and are accepting of who you are right now, and, most importantly, within yourself. To feel better about ourselves, we must do things for the right reasons in our life, not just for other people's approval.

Understand Your Feelings

While we do not want negativity in our lives, it is important to realize its source. By doing this, we can pinpoint why we feel the way that we do, and adjust our lives to accommodate these emotions and process them. It is equally important to discover the source of our positive emotions. It is very easy to let

negativity overpower and overturn your life. We can do this from the inside out or from the outside in, by letting our own negative thoughts and actions or those of others take over our lives. When we discover the sources of positive energies, it is important that we keep them coming full tilt, and keep the fire of hope burning bright.

Taking Risks

Research has told us that one of the reasons that people do not conquer goals is because of the fear of taking the initial risks to achieve what they want. This may be one of the reasons we find so many people being anti-goal oriented. But think about risk for a second. You cannot gain large amounts, if any, success in your life, if you do not take at least some risks. Should we not fly on an airplane because we have seen airplane crashes on the news? Should we not drive cars because we might get in a wreck? Should we not get married because we might get a divorce? We can't live productively unless we take at least some sensible and educated risks in our lives. If we are afraid to take risks, we are more reluctant to give up faster because of the simple fear of failing what we attempt.

As you know, we are given the choice to succeed at achieving goals every day. But, not everyone actually takes that chance. Think for a moment... if everyone did reach their potential in a given day, how much better would the world be? If you think about this for a

moment, you will realize how much better the world is with dedicated, strong-willed individuals who work every day at achieving their potential. The reason why everyone is not strong-willed and goal oriented is because they are not interested in doing any better for themselves, or they think that they will fail if they try to be better. Base your life on facts, truth, and educated decisions. Use the element of risk to your advantage in a sensible way, and the sky is your limit.

We can prove that we are strong-willed people to ourselves and others by never giving up our dreams and goals in life. We must strive to succeed in our lives at all times. When we fail, it is important that we learn from our failures and keep going forward in life. It is by venturing out of our comfort zones to make a difference where we have the most impact. Remember, what you feel about yourself determines how well you do in life. The most important part of continuing success is that you keep making it happen in your life. The one person that you should compete the most against in your life is yourself.

Chapter 17

It's Already Paid For!

Our salvation plan through Jesus Christ is already bought and paid for through Jesus' life, death on the old rugged cross, and resurrection. All we really need to do in our lives with that knowledge is to accept it in to our lives, and live in that promise, and that, at times, can be easier said than done. There is a price that has been paid for you that you can never pay back, so the best you can do is to live your life with purpose and intention, in the present reality of "what is", for your Divine Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Our challenge as followers of God through Christ is to live in the freedom of the promise that your life has been freed, and your chains have been broken.

My son, Jackson, and I were going to the store one day, and were listening to a streaming music app we have a family plan subscription to when I realized, by the commercials and advertisements I kept hearing, that Jackson was not logged in to our monthly family plan and, instead, was on the free plan, bombarded with lots of audio ads barking at him.

I said, "Son, we have a family plan, and it has been paid for in full for you." He kept arguing with me that the free plan was the family plan and I just didn't understand. He would say, "No, Dad, I just have to listen to these ads every 30 minutes, and I get to hear more music!" I replied, " But Son, that is not the paid-for plan! You don't have to jump through any hoops or listen to any ads. We paid the price so you could have unlimited access to the family plan!"

Only when I showed him, by taking his phone and logging him in to our family group account, did he realize that he was missing out on ad-free music with no hindrances or hoops to jump through, and complete freedom to listen to anything he wanted.

In the same way, your family plan has been paid in full. Are you living in the freedom that has been paid for in your life? Don't miss out on the best God has to offer you. A gift must be received for it to mean something. Otherwise, it is not truly appreciated or valued. If a gift is not received, it is only an offer there, waiting for acceptance. Are you accepting the gifts God has given you? Are you living in that freedom and hope?

It is in those moments when the hand that life deals us seems to be too much, that God wants us to remember that our lives matter, and that there were great sacrifices paid for our salvation and freedom. I believe that Jesus died for everyone, and that we are to live in that freedom that has been granted to us,

and not live in bondage, and having to jump through hoops. Our world is full of “functional saviors” like these.

Now that might sound like a really common-sense statement, but I am always meeting people that worship at the altar of “stuff” they want or think they need, or have unhealthy relationships, or another part of their lives that holds them back from living in freedom and finding hope for the future.

So don't be a mile wide and an inch deep with your spiritual life. Accept the gift God gave to you through the freedom; the resurrection from death that Jesus Christ offers us. Don't waste your life thinking you're not loved or that you don't matter. You are already enrolled in the family plan of God's grace and mercy. Stop jumping through hoops, clickbait, and ads. You just must accept the gift. The family plan is paid for, free for you, and it's awesome!

Chapter 18

Relationship Management

Being able to properly manage relationships with people is one of the best skills to have in life. We know that if we see people having success in relationships, they probably have success in other areas of their lives as well. Many of us also know how hard it is to be in an unhappy relationship with someone, especially someone we deeply love and care about. What we will concentrate on in this chapter is making the relationships work well between ourselves and those around us.

As most of us can agree, love is the greatest power in existence, and is the strongest feeling we can have for one another. Without love in our lives, we find that many turn to alcohol, drugs, promiscuous sexual behaviors, and many other negative things that lead to destructive paths in an effort to give an artificial sense of love when there is an absence of it. Love is also a necessity for growth and spiritual development. We are connected to each other by its power and drawn to God by its strength. It has the wonderful

power to defeat hate and indifference in people's lives and to strengthen the bond that people share between each other.

There are several resources about the subject of relationships in our world that all have the same emphasis, such as good relationships can only work with certain elements in place. Also, people have to change for relationships to work. In addition, you have to get back to the fundamental principles in your relationships, and so on. While these ideas are great, they only make sense if they really make a difference for your life and your own relationships. You can spend countless dollars on professional counseling and relationship books that claim to have all the answers, but in truth, you will not end up with anything if you do not know how to adapt all of the information you receive to your own real life and real situations.

Love is the universal power of the world shared by everyone, everywhere in some way, shape, or form. In exploring the teachings of Jesus Christ, we see that he treated each person whom he encountered with unconditional love. His relationships were governed by love's power. When people disobeyed God's law, such as when the merchants used God's temple for business, Jesus became angry, but he still loved them. His philosophy of love, as well as his death and resurrection served to prove God's love to us, and demonstrates God's love and forgiving power for us as humans.

When we can understand the awesome and amazing power that love has, we can learn to respect and honor its power to a great extent within our own lives. To approach this, we must first learn how to productively and wholesomely love ourselves first.

When you are in a relationship of any kind, you must understand the feelings of other people for it to work, and they, in turn, must learn to understand your feelings.

It is important that we become honest and open with our feelings in all of our relationships, especially in marriage or partnership. In an ever-changing world, it is easier to be open and honest with yourself and the person with whom you share a relationship than it is to become explosive or constricted. There is no reason why we should see more people join the over 50% divorce rate in this country. It is important to understand that sustaining relationships is comparable to achieving any other goal. It takes sacrifice, persistence, trial and error, willpower, and determination to make the relationship work well.

One of the biggest relationship problems is that one or both people are unable to diagnose problems with their relationship. So, instead of figuring things out, they fight and fuss and argue and fight some more until they are exhausted. Yet, they have still solved nothing. When we are unable to acknowledge problems, we cannot search for solutions. It just does not happen by default. It takes some work. Therefore,

we must learn to understand the issues that exist within our relationships if we truly want them to work. When you are able to accept that there are going to be imperfections and give yourself and your partner room for change in a relationship, you can move many mountains.

Some of the problems that plague many relationships never get properly diagnosed and treated. This can, consequently, bring up many unwanted problems. To combat this, I have made a list below of problems that can harm many relationships.

1. Lack of communication

Many times, relationships fail because people do not communicate properly. In fact, this is one of the leading factors that cause people to break off relationships altogether. When life becomes busy, it is easy to forget to communicate with each other.

We all have needs, and it is important that we are satisfying the needs and desires of the person with whom we are in a relationship and vice versa. This includes honoring all of the promises you make, compromising, and understanding each other's needs, emotions, and desires. These concepts are all part of the relationship. We are set apart from any other creature in the world because we are greatly evolved through communication. It is a powerful tool. Never forget to use it.

2. An absence of time together.

One of the great relationship myths is that couples must do the same things together, even if one partner likes it and the other doesn't. You do not have to find yourself doing things simply because it makes your partner happy. Find compromise in activities. You do not have to be unhappy at the expense of keeping your relationship together. Communicate with each other and find ways to make things work out for you both so that there is a happy median in decision making and activity planning. Spending time together is extremely important in physical relationships, and that importance is lessened when other things get in the way.

3. A resistance of change.

Always remember that people can change, and you must be able to adapt to that with them. This is one of the reasons that people who marry at an early age many times get a divorce within a matter of months or a few years. Many marriages fail in older couples because spouses spend little time with each other when there are children at home. When they finally reach retirement age and have time to spend with each other, they find that they do not know each other anymore because they both have drastically changed over time. Sometimes we find older divorced couples saying that the only reason they were married so long to their spouse in the first place was to keep the household together and the children happy. This is not the best way to live your life.

We know that change is a prominent aspect in life. It is not going anywhere. So it is wise not to resist change in your life or the life of your spouse or partner. Respect this quality about life and learn from it. After all, it is one of the only things that is sure to remain constant!

4. Prolonged problems

Many loving relationships become turbulent because one or both partners in the relationship seek the love of money or other material possessions, another person, or a variety of other things over the love that is shared in the relationship. When credit cards hit their maximum and the pile of bills seem to never end, the tension weighs on a relationship. It is important to always work together to solve problems instead of hiding them, only to come back during a rainy day, or, worse, simply ignore them. While many of us diagnose this as common sense, it is surprising how many relationships are destroyed by stubborn people who fail to realize problems, and do not deal with them directly with the other person as a team.

Remember, money cannot buy you happiness or love. It might be able to buy fun and a false sense of security, but not everlasting joy. As we see many times in our modern world today, some of the richest people in the world even have trouble sustaining relationships with a spouse or anyone else because money is their ultimate goal. While money can buy you many things that are very useful and make life

easier, it's not love, and it is certainly can't help love grow any stronger.

Research has shown us that one of the top reasons that partners cheat on one another in loving relationships is because they are looking for something that they feel the other partner is not offering to them anymore. Because we all have problems and will continue to have problems of some kind in the future, it is wise to embrace this fact, and deal with it, not resist it until it kills us or breaks us apart from each other.

5. A lack of honesty, understanding, and empathy in the relationship

We must be open and honest through our communication and actions. If we can't do this, we don't do ourselves or the other person any good whatsoever. I have noticed that in my own relationships and other relationships I have observed, honesty is a crucial key to success.

Tension arises and sometimes is never resolved because people are afraid of their loved one's reaction when they do something wrong. We cannot be afraid of our partner, and he or she cannot be afraid of us if we want positive things to happen in our relationships. Understanding each other, being open and honest, and being compassionate with each other are key points to consider.

We must always remember that relationships are reciprocals. They are two-way streets, and both partners must compromise in the middle. Because life is full of compromises, you must learn how to manage everything you have the ability to control. When you are able to love yourself, have love for God, and accept love and give it to others, you can truly benefit from the many gifts of life.

Possibly the largest test in a relationship of any kind is the test of time. Making a good relationship work is very comparable to the way that a good band, choir, or orchestra works. In this relationship, the director of the group shares the same intent as the rest of the members, and that is to make good quality music together. The director is not controlling, but is, instead, working with the group as a team to make positive results. Relationships of any kind must work the same way, as a team effort, for success to be achieved.

As with success in anything, including relationships, you have to work for everything you want. This work must be a constant process. The rent is due every day; it's never owned completely. Investments must be made. Once you have the skills to understand individualism and how special and unique he or she is, you will find it much easier to make things work out, no matter what situation arises in the future. Realize that all of us are humans and we are not perfect. Have the same grace and mercy you would

have for a beloved pet or small child when you address problems. Be kind. Be love.

Here are some points for successful relationship management:

1. Learn to avoid arguments.

Arguments are destructive to relationships. In fact, they are one of the most destructive things you can do. It's always easy to say things like:

“You are never there for me when I need you!”

“You are being the problem!”

“You never care about my needs.”

“Why don't you listen?”

“You never understand what I want!”

“Do you still care about us?”

The list goes on. Notice that each of these statements play the blame game in some way or another. When we use the word “you” or “your” in our dialogue, this automatically sets up the person we are talking to on the defensive. In fact, the other party may even jump on the offensive and start taking shots at you. Either way, no one ends up happy, and nothing is usually played fair. Instead, it is better to use phrases like the following when you are resolving a conflict:

“I feel hurt by the way you are acting”

“I need your understanding so that we can solve our problem”

“Please listen to me, I want to resolve our conflict”

By using these types of phrases, you are including yourself, not pointing the finger. Chances are, the conflict you are facing will probably resolve faster when you do include yourself in the problem solving instead of blaming someone or something else for everything. Many times when we get in arguments with our loved ones, we know the right buttons to push. We know what words or phrases are going to hurt the other person, so we sometimes use them and think that we will gain some satisfaction or recourse when we do so. This is not a good practice. It takes responsibility from both partners in a relationship to keep a healthy connection.

My grandparents were married for over 50 years before my grandfather passed away. They were in one major fight or argument in their entire relationship together. Before making a major decision, they would sit down together and talk about it. They told each other what their thoughts and feelings are, and stay calm, cool, and collective, even in the worst of times and situations. Because of this, they had a very happy and meaningful relationship together.

2. Use assertive communication.

Most of us are not mind readers, so we must learn how to assertively communicate instead. Though we cannot completely understand all of the other person's emotional needs all of the time, we can be open with our communication techniques. If we have a breakdown in communication, many issues that are a concern in a relationship can be ignored, and the relationship is sure to have even more problems.

While it may not be a good idea to share every single thought or feeling you have, it is important that you get pressing issues off your back, and that your partner does the same, or they might come back to haunt you both at the worst possible time. It is better to be open, assertive, and proactive than closed off, reserved, and reactive, to what happens in your relationship. If you are not honest and open in sharing your needs and desires in your relationship, no one else will do it for you.

3. Weigh the perspective

Another positive thing to do in a relationship is to not blow anything out of proportion. When anger flares with any relationship, oftentimes the hostility lies upon each partner's perception of the situation. If you do not know the full story of an issue you can't make a correct general assumption at all. You have to look at a situation from your perception as well as that of the other person. If you don't, you are only guessing in the wind and speculating answers. It is wiser, instead, to logically approach the parts of any situation you

face, and be honest and understanding. Again, acceptance and management with someone or something is much easier than constant resistance, resentment, and bitterness.

4. Incorporate understanding and trust

You have to understand that trust is a great factor in a relationship in order to make it work. When you arrange to meet your partner at a certain place at a certain time, you are in essence signing a contract of your trust and honor with them. You are promising to honor them by showing up on time at the right place. If you do not, you break the contract, and lessen their trust in you.

When I was younger, my mother and stepfather were just starting out in their relationship. One night outside our duplex, my mother misjudged her distance from my stepfather's car in her vehicle and badly scratched his driver's side door. While many men would be very angry upon hearing this, my stepfather remained very calm and understanding. After all, it was only a mistake of judgment. The repair bills on the car body were minimal to the repair bill. He could have faced in his relationship with my mother if he had approached things in a defensive and irrational way. Though it was tough for him, he realized that, like him, she was only human, and he could have made the same mistake as well.

Where there is understanding between two people, there is also a great deal of trust. If we are not able to bend with other people's changes, or they are not able to bend with the changes we make, then a relationship is not in its best position for success, and more prone to fail. It truly takes love and understanding. Focusing on the positive and letting the negative be less of an issue is what makes a relationship grow with time. While this does not necessarily mean that every person is compatible with everyone else, it does mean that you can make what you and other people have invested in each other truly work.

5. Assume responsibility for your actions.

As with every other success in life, you must take proper action and responsibility if you truly want something to work out in your life. Relationships with one irresponsible person and one responsible person usually find disaster in some way or another. Taking responsibility not only shows that you care for what you are doing in your life, but it also shows the other person that you care about them.

After the communication lines are left open and the trust and respect factors are observed, having a positive relationship takes less time than one that is a mess and constantly needs to be fixed. Just as you want a reliable source of transportation to take you to the store, work, or anywhere else everyday, you can

also have a reliable relationship if you pay the proverbial rent, and work to make it the best it can be.

The Limitations of Expectations

While it is important to have high expectations for those whom you love (your spouse, children, family members, etc.), when you raise the expectations of the ones you love too high, you can damage your relationship with them in many ways. We see movies, real-life television shows, and written words about the parents of many sports and music stars pushing their children over the edge of their means to constantly do better.

When the children do not get positive reinforcement from their parents when they do well, they lose trust in themselves as well as their parents, and, many times, turn to destructive things to themselves or those around them. While it is good to influence your partner, child, or someone else close to you to be their best, it is not wise to go overboard and become unrealistic, either.

We must try to give unconditional love, as God gives to us, and be able to accept it in return, no matter what the circumstance. Love truly does defeat all when we allow it in our lives and our relationships with those around us. Let love reign first and the light of God be first and foremost in your heart.

Chapter 19

The Continuing Road

Statistics have shown through the years that an alarming rate of people, especially men, die or become very ill shortly after retiring from their jobs. One of the main reasons for this, which has been gathered through research, is that many people who do retire do not believe that they have a purpose in life after leaving their career. They somehow believe that life has come to an end along with their job, and they simply let their mind and body go into a state of limbo. This magnifies the fact that when the mind and body go inactive, physical and mental health almost always begin to deteriorate soon after.

Many of my older relatives are good examples of what life should be like after retirement, because they never allowed themselves to stop growing, and learned how to live a better life. They constantly strove to do better in everything they did and looked for plenty of opportunities and activities that they enjoyed. What these people also showed me is that they had very good attitudes about the rest of their

lives. They were not grumpy about being old. Instead, they accepted it and put value and meaning in what they said and did. We see hundreds of elderly people today living to ripe old ages with this philosophy, and it makes sense to adapt this to our own lives.

We are constantly creating our own expectations and experiences every day. We set our mood after we awake, and this initial mood usually affects us for the entire day or even longer. I cannot count how many times I have seen people destroy their day, week, or even year, simply by their way of thinking. As a part of human nature, we sometimes find one thing going wrong with our day or week and set ourselves up for disappointment again and again by believing that things are not going to get any better. As a result, things usually do not get better and, as a consequence, they get worse.

This is very important to recognize and understand. It is the way that the human mind works. If you set yourself up for success by thinking positive thoughts versus setting yourself up for failure, your results will be much better in return. I imagine life as a type of game that must be played by a set of rules. We know that living with honesty, trust, respect, love, compassion, and other positive elements are the way to get what you want in your life, but when we play by other rules, as we see many people doing in life, we never know what we will get in return. By setting up a positive and powerful thought process, you are better able to get what you want when you want it.

It is also important to concentrate on setting guidelines for the future. If you get too specific in planning your future, you will almost always be disappointed because the fact has, does, and will remain the same that things do not usually work out exactly the way in which we plan them.

A method that many extremely successful people use in understanding and realizing their expectations and goals in life is to visualize what you want to happen before it happens. I use this method when I am invited to give speeches to groups, make a large purchase for myself, or engage in a variety of other major activities. In order to be the absolute best I can be at what I am doing, I need to have the right mindset. So, what I do for myself is take a moment to imagine how I will present myself to the people around me before I engage in a major activity and set up, in my mind, that I will be successful at whatever that activity is going forward.

For example, if I am getting ready to deliver a speech to a group of individuals, I will visualize myself giving a positive speech, looking out onto smiling faces in the audience, and, at the end, receiving a warm round of applause from the crowd. By visualizing this success in my mind, I set myself up for positive achievement. I also block out any negative emotions and let in positive expectations. Successful business people, athletes, and other high-level achievers find a great power in simply doing this exercise, and the

same success can come to you if you harness this power as well.

Remember how important planning is in your life. If you do not have a plan, you are almost always planning for failure. Your success, therefore, depends on whether or not you have the right mental picture of what you want, and that you have a game plan. You would not take off in a plane with a pilot who had no flight plan or leave on a bus with a driver who had no GPS or directions to a destination. In the same respect, you must live your life with a direction in mind as well as some destinations. People who find unhappiness and suffering in their lives are people who have done very little preparation for their future. Planning, expecting the unexpected, and working towards being better are all keys to doing better.

1. Setting goals

Once you are able to set goals into place, you have a good foot in the ground towards making good things happen for yourself. Yet even before you do this, you have to make an accurate and firm assessment of your potential. This way you do not get yourself into more than you've bargained for in the long run. We see many people who put all their eggs in one basket, and find themselves lost because they did not leave their options open.

2. Live with right intentions

Set your goals and give yourself a proper expectation and assessment prior to and after your attempt at achieving your goal. Write down your thoughts and feelings during this time in a journal. This will help you chart your progress and allow you to further understand and appreciate the process of achievement. If your goal is to be a better writer, get outside help and be analytical of your work. If you want to be a better public speaker, get constructive criticism from your peers and co-workers. You will find that you can get to where you want to go with a little help. Steer clear of the negativity that you might encounter from other people, or even yourself.

3. Understand the process involved in achieving lasting success.

As I have mentioned before, success is a process. It is not automatic, and you can't let your own fears, frustrations, anxieties, and other emotions own where your life goes. Be a part of what is real. Don't let your dreams be clouded by what is not real. What if Einstein quit working on his theories because a few people laughed at him? What if Beethoven or Mozart quit composing music because they were frustrated one day? The point is that these people achieved success in the face of adversity. They didn't let their own negativity, or the criticisms of others get in the way of their success. Although we encounter much of the same negativity in today's world, we must still

charge ahead and make lasting changes for our own lives as well as for the lives of those around us.

4. Manage your life in the direction of your desires.

Try to understand and evaluate your situation, circumstance, and results of what has worked before when you are making tough decisions. Find and maintain the right perspective of your life by knowing both your limitations, as well as your ability. By this, I mean that it is important that you make sure that your life is geared in the direction of your ultimate successes in life.

Chapter 20

Welcome to the Rest of Your Life

“Welcome to the rest of your life.” I heard these words from a relative of mine a long time ago at my college graduation. These words held as much meaning for me then as they do now. We start a new journey in life every day that we live, and every morning when we wake up we must be thankful and mindful of this.

Life is filled with opportunities to grow in new and exciting ways. It is up to each of us to understand this, and practice giving what we have to offer to what we do in life. Many people waste their talents, time, treasure and other resources pursuing things they think are meant for them, only to be heartbroken, and believe they are failures.

The achievement of success, in my definition, is to live to the best of our ability with what resources we do have. Make the most of those resources. We must

welcome the rest of our lives, full of possibilities and challenges, every day that we live, if we want to improve our situations, or grow in new and lasting ways.

Many people ask me, “Who determines my fate or destiny as a human?” Is it God? Is it you? Or are all things in life predestined by God, karma, history, or something or someone else? This is one of those coffee table questions.

Regardless of external forces that affect your reality, one fact remains the same, and that is that you always have the power of choice in your life. Free will is freely given to you, and you have the choice to make decisions, and have to live with those choices every day. Even if you choose not to make a choice, a choice has been made by you, whether you like it or not.

On the other hand, God set all of this Universe in motion billions of years ago, when time had a beginning, and what may be billions of years from now or much sooner, time will also have an end, as do all things that have a beginning in our vast Universe. This might happen later today or be long after we are gone from this world in physical existence.

The conclusion can be made that destiny is formed in part by human choice, and part by God. The key, then, is finding the median to work with your choices,

and the will and power of God for your best interests. You can have the biggest house, the fanciest car, or any number of worldly possessions but, in the end, all of our graves are the same size.

Now, I am not saying you shouldn't make a ton of money and help people along the way. Be a blessing to those in need. Give away a lot of money if you have the means to do so. I want that for you. God is a giver, and you should be, too. This might sound a bit morbid, but keep in mind that you had a beginning in this world and one day, you too will have an end. No one gets out of this world alive but, in the spiritual sense, I want you to end up spiritually alive in the arms of Christ when your time on this Earth is done.

That all being written and read, keep in mind that this life was not designed to be easy or perfect, so stop striving for the easy button, or perfection in what you do. Those are futile efforts. Instead, the point of this book has been to make the most of the cards you were dealt in this life - where you were born, how God created you, what time, talent and treasure you have available, and how your experiences, both positive and negative, have shaped you. This all matters.

You were born into this world to make an impact, to grow where you were planted, and to plant seeds in generations, yet unborn, through the lives you touch. Never forget how special you are, and how much your life makes a difference in your time in this world. Make every day count in every way you are able.

I use the following statement when I give speeches or even friendly advice to people:

Life is a gift; don't abuse it. Remember that you have only one chance to live. 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 can do. Live with passion, and never forget how important you are to the lives you touch every day. You matter to God, like you are the only one God created...

Never forget that great sacrifices of creativity and imagination are constantly being made every day by people everywhere for the pursuit of money and power. Do not let that sacrifice happen to you. Don't sell your soul to the trappings of this physical world. As King Solomon once wisely said, that is vanity and chasing the wind. Live with a creative and imaginative mind. Asking God for what you need, and to work through your life and who you are, right where you're planted, is an empowering way to live.

Praying the Boldest of Prayers

The most powerful, bold and awesome prayer you can pray to God is four words: **“GOD, PLEASE USE ME!”** When I took a step in faith and did this in my own life, God went to work in mysterious and wonderful ways that took me to places I could never imagine that I had never dreamed of before. Try it! I dare you! Pray that prayer right now.

God, and the laws of this Universe will only give you what you allow yourself to have. Remember, if you are not receptive to this, and try to do things all on your own without recognizing the power of God's will and the Law of Attraction, Law of Intention, and Law of Diminishing Returns, your efforts will most likely be tiring, and only self-fulfilling, at best. Live bolder than just for yourself and strive to be a part of the greater good. In the end, the choice for true success is all yours.

Remember that you are in charge only after you take charge of yourself, your relationships with others around you, and your relationship with God. A relationship with God, not religion itself, will get you on the right pathway. You are important, and people love you.

Congratulations for finishing this book. Now, please consider gifting this book away or buying a fresh copy for someone else who can benefit from it. Either way, I'd be honored if you would share my spoonfuls of hope in this book with others who might need it in their lives, especially if they are facing some harder times.

I wish you prosperity and wisdom. Remember to be the source, the blessing to someone, and ask God how you can serve God's creation in order to get the blessing you're after.

May God bless you and keep you now, and in all of your future endeavors. You are an awesome creation! Don't forget it. Welcome to the rest of your life!

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 in helping them to achieve their goals, and turn their dreams into reality. He earned a bachelor's degree from Texas Lutheran University in 2002.

He has hosted hundreds of YouTube videos and TV shows, as well as bi-weekly podcasts, and has authored paperback books, eBooks, blogs, and

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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 paperback and eBooks, articles, blogs, inspirational and motivational videos, outdoor TV show productions, and podcasts at www.dustinsprojects.com