



THE
FORMULA
FOR
KNOWING
GOD'S
WILL

FOR
CHRISTIANS,
AGNOSTICS,
AND
ATHEISTS

MIKE SNYDER



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This book is dedicated to my sweet and incredibly wise mother, Susan Snyder, as well as my three children, James, Nathan, and Elizabeth, the eldest of whom is 24. May all three prevail and discover the plans for their lives.

I also dedicate it to my long-time business partner, Bruce Rowley, with whom I've shared many a proverbial foxhole, mostly laughing and loving every minute of it.

And to God, who has more than upheld His part of whatever bargain we've shared.



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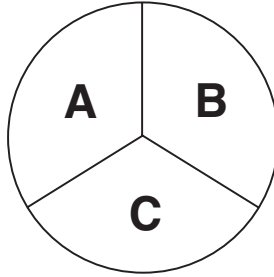
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! INTRODUCTION



Who Is This Book For?

This book is for four kinds of people:

1. Those who identify as Christians and believe in God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.
2. Those who believe in a “god” or “power in the universe,” though not the Christian construct of God.
3. Those who are agnostic and neither believe nor disbelieve.
4. Those who don’t believe in God at all: atheists.

So, how can a book on God’s will for your life address Christians all the way through to atheists? Yes, this book absolutely includes Biblical principles and what I will refer to as *formulas* as portrayed in the Bible. If you’re an agnostic or atheist, just view it as you would any other piece of literature. There’s always at least a thing or two you can learn from any book. That’s been my view, and it hasn’t failed yet. I may not

AGREE with everything. I might not even like the author's core viewpoints. However, there's always something to learn.

This book is not ALL about the Bible, God, and the scriptures. The strongest rope is not one of a single strand. The strongest rope is made of many, separate, independent strands all intertwined and working together. So, knowing God's will for your life includes principles from other disciplines like science, philosophy, and even the military. There's a whole lot of U.S. Marine Corps doctrine in this book. You can take the man out of the Marine Corps but not the Marine Corps out of the man as goes the old saying. Having spent 24 years in the Corps, yeah, there's learning extracted from that powerful life thread.

These disciplines introduce logic, as the Bible even includes logic, and what I refer to as *universal principles*. When you start absorbing principles across all these categories, you see that universal principles arise, universal truths that apply *universally*. This is a fundamental premise of this book.

How should atheists and agnostics react whenever "God" is mentioned? Easy, just insert either the word *power* or *intuition*. There you have it. Now, any reader can digest this book and gain value from it.

In fact, when referring to Biblical scriptures, figures, or stories, I'm not even going to quote the scripture. I will include an annotation next to the reference and include the scriptures at the end of the chapter if you care to look further. This book is about making a tough subject—how to know the will of God—simple. So, I don't want to refer to ten scriptures when one will do. And I don't want any of the audiences for whom

this book is intended to get tripped up in all the “Christian-speak” that is typical of a book like this.

What you’re going to see in this book is the absolute breakdown of anything mystical. Knowing God’s will is not based on “voice from the sky” experiences, though that can happen. In the Bible, it happened many times, but those instances were rare. More likely are the straightforward processes that we ordinary people can practice every day.

At God’s core, IMHO, He’s logical. He’s not trying to make anything about Him difficult for us to understand . . . or do. If anything, God is quite simple. Heresy, you cry! Really?

Take Adam and Eve. God tells them, “You can have this entire Earth. And you can do anything you want, though I don’t want you to eat the fruit of this specific tree. If you eat that fruit, well, bad things will happen.” And He told them what would happen.¹ Does this sound mystical? Did God make it hard for them to understand? Heck no! God made it very clear and simple. And Adam and Eve still goofed it up.

In this book, you will see many formulas that are actually quite logical and those which you can immediately put into practice.

Now don’t get me wrong! God can also be over-the-top unpredictable and ridiculous. Like the time He spoke to a “wicked prophet” through the man’s donkey!² Yes, the donkey spoke. Believe it or not. But that’s what the Bible says. Or the time Jesus healed a blind man’s eyes by spitting on them!³ Why can God be ridiculous like these examples? Is God himself ridiculous? No, he was trying to make a point. God can act ridiculously to confound us, get us to finally listen, or

break our unhealthy conventions, stereotypes, legalism, ruts, prejudices, biases, you name it.

So basically, I'm not going to confine God to anything. I firmly believe that whether you're Christian, agnostic, atheist, or anything in between, you can benefit from the logic and perhaps even the ridiculousness herein.

Why Am I Writing This Book?

First, everything is clear in hindsight. Starting in college, I became obsessed with knowing and doing God's plan and will for my life. I was an earnest young man who didn't want to waste my one life. I believed there was a plan out there for me. The problem then was, and remains so for us all, how do we know that plan? And that obsession has never stopped. Now, four decades later, I've lived a lot of my life and have been through trials and errors regarding how to know and follow God's will and plan. I have real examples with real outcomes. The experiments have been run, and we know what happened!

Most of us recognize the term *scientific method*. Oxford Languages defines it as: "*consisting in systematic observation, measurement, and experiment, and the formulation, testing, and modification of hypotheses.*"²⁴ Well, you can say I've used my own life in a scientific method to reach the hypotheses in this book!

Second, I'm a regular person. What does this mean, exactly? Well, although I've been a licensed minister, I'm not a career minister. I don't have my Doctor of Ministry degree. I'm not a professional theologian. And I think this is a good thing!

(Because neither was Jesus.) I'm a regular guy. I can write this book without being "boxed in" by theological expectations based on my position, as might happen if I were a full-time minister whose reputation must be upheld.

When I was a young man, I said a prayer: "God, in my life, let me do a lot of different things."

So, He answered! As an adult, I've lived in eight different cities, from some of the largest to the smallest. I've threaded at least eight different career paths. And God isn't done with me yet because I prayed that prayer, and I'm living His answer. My life has been an unusual petri dish of experiments, pivots, and testing whether I could discern and then do God's plan and will for my life.

To be fair, I don't know that I fully understood what I was asking for back when I prayed that prayer. All of these movements and pivots in my life have been fairly terrifying. I'm not the kind of guy who just throws caution to the wind. I'm not a daredevil. I'm not a driven, Type A person. But . . . I've only had ONE goal for my life, and that was and remains to do God's will. Well, sometimes that can be a wild ride, and I now have gray hair! You'll hear more of my stories in this book. Time and time again, God patted me on the shoulder saying, "Hey, I think it's about time for another huge dose of change!"

Mind you, nearly none of what I've done in my life has been per any "master planning" on my part. In fact, most of my life, I haven't known what to do or what big changes to make. The one constant has been trying to know and follow God's will and plan. THAT is the one thing I think I figured out: HOW to recognize when God's plan and will are moving

in your life at a precise moment. Then, understanding what actual action is required at that moment.

In sports, the military, science, and certainly in business, you get better the more you practice. Do the work, over and over again. Try, fail, get up, and never stop. When you do this regarding God's will, well, you get pretty good at recognizing it. Understanding God's will gets easier, even if the next steps are incredibly hard and scary! I've gained this learning through intensive application, not just theory. Dozens if not a hundred times. "It's been battle-tested," as we say in the Marines. "You can take this to the bank," as we say in business.

So, what was a mystery to me as a young man is now a rote principle today.

Trust me, if you accept some or all the principles we're going to review and you start practicing them, you WILL come to know God's plan and will for your life. That part will get simpler and simpler. However, beware! You then have to *do it!* That means getting outside your comfort zone and "taking action, moving out!" Or not. If you don't, well, since you're not exercising that muscle, it will diminish. You certainly don't have to do God's will. If you don't, you'll just be on a different path, one that may not be your best or not what God intended for your life. But, no worries! If you miss one turn, God won't write you off. He'll still be there for the next turn. Your life is a thousand steps made one at a time. If you step off "the path" and find yourself lost in the woods, He can get you back on course. It might just take a little longer, and that's okay too.

Now onto my third reason for writing this book. Throughout my life, I've interviewed and hired hundreds of young people. Over these decades, I've noted that so, so many of them have no idea what they want to do with their lives. I ask. They just don't know, not an inkling. Young people naturally face a big, bold world where they have to figure out what to do with their lives. Most lack direction and have no formula for figuring it out. If you lack a compass, you're just going to wander around aimlessly. I've also asked many of them, "What is the source of your values?"

Most times, sadly, I hear: "Well, to be a good person." While commendable, that's not a set of values. From my own early days, the sources of my values have been clear: God's Word (the Bible) and the U.S. Marine Corps! Both have very clear value sets.

Why are values important? Well, they govern how you think, act, and live. They are the sources you go back to when times get confusing, when your life gets tough, and when the people in your life get rough. Without values, you don't have anything to guide you. If you have a source for your values, great. If you don't, this book can help.

In all my years of living, of leading, of listening, even of sitting in many pews in churches all across our fine land, I have not heard anyone talk about how to know God's will like we're going to do. Frankly, it's a subject that is generally avoided.

Nothing Worthwhile Is Ever Easy!

I think part of the problem in discussing God's will is most who attempt to do so stay at the 30,000-foot level, meaning rather conceptual. What God intends is for you to apply His values with His formulas to live His will even on a daily basis . . . because He makes it easy! God's will lives at YOUR level of living, and I'm sure that, unless you're a pilot, you don't routinely live at 30,000 feet. Your feet are on the ground. Unfortunately, the many books I've read regarding God's will are largely conceptual. They're also heavy, heavy, heavy, *heavy* with that "Christian-speak" I've mentioned. Let's talk about this for a hot minute.

Most institutions in life have their own vernacular. They have their own shorthand, if you will, for tossing ideas around. In the Marine Corps, I can mention *commander's intent*, *culmination point*, or *fundamentals of the offense*. Unless you've been in the Marine Corps, you probably have no idea what I'm saying. In business, I could say, *brand strategy*, *market position*, or *P/L strategies*. Again, most of you probably don't know what I'm talking about. In Christianity, we say, *ministry of the Holy Spirit*, *presence of God*, *fruit of the Spirit*, or *the call of God*. Again, many of you have no idea what these constructs entail. Unfortunately, many books on God's will speak this way, making it very difficult for readers who may not be that into Christianity or are not well-practiced at it. Heck, it's hard for Christians too.

According to the Pew Research Center in a report on "Modeling the Future of Religion in America," only two-thirds (66 percent) of Americans now identify as being Christian.⁵

That's down from around 90 percent in the 1990s. And they expect that number to continue to fall. In an article by Ryan Burge of Eastern Illinois University entitled "Gen Z and Religion in 2021," Mr. Burge reports that only 36 percent of Gen Z identify as Christian.⁶ Well, this leaves many people unfamiliar with Christian-speak who might still want to know God's plan for them. In another Pew Research Center article, only 31 percent of teens and only 33 percent of their parents report that only one religion is true. Forty-five percent of teens and 47 percent of their parents report that many religions can be true.⁷

In a recent conversation with a young man who is a freshman in college and not a church-goer, I asked if he ever thought about the plan for his life. "Every single day," he responded. "Not a day goes by that I don't wonder what it is I'm supposed to do and become."

I asked if he believed in God. He took a day to answer! The following day, he called and said, "Yes, I do believe there's some guiding power in the universe, perhaps something akin to God."

That's good enough for me, and I believe many who may read this book feel similarly.

Christians themselves likely aren't doing themselves any favors. According to an article entitled "Bible Readership in the U.S. 2018-2021," a survey found that only 11 percent of Americans read the Bible every day. And that number is highly distorted by those over age 70 who read the Bible more than, say, Millennials. The article states that Millennials are "most likely to have never read the Bible."⁸

So, the logical takeaway is more and more Christians themselves are unfamiliar with God's many formulas for life contained in His Word. That Statista article claims that part of this reason is that the Bible itself isn't easy.

The Bible is a mammoth compilation of 66 books written by 40 different authors over thousands of years with more than 100 English translations, most containing more than 700,000 words. And the Bible isn't arranged by topic. There's no book in the Bible called "How to understand my Will." Instead, that topic is hidden in a book called Philippians and many other books.⁹ God's formulas require a lot of personal work akin to mining. You have to dig, dig, dig to get to truths from all parts of the Bible. Then, you have to put it all together. That's a lot of studying. Where do you start? Too many likely start *at the start*, at Genesis, which is an intimidating task. The Bible has about 1200 pages, and most of "the good stuff" regarding God's will is in the final chapters, not in the beginning. I'm certainly not criticizing God's Word at all. I'm just acknowledging that it's not like a textbook where the subject matter starts simply and progresses logically. God's Word tends to be portrayed on a timeline of history, meaning concepts randomly appear in different books in different time periods in different authors' voices. It's all great and wonderful, and yet it requires a lot of study.

Well, I've done the work! And I'd like to distill it down for you in a very practical and doable fashion.

If this is not what you want for your life, that's okay. If it is, please continue reading.

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CHAPTER 1



GOD'S
FORMULA
FOR YOUR
LIFE

$$\text{Life} = fx(X \cdot (Y + Z))$$

The TWO Wills of God

You should know that God's will and plan for your life come in TWO parts. Oh, so tricky, right? You mean, there are TWO kinds of God's will? He has TWO plans for your life? Yep. And they're sequential, meaning one follows the other. It's kind of like education. If you want to go to college and learn the big stuff, you have to start in kindergarten drawing with colored crayons. God first wants you to start in His kindergarten learning His basics.

God's FIRST plan for your life involves who you ARE. The basics like your values, your character, your emotions, your daily behaviors, and your daily moral decisions between right and wrong. We'll get to that in another chapter because we're going to focus on His SECOND plan first. Why are we going to flip-flop the order? Because you're likely reading this book to figure out "What am I supposed to DO with my life *now*?" So, we'll address that first.

Luckily for all of us, God's SECOND plan for your life focuses on what you DO. Every young person wonders, "What am I supposed to DO with my life?"

In this context, God has a will and plan for your career, your education, your relationships, your daily choices . . . basically all of your many opportunities to live a life that is both 1) fulfilling to you and 2) purposeful to God.

Why does God care about what you do? First, He absolutely wants you to live a fulfilling life, however you define fulfilling. Each of us is immensely different from the next

person when it comes to what fulfills us. That which fulfills us in life becomes a “driving need” inside us. One person might have a driving need to be creative, as in music, art, writing, theater, you name it. Another person might have a driving need to be inventive, as in engineering, architecture, developing new products, or tinkering around in the garage to make something better. Yet another person might have a driving need to help people, such as becoming a nurse or doctor, a social worker, or a teacher. Other people have a driving need to govern, get into politics, serve on community boards, or run for mayor. Others want to grow things. That might be agriculture, as in farming. It might also be marketing or sales, where you grow engagement with customers and revenue to grow a movement or cause. Others still have a driving need to serve. So, we join the military, become ministers, and work in non-profits.

What Is a Driving Need?

This idea of a *driving need* is divine. When each of us is born, we are born with an imprint of our talents and what motivates us. We are born with native talents that, when watered, will grow. Our talents are found in our minds, meaning those things we can do, and also in our hearts, meaning those things we want to do. As we get older, these talents have a “driving need” to be expressed. And that basically means that we express them occupationally, in the people we become.

This isn't hard to observe. Take any middle school for example. There are kids who like shop, meaning they like taking apart engines and putting them back together again or working with wood. There are other kids who love sports

and competition. There are others who are into music or art or theater. Math. English and writing. Speech and debate. You name it. From an early age, each of us starts to migrate towards those opportunities that allow the expression of our innate talents based on our driving needs.

Now, perhaps you know what your driving need is, but you don't know how to express it. God will help you with that. Perhaps you don't know what your driving need is. That's okay too. God will help you discover it. It's important to note that, in understanding and doing God's will for your life, you'll need to be decisive. No human action can happen without a decision. Well, I suppose you can let others make decisions for you. But that won't lead to God's best for your life.

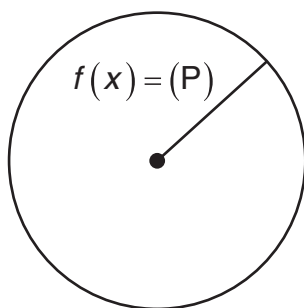
Perhaps you're conflicted. That's natural. Perhaps you're pondering, "Well, I think I'd like to serve, but I just don't know." I encourage you to just be decisive. Make your decisions. If you're wrong, you will know it in short order. But you can't walk the journey of your life without taking a first step, then another. And each step is a decision to do so.

If in doubt, make a decision. Whatever that decision may be, put a time limit on how long you'll give yourself to make that decision. If you haven't made a decision by the end of that time, make one the best that you can. If you don't, you may find yourself stuck years later in the same spot you're in today. And if you don't like that spot, then that's a bad place to be with a lot of the bad things that follow, like anger that you're stuck with, depression, taking your frustration out on others, and stuff like that.

If you find yourself with some of those negatives in your life, it's likely time to make a fresh decision. And God's there to help.

This natural, innate driving need is the basis of God's will and plan for your life. Here's the model, as found in the Bible.

God's Second Plan and Will for Your Life



“For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure.”¹

Or if you are an agnostic:

“It is the universe that works in you both to will and to do according to the universe's plan.”

Or if you are an atheist:

“It's your own subconscious intuition working in you both to will and to do for your own best outcomes.”

Please read that again about three times, slowly. Breathe, exhale, breathe, exhale.

Here's what this formula says: 1) God works inside you, in your mind and your emotions, 2) to know what to do, to do His will. And 3) He has a plan that involves you and Him that makes both parties happy. You see, God wants the best for you . . . and for Him. Yes, God has His own plans, and all of God's plans on Earth mean getting people to execute those plans. When the formula refers to *His good pleasure*, that means He wants to accomplish something with and through you. But He can't do it alone. He needs you!

There's a story in the Bible of a woman God tapped on the shoulder. Her name was Esther, and God wanted her to help save many people from being murdered. That was His plan, His good pleasure. But He needed her assistance and said so. However, Esther wasn't sure she wanted to do it, as it involved risking her position as queen and perhaps her life. God understood and said, "Hey, fine. I can always find someone else. However, bad things are going to happen to you and your family if you don't do my will here."²

By the way, she stepped up, and the story has a very happy ending for all.

Now, that's an extreme example of God wanting to accomplish a pretty radical goal, saving thousands of people from murder. Many times, God is just smiling at you and wants to bless you. That could be His good pleasure. Or perhaps there's someone or many someones He wants you to help, something He wants you to achieve for Him while you also benefit from a new direction. To do so, He'll attempt to change the direction of your life.

The answers to all our life questions, such as “What am I supposed to do now?”, can be found *inside* of us! God is already at work inside of us to generate the answers to our many questions of “What am I supposed to do now?”

- You don't need to question all your friends.
- You don't need to grasp at straws.
- You don't need to despair.
- You don't need to look for a “voice from the sky.”
- You don't need a miracle.
- You don't need to guess.
- And you absolutely should not do *nothing*, especially when you know God is talking to you. God = movement.

Here's the trick. We each have to learn to listen to what's happening in our hearts and minds. God speaks in a still, small voice.³ He is whispering to you in both places, your heart (feelings, emotions) and your mind (ideas, logic, directions). When God is speaking into your life, fundamentally, it's going to be inklings in your mind and emotions. There are other ways God speaks to you, but we're talking fundamentally here. Yes, He also speaks to you through parents, friends, pastors, and other ways we'll discuss later. However, these “supporting players” work to confirm what God is already whispering to you. In God's formula to know His Will and plan for your life, He's simply talking to you through your mind and feelings on what can and should be on a daily basis.

And here is how you'll know it's God. Or the universe. Or your intuition.

You can't escape it.

fx : ∞

**You can't escape it; you can't shake it;
it won't go away.**

That's how you know! Day after day, you keep having that same thought, that same feeling. You may not like it, but for some reason, you can't shake it! This is usually an aha moment when you realize something greater than your random thoughts and feelings is at work in you! It's at that moment that you probably need to sit up a little straighter and seriously ponder the implications based on what you're thinking and feeling . . . once you realize it could be God working inside of you to affect change in your life.

Many times, the thoughts and feelings "you can't escape" are in response to a request you made of God. Maybe it was a big prayer like "Should I quit my job and do something else?" Perhaps it was a smaller prayer like "My co-worker is driving me crazy. How should I handle that?" Knowing God's will, if not a plan, can impact every area of your life.

Here's a great quote from famous American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson confirming what we're talking about here:

*"You become what you think
about all day long."²⁴*

If you're thinking about something all day, day after day, perhaps that's what you should become. Emerson and God are aligned here.

And God speaks both positively and negatively. This means your thoughts and emotions might be either positive or negative towards an option or two you're considering. Let's look at an example.

It was 1992, and I was a first lieutenant with the Marines serving as a public affairs officer in New York City. I knew that my contract with the Marines was going to be up in a year. That meant that I would either opt to continue with the Marines for another three years, or I could get out.

And here's the familiar question: "What should I do?" I asked God about it, meaning I prayed. I literally asked Him in no flowery language, no long prayers: "God, what do you want me to do now?"

No immediate answer, of course! It's been my experience that God takes His time in revealing His next steps for your life. Why? Because of His FIRST Will and plan for your and my lives, which is to develop His character in us.

So, take this to the bank . . . God does not usually answer your prayers on a dime. He rarely shows you what's next in a comfortable manner. He lets you stew, wait, worry, and become anxious. Why? Because if He provided an immediate answer, you won't develop the character traits that are important to Him, things like patience, faith, peace, and self-control. In my experience, God arrives a day late and a dollar short . . . according to my druthers. However, according to God's plan, He arrives right . . . on . . . time. In many ways,

and I say this with much respect to God, *I don't like the way God arrives!* Golly, it would just be so much easier if God were like a soda machine. I put in my quarters and out comes what I want.

But God is God, and so be it.

Back to the story. I had to figure out what I was going to do. So, at that time, I wasn't high on continuing my young career with the Marines. I was feeling like doing something new. In my heart, I was negative about the Marines. At the same time, God was creating a new driving need in me to serve. I wanted to do something truly selfless to give back. Bing! I had an idea. Join the Peace Corps.

I would go from the Marine Corps, where you kinda have to be prepared to kill people, to the Peace Corps, where you save people. I asked my wife about it. Well, she couldn't imagine being overseas and that far from her mother, and she meant it. The idea, dead on arrival. DOA. God closes doors sooner than He opens them. Take *that* to the bank too. So, my idea to join the Peace Corps was a closed door.

At the same time, I also had an idea and passion that I wanted to help churches get out of debt. Wow, how random, right? Not really. When I was a youth, I attended a church that had so many things going for it. The church was growing and things were exciting! But to grow, the church decided to take on debt to build a new facility. It did, and then everything became about paying for the debt. Growth slowed as the focus became money. And because there wasn't enough money to go around, the church's ministries shrank. It really left an impression on me.

So, I had this feeling that I might want to help growing churches avoid debt or get out of the debt they were in. That was my heart, my emotions. But how would I do that? Well, that involves the mind, the ideas as to how to do things. One day, bing! I hear this still, small voice in my head: write a business plan.

Write a business plan? I'd never done that before. But I found myself excited to do so! So, I began researching what a business plan involved. I decided that one of my options was to create a foundation that would help churches get out of debt. And I wrote a business plan with ideas on how to do just that.

Isn't this ridiculous? At the time, I thought it was kind of ridiculous too. I look back all these years later, and it still looks ridiculous. Yet, I am very proud of "young Mike" who followed the promptings in his heart and mind and didn't overthink it. He just sat down over many evenings and banged out that business plan not knowing how it would come to happen. One step, then another. Don't worry yet about the rest.

It just so happened. Let me say this again. *It just so happened.* God likes that phrase because it's how He kinda works. It may look random. Yes, it just so happened that the church we were attending on Staten Island was—can you guess it?—uh huh, they were steeply in debt. The story there is long, but basically, this church got crosswise with the City of New York on some property the church purchased from the city. The church essentially lost its financing for the facility it built on the land purchased from the city when the city demanded more money from the church. And this was a

church of 2,000 members, the largest Protestant church on Staten Island.

It just so happened that one day, I mentioned to one of the assistant pastors at this church that I had written a business plan on how to get churches out of debt. He asked for the business plan, and I provided it. I didn't think he'd have any interest in it. I was surprised. I could have said, "No, it's not ready yet." I could have been afraid of making an ass out of myself. Instead, I said, "Yeah, sure." Next thing I knew, I was in a meeting with the senior pastor of this church, and I found myself saying, and I can't believe I did it, "I'll work for this church for free for one year to help the church get out of debt."

He said okay. I said okay. My wife said okay. And the next thing I know, I'm out of the Marine Corps working for this church for free.

Listen, this is a pretty radical example because most of us can't work for free! My wife was making a great salary, and we agreed, God bless her, that we'd give it one year.

Within a month of working at that church, the church's business manager quit, and the senior pastor asked me if I wanted the job. I did, and I got paid for it. I also took over international missions and local evangelism. I never did get the church out of debt and soon forgot about my business plan. But I was having the time of my life learning and contributing in new ways, per God's plan for my life. The business plan was just an instrument to help me get there. I followed His promptings to *prepare* me for His ultimate plan, which was to get me onto the church's staff. We'll talk further later about this important principle: *preparation*.

I wanted to go into the Peace Corps to help. Instead, I found myself in God's Corps.

Remember, remember, remember God's formula for our lives: "For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure."

This formula is like shooting pool. You aim for one ball, miss it, and in doing so, you sink another ball unintentionally. THE POINT: you have to take the shot, any shot. In my game of pool, my first shot: I wrote the business plan, not even knowing what I'd do with it. My second shot was based on some chance meeting with the assistant pastor: I mentioned my business plan. My third shot: I took the meeting with the senior pastor. My final shot, where God sank the eight ball: I said YES, even though it *appeared* to come at a cost, like no pay.

Remember the part of the formula that says "for His good pleasure"? Let's discuss that some more. So, the move to leave the Marine Corps and live my dream of "giving back" through non-profit work was certainly good for me. However, God also had a plan. It was right for the church. His church. HE knew that the business manager was going to quit. HE knew that the senior pastor needed someone like me who was full of positive Marine Corps "we can do this" energy, something the pastor desperately needed after the beating he and the church took from the city. GOD had a plan to 1) advance the life of one man and 2) benefit a pastor and church that needed a new shot in the arm.

Funny thing, in short order, the church experienced several windfalls that reduced its debt and got in place a long-

term agreement for full repayment with the contractor who built the church.

I worked for the church for three years. However, the church didn't pay much, especially considering we bought a house and were living in New York City, not a cheap place to live. Enter the Marine Corps, again. *It just so happened* that, every other month, the Marine Corps would call our house. I'd come home after work, and my wife would say, "Hey, the Pentagon called today, and there's a message on the answering machine for you."

You see, public affairs officers in the Marine Corps aren't numerous, and the Marine Corps had various opportunities where it needed temporary help. So, I listened to the message, and the Marine Corps was offering me a part-time job to be a Marine Corps reservist supporting their recurring temporary needs. I'd be promoted to captain and get to do cool things, like lead the public affairs team at the World War II 50th Anniversary D-Day Commemoration Ceremony in Europe in 1995. God's plan at work. My mind said, "We need the money." And my emotions said, "This is really cool."

So, I said yes.

Big point here . . . if you want to achieve anything in life, let alone God's plan for your life, you're going to have to say yes . . . a lot of times. In fact, I recommend that, if in doubt, say yes. Why? Saying no to life ensures you stay stuck. Saying yes, well, doesn't that open up a whole can of worms? And worms churn the dirt, making it better and richer. What would the world be without worms?

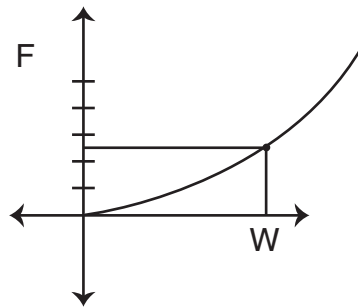
The church turned the corner with its debt. It was a matter of perseverance and willpower. I know today that my presence on the church staff mightily contributed to the collective decision to keep persevering, the Marine Corps way. “It’s not by might nor by power,” God says.⁵

The church is flourishing to this very day.

In committing to the Marine Corps as a reservist who would do part-time work here and there, God laughed because He knew He had just changed the course of my life, for His and my purposes. Yet, I had no idea! I thought I was just bringing home a few extra dollars every month to help pay the bills.

Well, God had other plans, of course.

But How Do I Know?



At this point, you’re likely asking yourself, “But how can I KNOW that those thoughts and feelings are from God?” This is a very natural question and perhaps it’s accompanied by some fear. Fear of change. Fear of failure. Fear of leaving your comfort zone. Fear of loss. Fear of looking stupid. Fear of disappointing others. All kinds of fear. Natural fears.

If you feel fear, good! In my experience, God's will and change in plans for you usually produce some level of fear. And why? Because above all . . .

**God requires you to step out in faith.
Without faith, it is impossible to please God.⁶**

So, when you feel fear, know that God is also working to mature you during this process of following His will. This is His FIRST will for your life, to make you more like Him. To develop more character in you. Who you ARE. You counter fear and that feeling of "not knowing" with faith.

What is *faith*? According to Oxford Languages . . .

*"Faith is complete trust or confidence
in someone or something."⁷*

According to God . . .

**Faith is the substance of things hoped for,
The evidence of things not seen.⁸**

When you HOPE that what you're thinking and feeling is from God, well, the next step is to have faith, complete trust, and confidence in Him. So, you make your decisions based on what He's doing inside you. You stop waffling, and you decide. You put aside fear and questioning and just start taking the next steps. You may not be sure exactly what will happen, but you can have confidence that God will "make real" that which has not yet happened, that which is not yet observable.

I have good news for you! Faith isn't that hard. In fact, every day you operate in faith, and you probably don't know it.

- You open your refrigerator and expect it to be cold.
- You ride a roller coaster and expect it to not fall apart.
- You drive to work and expect the car not to break down.
- You take a flight and expect the plane to arrive safely.
- You sit on a stool and expect it to hold you.
- You expect your internet and electricity to work.

We actually live in faith each and every day. We don't recognize it as such, but it is. Whenever you are exercising “trust and confidence” in someone or something, well, Oxford Languages defines that as faith. What we need to do is recognize that we actually have a lot of faith in other areas of our lives. Now we just need to apply similar faith—trust and confidence—to God and what He's trying to impart to us in our lives.

When you start walking daily in faith with God and His will, your life will change completely. Because that's His plan! He wants to transform you into someone different than you are today.⁹ You can be 20 years old, 30, 70. It doesn't matter how experienced you are with God. You may or may not go to church. You may or may not pray regularly. You may sin a lot or a little. You may be the best person you know or not so much. There is ALWAYS a new level that God wants to take you to. In this sense, God's will and plan for your life have no end. It only ends when you die.

Since we're talking about faith and transformation, let's move on to the next chapter where we explore God's FIRST Will and plan for your life.

REFERENCES

1. Phil. 2:13. "For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure."
2. Esther 4:14. "For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then will relief and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place, but thou and thy father's house will perish: and who knoweth whether thou art not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"
3. 1 Kings 19:11-12. "And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before Jehovah. And, behold, Jehovah passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before Jehovah; but Jehovah was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but Jehovah was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but Jehovah was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice."
4. Omar Itani, "13 Quotes by Ralph Waldo Emerson That Will Change the Way You Think," April 14, 2020, medium.com/mind-cafe/13-quotes-by-ralph-waldo-emerson-that-will-change-the-way-you-think-d4d0b243242#:~:text=%E2%80%9CTo%20be%20yourself%20in%20a,else%20is%20the%20greatest%20accomplishment.%E2%80%9D.

5. Zech. 4:6. “Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of Jehovah unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith Jehovah of hosts.”
6. Heb. 11:6. “And without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that seek after him.”
7. *Oxford Languages*, s.v. “faith,” accessed April 13, 2023, www.oed.com.
8. Heb. 11:1. “Now faith is assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen.”
9. Eph. 4:23-24. “And that ye be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, that after God hath been created in righteousness and holiness of truth.”

CHAPTER 2



GOD'S FIRST PLAN AND WILL FOR YOUR LIFE



$$X = T^4$$

Follow Him, become like Him.¹

Or if you are an agnostic:

“The universe wants you to be the best possible version of yourself.”

Or if you are an atheist:

“Your own intuition will propel you towards goodness and positive values for your own best outcomes.”

Before anything else in your life, God absolutely wants to TRANSFORM your character, your soul, your mind, your heart, everything you are. Before you think about what you should be DOING in life, know one thing. First, He wants to help you change who you ARE. He wants you to follow Him and be transformed so much that you'll become His spiritual son or daughter.

God's FIRST will and plan for your life definitely precedes the SECOND. In fact, the more successful we are in living His FIRST will, who we ARE, the more successful we'll be in His SECOND, what we DO.

About the A–B Relationship

$$A > B$$

There's an A–B relationship between the two. A always precedes B.

A

Do not be ***conformed*** to this world,
but be ***transformed*** by the ***renewing***
of your mind

B

That you may experience
God's will for you.²

So, what is God talking about here?

First, what is it to be *conformed* to this world? From Merriam-Webster, the definition of *conform*. . .

1. *“To be similar or identical;*
2. *To be obedient or compliant;*
3. *To act in accordance with prevailing standards or customs.”³*

Hmmm, okay. So, God doesn't want us to be similar or identical to other people who live a *secular* life, meaning a life pursuing “what's best for me and only me” or “what makes me feel good.” He wants us to be different from that.

Meanwhile, what does it mean to be *transformed*? From Oxford Languages . . .

“To make a thorough or dramatic change in the form, appearance, or character of.”⁴

Last, what does it mean to be *renewed*? From Merriam-Webster:

“To make new spiritually, regenerate.”⁵

And how does Merriam-Webster Dictionary define *regenerate*?

1. *“Formed or created again;*
2. *Spiritually reborn or converted;*
3. *Restored to a better, higher, or more worthy state.”⁶*

So, here is God’s FIRST Will and plan for your life, restated using these definitions and as if God were speaking to you . . .

God’s FIRST plan for you:

I don’t want you to be like everyone else, behaving however you want and putting yourself first.

I want you to be like Me, which means you’ll have to unlearn many things and replace them with new values, my values, and then live them.

Listen, when you do this, you’re going to change, dramatically. But this is My plan, that your soul (mind, will, and emotions) basically become re-formed, re-shaped into

who I intend for you to be. This might be like cutting off a rotten limb and watching a new one grow back! And you'll be so much better for it, stronger in every way, and more capable to achieve what follows in your life.

What are the things we'll have to unlearn, what God calls "the world"? Basically, think of every negative human emotion or behavior. Here's a partial list: anger, fear, greed, lust, envy, hate, spite, pride, meanness, pettiness, violence, putting yourself first, unbelief, not being faithful to others, impatience, revenge, hypocrisy, emptiness, frustration, helplessness, sadness, guilt, loneliness, resentment, jealousy, unloving, intolerant, manipulative, contentiousness, divisiveness, selfishness, hopelessness.

Instead, God wants you to be like Him with new values that you practice in every area of your life, especially when you don't want to! Here's a partial list: forgiveness, selflessness, humility, meekness, kindness, grace, mercy, faith, hope, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, self-control, don't love money, go the extra mile, turn the other cheek, don't return evil with evil, overlook offenses, don't get mad if you don't get what you want from other people.

And especially:

1. Love God with all your heart.
2. Love others as yourself (which means you have to love yourself first).
3. Be obedient to God.

Is all of this random? No.

Let's Talk about First Principles

First principles originated with Aristotle, the ancient philosopher. Aristotle defined first principles as “the first basis from which a thing is known.”⁷ When you look into this concept of first principles further, it appears that most fields of study, like physics, music, math, engineering . . . they all have first principles.

What does this mean, exactly? Well, it basically implies that, regardless of your occupation or field of study, certain basics apply *first* before you can move on to more advanced thinking and applications.

Take sports, for example. Specifically, baseball. You learn the basics like catching, throwing, and hitting. Then, you learn how to actually play baseball.

So, let's sequence what comes FIRST in the values God wants to impart in His transformation of you.

First are values that affect you alone, who you are. Even if you never ever interacted with another person. These are not comprehensive lists, just categorizations containing a few samples.

First are values reflecting who you are, fundamentally:

- Goodness
- Self-control
- Meekness
- Selflessness
- Peace

Second are values that govern how you interact with others:

- Forgiveness
- Mercy
- Long-suffering
- Patience
- Kindness
- Going the extra mile
- Turning the other cheek

Third are values that govern how you interact with God:

- Faith
- Hope
- Love
- Obedience

By the way, once you achieve this third set of values, you can turn them around and add them to your second set of values, expanding faith, hope, and love from your relationship with God to your relationships with others and even what you are DOING in life.

As night follows day, there is a natural sequence in how you learn and apply values in your life. You don't have to tackle everything at once. There will be a natural progression, 1–2–3. This natural progression takes time and reflects growth and maturity in our lives. In my life, I have often focused on one value at a time and tried to learn it, most of the time with some pain involved. You can't go praying for patience and expect hunky dory in your life. You're going to get sandpapered!

Prepare to Be “Sandpapered”

What does this look like, God’s sandpaper? Well, when I was in middle school, I took shop. Our first assignment was to take a rough board of mahogany and make finished cutting boards for our moms. First, we cut the boards into the shapes we wanted. Then, the sanding began. I hated sanding. It was hard! These boards were rough, you know. They had grooves and splinters. They were imperfect, as most things are in life. Yet, we were told to make these boards as smooth as a baby’s behind.

So, the sanding began.

The first step in sanding a rough board starts with what’s called 60-grit sandpaper. In sanding, there are two categories of sandpaper that are defined by the size of the sand particles: macro grit and micro grit. Macro grit starts with very large particles of sand. Micro grit proceeds with smaller, finer particles.

Sixty-grit sandpaper is called *coarse* sandpaper. It’s meant to remove large, unwanted imperfections in the board very rapidly. Sixty-grit sandpaper does the hard work first. However, when 60-grit has done its work, I learned you aren’t done. There’s a progression. We eventually wanted to get to micro 400-grit paper, which was the last application before we were done sanding and could get to the joy of staining and varnishing. So, we went from 60-grit to 80-grit to 100-grit, 200-grit, and then 400-grit.

I learned that sanding required a lot of hard work, patience, and faith! Would I ever be done sanding this darn board? Sometimes I’d gouge my board with poor sanding. Through

my own impatience, I'd sand too hard, creating a divot in the board. I'd then have to drop down again to a coarser grit and re-sand the entire board! I learned two things. First, I didn't like sanding at all! Second, I learned to be much more patient and gentle with my board to avoid having to re-sand it all over again.

I finally got that cutting board done, and my mom loved it. Still has it to this day. For the joy of the outcome, we do the hard work first. And, we learn how to do it right.

You can't get to 400-grit sandpaper in your life if you don't start with 60-grit. I learned that if you try to cheat by jumping ahead to higher grits of paper, the board just tears up the sandpaper, and you get splinters in your fingers requiring a trip to the school nurse for a tweezer and bandages.

Rats! First things first.

Is “Transformation” Hard?

Well, one of my favorite sayings: *Nothing worthwhile is ever easy.*

*“Nothing in the world is worth having or worth doing
unless it means effort, pain, difficulty . . .
I have never in my life envied a human
being who led an easy life.”⁸*

—Theodore Roosevelt

So, yes, transformation takes focus, study, and effort. However, we are surrounded by transformation. Transformation is both natural and intentional.

In nature, a caterpillar goes into its cocoon and, after a time, emerges a butterfly. Nature goes through four seasons: spring, summer, winter, and fall. Trees go from blossoms to leaves to color to falling leaves to a form of death awaiting regeneration in the spring. The sun sets, and we go from light to darkness, also seeing the majesty in the night sky denied during sunlight. As humans, we're born this small, pink boy or girl. Over the next 18 years, we transform from an infant into a grown adult. That's our physical being.

Even as humans, our intellect and emotions constantly grow and transform, at least when we're young. Why should transformation stop? It shouldn't. However, especially once we become adults, transformation can stop. Why? Because now it's a choice. Think about it. As kids, we didn't have a choice. We "had" to go to school. Our parents put responsibilities on us. Perhaps they made us go to church. As adults, we are free from external motivations. We become internally motivated, or not so much. The degree to which we continue to positively transform as adults is completely dependent on our will and decision to do so.

Take some examples. We get married! Yay! We start having fights! Boo! Grow through it? That's a choice. We become parents! Yay! Hey, this is hard and requires great sacrifice! Boo! Grow through it? I got a job! Yay! Yuck, I don't like these people! Boo! Grow through it?

So as adults, transformation can 1) grow by choice, 2) stall out through indecision and lack of work on it, or worse, 3) retrograde, meaning we move backward through bad choices and negative responses like anger and resentment. Let's be

truthful. Not everyone responds in a healthy manner to what happens to them in life.

God means for us to transform, and we are surrounded by this truth. However, transforming our souls does not just “happen” as with the caterpillar or trees. Transformation with our souls requires deliberateness, effort, and a goal. God says, transform into Me. That’s His goal for us.

Marine Corps Transformation as a Motivator and Example

For decades, the U.S. Marine Corps has relied on a message of transformation to recruit and train generations of Marines.

When I was a major in the Marine Corps, I was assigned to the public affairs division at Marine Corps Headquarters at The Pentagon. Now, one of the missions of Marine Corps Public Affairs is to help the public understand all things Marine by being as transparent and public with information as possible. The Marine Corps has two websites. The first is the primary site: Marines.mil. The second site is Marines.com, which exists only for recruiting purposes. Well, I happened upon this second site and had an interesting and dismaying experience. The site was dark, used mystifying language and metaphors around the Marines’ strategy of “transformation,” and had no links off the site that might be helpful to potential recruits or anyone who wanted to understand more about the Marine Corps. Last, you could only go forward. If you hit the back button, it didn’t work.

I thought this website was clearly not doing the Marines as much good to various stakeholders other than possible recruits who may visit the site. I enlisted the support of my

boss, and we set up a meeting with Marine Corps Recruiting Command.

As I recall, my boss and I arrived and found ourselves outnumbered by about 10 others in the meeting, including a very senior officer from the recruiting command as well as a team of four from the Marine Corps' longtime ad agency, J. Walter Thompson (now Wunderman Thompson). The Marines have used this agency since 1947, and there's a reason—as we discovered.

The meeting was gracious but short, led by an executive from J. Walter Thompson. He acknowledged our concerns and went on to give his explanation, as though he were talking to a child. He said that the recruiting website had two purposes and ONLY two purposes: to convey this message of “transformation” to young men and women and to drive the recruit to schedule an appointment with a recruiter. Everything else (we wanted) had to be sacrificed, at least on that website.

He further explained how the messages of all the military services compare:

“If you want to see the world (adventure), you join the Navy. If you want to learn a skill (skills comparable to commercial companies), join the Air Force. If you want to become someone different and larger than you are today (transformation), you join the Marines. And if you can't do any of the above, you join the Army.”

Sorry, his words, not mine, which are proven by decades of research and results. This J. Walter Thompson exec said that, in all the years the company has worked with the

Marines, they've met the recruiting goal each and every year. And while they appreciated our thoughts and prayers, they weren't going to water down the website. At that point, you do as good Marines do after being slightly "dressed down." You salute smartly, do an about-face, and go about your previous business.

So, how do the Marines go about creating this "transformation" in new recruits? Boot camp! First, boot camp for a U.S. Marine is longer than any other service. Marine boot camp is 13 weeks. Army boot camp is 10 weeks. Navy, 9 weeks. Air Force, 7.5 weeks.

The point here: *transformation takes more time and investment.*

Also, during boot camp, Marines endure what is known as *The Crucible*. From the Marine Corps website . . .

"The Marine Crucible is the final 54-hour training exercise that tests the recruits on the knowledge, skills, and values taught throughout training. Those who complete the final challenge are awarded their Eagle, Globe, and Anchor, symbolizing their transformation from recruits to Marines."⁹

It's transformation, through this intense test called *The Crucible*. And God asks us for nothing less. God says we're transformed by studying His word and through trials, just like the Marines.¹⁰ Go figure.

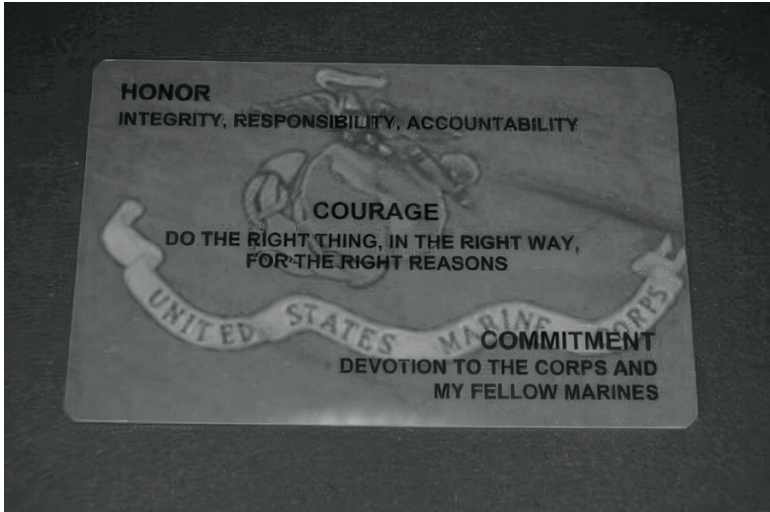
So, what values do the Marines study? Well, there are the 14 traits valued by every Marine:

1. Judgment

2. Justice
3. Decisiveness
4. Integrity
5. Dependability
6. Tact
7. Initiative
8. Endurance
9. Bearing
10. Unselfishness
11. Courage
12. Knowledge
13. Loyalty
14. Enthusiasm

So, the U.S. Marines have a goal of transformation with a laundry list of values, and so does God. In fact, in the Marine Corps, the process of transformation continues as long as you're a Marine. Every Marine has a program of personal study and assigned reading throughout their career. Marines also conduct routine breakout sessions where they discuss leadership and principles of transformation, year after year.

There was also a time when all Marines had to carry a card (the size of a credit card) in the right pocket of our uniform, each and every day. On that card was imprinted, "Honor, Courage, Commitment." It was so important to the Marine Corps that we followed our shared values that we had to wear this "commitment card" on our bodies every day, close to our hearts.



In fact, it was common for an officer or senior sergeant to “thump” a Marine’s pocket to see if the card was inside. God help the Marine who didn’t have the card with them. What entailed if you didn’t was an unpleasant “dressing down,” or lecture, followed by an assignment to return to the barracks, retrieve your card, and put it in your pocket!

I can tell you with certainty that the U.S. Marine Corps first and foremost creates NEW individuals who started boot camp as “anybody and nobody” and transformed into new people called U.S. Marines committed to shared values FIRST. Why? Because the U.S. Marine Corps first values WHO you are and then what you DO. To the Marines, it doesn’t matter what you DO if you do not maintain shared values showing who you ARE. If a Marine retrogrades in his or her values, it’s going to be noticed, and that Marine won’t be promoted and eventually drummed out of the Corps.

God loves the U.S. Marine Corps. And that's why when you get to heaven, you'll find the streets are guarded by U.S. Marines! Sorry, that comes from the Marines' Hymn.

The Marines' Hymn

From the Halls of Montezuma

To the shores of Tripoli;

We fight our country's battles

In the air, on land, and sea;

First to fight for right and freedom

And to keep our honor clean;

We are proud to claim the title

Of United States Marine.

Our flags unfurled to every breeze

From dawn to setting sun;

We have fought in ev'ry clime and place

Where we could take a gun;

In the snow of far-off Northern lands

And in sunny tropic scenes;

You will find us always on the job

The United States Marines

Here's health to you and to our Corps

Which we are proud to serve;

In many a strife we've fought for life

**And never lost our nerve;
If the Army and the Navy
Ever look on Heaven's scenes;
They will find the streets are guarded
By United States Marines.¹¹**

Isn't it amazing how the U.S. Marine Corps maps God's FIRST and SECOND will for your life? Who ARE you, then what do you DO?

Why Does God Want Us to Transform?

Fundamentally, God wants us to transform into an image of Him because mortal life is temporal while eternal life with Him lasts forever.

Another way to think about *transformation* is *acculturation*. In fact, acculturation is a subset of transformation. In the Marines—before you can succeed in your transformation from a recruit into a U.S. Marine—you first must become “acculturated.”

Acculturation is a concept applied in the fields of psychology, anthropology, and sociology. This concept basically addresses the introduction of an individual from one culture into another where that person adopts the new culture. Think about America's history as the Melting Pot where millions of immigrants came from all over the world to lose their original cultures and assimilate into American culture. To do so meant adopting new values, customs, norms, cultural attitudes, behaviors, and even a new language.¹²

Acculturation takes time. With the Marines, it takes at least 13 weeks followed by a career of rituals, ceremonies, celebrations, and training to deepen your acculturation. It really never stops. So it is with God. His plan is to acculturate you during your human life of continual transformation.

In fact, in the construct of acculturation, the lead strategy is called *assimilation*. With assimilation, you abandon the old way and totally assimilate into the new way. Yes, God's plan for you is total assimilation into His new way.

This means He needs to change the way you think and act; He needs to change your expectations. He even needs to change your language. Just as in the Marines, you stop speaking "person" and start speaking "Marine." There are no individuals in the Marines! It's actually a saying. Individuals have their own language. Marines have a common language, usually starting with *sir* or *ma'am*, or *Gunny* or *First Sergeant*, rarely using the word *I*, and typically ending with the sounds *oorah* or *errrr*. Oorah can also be a form of greeting. Fundamentally, the Marines' language is mutual respect. God's language is love, by the way.¹³ He says that, if you do not love, then you do not know Him.

I don't have a lot of dreams where I think God has spoken to me. But I've had a few. And yes, God can speak to you through dreams.¹⁴ You'll know it's a "God dream" because 1) you'll wake up pretty immediately, startled with great recollection, 2) the dream will convey wisdom, and 3) you'll have an action to take, God's will and plan.

I had one dream that transformed my life. In that dream, I was standing before Heaven, and I wanted in! God asked me, "Have you learned to love? Because the language of Heaven

is love.” I woke up startled, humbled, and determined to learn to love more and more broadly. It’s one thing to know you’re supposed to love. It’s certainly God’s greatest commandment. However, it’s another thing entirely to have such a personal experience illustrating the compelling need to not just KNOW that you’re supposed to love but to get that knowledge from your head into your heart, from which the passion for action comes.

The pastor I worked for in Staten Island once called this *The 18-Inch Difference*. The difference between your head to your heart is 18 inches. I’ve used this witty truth many times in my many leadership roles speaking into others’ lives.

Yes, God’s FIRST plan for your life is to transform you into someone who FIRST shares His values and, based on those values, can take life’s battles and come through victorious. What does “victory” look like to God? It’s in the small things FIRST. First principles, right? Are you mad at your neighbor? Or do you forgive? Do you hold a grudge, or do you let go? God says if you’re responsible for the small things, you’ll be responsible for the bigger things.¹⁵

I was once a vice president at an ad agency. I managed the “account group.” This was the team that interacted with clients. There was another vice president who was responsible for the “creative group.” This was the team that wrote and designed the ads. One day, that VP stormed into my office demanding to know why I was letting my team design and write ads. That was *his* team’s responsibility. He was mad, shouting, and red-faced. I told him I had no idea what he was talking about, and he stormed out of my office. For many weeks, he held a grudge against me.

So, what did I do? Get equally mad? Talk behind his back? Get even? No. I took it to God. I asked God, “What do you want me to do here?” Don’t get me wrong. Yes, I wanted to get mad back at this guy. Unfortunately for me, I had been acculturated by God. In God’s culture, it’s not what I want but what He wants. God told me, in my mind: “I said to bless and pray for those who curse you.”¹⁶

So, I did. I prayed that God would bless that man, even though he hated me. I chose to live God’s values in this trial. I wanted to get mad, defend myself, and make my point. But that’s not what God says to do. He says, “Bless and pray for them.” So, I did. And what happened?

Within three months, I became CEO of that ad agency, and the man who was cursing me had quit and moved on. Who knew?

There’s an important point here:

*What happens when we obey God and
practice God’s values?*

Let’s do some physics here by reviewing Newton’s Laws of Motion.¹⁷ These are considered to be “immutable” laws of aerodynamics, by the way.

Definition of *immutable*:

*“Unchanging over time or
unable to be changed.”¹⁸*

God just happens to be *immutable*.

**God is the same, yesterday,
today, and forever.¹⁹**

Newton's First Law: Inertia

"An object at rest remains at rest, and an object in motion remains in motion at a constant speed and in a straight line unless acted on by an unbalanced force."

Application: You're not going anywhere UNLESS you start moving. Once you start, you'll likely continue moving.

Newton's Second Law: Force

"The acceleration of an object depends on the mass of the object and the amount of force applied."

Application: The harder you work, the faster you'll move.

Newton's Third Law: Action and Reaction

"Whenever one object exerts a force on a second object, the second object exerts an equal and opposite force on the first."

Application: When you obey God, you exert a force on Him. And He is compelled to respond.

Here's why obeying God and practicing His values are so important:

1. When you overcome yourself and start moving,
2. The harder you work at it,
3. The faster you'll move in your life,
4. And you'll force God to move on your behalf.

5. He has to. It's not optional. Because God's laws are immutable too.
6. When you obey God, knowingly or unknowingly, in matters big and small, you release universal principles in your life,
7. Thereby compelling God to respond, to move in your life on your behalf.

Really? Yes.

Here's what God says:

“The words I’ve said on a matter will never be voided. Instead, I can be relied on to accomplish my pleasure and prosper you in that matter.”²⁰

Here, the word *prosper* does not mean money, although it could involve gains like that. Instead, it means “to push forward, to break out, to be good to, to make an effect.”²¹

Isn't this what we all want? Isn't this the point of the whole book? We are looking for breakthroughs in our lives. We want effects, meaning we want things to happen. We want good things to happen. And God promises to do just that . . . when we obey His universal principles.

Here is one example I've relied upon my entire life. It's one of my core life principles because it's a promise, a formula, wherein God's words cannot be changed. This formula shows a cause-and-effect relationship between our behavior and what that releases with God.

The Formula for an Enriched Life

A. When you're 1) humble before God and 2) obey,

B. You will get riches, honor, and life.²²

A equals the basis of God's FIRST will and plan for your life. Who you ARE. B equals God's SECOND will and plan for your life: what you DO by which you achieve money, status, and all the good things you want in life, such as rich relationships, happiness, and that feeling of accomplishment.

There are hundreds of other A–B formulas, actions then reactions, and promises God has made to us. Here are a few :

- “When you're afraid, I will strengthen you.”²³
- “When you trust in me and stay focused on me, I will keep you in peace.”²⁴
- “I will instruct and guide you in what you should do.”²⁵
- “When you're really stressed out, I will give you rest.”²⁶
- “When you trust Me and wait for Me, I will give you strength.”²⁷
- “In your life, when you love Me, I will cause everything to work for your good.”²⁸
- “Honor your mother and father, and I'll give you a long life.”²⁹
- “When people try to foil or harm you, I'll ensure they won't prosper in their effort.”³⁰
- “Submit to me and then resist the devil, and he will run away from you!”³¹

- “As you get closer to Me, I’ll get closer to You.”³²
- “Pray and ask me for what you want, and if you believe, I will give it to you.”³³

If you want a B or lots of Bs in your life, you need to start doing the As!

So, What Do I Ask For?

When you pray, you need to ask for the right things. If you ask for things not important to God, or sinful things, you’re not going to get His help and answer to that prayer.³⁴

This means don’t ask for a million dollars. Don’t pray that your enemy gets knocked off. Don’t pray for stuff like Porsches and mansions. Don’t pray to win the lottery. Don’t pray to get lucky with your date tonight. Don’t pray to get an A on that test today. Surprise! Yes, don’t bother with any prayer where you’re asking for a direct, self-interested benefit based on negative values like greed, envy, and lust.

Can you pray for a new car and a new house, getting an A on a test? Yes. But you need to consider your heart and ensure the prayer is based on wholesome values:

“God, my car is about to die.
Please guide me in figuring out how to get a new one.”

“God, we need a bigger house for our growing family.
Help me find one we can afford.”

“God, I really want to do well on this test.
Help me recall all I’ve studied.”

What other kinds of prayers does God like and answer? They don't need to be flowery and long. In fact, I encourage you to start small. Don't "pray" per se. That sounds religious and hard. Instead, just have a chat with God, short and to the point. He gets you. You don't have to try hard or put on a show for Him. Remember, the closer you get to Him, well, the more He closes the gap! So, just try.

"Help me be more patient with my spouse."

"Help me be the best parent that I can be."

"I need a job!"

"Should I do this or that?"

"Help me forgive this person."

"Help me with ideas and great people
to help my business succeed."

"Help me be a better boss and treat people kindly."

"Help me stop cussing/drinking/
whatever the 'sin' might be."

"I just really hate that person; help me love them."

"I'm just really sad; please give me joy."

"I need better friends. What do I do?"

"I'm really stressed out! Help!"

“My friend’s wife just died; help me to help him through this.”

“My car just broke down in the middle of nowhere. Help!”

“My car is dying, and I’m afraid I’ll soon be lacking transportation. Help!”

Here’s why chatting with God (praying) is so important. When you talk to Him, you are exercising His FIRST Will for your life. In so doing, you release Him to work in your life. This is an immutable law with Him. After you talk with God, exercise His SECOND Will for your life. This means start listening to what’s going on in your mind and emotions because He absolutely will be at work there trying to answer your prayer! Sometimes, answers to prayer can come externally. Meaning, if you’re praying for better friends, it might just so happen that a new employee joins your team at work and you become friends. Or an answer to prayer might be revealed inside you. In the case of better friends, God may say, “Well, stop hanging around the bar and instead go to XYZ church and join their young adults class.” Or, “XYZ person in your college history class is also wanting better friends. Go talk to him/her.”

Believe me, God’s guidance can be that specific.

And here’s a very important principle when you chat with God: He will only show you the next step He wants you to take. He generally won’t show you everything all at once. Oh, He may reveal the overarching vision or goal, such as going to college. However, how to overcome every challenge in accomplishing that goal will be revealed at the right time.

Revealing too much upfront would be too easy, on one hand, and too hard on the other. Easy meaning, wouldn't you like to know? No faith required. Hard meaning, you can't handle the truth! Generally, we can only handle so much at any given time, so God keeps it light and digestible.

You don't eat to last a month. You eat to get energy for the next few hours. God is like that.

It's true. If God had shown me all at once everything I'd be doing 20 years down the road, I would have laughed and laughed and then tried really hard to keep it from happening! That's because the person I was 20 years ago wasn't at all ready for the life I lead today. What I was interested in years ago is different from what I'm interested in today.

In promotion ceremonies in the Marines when a Marine gets promoted to the next rank, the officiating officer makes a point to say to the Marines' friends and family that the Marine is not being promoted for what they've already done. They're being promoted because of the trust and confidence the Marine Corps has in them for what they're now capable of achieving in the next role with more, new responsibilities. God embraces the universal principle of *incrementality*.

I once had a business partner who really nailed this principle in a pithy saying: "Yard by yard, hard. Inch by inch, a cinch."

Also, God prefers real clarity. He prefers to put one thing on your mind and heart, only one. That next step. He wants to be really clear and unmuddled so you and I don't miss the message. Even two or three next steps would be overwhelming. One step at a time.

Sometimes God's Answers Look Really Camouflaged

So, when you get that next step from God, no matter how ridiculous or nonsensical it may seem at the time, just check it out because . . .

When you ask God for something, you never know what God will do and what form the answer will take! Be ready to be surprised.

Let's run through an exercise, one we're all likely familiar with, either personally or through a close friend.

Let's say you have a car that is just on its last leg. You just know it's going to crap out on you when you least need it. So, you pray about it: "God, I'm really worried about this car. You know I don't have money for a new one. Please help!"

Here's what you might experience. First, all of a sudden, you don't feel as bad. You'll have this warm sense of peace that you suddenly feel. Then, BAM! A thought pops into your head. It could be so many things. Here are some options along with normal "self-talk" and some possible decisions and outcomes.

1. **"Just take it to the shop and have them check it out."**

Your first thought: "Bother, I've been told by my friends that repairs are going to be more than I can afford. But, okay God! I'll give it a shot."

So, you go. Sure enough, they come back and confirm, crapola, your car needs a lot of work. You tell

the shop you can't afford the repairs. But then, they say, "You know, we take cars like this, fix them, and then sell them. I'd like to buy your car for \$1,000. Also, we have five solid cars right over there that we fixed and that you can probably afford. Are you interested?" BAM!

Or, "Yeah, your car is fried. Look, I know this guy who buys cars at auctions, cleans them up, and sells them pretty cheap. Give him a call. Perhaps he has a car for you, on the cheap."

2. "Call Betty."

Betty is a friend of yours. Your first thought: "Why?! How can she help? She's too busy anyway. But, okay God! I'll give it a shot."

You call Betty, tell her you're afraid your car is dying, and ask if she has any ideas. Betty just gets so excited all of a sudden. She explains that her kid just left for college in another state, and now they have an extra car sitting around. Betty explains that they didn't want to sell it because the kid will be coming home for the summer, but they also want the car to be driven in the meantime. And she offers it to you until you get your final plan in place.

(Over time, this scenario develops . . .)

After a few months, Betty calls you. She says that God has been speaking to her and her husband, and well, they've been told to just give you the car. BAM!

3. “Go lease a new car.”

Your first thought: “Why? There’s no way I can afford to lease a new car right now! Geez, what a stupid idea, God.”

But you can’t shake the thought, so you wander down to the dealership to inquire about leasing a car you might like. You’re told something that blows your mind. These leases are so cheap because the manufacturer has too many of them and is offering a really really good deal! BAM!

(Or a different scenario . . .)

You find a car and lease you like, but it’s still out of your price range. You’re disappointed. You go home. A week later, you’re at work and your boss calls you into her office, informing you how impressed management is with your work, and well, they’d like to promote you to supervisor and that comes with a 20 percent raise. Now you can afford that lease. BAM!

These are examples of how God can work in your life over something as simple, yet important, as a car. You think I just made these up? No way. I’ve seen these very outcomes over the years. Because when someone is concerned about reliable transportation, you kinda hear about it as well as the outcome when they arrive at work driving a new ride.

Truly, God wants more BAMS! in your life. Just do His FIRST Will, then listen as He executes His SECOND Will, and then connect the dots. Don’t overthink it. Go to the first dot, then the second dot will appear. Go to the second dot,

and perhaps a third dot appears. Steps like these require faith, of course. Simple trust and confidence.

Just remember, God is not a soda pop machine. You can't put in your quarters and out pops God. It doesn't work that way.

Unfortunately for us, there's a *C* in God's formula for our lives!

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25. Ps. 32:8. “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go; I will counsel thee with mine eye upon thee.”

26. Matt. 11:28. "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."
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34. James 4:3. "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may spend it in your pleasures."

CHAPTER 3



NO
PAIN,
NO
GAIN



$$X = A + B + C$$

A: God's FIRST will:

Transformation

B: God's SECOND will:

Advancing you in your life in a way that also advances God

C: What follows:

Trial by fire: pain

It's pretty funny when you think about it. In the Bible when God says, "It's Me working inside you to both will and do of my good pleasure" . . . well, the VERY next verse says, "Now, don't complain or dispute Me!"¹ Oh, goodness. This implies there's going to be a degree of pain involved.

With God, He calls pain "trials." And when you follow God, you will have trials! What God has to say about trials (i.e. pain) is pretty colorful.

"In your life, you will experience fiery trials. And when they come, don't be surprised, wondering why these strange things are happening to you!"²

Take a moment to reflect. When have you been surprised by strange happenings that literally rocked you back on your heels? Perhaps those moments are not as random as they might have seemed at the time. Also reflect: did you learn anything? How did you respond? Are you proud of yourself in that moment?

It's okay if you're not happy with how you did in that trial. The root word of *trial* is "to try." When we "try," sometimes we succeed and sometimes we don't. No one is perfect or performs flawlessly, and this applies broadly in life. Whew.

What kinds of trials do we experience? Trials of character, meaning that people, things, and events will put you in the conundrum of having to make decisions that reflect your character. Think of the example in the previous chapter where that creative director hated me and that required the desired response from me. These are trials to perfect His FIRST will for you. There are also trials of purpose regarding His SECOND will, trials pertaining to that question of "What am I supposed to do now?"

Two common trials of purpose involve waiting and failure.

Let's resume my story. So, I was still working at that church in Staten Island, and I realized I did not want to pursue a career in ministry. It started as a feeling. I just wasn't excited anymore. I was frustrated with some things. My wife was also frustrated with her job and wanted to get closer to her mother. We were thinking it was time to have kids, and we couldn't imagine having kids in New York City, so far from our families. In my mind, a thought—with conviction—grew: "It's time to get out of New York City."

And then the waiting began.

Waiting Is the Hardest Part

You might recognize these words from "The Waiting," a song by Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, which was the lead single from their album, *Hard Promises*.³ Both are appropriately titled!

*The waiting is the hardest part
Every day you see one more card
You take it on faith, you take it to the heart
The waiting is the hardest part*

What exactly is *waiting*? Well, there are two kinds of waiting. I like Oxford Languages's definition of *wait*.

1. *“Used to indicate that one is eagerly impatient to do something or for something to happen.*
2. *Stay where one is or delay action until a particular time or until something else happens.”²⁴*

The first definition is where most of us live when we're "waiting." We are eagerly impatient to do something or for something to happen. Well, God wants us to do the opposite: be patient.

The second definition is where God wants us to be. Stay where one is or delay action until a particular time or until something *else* happens.

You see, the first definition is based on a spirit of *impatience* based on a vision of **unclarity**, as in "do something." Anything. The second definition is one of *expectation* based on a vision of **clarity**, as in "wait for something *else*." The use of the word *else* here is telling. It means that the person waiting knows that something *else* needs to happen before the waiting can cease and progress begins.

With God, He has specific *else*'s upon which we . . . wait.

There Are THREE Reasons Why We Have to Wait

First and foremost, God is working His FIRST will in us. Waiting means we start exercising some or many of that list of values God has, like patience, faith, and self-control.

Second, it takes TIME for God to arrange His SECOND will for our life. Seriously, His SECOND will involves “chess pieces” on Earth that need to be moved around and material things that need to fall in place over time.

Third, perhaps we’re not listening or doing the very things He’s indicated we should do, so God is waiting on us!

So, I was waiting and trying to figure out how we were going to get out of New York City. Months were ticking by with no apparent direction or solution to get out of New York. I had also applied to Harvard’s MBA program and been rejected! Failure. Pain. Man, life just sucked. However, remember that I was in the Marine Corps Reserve? God was moving here.

Out of the blue, the Pentagon called again with an incredible offer. The Marine Corps wanted to put me back on active duty and move us to Kansas City where I would be a national program manager of a new grassroots public affairs initiative. I was told I would create an instruction program on how to conduct local grassroots marketing and teach it to thousands of other Marine reservists all over the country. I was also told the Marine Corps would pay for the move!

Was I interested? I was ecstatic! This new job was so interesting to me and compelling. It was on a really large scale that would teach me new things. Plus, BAM! We would be just a two-hour drive from my wife’s family in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Wow, God caused everything to come together. I never knew whether this job was offered to anyone else. The Marine Corps just called me without any notice or indication. They'd been working on that program for years. It had to fall into place, and it fell into place around the time I was looking to do something new. And I got the job. So, we moved to Kansas City where life was grand again.

However, the waiting, frustration, and even failure along the way were not pleasant. They were painful. From God's side, He just needed to get everything into place for me, perhaps even cause someone at the Pentagon to recall this young, earnest officer in New York City who had already done a pretty good job with other assignments.

Adversity Produces Resilience

$$\left(\vec{a}\right)^2 = 11 \vec{r} 11^2$$

“What does not kill me makes me stronger,” wrote Friedrich Nietzsche in his 1888 book *Twilight of the Idols*.⁵

I've generally learned over life that most of the popular sayings (called “aphorisms”) we hear are generally true! Such as the above aphorism.

Here are a few others:

“You can never cross the ocean unless you have the courage to lose sight of the shore.”

–Christopher Columbus⁶

“The only man who never makes mistakes is the man who never does anything.”

–President Theodore Roosevelt⁷

“The gods help those who help themselves.”

–Ancient Greek Proverb

Many think that last aphorism is from the Bible. In a poll in the late 1990s, Christian demographer and pollster George Barna found that 81 percent of respondents thought this aphorism was taught by the Bible. It is not. From the same Wikipedia entry, “Despite not appearing in the Bible, the phrase topped a poll of the most widely known Bible verses. Five percent of American teenagers said they believed that it was the central message of the Bible.”⁸

Now, while not appearing as a direct quote in the Bible, the principle of this aphorism is *all over the Bible*. Universal truths apply universally.

Some Christians have a problem with the wording of that aphorism. Let’s get past that. What this ancient Greek proverb means is altruistic.

Do the work. Take the initiative. Get moving.

Is there anything so wrong with that? And doing the work, taking the initiative, getting moving: these ideas DO have precedence in the Bible.

According to God's FIRST will for our lives, He wants to develop faith within us. According to His SECOND will for our lives, we're to have faith that He's speaking within us to do His will. And, God follows this up by saying if we have faith, we need to get moving! Do the work! Toil!⁹ For if we say we have faith, but we don't have the work to show for it, God says our faith is "dead."

So, when we get moving, we are actually activating God's universal principles that require Him to help.

And when we start moving, we start encountering adversity. No pain, no gain.

In his book *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*, social psychologist and author Jonathan Haidt refers to the "adversity hypothesis" as a construct of happiness. This construct says "people need adversity, setbacks, and perhaps even trauma to reach the highest levels of strength, fulfillment, and personal development."¹⁰

Ouch! Yet, this parallels God's thinking on the subject.

This adversity hypothesis is followed by resilience theory. In a 2019 article on resilience theory, psychologist Catherine Moore writes, "Resilience theory argues that it's not the nature of adversity that is most important, but how we deal with it. When we face adversity, misfortune, or frustration, resilience helps us bounce back. It helps us survive, recover, and even thrive in the face and wake of misfortune."¹¹

Another matching aphorism!

“What life does to us depends on what life finds in us.”¹²

–Warren Wiersbe

Moore even offers exercises to develop resilience. That’s pretty funny because that’s exactly what the Marine Corps does too.

The Marine Corps has these exercises called “reaction courses.” In these exercises, a Marine is placed in a scenario of great adversity and then given about 20 minutes to solve it. One of the exercises I had to solve involved how to get my team of four Marines across a large, deep stream using only the random and puzzling resources provided by the exercise. The test was to decide how to put those puzzle pieces together. Sometimes you fail these exercises, as I did in this case! There’s great suspense as you fight against the clock to find the right solution. However, you keep doing them, and over time, your brain learns how to solve new, never-before-encountered problems better and faster. You also don’t worry so much about that clock because you’re calmer and more confident that you’ll resolve the problem in time. The Marines teach *resilience*, especially regarding limited resources and solving problems with what you have on hand.

“Resilience is the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands.”¹³

Through the process of adversity and resilience, we grow and develop new internal resources that will help us face greater challenges and opportunities. When we go through this process of *adversity resilience* over and over again, adversity (pain) becomes a whole lot less terrifying and “negative.” Instead, you start to respond like this . . .

“Okay, I’ve been here before. I’m not sure I know quite what to do just yet. This is obviously going to take a lot of work! But I find myself kinda excited about it! I know my situation will work out more than just fine.”

One of my favorite movie quotes comes from the 1971 version of *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*. In the movie, Willy Wonka watches as one of the contestants for his fortune, Augustus Gloop, gets sucked into a chocolate pipe, promptly becoming stuck as the pressure builds behind him, threatening to shoot him up the pipe like a bullet. Willy Wonka appropriately says, “The suspense is killing me! I hope it lasts!”¹⁴

This is how God operates, with much suspense in the process. Can we be like Willy Wonka, dealing with the suspense with maturity and humor?

But adversity in life never lasts forever. Another aphorism:

“Tough times never last, but tough people do.”¹⁵

–Robert H. Schuller

Going back to the ABCs at the start of this chapter, let’s introduce D . . . A-B-C-D.

A, God develops character. B, God's plan forms and we pursue it. C, pain occurs creating new resilience and resources in us as we step into the next phase of our lives. D, we enjoy a season of peace. Whew! Both pain and peace have a cycle. Neither lasts forever.¹⁶

*"The only constant in life is change."*¹⁷

—Heraclitus

So, we were in Kansas City for three years. During that time, this new national program was hugely successful. I also enrolled at the University of Kansas and got my master's degree in marketing communications. I was up for a promotion with the Marines, from captain to major. I had orders to move to Washington, D.C. and work in the Pentagon. I thought my future was in the Marines. I planned to do my 20 years and retire. How safe.

And then tragedy struck . . . again.

I didn't get promoted to major. I remember that day when the colonel walked into my office and told me. I was stunned. It's one of the rare instances in my life when I've cried. After the colonel left, of course. The Marine Corps didn't think I was good enough. I wasn't good enough. The facts of the matter were the facts of the matter. You see, in the Marines, when you're a captain, you're required to take a specific continuing education course called "Amphibious Warfare School." And you're required to complete the course before being promoted to major.

Well, uh, yeah. I hadn't taken the course yet. Instead, and it was a deliberate decision on my part, I got my master's degree. I couldn't do both at the same time. Well, the Marine Corps didn't look kindly on that. Also, I had never served overseas while most of my peers had. No fault of my own. The Marines just never sent me overseas, even during combat periods in Kuwait and Iraq. Instead, I served in places like New York City and Kansas City where there weren't even Marine Corps bases. So strange, my path in the Marines. (There's that word *strange* again. God operates in strange ways.)¹⁸

So, in the Marines, you get only two chances at promotion to the next rank. I had just failed my first chance. And I knew based on promotion statistics that Marines who fail in the first chance generally fail their second chance. My odds weren't good. I could either ignore this logic and take my chances, or I needed to face reality here, no matter how painful.

I talked to my boss, and he agreed. If I took that assignment at the Pentagon, I'd likely fail my last chance at promotion to major within the next year, and I'd be forced out of the Marine Corps.

Meanwhile, my wife and I really liked Kansas City. Even while I was contemplating a move to Washington, in my heart, I just kept hearing, "Wouldn't it just be so nice to settle down here, in wholesome Kansas?" I couldn't shake it.

And that's when I had to decide. Do I take a slim chance with the Marines, or do I get out for the second time with my newly minted master's degree? I knew the answer to this, for God had been speaking to me. What did I do? I resigned with no other job secured yet.

And that's when the waiting began—again.

I had, oh, about four months before actually leaving the Marine Corps, so I started looking for a job. Unless you have a very specific skill, like aircraft maintenance, leaving the military and finding a new job can be a daunting task. I was a public affairs officer. Well, there aren't too many of those jobs around, even in Kansas City. So, I began looking for jobs in communications or marketing. I fervently prayed for God's help, that He would do His will in my life.

I gained some traction with H&R Block, headquartered in Kansas City. I had a good first phone interview for a mid-level communications job and was invited back for a second in-person interview. I'll never forget that experience. I arrived early for my meeting. While sitting in the lobby, I noticed a long awards case along the wall across from me, and I got up to investigate. It was a case full of employee gifts based on years of experience. I noticed pen and pencil sets, coffee mugs, stationery, trophies . . . all awarded depending on how long you had worked there. One year, three, five, 10, 20. I immediately felt sick. You see, one of the reasons I got out of the Marines the first time in New York City was I realized that, no matter how hard I worked or how talented I was, I would only be promoted on the set-in-concrete schedule the Marines and every other military service uses. And I didn't want that for my life. I wanted to be rewarded for my performance ahead of set promotion schedules. So, I left the Marines, and here I was staring at an awards case. It just smacked of the same feeling I had with the Marines.

So, there I was again, looking at this award case, feeling sick. And then clear as day, a thought in my mind screamed, “Leave now. Just get up and leave.” So, I did. I told the receptionist to convey that I was no longer interested in the job, and I went home. I also had to do some fine explaining to my wife. To this day, I can’t believe I just left. And to this day, I can’t believe how close I came to missing God’s plan for my life.

It must have been another month or so. Another month wallowing in my failure amidst the anguish of waiting. Our first son had been born a few months earlier, and my wife was a stay-at-home mom. How was I going to support my family if I didn’t get some traction soon? What an idiot I was for turning down H&R Block!

Life sucked.

And then, *out of the blue*, I got a call from an executive recruiting firm in Wichita, Kansas. He said someone in Kansas City had forwarded him my resume. What? Who? To this day, I don’t know who or how he got my resume all the way down there in Wichita. But he did, and he said his client, a large accounting firm, was very interested in me. They needed a marketing director, their very first, who would create the role for a large, growing company of over 100 people and seven business divisions. Wow! I was so stunned and stoked. I took the interview.

And then I took the job. BAM! Once again, I’m out of the Marine Corps. Of course, the job offer kinda came at the last minute, as God likes to do. No pain, no gain.

In my experience, and I know I've said it before and it bears repeating, God arrives late on our timeline and just in time on His. God arrives just in time, if we believe and hang on. Oh, I was believing, and believing got harder and harder as time passed and I got really stretched. But I didn't snap! Why?

God promises not to test you beyond your ability to handle it.¹⁹

Let's break down this principle. God says . . .

1. Hey, you're going to face trials—it's inevitable.
2. But don't worry, I'm faithful. I'm on your side.
3. I won't toss anything your way that I don't think you can handle.
4. I will provide a way of "escape" for you,
5. So that you will ultimately pass the test,
6. And get to the reward.

Grim Versus Grit

At the point where we realize we're going to face some trials and wait, we have two postures we can adopt.

The first one is what I call a *grim posture*. The definition of *grim*:

"Mirthless. Black. Depressing. Worrying."²⁰

Ugh. Well, we MAY want to feel like that, but by now, we know that's not our best response. While we may not be

all smiles and jovial about what's happening to us, we can adopt a slightly different posture, one of *grit*. From Oxford Languages:

*“Courage and resolve; strength of character.”*²¹

From Merriam-Webster:

*“Firmness of mind or spirit: unyielding courage in the face of hardship or danger.”*²²

Oh, I just love these definitions of “grit,” especially contrasted with “grim.”

What a big difference between *grim* and *grit*. We're talking about ONE letter that makes the difference in these four-letter words. This small difference reflects the very wonder of the small choice we have to make during our trials and waiting. What posture will we choose? Will we choose to proceed morosely, grimly? Or will we choose to proceed with resolve, courage, strength, and grit?

Proceeding with grit recognizes that, hey, this is not a pleasant time. We don't have to be happy about it. We don't have to falsely portray ourselves as not succumbing to the realities of hardship. Sometimes the best you can do is grit your teeth and wait.

There were several moments in my life when the business got very tough. Running out of money to make payroll. New sales just not coming in. An economic recession or pandemic, or both. Times of great uncertainty. At those times, many lasting several months, I would pull out a yellow sticky, write

“grit” on it, and post it on my desk where I could easily see it throughout the day. To me, *grit* was my basement. I couldn’t or wouldn’t go any lower.

To toss aside *grit*, which I find to be one of the best human traits and abilities in the face of great adversity, would mean descending into grimness, or worse, despair.

In the trials and waiting periods in your life, you could do far worse than face down your moments with *grit*. Perhaps you can do better than grit. Just saying, if that’s all you can do, be gritty! Just ask your friends and family to forgive you and give you some room to be human because you’re doing the best you can. You’re just hanging on to the best of your ability.

So, going back to my story, no pain, no gain. And even though I thought I might lose my mind or die from the stress, well, I didn’t! And God came through, again.

My young family moved to Wichita. The Marines actually paid for the move. It was part of their contract. I got a big signing bonus. My new pay was much higher than I would have made had I been promoted to major! We entered into a new season of peace.

I stayed in the Marine Corps Reserve, eventually completed that dang course, and got promoted to major!

And then all hell broke loose again! Let’s move on to the next chapter.

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CHAPTER 4



HOW
“TO GET
LUCKY”
IN LIFE



$$fx(L) = fx(P) \times fx(O)$$

Luck. As a young man, I initially hated that word because I thought all I had was bad luck.

In high school, I competed statewide in a tough nomination process to get into the U.S. Air Force Academy. Yet, I didn't have 20/20 vision, and I couldn't be a pilot. I wasn't accepted. I also didn't get into Harvard. I thought I would just live a life of bad luck.

But I did get my backup plan, which was a full-ride, four-year ROTC scholarship with the Marines. In my freshman year, I tried to switch my Marine Corps scholarship to the Air Force. Denied! (Even then, I couldn't see God's plan, which involved me and the Marines, but God was causing it to happen anyway.) Also in college—I was at the University of Oklahoma—I had another big dose of bad luck. I was in the honors program and did quite well in studies and leadership positions. Every year, the university participates in nominating students to compete in the Rhodes Scholarship program. I was surprised when I got a letter from the university asking me to participate. So, I did. And I failed.

In the interviews for the Rhodes Scholarship, I was asked about my heroes. I responded quite eloquently, I thought, that I didn't have any heroes and gave a long-winded explanation as to why. In my debrief explaining why I wouldn't proceed in the competition, I was told that my interviews were amongst the most interesting and compelling. However, the committee just couldn't advance someone who didn't have any heroes.

It's amazing how many of my own "failures" have been due to my own hubris, and I've only shared a few so far! Today, I have many heroes!

But there's a formula for luck. Perhaps you've heard of it:

*"Luck is what happens
when preparation meets opportunity."*¹

–Roman philosopher Seneca

Now put it into a formula:

Luck = Preparation + Opportunity

In that formula, there's obviously something you control. That's preparation. And in that formula, there's something God controls. And that's opportunity. You also play a big role in opportunity because you have to be *moving*.

In both preparation and opportunity . . .

You must say YES!

I don't often take my philosophy or theology from movies. However, God can move in strange ways, right? In 2008, the movie *Yes Man*, starring Jim Carrey as Carl, came out.² Carl was a down-on-his-luck junior banker who couldn't get promoted and couldn't hold a relationship. You see, Carl was a downer. He didn't want to do anything outside of his comfort zone. He was a "no man." He said no to everything. However, an old buddy encouraged him to go to a motivational seminar, which Carl did very reluctantly. This was a "yes man" seminar:

how to succeed in life by saying YES more. In it, this fiery speaker gets in Carl's face and roars, "Yes! Yes! Yes! You will say YES to everyone who asks you to do something!"

More or less, Carl reluctantly agrees. He starts saying yes. And in the movie, Carl's life changes dramatically. In his job, he starts saying yes to all the requests he routinely received from people and businesses asking for small loans. He starts saying yes to hundreds of these requests. This new "micro-loan" program he inadvertently created gets noticed by corporate, and the next thing you know, Carl gets promoted. He also starts saying yes in his personal life. He starts doing all kinds of new things, getting exposed to all kinds of new people. He falls in love.

By saying "yes," Carl's dreams came true. He became so lucky! Watch the movie if you haven't seen it! It will be good for you.

Years ago, I became a "yes man." Oh, I still say no to a bunch of stuff. We still need to walk a life of wisdom. However, I try to say yes to the stuff that matters as motivated in my heart and mind, the places God works.

In the formula for luck, you need to say yes to both preparation and opportunity, or you'll miss opportunities and continue having bad luck.

In New York City, I got that call from the Marines asking me to participate in the reserves and take on unique assignments. I said yes. That led me to be prepared. I was active in the reserves when I was presented with the opportunity to start that new program in Kansas City. I said yes. In Kansas City, I had the thought that I'd really like to get my master's

degree. I said yes. Once again, I had reached another level of preparedness.

Later, when I was called by the Wichita executive recruiting firm regarding my new opportunity, I learned that the accounting firm required a master's degree from a Kansas university. I was uniquely prepared for that requirement.

Don't look now, but who appears to be getting lucky?

How does this work with God? Well, He'll put the desire and the idea inside of you to do the things that will *prepare* you for His opportunities. And you need to say *yes*.

In your life, you won't get lucky without some level of preparation over and over again.

While employed at the accounting firm, I decided to pursue credentials relevant to my career. There's this credential called "Accreditation in Public Relations (APR)" from the Public Relations Society of America. It's a tough certification to get and requires about a year to do so. A lot of studying and hard work. But I did it and earned that credential.

Mind you, I had no specific plans to do anything with it. It just seemed the right thing to do at the time, God's will in motion. Though I didn't know it at the time, this credential would have a big part to play later in my life.

But first, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 occurred, and I was ordered to go back on active duty and work at NORAD in Colorado Springs. I was there for a year. I still had my job at the accounting firm, and the law said they had to keep my position open for my eventual return.

I had absolutely amazing experiences while at NORAD. I worked directly with the White House, FEMA, FBI, FAA, and even the Royal Canadian Mounted Bounties on an inter-agency team whose mission was to restore America's confidence in air travel. I also conducted countless interviews with media from all over the world. Barbara Starr with CNN would routinely call me asking if a combat air patrol was flying over Washington, D.C. or another city. (It was quite the topic in those days.) I even responded to inquiries about UFOs and Area 51. I've heard that, to this day, I'm some sort of cult figure in the UFO community.

I left NORAD to return to Wichita and my job at the accounting firm. However, God was doing something in my heart. I was feeling discontent at the prospect of returning to the position. I had been exposed to so much while at NORAD. I just felt there was something bigger in store for my life.

I returned to Wichita and set up a meeting with my boss. In that meeting, I asked for the sun, moon, and stars. I said I wanted to hire a marketing coordinator under me so I could do more sales and consulting. I asked to be on the firm's management team. And I asked for a raise.

Instead, I got fired.

Yes, fired. My boss said the firm wasn't prepared to meet any of my requests, and from their experience, when you say no to an employee, they become "bad" employees. So, fire them. The firm, which is a great company by the way, gave me six months to find a new job. God bless them. That's quite the runway.

So, I was back in failure mode. God, that wasn't supposed to happen! I was stuck! I was mad! I had a second child who was an infant. My wife was still stay-at-home. It was all on me.

And I was playing a new waiting game.

Well, I took an inventory of what I thought I wanted to do. For a long time, I had a driving need to own and operate a small business. I thought so much about it, about the ability as an employer to lead people and speak into their lives. The challenge of creating some product or service and seeing if the company would succeed. But doing what? For years, I wondered about this but could conjure up no idea as to what kind of business I'd operate. But that driving need was still inside me, spanning over many years. So, there was that.

I had done some marketing consulting while at the accounting firm, and I learned I really liked that. I had also fallen somewhat in love with the firm's clients. Many of these clients were small and medium-sized manufacturing firms spread all over Kansas. I visited with them and just fell in love with the romanticism of it. Small town. Metal building. And inside were earnest, talented, and humble people manufacturing leading products in their category for customers all around the world. Wow!

All of that first-hand exposure to business was itself a form of preparation. I didn't know it at the time, but God was apprenticing me in business. Apprenticeship is such an enlightening idea, and I hadn't even considered it up to that point.

I had achieved another form of preparation while at the firm. I had been very active in the Wichita Chamber of Commerce. I knew a lot of people. I had developed an expansive network. So, I began networking.

I called my good friend John who was then the president of the Wichita Convention and Visitors Bureau. I told him it was time for me to leave the accounting firm and shared my above passions.

He said, “Man, you sound just like this guy named Bruce Rowley who took over at Associated Advertising. He talks the same way. He’s your age. You should meet with him.”

Well, in all of the things I could ever do, the *last* thing I ever wanted to do was work at an ad agency. And, if I ever had to work at an ad agency, the *last* agency I’d pick would be that one. For several reasons I won’t go into, I didn’t have a lot of respect for that company. It was flailing.

But, being a yes man, I said, “Okay, let’s meet Bruce.” John set it up.

And here comes that overlooked APR credential.

I met Bruce. He was and remains a fiery, talented man full of passion and ideas. We hit it off immediately. He shared that he was turning the agency around and had a great opportunity with Cargill’s turkey division, which had just relocated to Wichita to join the division’s headquarters, Cargill Meat Solutions. Cargill produces the Honeysuckle White and Shady Brook Farms brands of turkey products you’ll find in grocery stores all across the country. He said his opportunity to get in the door was a public relations assignment, and he

wanted someone accredited in PR to join the team and lead this effort. It just so happened that I had that credential! Look, in all of Wichita, there were only three of us with that credential, and the other two were leading their own PR consultancies. I was available. He also wanted someone who had worked in a major city on significant work. Seems I was fairly prepared, having worked in New York City with major assignments in Kansas City, NORAD, and the Pentagon. It weaved a good story for that moment of opportunity.

Luck = Preparation (that PR credential) + Opportunity (ad agency)

And just like God, I had to get over myself to say yes to the opportunity. But I did.

I should also mention that when God works in your life, He'll close doors. It's been my experience that only one door remains open at any given time. That was the case here. I didn't have many choices. Several doors had closed. This ad agency was the open door, so I went through it. I became a vice president at that agency.

We had crazy success. I worked hand-in-hand with Bruce, and we turned that agency around. We doubled revenues in two years. We had the time of our lives.

But let me take a step back. When I took the job, I was 38 years old. I had no experience at all with advertising. I had no idea what I was doing. I rocked it in public relations, but that was a small fraction of my new responsibilities.

Another of my favorite quotes comes from Thomas Edison:

“Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work!”³

This saying means opportunity comes camouflaged as hard work!

Almost from day one at this agency, I was overwhelmed, seriously overwhelmed. I didn’t know what I was doing, and we were pedal to the medal. You think being a Marine was hard? At the agency for the entire year, my days started at 3:30 a.m. I would get to the office, brew a pot of coffee, and while waiting, drop to my knees asking God for the strength to take on just one more day. Why so early? I needed to study and organize myself before the chaos started at 8 a.m. By noon each day, you’d find me wandering around the outside parking lot trying to find the courage to go back inside for the second half of the day. No kidding. To date, this opportunity was far harder than any of the others.

God had a plan here. He was giving me the desire of my heart. I was finally leading a small business where I was speaking into so many people’s lives. But it came with a price. He needed to do a radical makeover in me. So, enter the pressure cooker. Unlike other periods when God’s will led to change in my life, this new period was not a period of peace.

God wanted to take me to an entirely new level, that of being a battle-tested business veteran. Being battle-tested never happened to me in the Marines. He had used the Marines for different purposes in my life. I certainly became

battle-tested in business. Moreover, however, He wanted me to become battle-tested in faith. In meekness. In love. Could I endure real hardship and still *believe*? Would my childish faith pass away, or would it mature so He could give me more responsibility?

He knew His plans for me in the future, and He had His own plans, too. Achieving the best for my life as well as His plans meant I had to go through an intense Crucible period, as in the Marines.

You see, I wasn't a kid anymore. I was a mature adult who volunteered to throw his hat into the big league: running a small business of about 45 employees.

There's an important God point here:

**“To whom much is given, much is expected.
God will require more of you.”⁴**

Yes, God will require pints of blood.

The great figures in the Bible had to endure so much BEFORE God used them for His big plans.

Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness with no food fighting with Satan, who tempted him mightily. Paul, the great apostle who started out murdering Christians, met Jesus on the road and was blinded by what became his conversion to Christianity. During his ministry, Paul was kidnapped, routinely threatened, beaten, shipwrecked, imprisoned, bitten by a viper, and eventually martyred.

David, the famous king of Israel who wrote Psalms, was told as a youth that he would become king. He then slew

Goliath, becoming the most beloved man in Israel. This inflamed the current king who sought David's life and would chase him around the wilderness for many years until, upon the king's death, David received God's promise. David endured absolute misery and heartbrokenness for years.

Moses, who eventually led Israel out of captivity in Egypt, started as an Egyptian prince until he killed an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew, and he was sentenced to death by Pharaoh. He fled Egypt across the desert where he encountered God. He returned to Egypt, delivered Israel, and then spent the remainder of his life, 40 years, wandering around the desert as God worked out His plan. This included Moses writing the Ten Commandments. In the end, because of disobedience, God did not let Moses enter the promised land.

Abraham was told by God that he would become the father of many nations, including Israel, and was commanded to leave his current land and people at age 75. Abraham left, went to Canaan, and although his wife was barren, had a son as promised by God. Then, God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son. Abraham obeyed but at the last minute. God intervened, preventing the sacrifice.

There are many more stories where God's men and women endured much hardship.

The point here is that when God gives you a lot, He expects a lot in return. Further, it may be very difficult and unpleasant, at least for a time.

Those are certainly extreme examples. You and I, most likely, live mostly ordinary lives where what God is trying to

achieve is smaller in scale, though nonetheless important. Even in our ordinary lives, God will put us through periods of harsh testing 1) to get us to become the person He wants us to be, so 2) we can further do what He wants to achieve, for us and Him. This is a cycle that repeats over and over again.

At the ad agency, God put me on this vicious hamster wheel of high-speed Preparation–Opportunity, Preparation–Opportunity, rinse then repeat.

I was learning and doing advertising. I was learning how to sell big accounts. I was learning how to run a profitable business. I was learning how to manage an employee-owned business. I was at the agency for six years, eventually becoming its CEO, as I've mentioned. This occurred when Bruce left for a great position at Koch Industries running global marketing for their Lycra brand. When I became CEO, my dream, guess what happened? I immediately faced the Great Recession of 2007–2009. I got the ad agency through this period, and it wasn't fun.

At that point, I became very unhappy. I missed having a business partner to help me run the business. Bruce had been that. I had just been through a very tough period where many ad agencies went under. We had survived by “leaning into the hurricane.” I remain very proud of the unorthodox and even counter-intuitive actions we took during the recession. But I came out of it depleted. I felt I just couldn't give one more ounce of energy or blood to this company that I didn't own. But I didn't know how to get out! I mean, when everyone in the business community knows who you are, how can you start asking around about new opportunities? The firm's clients would certainly hear that the agency's CEO wanted to

leave the company. That would be very harmful to the firm. So, I stayed there feeling stuck and absolutely miserable. I hated going to work.

So, I did a dangerous thing. I chatted with God about it. I actually asked Him, “I don’t care what it looks like—just please deliver me from this current assignment. Get me out of this company.”

And then, once again, I got fired.

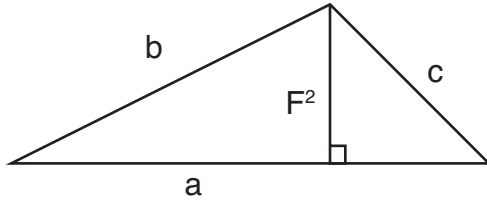
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CHAPTER 5



YOUR
GOAL—
GET INTO
“FLOW”
WITH
GOD



So, once again, I had been fired. For the umpteenth time in my life, I experienced what seemed to be a failure. However, *this* time, I responded differently. I was now 44 years old, and I had been through this cycle with God a few times. I had a track record with God.

Do you know how light travels? Meaning, light from the sun. It travels like this:



Light travels as a wave. It's called a "sine" wave with ups and downs in one constant flow as light travels from its source to its destination. We have this general idea that light is produced by the sun, though I honestly can't tell you a whole lot more about it. We wake up having faith that we'll see the light today, and we pretty much take for granted the powers and forces that caused that light to be, each and every day.

Have you ever stood on a beach by the ocean just listening to the crash of the waves? There's a beautiful rhythm to it. The waves flow in, crash on the beach, flow back out, and

repeat. Now, we have this general idea that it's the sun and moon's gravitational pulls that cause this wave action as well as temporal winds. And yes, once again, we rather take these powers and influences for granted. Each day, the waves flow in, and they flow back out.

God's imprint on the universe is universal. Like light and water, God travels in waves, up and down, in a constant flow in our lives. And we can take this for granted or not. We can start paying closer attention to this natural flow in our lives—the wave action if you will. Up and down, all connected in time and rhythm.

So, by this point in my life, I had experienced several waves with God, ups and downs, and I had learned by this point that, after a down part in my life, there always followed an up period.

I was fired from my last job for a very specific reason. I wanted to do an acquisition, meaning there was another company in Wichita I wanted to acquire. The morning of the Big Day, I told my wife, "There's a 50/50 chance that I might be fired today. We have a board meeting where I'm going to pitch this acquisition. If they don't want to do it, I'm going to quit and pursue this on my own."

We had that board meeting where I pitched this acquisition. The response: "We're tired of your crazy ideas, and we're tired of you! You're fired."

The board, by the way, was composed of my key employees. Being an employee-owned company, that's how it works. So, I went home that night unemployed and ready to pursue this acquisition on my own.

Rather than be upset, feel like a failure, or think that life sucks, I had grown to a new level of trust and faith in God. I didn't complain, especially since I had prayed that God would deliver me from this company. He did!

Let's introduce this idea of "being in flow with God."

Sun Tzu is a well-known author of the book *The Art of War*. He was an ancient Chinese general who wrote this fundamental book on how to conduct war. In the Marines, I studied this book. Now, I liken "war" to life and business. War is simply overcoming an opponent. The point in life and business, not to mention the military, is to win, right? In my life, I've taken principles of nature and principles of war and applied them to my daily life BECAUSE . . .

Universal principles apply universally.

Lao Tzu said, *"But water will wear away rock, which is rigid and cannot yield. As a rule, whatever is fluid, soft, and yielding will overcome whatever is rigid and hard."* In the military, we take this principle to mean, "Don't be hard and rigid in war. Flow around obstacles; be fluid and flexible."

What this said to me: "So, you've just been fired. Flow around that rock. Be fluid; I'm there."

And I said yes. I said, "God, I've been through this up-and-down cycle with you enough to know you have something planned for me. I don't know what it is, but I'm going to flow around this obstacle as water flows around a rock."

Here's the insight. Look for universal principles. Observe nature because nature has His imprint. And his imprint is

always the same. Light travels up and down. Nature has seasons, up and down. Water flows around rocks.

I . . . will . . . get . . . through . . . this . . . as . . . always. As sure as spring follows winter.

That's called faith . . . however, now informed by much life experience. God had shown Himself so faithful the entirety of my life so far. Why would He fail now?

So, this time, rather than complain and become depressed, I looked instead at what He was going to do next. And, of course, I enacted the formula for His SECOND will. I waited and listened to what He was saying inside me, my feelings and my mind.

Well, He said something very simple and clear, of course: "Call Bruce." Bruce, my former partner in the ad agency before he quit and moved on. We still had a close relationship. We had stayed in touch since he moved on. So, I called him.

"Bruce, I just got fired from the agency," I said.

"Funny that," he said, "because I'm also on the street now."

Bruce had been working at a medical records company as VP of sales and marketing. He was key in arranging for the company to be acquired by a French conglomerate. However, once that deal happened, yes, he found himself "on the street" at the same time as me. Once again, God works in strange ways.

We decided to meet at a tavern over beers to discuss what to do. That tavern's name? Believe it or not, it's called Lucky's. Over many meetings at Lucky's, we devised a plan to start our own company.

Meanwhile, I had also pursued that acquisition on my own. After nearly six months of what I thought was a “sure thing,” the deal fell apart. I was pretty demolished when it fell apart, and that left one door open: Bruce and I starting our own marketing firm.

We did, and we got lucky! Within six months of starting our company, we were a million-dollar business with 12 employees.

Lao Tzu says, “flow.” I’ve found that God wants to get in flow with us.²

What Is Flow?

The construct of *flow* is both ancient and modern. Much has been studied and written lately about flow. Fundamentally, flow starts with a neuroscience concept of getting into *flow* with yourself. There are also constructs about getting into flow with someone else or a team of people. I’ve personally found that you can be in flow with someone else, though that’s very rare.

From the Navy Seals to high-performance businesses to sports organizations like the NFL, teams are working hard to get into *flow* with each other.

In a book titled *Stealing Fire* by Steven Kotler and Jamie Wheal, two experts in peak performance, the authors discuss the Navy Seals’ “unique ability to think as a unit, [which] allows them to flow seamlessly, anticipating and knowing the move of each team member, even in silence, especially in silence.”³

The essence of *flow* is to lose your sense of individuality and plug into something larger than yourself, like Navy Seal teams, business teams, your own creativity, or an opportunity.

According to Merriam-Webster, *flow* as a verb form means:

1. *“To proceed smoothly and readily,*
2. *To have a smooth continuity,*
3. *To hang loose and billowing,*
4. *To derive from a source, or*
5. *To deform under stress without cracking or rupturing.”¹⁴*

The noun form of “flow” means:

1. *“A smooth uninterrupted movement or progress,*
2. *The direction of movement or development,*
3. *The quantity that flows in a certain time, or*
4. *A continuous transfer of energy.”¹⁴*

The Marines like to quote Napoleon Bonaparte who said, *“In war, the moral is to the physical as three is to one.”¹⁵* This is saying your attitude and willpower mean far more than the immediate physical realities and challenges you face. Three times as much. As you think, you will *become*. Positive or negative.

Flow is similar. It’s similarly hyperbolic, not linear. “Hyperbolic” here means “greatly exaggerated,” not as in dramatically untrue but as in the results are far more than expected. The math ceases to be logical. In flow, you’re making big jumps where the logic may not add up.

So, flow results in the non-linear, hyperbolic equation:

$$1 + 1 = 3$$

(Or 5. Or 7. Or 100.)

Here, the first one is you. The other one is God, another person, or even your situation, immediate opportunity/challenge, whatever you have your mind on.

Flow is akin to *synergy*. As defined by Oxford Languages:

*“The interaction or cooperation of two or more organizations, substances, or other agents to produce a combined effect greater than the sum of their separate effects.”*⁶

Many of us in business refer to synergy as “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” In business, you hope that, by getting people, processes, and production aligned, you attain hyperbolic results, not linear. You’re absolutely looking for that $1 + 1 = 3$ hyperbolic equation.

Flow is akin to the idea of having a *force multiplier*, a concept used in the military. Basically, take your force, whether an actual military force or even just yourself, and add something to it that multiplies the effect. According to the Department of Defense, a force multiplier is “a capability that, when added to and employed by a combat force, *significantly* increases the combat potential of that force and thus enhances the probability of successful mission accomplishment.”⁷

A force multiplier in the military can be something as straightforward as artillery, air power, or even satellite

imagery of the enemy position. It typically results in what the Marines call “an unfair advantage.” Marines believe that fights shouldn’t be fair. If they’re fair, then the leader hasn’t done his or her job in using multipliers. Flow is a multiplier. God is a multiplier. What if you can get the two working together in your life? Well, you’re going to see hyperbolic results.

How Do We Get into Flow?

According to Wikipedia’s entry on flow: “Named by the psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi in 1970, the concept has been widely referred to across a variety of fields, though the concept has been claimed to have existed for thousands of years under other names.”⁸

Interesting, isn’t it? The concept and reality of *flow* have been around for thousands of years. Looks like there’s a universal principle behind *flow* that makes it rather immortal, tested, and proven.

How do we get into flow? It’s an advanced state of personal maturity where several factors converge nearly simultaneously.

In studies of flow, Jeanne Nakamura and Csíkszentmihályi identify the following six factors as encompassing an experience of flow:

1. Intense and focused concentration on the present moment
 - This means also removing distractions.
 - This is total dedication and commitment to the moment.

- This means staying in the moment for as long as the moment lasts.
 - Flow is inherently a creative process.
2. Merging of action and awareness
- This means you cease to have thoughts and actions independent of one another.
 - Normally, a person has a thought, stops, thinks about it some more, and then decides whether to take an action or delay the decision.
 - In flow, there's no time element separating thoughts and actions, which blur together and happen simultaneously with no time involved.
3. A loss of reflective self-consciousness
- You suspend judgment.
 - You lose the sense of "self" that otherwise can limit the experience.
 - You abandon self-talk, especially negative self-talk.
 - In flow, it's like "you're not even there." Some may say it's like an "out of body" experience.
 - You tune in more to what is going on around you, in what you're doing, sensing, feeling, seeing, thinking, and experiencing.
4. A sense of personal control or agency over the situation or activity
- You enter a bubble of great confidence and joy.
 - You abandon fears and doubt.

- You follow the flow of recurring ideas, revelations, and conclusions, thereby taking control by not letting flow become impeded.
5. A distortion of temporal experience, as one's subjective experience of time is altered
- Hours can pass and you don't notice.
 - Your experience becomes hyperbolic rather than linear.
 - You start making connections in a 3D manner, perhaps with things that have been around you that you're seeing as if for the first time.
 - "Things" can be your physical environment, people in your life, ideas, or concepts you've long held, creative solutions you've long sought, just about anything.
 - You can stay in flow over days as well if your mind and emotions stay fixed on the great leaps being made.
6. Experience of the activity as intrinsically rewarding, also referred to as an autotelic experience
- You're not necessarily focused on a "productive outcome."
 - The experience itself is the benefit, an end, or purpose in itself.
 - Flow is like going to the park with the kids. You return with happy feelings and experiences versus something productive, like mowing the lawn.⁸

Three more are added by psychology writer Kendra Cherry:

7. Immediate feedback
 - There's an intense inner feedback loop.
 - Ideas feed immediate connections that build on each other without stopping.
 - You may feel a stream of consciousness.
8. Feeling the potential to succeed
 - You're excited about what you're feeling, experiencing, and finding.
9. Feeling so engrossed in the experience that other needs become negligible
 - You may forget to eat or sleep.
 - You may temporarily put off other responsibilities to stay in the moment.
 - All that matters is the flow.

At its core, *flow* is about reaching a higher state, a “flow state,” that is a near-perfect place to be.⁹ For when you are in *flow*, you're fundamentally achieving more, faster, with less stress and more joy and satisfaction.

We're talking about flow because flow is definitely the objective for both who God wants you to BE and what He wants you to *do*, both parts ONE and TWO of His will and plan for your life.

Flow is a very mature state reached by mature people with experience in it. Age only matters insofar as we've learned the life skills, frame of mind, and occupational knowledge

required for flow. So, give yourself time! By the way, it's been my experience that you enter and then drop out of a flow state. It's almost too intense to stay there for too long, and there are other things to attend to, like cooking, kids, work, etc. Flow is something you learn to "tap into" when it comes calling or you come calling. Flow is like long-distance running. When you're in shape and have been running, you can skip a few days with no detrimental impact on your ability to run. However, go a week or a month and you'll experience great degradation. You'll have lost fitness. You'll have to regain the high-performance ability you previously achieved. So, being routinely in flow is an objective; otherwise, you degrade the ability.

How Do You Know You're in Flow?

I like bees. I like to watch them and I really enjoy the buzz of their wings as they fly by.

And flow is like bees.

When you hear one bee, it's a pleasant "bzzz." However, as you approach the hive, what was once one bee now becomes thousands of bees, all buzzing into a pretty powerful, continual crescendo of buzz. You can no longer distinguish individual bees or that individual bzzz.

As you start to move faster in flow with God and others in your life, individual experiences start to deform and connect into compound experiences. Your intellectual, emotional, intuitive, and spiritual acuities and abilities explode. They're no longer linear. They produce hyperbolic buzz experiences and results. You start making fresh and new connections that others miss. You start seeing convergence in your life, where

observations compound on one another in some odd dance toward new and unexpected destinations. Your ability to “see” the world around you takes on this 3D perspective, as if the very things around you, both people and things, are speaking to you. All of this happens faster and faster in your life, and you sense a proverbial “buzz” happening to you and around you.

Bruce and I have been in flow from the moment we met in 2003. Of course, it got stronger the longer we worked together and battled together. We read each other’s minds. We finish each other’s sentences. We reach the same conclusions, quickly. We want the same things. There’s little self-interest or ego. And we’re having fun, even during periods that should be pretty stressful!

We share a favorite Hunter Thompson quote: “*Faster, faster until the thrill of speed overcomes the fear of death!*”¹⁰

I’ve had seven business partners over the years, and only Bruce has ever been in flow. There’s a reason for this. My take:

1. In order to be in flow with another person, you must first be in flow with yourself.
2. In order to be in flow with another person, you have to:
 - a. Be of a kindred spirit. Most people aren’t.
 - b. Want it. Most people don’t want to be that vulnerable.
 - c. Put it all out there with that person. Don’t hold back.

Finding someone who can be in flow with you is like finding buried treasure or a needle in a haystack. No, harder than that. Well, without God's help.

How to get into flow with someone, including God:

1. Shared values
2. Shared philosophies
3. Shared desire to work hard, together
4. Shared trials by fire, proof of partnership
5. Shared "future" mindset, vision
6. Willing to pivot, fast
7. No egos!
8. Shared willingness to take chances and proceed with courage in the face of uncertainty
9. Complete shared trust and confidence in each other
10. Enjoying the ride

To help you understand it better, here are a couple of examples with Bruce.

First, we fundamentally share the same positive, Christian values that we've listed previously and abhor secular negative values. Neither of us is what you might consider a prude or goody-two-shoes about it.

Second, our philosophical overlap is incredible. From the day we met, we began discussing business philosophy and discovered we thought the same. For instance:

1. We had both read an article where a famous CEO said, "Each day, you have to make 100 decisions, and if you only make 50, then tomorrow you have to make

150 decisions.” We agreed that making no decision was worse than making a bad one.

2. At a critical juncture in our new company, we realized we had a bunch of mean people working for us! We had hired quickly as we grew quickly and chose skilled people with lousy values. Bruce mentioned learning at Koch Industries that “you hire for values and teach skills.” We had gotten it backward. So, that very day, we changed our philosophy on hiring. We turned over the company’s team in about six months, and everything changed for the better with people with solid values with whom we were teaching the skills.
3. One day, we realized that our VP of sales was dictating the future of the company by selling all the wrong stuff. And even though we tried to change the sales strategy, it was really the only strategy that person understood. So, we decided to change our strategy completely using acquisitions. We fired the salesperson, picked up the phone, called a competitor, had lunch the next day, and acquired his company a year later.
4. After doing our first acquisition, our combined culture was a mess. Everyone was trying to protect their turf, and everyone was trying to make all these absolute rules to protect their interests. We didn’t have a cultural model to guide us. Late one Saturday night, Bruce emailed me what was then Netflix’s culture model, found easily online. I took one look at it, and that was it! We rapidly adopted it, and it solved our cultural problems.

These are just a few examples among hundreds. I want to pause here and thank God. First, Bruce is and has been God's greatest gift to me beyond my immediate family. I prize his relationship over any amount of money. Meaning, God's gifts can be unexpected! I didn't go asking for a life friend like Bruce. However, God knew how much I would need him to live God's plan for my life and just how much of a blessing he would be. What if I had said no back in the day for meeting with him based on my small-minded misperceptions and arrogance about advertising and the ad agency he led? I can't imagine. Thank God that He helped get me over myself.

Together, we've run multiple companies. Together, we've literally looked out of our conference room window at vacant buildings and parking lots in downtown Wichita and turned them into a small commercial real estate empire.

God used Bruce as a force multiplier in my life, the same way God used me in his.

We are both yes men.

Also, God knew what He was doing when the idea to acquire a company literally popped into our shared minds. It wasn't something we had been studying for a year. In a moment of frustration, we realized we needed to do something dramatically different. We thought it would be for growth purposes. Yes, the combined company grew because we transformed from an ad agency with Wichita-only clients into a digital marketing firm with clients nationwide. What we didn't know or expect was that, three years after the merger, we would lose all our initial advertising clients.

If we hadn't done that acquisition, our original company most assuredly would have gone out of business. You see, Wichita is a great place for companies to start, grow, and then be acquired and moved out of state. Or grow and then move their business out of state to a larger market with more resources. So, through no fault of our own, all those original, large ad clients got acquired or moved their businesses out of state.

By the time we lost all our ad clients, our new business model was fully in place and the pain was negligible.

Sometimes, it can take years to fully understand God's plan. Yes, hindsight is 20/20.

There's a story in the Bible about a young man named Joseph. He lived in the land of Canaan, which today would include Israel. His brothers hated him and sold him into slavery. He ended up in Egypt, in prison. However, God had given Joseph the ability to interpret dreams. His ability to do so gained Pharaoh's attention. Joseph became his right-hand man. Joseph then interpreted a dream about a huge future famine. Egypt prepared. And when the famine hit, Joseph's brothers traveled from Canaan to Egypt seeking grain, which was granted by the very brother they had sold into slavery years earlier. Though initially living a life of loss, pain, failures, and trials, God elevated Joseph who was not only able to enjoy the benefits of his final position but also to do God's plan, which was to save the future nation of Israel from famine. It took God many years to "put the chess pieces together" in Joseph's life. Luckily for him, Joseph held on, never lost faith, continued to build his abilities, didn't ask too many questions of God, and just kept moving forward.

So, yes, God knew our business was going to fold unless He did something about it. He planted an idea, which, when you're in flow, you recognize and just do.

Look, I'm not saying that you should just be completely reckless about your decisions. We weren't. We debated the merits of the matter. We consulted our lawyer and banker. We had a year of due diligence. However, the decision was promptly made. By the way, when I called that competitor and we had lunch the next day, we learned that he was really tired of running his company and wanted to do something fresh. He totally was open to the acquisition! Who knew? God knew. I just needed the faith and chutzpah to pick up the phone. Act.

When you get into flow with God, you stop *worrying* about doing His will. Instead, you start *seeing* it everywhere. You realize that you're walking a life where you're already *doing* His will.

When you reach a point where you're in flow, lightbulbs just start going off. Literally every day and everywhere. The great question and conundrum: what do you do with all that insight?

What to Do with Insights Gained in Flow?

What do you do with the insights you gain when in flow? You act on them. Here's an example from my life.

Having recently moved from Wichita to downtown Kansas City, I started attending a new church. (This was the first YES.) I attended a few Sundays. At the end of a particular service, they announced that anyone curious about the church's philosophy and ministries could attend a session with

the church's pastors. I decided to go. (This was the second YES.) I attended and learned that one of the missions of the church was creating disciples. I immediately had a question, so I asked. (This was the third YES.) "How does the church evaluate and measure discipleship?"

The senior pastor paused for a moment and then responded, "Well, we're working on that."

Measurement of discipleship is something near and dear to my heart. I've long wondered if the American church might gain a better model for "doing church." Over many years, my mind and heart treated this as a side fascination, even while I worked with the Marines and in advertising. So, when I was exposed to the pastor's response, I was ready. And God was ready.

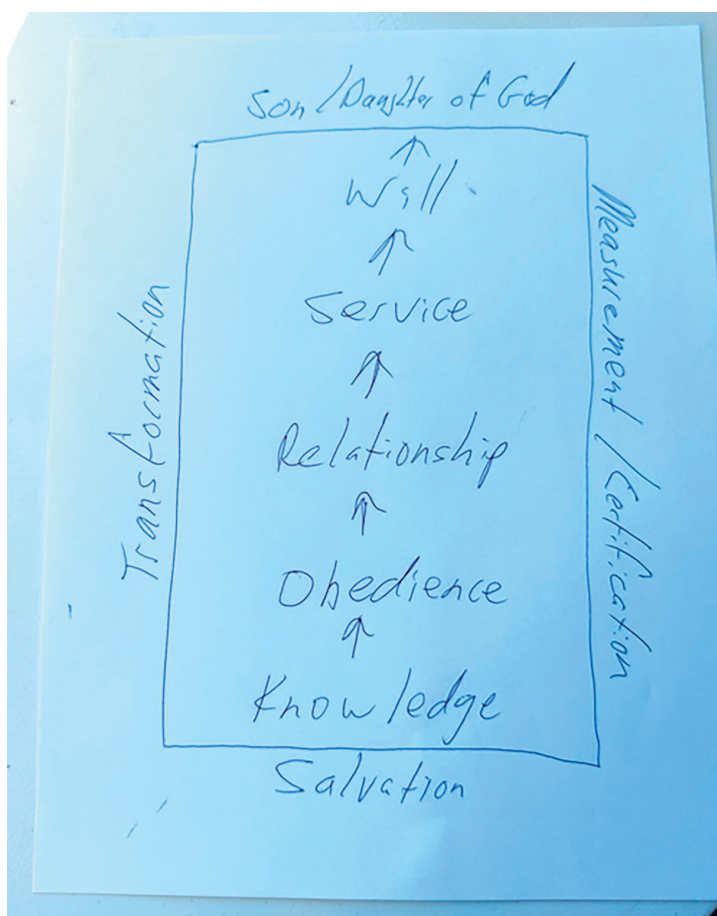
Let's discuss my preparation for this moment.

You see, in the Marines, performance is all about evaluation and measurement. In business, performance is all about evaluation and measurement. "*If you can't measure it, you can't manage it*"—this is a management quote attributed to guru Peter Drucker.¹¹

In fact, you can't get promoted until your evaluation shows you've "checked all the boxes" measuring the performance that qualifies you for your next promotion. I've wondered for years why Christianity doesn't have a discipleship model similar to other institutions that we all interact with in our lives. Heck, my son reached Eagle Scout using only evaluation and measurement. He had to pass test after test to reach the next scout level, eventually attaining Eagle Scout after years of struggling with joy to reach the ultimate rank.

I went home pondering the pastor's response and immediately had an idea, or what some might say was a revelation. I call it a spark, as in sparking.

I pulled out a pen and a blank piece of paper and drew a "model of discipleship" based on all my experiences with the Marines, in business, and with Christianity. It didn't take a month to develop. It didn't take a week. Not even a day. It took a minute.



Okay, so now I had this model on paper. I had this insight that came out of nowhere. Now what?

“All of a sudden . . . ” I had another thought, the next spark. Meet with the pastor. I didn’t know this man. He didn’t know me. I had just started attending the church. But what the heck?! Follow the flow. So, I broke open my computer, got the pastor’s email from the church’s website, and brazenly invited him to lunch. (This was the FOURTH yes.) He was delighted to meet a month out. We set the date.

By the way, my new little discipleship model . . . not mystical. Not magical. Not random. I’d been preparing my entire life for it. The Marines. Business. Boy Scouts. And education. I’d been noodling the darn thing for years. I just never had a pointed opportunity that would channel all of my experiences, education, and creativity into a moment of clarity. That’s how flow works.

The model was also in part due to the instruction from Sheena Iyengar, who presented a Ted Talk in 2014 called “How to Make Choosing Easier.”¹² At that time, she was a professor at the Columbia Business School. In the talk, she proposed using this mental model to overcome “choice overload.” She illustrated how what she calls “the 4 Cs model” makes choosing easier for people. She also showed in this short talk how people take action when something, anything seems easier. Ostensibly, her talk applied to marketing, and I am a marketer.

Basically, her instruction is about making something easy. I wanted to make a model of discipleship easy.

Her 4 Cs:

1. **Cut**, which literally means reducing the number of choices.
2. **Concretize**, which means taking an abstract concept and making it visual and tangible.
3. **Categorize**, which means taking a set of offerings and breaking them into categories.
4. **Condition for complexity**, which means taking what seems to be a complex process and making it simpler, breaking it into steps.

Now, once you've been exposed to instruction or truth that seems to impact you, what do you do with it? Do you say, "Man, that was good!" and just move on with your life? Or do you apply it? Well, having a marketing company, I decided to apply this model. So, I instructed our firm's marketing team on the 4 Cs, and it has made a huge impact on how we do marketing for the benefit of our clients year after year now.

It also informed my little discipleship model. I used all four of the 4 C concepts. Again, preparation meeting opportunity. The 4 Cs model helped me put together this new discipleship model at the time I encountered this new church when they were working on a model of discipleship. This example illustrates the principle of *convergence* that you will experience in your life as you pursue God's will and eventually get into flow with Him.

I met with the pastor for lunch. I learned he was completing his doctorate of ministry degree, and his thesis was on "faith and the arts." You see, this particular church has an outreach

ministry to artists and even has an active art gallery at the church that participates in downtown Kansas City's art scene.

We then went on to review my new model for discipleship. He paused a few seconds, appeared consternated, and then said, "You know, we're currently overhauling our online discipleship app, and this is very interesting to me."

Apparently, and I didn't know this, back during the 2020 pandemic when everyone had to stay home, this church—which has five campuses around Kansas City—created this new app. It was the pastor's brainchild, and he had recently been commissioned by the senior ministry team to overhaul it, to create version 2.0.

Weeeelllll, I didn't know that. Here, I was sparking on something near and dear to his heart. *Wow, how coincidental* that I'd offer my thoughts on a new discipleship model during this time. Who would have known?

Remember, as part of God's plan for your life, He's also achieving His plans. So, my whipping out a pen and drawing up a model, then offering it to this pastor exactly when they're trying to overhaul their discipleship app? Uncanny, right?

So, I leave the lunch, go home, and am immediately flooded with more thoughts on topics briefly discussed during lunch. What to do? Do I just ignore these fanciful thoughts, or do I put the thoughts into an email and send them? My self-talk tried to talk myself out of it. "Come on, you're pestering him. Let the pastor be." However, the other side of my self-talk prevailed. "Look, there's likely something bigger than yourself at work here. Don't judge it. Follow it. Send the email."

So, I did.

Did God have a plan great or small here? I didn't know. I was following what He put into my heart and mind and acting. Did I care whether I was going to offend anyone? Was I just being a stupid pest? No, not really. I was sensitive to it. However, I couldn't let fear lead me. God does. His will does. Even if what I'm doing at the time seems . . . strange and ridiculous!

So you have to put it out there. That's all God asks of you. Do it. You may never know what came from your action and obedience. In flow, you just do. Otherwise, if you don't, you risk crashing the flow and crashing God's will.

Flow Is Like a Bouncy Ball

The whole point of flow: it doesn't stop! It just keeps going!

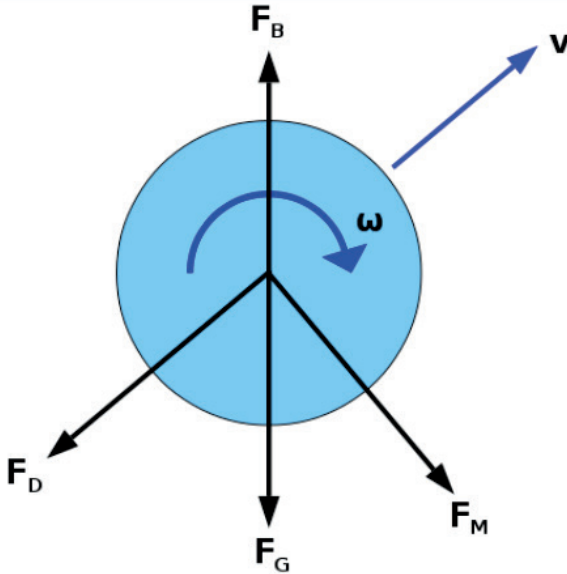
Being in flow is like what I call a "bouncy ball." Remember when you were a kid and had those bouncy balls you'd play with, those balls that got everywhere and really irritated your parents? Perhaps you have kids now and you love playing with them.

When you drop a bouncy ball, it literally never stops bouncing! At least on a hard surface. It just keeps going. Oh, eventually it stops, but it's amazing how many bounces a bouncy ball achieves.

In fact, when you visit Wikipedia to learn more about bouncing balls, well, there's a lot of physics involved.¹³

$$\sum \mathbf{F} = m\mathbf{a},$$

$$\mathbf{F}_G + \mathbf{F}_D + \mathbf{F}_M + \mathbf{F}_B = m\mathbf{a} = m\frac{d\mathbf{v}}{dt} = m\frac{d^2\mathbf{r}}{dt^2},$$



The point here is what may seem to you to be a random bouncing ball in your life actually contains universal principles that you may not see at that moment. God has His physics at play when you start bouncing in His flow.

And it doesn't stop!

So, in this story, I had already developed and presented a new discipleship model. I then followed that up with an email with new thoughts and destinations. Were we done yet? Nope. More bouncing.

A few days later, I sent the pastor another email addressing new insights about his personal ministry. I won't show that email because it's personal. He responded, and well, we kind of had a bouncy ball moment going on here. But it's not *all* about the pastor. God also wanted to do something in me.

I went to church the very next Sunday, and the pastor was up there preaching about the beauty found in God. I realized that his sermon was very aligned with what we'd been discussing back and forth in what had become a few email chains. Was there *convergence* here? Probably. Will I know what that convergence was? Probably not, at least for a while. But the signs of convergence were there because I was seeing unintended consequences, or unexpected bounces in the bouncy ball model, everywhere.

So, I went home from the service and looked out my picture window at downtown Kansas City. I immediately had a revelation. I took this photo.



When I moved to downtown Kansas City, I had none of these objects in this window. Over time, I added each object randomly, or so I thought.

According to Dictionary.com, a picture window is “a large window in a house, usually dominating the room or wall in which it is located, and often designed or placed, to present an *attractive view*.”¹⁴

A picture window isn’t an ordinary window. A picture window is the spot from which you see the outside world. Symbolically, it represents your worldview. How you view your world.

Notice in the above picture that each of the objects we’re going to discuss rests on each of the four pillars of the frame of this picture window. Oddly, there’s symbolism here too, as if to say, “If you want to see attractive things through the picture window of your life, you need to see and understand the principles comprising the frame of your worldview.”

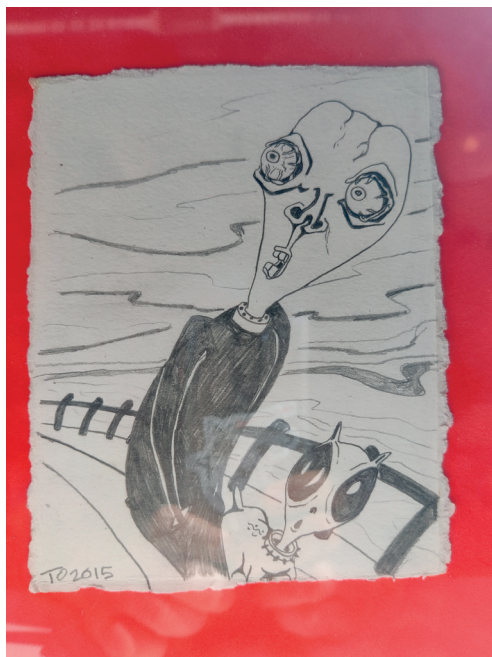
The first to be added was my old license plate from Kansas. When I re-registered in Missouri, I saved the old custom license plate and put it in my picture window.



That license plate says, “SQIRL.” Squirrels are my avatar, assigned to me by my children. Apparently, according to my children, it’s my ability to talk to squirrels. Yes, I talk “squirrel.” When they were young and we’d take walks in parks, I found a way by cupping my hands to my mouth to make a sound similar to a squirrel’s barking or chattering. When doing this, without fail, a squirrel will stop what it’s doing and immediately start chattering back. To me, this license plate reflects me, my life.

I love the coincidence of Kansas’ tagline at the bottom of the license plate: “Powering the Future.” How *coincidental*.

It was perhaps a year later when I found a piece of overlooked art in my attic. I put it next to my license plate in my picture window.



I love the story of this piece. I was driving to a meeting and passed an estate sale sign. I had someplace to be, but there was something inside of me saying, “Check it out.” So, I stopped and did. I came out with this work of art. It’s called *The Walk*. If you look closely, the figures of the man, the dog, and the world around them look distorted. The man and his dog look incredibly stunned and frightened at the amazing and challenging world around them . . . on a walk.

Just like our lives. This piece represents the journey of our lives.



A few months later, I was on a trip and stopped for gas and a coffee. While getting coffee, I looked around, and my gaze locked onto a display of kitschy license plates. I focused immediately on one. I bought it—and I’m not one to buy stuff

like this, ever. However, I just felt compelled, without a reason, to get it. I went home, and not knowing what to do with it, yes, I put it in my picture window.

Then, a few months later, I added another little piece of art and added it to my picture window, in between my faith license plate and *The Walk*.



This little piece is called *Blue Bayou*. I almost didn't buy it, but I loved the beauty and serenity of it. To me, it captures *life as it can be*. Simple, beautiful, serene. When I got it, I didn't know where to put it. So . . . it ended up on my picture window.

Flow.

When I came home from that service where the pastor preached about the beauty found in God, I stood in front of my picture window, and BAM! God immediately showed me His plan right there on my picture window. Over several years, I had placed those objects on the picture window, randomly. I got each piece not knowing I'd add anything else. Each was random.

However, each works together to tell the story of this book.

1. In your life,
2. There will be this terrifying walk, your journey,
3. And when you do something hard, like have faith in God's will and plan and keep walking,
4. He'll bring you to something beautiful and wonderful in your life, over and over again.

God was talking to me through my picture window.

Look, eventually, God is going to try to refocus you from the big things, like what to do with your life, to the smaller things, like getting into flow with Him so He can spark you on a daily basis. Perhaps He can use those sparks. Perhaps they are just for your enjoyment because He loves you. Remember, in flow, the experience can be the reward.

I had no idea months ago that, when I sat in that new member meeting listening to the pastor talk about the mission of the church and discipleship, all of what followed would just flow like a river from its source. But God did. So, along the way, I believe I've been able to help this pastor and the ministry break through some obstacles to opportunities, and God used all of it to help me see the message He had

constructed on my own picture window that is now part of illustrating to you the concept of flow.

When you're in flow, amazing things can happen almost immediately. You'll be like, "Wow, that's so odd!" Or you'll say to yourself, "What a coincidence!" And you'll say, "I can't believe that just happened."

Well, believe it. Because when you're in flow, you're going to see the world around you a bit differently. You'll start seeing things you couldn't see before when you weren't in flow. Why? Because being in flow requires you to lose yourself and start paying attention to others and your environment. It just so happens that flow is the end goal of God's FIRST will for your life. Who you *are* is so close to what He is that you and God become pretty inseparable. When you get into flow with God on this FIRST will, the SECOND will just explodes in new and unanticipated ways, big and small.

All within the picture window of your life.

Now, perhaps my example seems ridiculous to you. That's to be expected because this example of flow occurred in MY life, not yours. What's important in my life may not be what's important in yours. So, it seems ridiculous to outsiders.

I've experienced this personally, too. My second son dropped out of college unexpectedly. I didn't want him to drop out. I thought it was a ridiculous move. Thankfully, I understood that it's his life, not mine, and his decisions and walk will be far different from mine, even if it looks ridiculous to me. So, rather than mock and try to torpedo the decision, I supported it. At the time, I advised him, "Do what feels right in your heart. The important thing is that you make a decision."

After leaving college, he went through some very trying times bouncing around from one job to another. One dot in his life followed by another that didn't really appear connected. Followed by another. Well, after about a year of travail, the dots all came together for him, at least for this stage in his life. He achieved a great position as a manager for a company that appreciated his previous experiences and rewarded him for it. His driving need, like his old man, is to run his own business someday. I can see that his experiences since leaving college are preparing him for that end. And I tell him so. He's being apprenticed in sales, marketing, and management.

Even though neither he nor I could really appreciate it at the time, all the individual dots that were happening in his life eventually connected into a picture that made sense.

Constellations Will Form You in Your Life

We learn so much in school, and as I've said, "universal principles apply universally."

In school, we learned that, thousands of years ago, people would glance into the night sky at stars. And they would start connecting stars into patterns. Today, the field of astronomy calls patterns of stars *constellations*. There are 88 different constellations. Forty-eight were named by the ancient Greeks, and 40 more were identified later on.¹⁵

Let's see: there's Orion. There's Ursa Major and Ursa Minor, also known as the Great Bear and Little Bear. There's Cassiopeia and the dogs of Canis Major and Canis Minor. We're also familiar with the Big Dipper and Little Dipper. Apparently, these are not major constellations but smaller patterns within constellations.

And you can't just walk out and see all of them at once. You have to be in the right place at the right time to see different constellations due to the rotation of the earth around the sun.

Let's go back to Merriam-Webster, which defines a *constellation* as:

1. *"The configuration of stars especially at one's birth.*
2. *Any of 88 arbitrary configurations of stars or an area of the celestial sphere covering one of these configurations.*
3. *An assemblage, collection, or group of usually related persons, qualities, or things.*
4. *Patterns or arrangements.*"¹⁶

As you live in flow with God's will and plan for your life, you start establishing dots or "stars" in your life. Then, you establish another and another . . . and another. Over time, you look back and you can see patterns. In fact, the longer you live, you begin to see entire constellations depending on what God has been doing in your life over time. So, you continue to live, establishing new dots, patterns, and constellations. With God, there's no end in creating patterns in your life, one dot or star at a time.

Unfortunately for stars and us, there's one imposing word. Pain.

From Scientific American: "A star is born when atoms of light elements are squeezed *under enough pressure* for their nuclei to undergo fusion. All stars are the result of a balance of forces: the force of gravity compresses atoms in interstellar gas until the fusion reactions begin."¹⁷

That sounds unpleasant for stars! Yes, stars are born through an intense process of transformation. But no pain, no gain. Even with stars, universal principles apply universally.

Looking back at what God has done and seeing the patterns in it is quite joyful, despite the pain involved to get there. Seeing old patterns also creates confidence in moving forward. Despite the pain that awaits as we grow, the pain will be worth it. We just have to be patient and faithful knowing that we'll connect the dots and see what great patterns God formed:

1. IN us (God's FIRST will),
2. FOR us (God's SECOND will), and
3. THROUGH us (what God is achieving for Himself through us as part of His SECOND will).

The challenge, quite frankly, is staying in flow, staying in the midst of God's plan. Let's talk about that.

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CHAPTER 6



$$fx = f \sin F^2$$

Staying in flow or even staying focused on moving forward in your life can be hard because: *life happens*. The concepts of *fog* and *friction* are akin to “no pain, no gain,” but they are different.

These concepts come, yes, from the U.S. Marine Corps. Every Marine is trained in it because fog and friction are inevitable in combat. Every Marine is trained in how to recognize it and how to push through it.

As I’ve said, life is like combat. It’s you against the world, so to speak. You have to fight for every inch of gain in your life. Universal truths apply, like fog and friction.

In Life, You Will Be Foggy

The concept of *fog* originated with Karl Von Clausewitz, a Prussian general and military theorist from the 1800s who wrote a fundamental book on military strategy called *On War*. It’s required reading in the Marines. In this book, he focused on the moral and psychological aspects of war. In it, he coined the reference to “fog.”

He says, “*War is the realm of uncertainty; three-quarters of the factors on which action in war is based are wrapped in a fog of greater or lesser uncertainty.*”¹

Fog is the inability to see. It’s the uncertainty that occurs when you can’t see in the middle of a battle. In combat,

Marines will experience the “fog of war.” This is the smoke and chaos that covers the battlefield. Have you ever seen a war movie? *Saving Private Ryan*. *All Quiet on the Western Front*. *Hacksaw Ridge*. If so, you’ll be familiar with the combat scenes where artillery is landing, smoke covers the battlefield, and the cacophony of battle prevents you from hearing the person next to you. People are dying. You don’t know where the enemy is, and you don’t know what to do at that moment because of all this uncertainty. You empathize with the characters as they hunch down, afraid, not knowing where to go or what to do. Not knowing exactly where they are and if the enemy is close. They’re supposed to advance. However, the enemy is fighting back, and at the moment, things seem, if not uncertain, well, insane.

The Marines have a principle: “The value of a plan, worthless. The value of planning, priceless.” That’s because, as soon as you cross into combat, the enemy acts too. All of a sudden, at least some of those great plans you’ve made are now worthless because you made them not knowing what the enemy would do and how life or fate would react. Now, you anticipated certain scenarios, but perhaps you did not anticipate the exact scenario that actually happened!

This happens all the time in God’s SECOND will for your life.

You don’t know the next step you’re supposed to take. Or something you thought would happen doesn’t. Or you start getting conflicting information or counsel from friends and relatives. You become confused. WHAT is going on?!

So . . . are you just going to sit there doing nothing, waiting for the fog to clear? What are you supposed to do?

Get moving. Keep moving.

Move.

There's another concept in the Marines called *maneuver warfare*. Basically, movement is life. The enemy, meaning your life's challenges, will try to "fix you in place." This concept means that you find yourself in a foxhole, or a divot in the ground, while shells are exploding all around you. Machine gun fire is whizzing past you. You're scared and want to just hunker down where you are. When you stop moving, it means the enemy has fixed you in place. You don't want this to happen because the next scene involves the enemy further maneuvering for the coups de grace on you as you sit there fixed in place. Consider this so, spiritually.

When things get foggy in your life, your first inclination will be to stop moving. Even if you initially started enacting your plans with enthusiasm, when you lose the ability to see or have confidence in "what's going on," you're naturally going to pause. You don't want to move. You may have lost your initial enthusiasm and may even feel literally frozen with fear. I have felt like this many times in my life, especially after things I expected to happen didn't. Fog is particularly prevalent when doors are opening and closing in your life.

You're going to have to fight your fears and natural inclination to hunker down. Get back up and keep moving. Movement is life. In life, as in battle, you must do what seems unnatural. You must get out of that hole, jump out of that hole, and face the fire. You may die, or you may succeed. One thing is certain: if you stay where you are, you will die. Of course, we're talking figuratively. What happens when

you get frozen in place and stop moving? Remember that principle where God requires faith along with works? Your only chance at what God calls the “fullness of life” is to move. Only through maneuver warfare do you have any chance of outmaneuvering your enemy and winning your battle, pushing through all that fog, willfully and purposefully.

You’ll have to move in the fog of your life when you just don’t know what’s going on, even when you feel like you can’t see a darn thing.

In the Marines, there’s this idea of a *culmination point*. This is also a concept from Carl Von Clausewitz. This idea is that, in any battle, there will come a point where the battle hangs in the balance. Victory can go either way. You may win, or your enemy may win. The difference hangs in willpower. At this *culmination point*, whose will shall prevail?² Yours or the enemy’s? Whoever’s will prevails takes the victory. Who wants it more? Who keeps getting knocked down but stands right back up? We’re talking dogged persistence here and the absolute refusal to stop fighting by any and with all means possible. You can do the same in your life in any instance.

Embrace Your Inner Underdog

This can be extended to what I call *the underdog principle*. You see this principle at work all the time. Sports, business, anywhere there’s some sort of competition. Underdogs are those competitors who most observers assume have little or no chance of winning. Perhaps they’re not as talented or strong. They’re not big enough. They may not have enough experience. They don’t have a track record of winning.

Underdogs do have two defining qualities:

1. Underdogs simply want “it” more. Their heart, their passion exceeds that of their competitors.
2. Underdogs try harder. They just work harder, practice more, train more painfully, go the extra mile, and put in the extra time. They become more resourceful and resilient.

Why? Underdogs know that, when they reach the culmination point in their competition, that’s when they’ll prevail. That’s when the opposing team, whatever it looks like, will gaze and concede: “We just didn’t know who or what we were really up against.” You see this all the time in sports. Sports commentators refer to unexpected victories by underdogs as an *upset*. Upsets are when underdogs unexpectedly win.

Are you an underdog? Do you need an upset?

This is really important. Consider your life. What battles are you in? What battles are you facing? Are you going to be pushed around by whatever forces face you? No. In key moments when you just want to give up, give in, and stop fighting, you must assert your will. Embrace your inner underdog. Try saying out loud: “No way, I am NOT going to give up. I am NOT going to let my circumstances dictate my life. I WILL keep moving forward! I will CONTINUE trusting in God and that He will finish what He has begun in my life.”

You jump out of your foxhole because you have faith in your training, you have faith in yourself, you have faith you’ve been given this plan, you have faith in your vision, and you have faith in outcomes that you can’t just see yet.

As in the Marines, the concept of movement is true with God. God says, “Have faith and go!”³

In your marriage.

In your career.

With your kids.

Whatever that looks like in your life.

You jump out of your foxhole and . . . keep . . . moving. You push through your fog. You win unexpected victories. You become more resilient because of the adversities you face and overcome.

You’ll Also Face Down Friction

The concept of *friction* also comes from Karl Von Clausewitz. He says, “*Friction is the concept that differentiates actual war from war on paper, those surprising things that happen during wartime that make even the simplest thing difficult.*”⁴

In war, in your life, sometimes even the simplest of things will be oh-so difficult.

The U.S. Marines teaches officers this. Doctrine says to expect even the simplest of things to become very difficult in war. Basically, expect that anything that can go wrong will go wrong. Why? This concept of friction.

In the military, friction has many forms. You don’t get resupplied on time. Your communications equipment stops working. The enemy starts jamming your frequencies. They do something unexpected that causes you to scramble in response. Your air support is late. Reinforcements don’t arrive. Your force is exhausted. Friction could be anything.

Have you ever experienced the feeling or reality that everything in your life suddenly seems difficult? Everything seems to be going wrong, moving against you. That's friction.

It's natural. It's the way of things. It's one of those universal principles. Forces you can't even identify in your life will push back. Something or everything will seem to go wrong. Whatever you are doing is not producing. For a time at least.

This is the testing time.⁵ This is the time you become stronger. In fact, it's the time when you will rise to overcome that culmination point, regardless of fog and friction because you rose to the occasion and punched your way through. You faced the Great Question: "Are you going to give up or keep moving?" And you prevailed.

God says you will suffer for a while, so you may become more perfect, more established, more strengthened, more settled.

The very friction that seems to show we're less perfect, less established, less strong, and less settled in our lives actually works in the exact opposite direction. Today, you may be freaked out and overwhelmed, tired and dismayed. Tomorrow . . . everything can change. Or more likely, your growth will be incremental, day after day. Day after day, depending on the decisions you make, you'll find yourself standing stronger in your life, filled increasingly with hope and faith that a turn is inevitable.

You'll punch through the fog in your life and face down life's friction. Doing so also engages the principles of *standing*.

At the end of the day, any day, God is requiring you to **stand** in the midst of your battle.

God says, having done everything you can, just stand.⁶

The Two Ways to Stand

The first way to stand is the bad way. It's being double-minded. This idea of double-mindedness is a very powerful force in our lives. It basically means you're allowing yourself to be confused. I've seen this scores of times in my own life, in the life of my kids, and in my co-workers.

Merriam-Webster's definition of *double-minded* is:

1. *“Wavering in mind*
2. *Undecided*
3. *Vacillating*
4. *Insincere.”*

Here's what happens. You think you may know the next shot in your life, the next direction, and the next decision. You're somewhat confident but not entirely there. Then, you start talking to friends or family who say, "Well, you could also do this or that. Have you considered those options?"

All of a sudden, what you thought was a sure path is now uncertain. Or perhaps you've just overwhelmed yourself because doubts will try to flood your mind and emotions. Options. The options are endless. You may be succumbing to the fog in your life. This is natural and requires *self-control*. Self-control is a value that is part of God's FIRST will for your life. However, if you haven't progressed in self-control, you start looking at all the options, doubts, and fears. And then

you basically become distracted and confused as to what you should do. This confusion stops your movement as you start pondering all of them in some kind of endless loop. Now, you're frozen in place and time. Uh oh.

Look, it's okay and even responsible to narrow your decision set to two to three options. Beyond that, you need to shut down the others. God will help you narrow down a short set of options. However, if each day you're throwing a new option into your mind, He's going to stop and wait for you to settle down and gain control over yourself.

God says that a double-minded person becomes unstable.⁸

In fact, God is pretty harsh about it. He tells us to ask for what we want in faith. When you doubt, you become like a wave in the sea, tossed about by any of the many winds (friction) in your life. You get pushed one way, then another. He says when you become confused, perhaps perpetually confused, don't expect God's will to happen in your life.

Double-mindedness, or the constant rethinking of your plans, often comes from the "counselors" in your life, family, and friends.

There Will Be "Good" and "Not-So-Good" Counselors in Life

I often mentor youth. Once, one of my daughter's friends who was home on spring break, texted and asked if he could swing by to discuss his future. We sat down and he shared that he had summer internship opportunities all over the place, literally around the country, and he was confused as to which one to pursue. He wasn't quite brain-locked about it.

I simply responded by asking, “Which one feels right? Which one are you really excited about?”

Without hesitation, he said, “The one in New York City.”

Check the box of God moving in his heart. So, time to gut-check the mind. I asked, “Does the one in New York City make sense to you? Would it be a great internship?”

“Absolutely,” he replied.

I immediately responded, “Well, looks like your decision is clear to you.” And then I shut up.

An important point here. You need to be careful in seeking advice from other people. They’re not living your life. They likely don’t have your skill sets or driving need for expression. They don’t know what’s on your mind and heart and for how long. In fact, they may do more damage than good. They may try to talk you out of something because they just hate the idea. It has nothing to do with you. They just don’t like it. Or they’re afraid. Or they don’t take similar risks in their life. Or they’re proud and not listening. Or they’re dismissive because they find the whole topic boring. Or they’re overly concerned with their idea of who you should be.

I’m not saying you shouldn’t seek counsel. God says to do so.⁹ Just don’t be led around like a little child. You’re an adult! Try to figure out their intentions and motivations. If you see a disconnect, discount what they’re saying. Regardless, understand the role of counselors in your life. They are to help provide wisdom and inform your decisions. They’re to ask smart, objective, neutral questions that get you thinking and closer to a wise decision. They’re *not* to make your decision for you.

In fact, here are two warning signs that you need to shut down the discussion with a supposedly well-intentioned counselor who is actually doing more harm than good:

1. *Their feedback is laced with negativity.* Good counselors ask neutral questions free from any personal bias or prejudice on their part. They don't bring themselves into the equation. They ask questions like, "What do you think of this or that?" Or, "How will you handle this or that?" Smart counselors ask questions that open up your creative thinking rather than shut it down. Poor counselors shut you down. If you seek counsel from someone and they start saying things like, "Man, I just don't like this at all," "That just sounds incredibly expensive and stupid," or similar statements or questions, you'll start shutting down the creative process that should lead to problem-solving surrounding a decision.

Basically, trust your feelings here. If you're talking to a not-so-good counselor and you feel beaten down and discouraged during the discussion, pull back. When you're in a discussion with a good counselor, you'll feel uplifted and encouraged by the positivity and new ideas created by the healthy back and forth, even if it's pointing you in a new direction.

2. *They try to make your decision.* Ha, look, we've all been there. I know I've said this to others occasionally: "Well, I wouldn't do it." Or conversely, "I'd certainly jump at this." Ah, that's well-intentioned, yet irresponsible. A way to know whether a counselor is getting off track is when they use that word, *I*. *I* has no place in a discussion about *you*. Perhaps it's okay if the counselor is relating a personal story that

relates to you and your decision. However, if the use of *I* shows up in decision-making language, you need to discount it. As the person facing a decision, don't let anyone make it for you. It's your life. You need to make your own decisions regardless of whatever smart or poor counsel you may be receiving from friends and family.

Look, sometimes it feels good to let someone else make the decision. You'll feel like you were let off the hook. Well, that's not going to get you where you *should* be. You may end up "off plan." When people in your life try to make your decisions and you go with it, not necessarily fully believing in it, you won't be successful because doubt will follow and stymie your progress. You won't be able to stand when you encounter the fog and friction that ensues from a questionable decision.

The Second Way to Stand in Your Life Is with Confidence Versus Doubt

$$(c)^5 \sqrt{d}$$

What does the word *stand* actually mean? Let's go back to Merriam-Webster.

To stand means:

1. *"To support oneself on the feet in an erect position.*
2. *To rise to an erect position.*
3. *To take up or maintain a specified position or posture.*

4. *To maintain one's position.*
5. *To be in a particular state or situation.*
6. *To hold a course at sea.*
7. *To be in a position to gain or lose because of an action taken or a commitment made.*¹⁰

Wow, the first state of standing, double-mindedness, says you'll be tossed about like a wave of the sea. The second state of standing, confidence, says you'll hold the course at sea. You just can't make this stuff up. I'm not quoting the Bible here. I'm quoting a dictionary! Universal truths apply universally.

So, let's tie the construct of *stand* together, using how Merriam-Webster defines it.

*Why are you knocked down, on the ground?
Get up!*

*Stand, get into position, and fight off anything
that tries to knock you down again.*

It will help if you're in the right state of mind.

And stay your course!

*Remember, you're in the position to gain based on the
commitments you've made.*

Just don't give up!

I really like Merriam-Webster's use of the word *commitment*. This goes beyond deciding. Naturally, deciding is the first step. "I've decided to do this!" And then new doubts flood in that cause you to un-decide. What can prevent this? *Committing*. Committing puts your decision into motion to a point where you're now a little or a lot invested. You've made a commitment that establishes your decision and shows you've overcome the inertia that's part of any decision, and you are decisively *moving forward*.

*"I'm going to take that job (deciding),
so I called them back and said yes (committing)."*

*"I'm going to start my own business (deciding),
so I called the bank about a loan (committing)."*

*"I want to go to that university (deciding),
so I applied (committing)."*

*"I have to get out of this bad relationship (deciding),
so I broke up with my partner (committing)."*

*"I want that professional credential (deciding),
so I paid the \$200 for the first course (committing)."*

Once you've made a decision, you must ask yourself, "What do I need to do now to commit to that decision?"

Let's go back to the story of the young man and his internship. Well, after deciding that the New York City internship was for him, he immediately started questioning it.

“Where am I going to live for the summer? How am I going to be able to afford to live there?” Natural considerations sure.

My response: “Those things will take care of themselves.” I told him he didn’t know yet what he’d be paid nor did he know if the company had a living solution for summer, out-of-state interns. I advised him that by saying YES to the internship, he would put into motion forces that would resolve those questions.

This brings us to a very important principle regarding standing. It comes from the German philosopher Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Perhaps you’ve heard of him. I discovered his quote while stepping into the whirlwind experience of that ad agency I eventually led:

“At the moment of commitment, the entire universe conspires to assist you.”¹¹

Even while a part of life will present fog and friction, “the universe” has other plans.

William Hutchison Murray was a famous Scottish mountaineer and writer who also spent three years as a prisoner of war during World War II. He basically took this Goethe principle and expounded on it:

Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts

of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamt would have come his way. I have learned a deep respect for one of Goethe's couplets: Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it!¹²

At the ad agency, we actually had this quote printed and framed and gave it to all of our employees and clients. Why? We were changing the agency so fast, many had doubts. We, meaning me and Bruce, wanted to put something on their desks to remind them to have faith, to keep moving forward, perhaps not knowing how we'd do it, and yet to embrace the ride!

Goethe also said, *"The hardest thing to see is what is in front of your eyes."*¹³

At the end of the day, at the end of your fight, know a few things. God is for you.¹⁴ And He is.

Your challenges, your fog and friction, these will not prevail. You can and will punch through your fog and face down your friction. Your willpower will arise, especially as you stand confidently and start committing to decisions.

As you continue to move forward, you will experience the will of God in your life. He will fulfill it.¹⁵

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CHAPTER 7



THE IMPORTANCE OF AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE



$$f(x) = G^2$$

Tell you what: if the engine of a car is akin to God's will powering your life, well, gratitude is the oil keeping that engine humming.

When I was a youngster, my father, who is also a retired Marine officer himself, taught me five conditions for success:

1. Be at the right place,
2. At the right time,
3. In the right uniform,
4. With the right gear,
5. AND THE RIGHT ATTITUDE!

So, in this chapter, we're talking about number five on that list for success: attitude. Yes, an attitude of gratitude.

Attitude as defined by Merriam-Webster:

1. *"A position assumed for a specific purpose.*
2. *A mental position with regard to a fact or state.*
3. *A feeling or emotion toward a fact or state.*
4. *Abodily state of readiness to respond in a characteristic way to a stimulus (such as an object, concept, or situation)."*

Basically, without the right attitude, neither your mind nor your emotions will be engaged and ready for what God has for you. You may not be in the state of readiness to react positively to God's new stimuli in your life.

One thing is for sure: if you want anything from God in this life, you need to have the right attitude. Be easy on yourself. You can have a bad day. Some days, you might have "a bad attitude." You just need to be very careful that those days are far fewer than the days with a "good attitude."

Have you ever known a person who just constantly has a bad attitude, which can be colored in many different ways? Perhaps they're always mad. Perhaps they never listen. Perhaps they always insist on being right. Perhaps they're arrogant. Perhaps they're insulting. Perhaps they're never happy with what you do or with what they get.

First, you'll find yourself wanting to avoid these people. Second, you'll find yourself not wanting to be very generous with them. Finally, you'll try to expunge them from your life entirely.

Why would God be any different? The Bible says He actually opposes these kinds of people.²

Your attitude is like the foundation of a house. It holds everything up. If the foundation is bad, the house will collapse.

So, what kind of attitude are we supposed to have?

Gratefulness/Gratitude/Thankfulness

Who says? God. God makes this very, very, very clear!

**In everything you do, give thanks,
for this is the will of God.³**

Gratitude is actually God's will for you. It's part of His FIRST and SECOND will for your life. First, gratitude needs to become part of who you ARE. Second, He actually can't do much in your life without the grease of gratitude being part of how you act, how you accomplish, and what you DO.

And how do we know that? If we lack gratitude, why would that prohibit God from working with us? Because if we're *not* in an attitude of gratitude, well then, we're probably harboring a bad attitude. Keep it simple. It's one or the other. If we don't have this attitude of gratitude, we're probably tending or trending toward a bad attitude in the opposite direction of gratitude. And as God says, He basically opposes and resists people with bad attitudes.

Gratitude itself is a wonderful thing with all kinds of wonderful benefits.

From Harvard Health Publishing:

"The word *gratitude* is derived from the Latin word *gratia*, which means grace, graciousness, or gratefulness (depending on the context). In some ways, gratitude encompasses all of these meanings. Gratitude is a thankful appreciation for what an individual receives, whether tangible or intangible. With gratitude, people acknowledge the goodness in their lives.

In the process, people usually recognize that the source of that goodness lies at least partially outside themselves. As a result, being grateful also helps

people connect to something larger than themselves as individuals—whether to other people, nature, or a higher power.

In positive psychology research, gratitude is strongly and consistently associated with greater happiness. Gratitude helps people feel more positive emotions, relish good experiences, improve their health, deal with adversity, and build strong relationships.”⁴

So, by gratitude, we’re more capable of connecting to “something larger” than ourselves, like God. It’s also the secret to happiness. Not bad. But there’s more.

Apparently, gratitude is key to improving your mental health.⁵ Many studies have concluded that the more you count your blessings, the happier and less depressed you’ll be and the less anxious you’ll be.

*“We need to learn to want what we have,
not to have what we want, in order to get stable
and steady happiness.”⁶*

–Dalai Lama XIV

Now, having gratitude does not mean we’re pretending that everything is peachy or that we’re in denial of things that might be going wrong. You can be gritty yet grateful. It’s just focusing on the “half full” part of the “glass is half empty or half full” metaphor.

When we have a heart of gratitude:

1. We're more resilient. Gratitude fortifies us and acts as a psychological booster.
2. We're anchored more in the present moment, meaning we're less apt to worry about what has already happened or what might happen in the future.
3. We strengthen our relationships.⁷

There's that word *resilient* again. Gratitude helps us be more resilient and present to see what God is doing in our lives and even what we should be doing to move forward.

How Do We Get Gratitude?

Gratitude is a choice. It's a matter of perspective. You can look at your life and say, "My glass is half empty! Woe is me." Or you can look at the same set of facts, feelings, and perceptions and say, "My glass is half full! How grateful I am!"

Gratitude is not only a practice, like saying thank you, but also a *state of being*. A *state* reflects a permanent condition, not something temporal like a passing feeling of gratitude. When you are in a state of gratitude, from one day to the next, you'll tend to be grateful. Sure, you can get mad or disappointed, frustrated, and whatnot. However, even when dealing with those temporal, negative feelings, you can still be in a state of gratitude. You just need to ensure you let go of those temporary bad feelings (temporary state) and get back to gratitude (permanent state).

In fact, you can even reach the point where you're grateful for the negative things happening in your life because you

know they'll help you reach deeper levels of character, and you also know those very negative forces might even help bring about God's will in your life.

From PositivePsychology.com:

*“In a state of gratitude, we say yes to life.
We affirm that, all in all, life is good
and has elements that make it worth living.”*

And,

*“Gratitude has, for many, been replaced by
disappointment, anger, and resentment when
these expected ‘blessings’
either do not appear or they disappear.”*

Basically, gratitude displaces anger, which, if you get your psychology from Yoda and *Star Wars*, leads to the Dark Side of The Force. More on this soon.

Delving deeper into gratitude:

*“We have learned gratitude helps people focus on
the positive aspects of their life. Gratitude can help
build and maintain relationships with others,
resulting in hope, life satisfaction,
and more proactive behaviors toward others.”*

And,

“Gratitude has a positive affiliation with positive affect, life satisfaction, extraversion (sociable, lively), forgiveness, and a negative affiliation with substance abuse and neuroticism, as well as an inverse relationship between gratitude and anxiety and depression.”⁸

Gratitude basically lays the foundation for the good things God has planned for you. When you are in a state of gratitude, your heart and mind are open instead of closed. You are ready to see more good things that may be in front of you, and you’re also in the mindset to say yes to those opportunities. You’re happier, and that happiness and joy will help you overcome obstacles as well as achieve higher levels of performance in what you’re doing.

What Is the Opposite of Gratitude?

$$G^4 > (a \times 5)^0$$

Anger and resentment! If you’re not operating in an attitude of gratitude, you’re likely tending or trending in the opposite direction, a dangerous direction. When you’re in a state of gratitude, not only are you thankful but you’re also more forgiving and ready to let go of offenses. Anger and resentment are just the opposite. Anger held onto for too long turns into resentment. Resentment is unforgiving and can even involve hatred. Resentment tends to feed on itself, getting deeper and deeper into someone’s heart.

Resentment is a bad place to be. Resentment leads to an erosion of physical, intellectual, and emotional well-being.

Do you have any resentment? Check your heart. Resentment is entrenched anger towards someone or something that you just can't get over.

- Are you resentful of your parents, spouse, or former friend?
- Are you resentful that you're in the position you're in?
- Are you resentful about physical attributes you can't change, like height or weight?
- Are you resentful in general that other people get what they want, but you don't?
- Are you resentful about an event that happened in your life?
- Are you resentful with God, that He hasn't "shown up" like you expected?
- Are you resentful of a church or pastor "who failed you?"

Resentfulness can look different in each of us. And each of us will face resentment in our lives. We just can't succumb to it. Resentfulness eventually leads to a feeling of self-righteousness, a conclusion that you're justified in feeling the way you do. You're right, and whatever you're mad at is wrong. This feeling of self-righteousness is directly opposed to the values God holds dear. It basically places you on the throne of your heart, a spot God wants to occupy. And while you occupy it, He may be restrained in what He can do in your life until you get over this very dangerous place.

More about resentment:

“People in these states may have trouble sleeping, experience changes in cardiovascular activity and stress-related hormones, and over time, develop clinical conditions including depression. In other studies, people who cannot forgive tend to experience stress that accelerates the aging process and leads to a variety of diseases.”⁹

The good news here is that both gratitude and anger/resentment are choices. The switch can be immediate. Just choose to let go of anger and resentment and replace it with gratitude. If you’re struggling with letting go, just ask God for help: “God, please help me to forgive myself and others for [define the subject of resentment]. Help me to be grateful.”

He will, and you will. You’re correctly asking for the very outcomes He wants for you. If you need to, repeat this little chat with God daily, twice per day, or as often as necessary. The more you practice, the more you’ll enter a permanent attitude of gratitude.

I’ve had to do this a lot in business. With employees. With clients. With partners. With vendors. Many times in a day, especially when the anger is still “hot,” I’ll quickly ask God to help me forgive the subject of my anger. Maybe 10–15 times a day, initially.

It really begins with self-talk. What kind of self-talk do you use? If you’re grumbling to yourself about people, places, or things, you’ve got to stop it. Yes, you and I can completely be in charge of what we let flutter through our hearts and brains.

We're not captive to them. They're captive to us!

God says to challenge negative thoughts and outright hurtful, wrong imaginations.¹⁰ He says to take them captive, cast them down. How will you know what thoughts need to be challenged and cast aside? He says they are the thoughts that go against what you know to be true, the thoughts that challenge what you know about God and His values.

As you begin to challenge and turn your self-talk, what should you focus on instead of those negative, grumble-worthy thoughts and feelings?

God has an answer for that, too.

He says, "Think about those things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, reputable, virtuous, praise-worthy."¹¹

Positive self-talk is a habit. Gratitude is a habit. Anger/resentment can also be a habit. Remember that Will Durant quote? "We are what we repeatedly do."¹² So, repeatedly do that attitude of gratitude.

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CHAPTER 8



START!



$$f(x) = \frac{d}{s^3}$$

Beware of Taking Something Simple and Making It Hard!

In life, there are things both simple and hard. Walking: pretty simple. Heart surgery: pretty hard. Driving a car: simple. Nuclear physics: hard.

We're not talking about heart surgery or nuclear physics here. We're talking about something pretty simple. Oh, knowing God's will may seem complex, daunting, and hard, but it's not. It may not be exactly easy because *nothing worthwhile is ever easy*. However, just because something is not easy does not mean it's equally not simple.

In fact, humans like to take what's simple and make it more complex. From a psychology review, "Complexity increases, largely unconsciously, as we seek to improve, to learn, to progress and to satisfy our own needs. Our desire for better and our desire for more means we cannot help but make things more complicated."¹

Even Confucius weighs in on this: "*Life is really simple, but we insist on making it complicated.*"²

When you look at the literature that studies simplicity versus complexity, it's pretty clear. We humans prefer complexity! Further explored, "Faced with two competing hypotheses, we are likely to choose the most complex one. That's usually the option with the most assumptions and regressions. As a result, when we need to solve a problem,

we may ignore simple solutions—thinking ‘that will never work’—and instead favor complex ones.”³

In fact, in the businesses I’ve run, I quickly learned to weed out the people who take something that should be simple and make it very complex. Introducing complexity where it’s not needed is a way to go out of business. Instead, I prefer to hire people who can keep things simple or take complexity and make it simple.

There’s the military KISS aphorism you’ve probably heard:

“Keep it simple, stupid!”

This comes from the concept of friction. If things are going to work against you, and they will, or if everything that can go wrong will go wrong, why would we *choose* to make the situation even worse by introducing complexity? There’s a reason why *stupid* is part of the KISS principle. First, introducing complexity IS stupid. Second, it’s over-the-top in reminding that person to “stop it, now!”

Trust the Process

Knowing God’s will and plan for your life may seem really complex! It did to me. However, it seemed hard only because I didn’t yet know the formula that would make it simple. In life and work, it all comes down to processes within a formula.

1. How do you purify water? Oh, there’s a process or even a pill for that.
2. How do you make gasoline? Oh, there’s a process for that.

3. How do you get fit? Oh, there are nutrition and physical fitness processes for that.
4. How do you know the will of God for your life? Oh, there's a process for that!

You now know the formula and the processes. Now, you just need to 1) keep it simple and 2) start! No process works unless you start doing the process.

There's a trick to processes. Don't change them! In some cases, like landing a 747 airplane, the pilots obviously don't mess with the process. However, I've seen many employees try to change proven processes. They're either eager or arrogant. We listen to what they have to say. And we respond either with, "That's a good idea, let's try it." Or, "You just haven't done this enough to know that this process is tried and true."

I'm here to tell you that the process for how to know God's will and plan for your life is proven. It's tried and true, confirmed also by universal principles that apply universally. However, I'm not so arrogant as to say it can't be improved.

I do encourage you not to tinker with it just yet! Try the process. Get your results. Then tinker with it. Just remember, each life will have its own variances. The process I've laid out is true, generally. That doesn't mean you won't experience something very different! Anything, anything, anything, and I'm going to repeat it again, anything is possible with God.

I'm not trying to put Him in a box, a can, or a bottle like a genie. I'm simply relying on the fact that God is consistent. He never changes.⁴

Because God never changes, because His principles are universal and never-ending, you can count on the process outlined by He Himself.

So, do them. Start. One step at a time. Don't overthink it. Don't fear. Don't assume it won't work for you. It will!

And I'm going to say what I said in the introduction—it might get me into trouble with some Christian theologians. I don't care if you're a Christian. I don't care if you're Hindu or Jewish. I don't care if you're Muslim. I don't care if you're agnostic or an atheist. There's a plan for your life. You can know it. You can practice all or some of what I've explained, and you will reap the benefits, all or some.

And during the process, perhaps, just perhaps, your assumptions will be challenged. You will become a changed person, as I have. I've not given up my faith in God. It's multiplied. However, I have changed a ton of my worldviews and daily practices based on my experiences with God. (Uh, that's God's FIRST will for your life! Change! Transformation!) So, beware of what might happen to you!

Do You Need an Accountability Partner?

Sometimes, it's helpful to have an accountability partner. According to Wikipedia's entry on *accountability partners*: "An accountability partner is someone who supports another person to keep a commitment or maintain progress on a desired goal. They will often be a trusted friend or acquaintance who will regularly ask an individual about their progress or receive confessions of moral wrongdoing."⁵

An accountability partner is someone with whom you can share your deepest feelings, thoughts, and goals. Accountability partners can also be quite practical. In fitness, trainers often act as accountability partners. They ensure you show up for the workout, eat right, and maintain healthy patterns in your life. In the military, fresh recruits who report to their first assignment are often assigned “running mates.” These are peers with more experience who ensure the newbie learns the ropes, stays out of trouble, and adopts the right military habits. Even in business, project teams act as accountability partners. Members of the team work together to ensure the project gets defined, the next steps are identified, team members are assigned, schedules are set, outcomes are met, etc.

Accountability partners are very helpful, especially if self-discipline is not your strongest strength or if you have a history of dropping a goal almost as soon as you set one. Having an accountability partner can also be fun. Often, an accountability partner has a similar vision or goal and you can accomplish them together in a similar timeframe.

In the military, there’s an old saying: “You always put two people in a foxhole.” Why? Because one person in a foxhole can get scared and freaked out. However, with two in the foxhole, they serve to calm each other down, not be so frightened, and remind each other to stay focused on the mission.

So, ask yourself if you’d be better off having an accountability partner in your life, especially as you challenge yourself with new decisions based on what you think God is

saying to you. Where do you find an accountability partner? It can be anyone in your life who 1) you value, 2) you trust, 3) won't be judgmental, 4) is safe to reveal your failures and challenges, and 5) with whom you can also cry, smile, and celebrate.

Remember to KISS this. Keep it simple! Don't overthink it. Maybe your future accountability partner is someone you just met at school, work, or church or someone in your youth group, perhaps the youth pastor. It can be your crazy uncle, a friend of your parents, or someone older than you who you respect. Pick one and see how it works out. You can always change course.

In life, starting simply without having all the deets worked out is so important.

The Marines have a decision matrix called *The 70 Percent Rule*.

1. Make a decision when you have 70 percent of the information or confidence you think you need.
2. If you wait for 100 percent, you'll either never make the decision or the moment for the decision will have passed.

So, start. This minute. Challenge a negative, persistent thought or self-speak in your life. Forgive someone. Ask God for help. Seek a certification. Be thankful. Start listening to your inner heart and mind. DO SOMETHING! Don't do nothing.

And please remember, when you move an inch, God will move a mile.

God is for you.⁶

**God will give you rest and will not
burden you with too much.⁷**

**God will complete His work in you
and for you.⁸**

Both who you ARE and what you DO. You can, and you will, both know and do the will of God for your life. Start, now. If you'd like more resources for your journey discovering God's Will, please visit **whatisgodswill.com**

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3. "Complexity Bias: Why We Prefer Complicated to Simple," Farnam Street, accessed April 24, 2023, www.fs.blog/complexity-bias/.
4. Heb. 13:8. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day, yea and for ever."

5. “Accountability Partner,” Wikimedia Foundation, last modified March 6, 2023, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Accountability_partner.
6. Rom. 8:31. “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?”
7. Matt. 11:28-30. “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”
8. Phil. 1:6. “Being confident of this very thing, that he who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

APPENDIX

$$f(x) = (1 \rightarrow 7)^8$$

Summary of the Formula for Knowing God's Will and Plan

1

God's FIRST Will: Transformation

God cares most about WHO YOU ARE.

God will change your values.

God will work to assimilate you.

2

God's SECOND Will: Listening to Your Heart and Mind

God cares immensely about WHAT YOU DO.

His will is inside you.

You'll have to practice "faith": trust and confidence.

3

Expect PAIN!

You will get "sandpapered."

You will suffer through waiting.

Wait for God to move the chess pieces in your life.

Don't waste this period in your life.

You will gain resilience.

Choose grit over grim.

4

Get “Lucky” through Preparation

Help God help you.

Don't do nothing; do something.

Say YES; become a YES person.

5

Get into FLOW

Get beyond yourself.

See what's happening around you.

Focus intensely and move when you start to spark.

Get into FLOW with 1) yourself, 2) God, and 3) others.

Look for patterns that form in your life.

6

Punch Through Fog and Face Down Friction

Fog and friction are good things.

They show that you're moving.

Remember to just STAND with courage and confidence.

Ensure you're listening to “good” counsel.

7

Embrace an Attitude of Gratitude

Gratitude is the secret to happiness.

Gratitude is the grease that causes you to
move faster in life.

Gratitude repels you from evils like anger and resentment.

Gratitude draws you closer to God and others.

8

Start!

Trust the process.

Take small steps to begin.

When you move an inch, God will move a mile.

Self Gut-Check Checklist

1. Do I want to transform my life to achieve some greater purpose?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Why or what now?
2. Do I have a source of values that will guide my behavior and inform my decisions?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Why or what now?
3. Am I ready to trust that my own heart and mind are the places where God will work to inform me of the vision and next steps for my life?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Why or what now?
4. Am I willing to commit to a life of transformation to become who I'm supposed to be?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Why or what now?
5. Am I ready to start saying yes more to my opportunities, even if I can't quite see the final pattern for my life?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Why or what now?

6. Do I really acknowledge and accept that moving forward in life means going through testing times and trials that will develop more character and resiliency in me?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Why or what now?

7. Will I commit to being gritty while being sandpapered during these testing times?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Why or what now?

8. Do I acknowledge that getting lucky in life means that I need to prepare, over and over again?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Why or what now?

9. Do I have an idea as to how to prepare right now?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Why or what now?

10. Am I getting good advice (counsel) from friends, family, and others?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Why or what now?

11. When things get foggy or life starts pushing back (friction), am I willing to stand and persevere rather than collapse and give up?
- Yes
 - No
 - Why or what now?
12. Do I want to get into a flow state with myself, God, and perhaps apply with a team or another person? Am I prepared for the selflessness this entails?
- Yes
 - No
 - Why or what now?
13. Am I willing to commit to applying *The Formula* over many years to help get me into a state of flow and maturity in my life?
- Yes
 - No
 - Why or what now?
14. Is there anything preventing me from starting right now? What is it?
- Yes
 - No
 - Why or what now?
15. Anything in life involves a process. Can I trust this process and just follow it?
- Yes
 - No
 - Why or what now?

Youth Group/Small Group Discussion Questions

1. Religion
 - a. Why do so many youths and their parents believe there is more than one true religion?
 - b. Why do most youths not associate with Christianity?
 - c. What does this mean for Christianity today and in the future?
 - d. Is there anything we should be doing now to change how Christianity acts or speaks to embrace this new reality?
 - e. How will Christianity stay relevant?
 - f. Are we reading the Bible regularly? How are we reading the Bible?
2. God's Formulas
 - a. What are God's formulas for living not only a successful life but a life meaningful to both us and Him?
 - b. What do we think about this idea of God's FIRST will for our lives, transformation?
 - c. How do we observe and measure transformation in our lives?
 - d. Would anyone like to share an example or experience of how they practiced a value or transformed into someone better than they were previously?
 - e. Is transformation deliberate, or does it just happen to us?

- f. Do we believe that it's God working inside us to know His will?
 - g. Does anyone have an example of connecting your emotions and mind to the will of God for your life?
 - h. Do we really have faith? Share examples of when you did have faith and when you didn't. What did you learn from it?
3. Trials
- a. When we go through trials, does it mean we're being "punished" by God?
 - b. If trials are natural, why do we hate them so much?
 - c. Do we really believe that there can be no gain without pain?
 - d. What does "no pain, no gain" look like in your life right now?
 - e. What do we think about this idea of *sandpapering* in our life? Does it ever stop?
 - f. Do we think God moves things around in our lives like a chessboard? What are some examples?
 - g. What does this idea of *resilience* mean to you? It's not a word we toss around regularly. Why?
 - h. Are you in a state of grim or grit? Talk about it. How do we get from grim to grit?

4. Preparation

- a. Do we believe God helps those who help themselves?
- b. Why do so many people think this is the overarching meaning of the Bible?
- c. What does it really mean that “faith without works is dead,” and how does this apply to God helping those who help themselves?
- d. What do we think about luck? What role does it play in our lives? Can we make ourselves more lucky?
- e. Is being a YES person a good thing?
- f. What are we saying YES or NO to right now, and why?
- g. Should we watch the movie *Yes Man* together?
- h. What do we actually do to prepare ourselves in life?
- i. How deliberate does preparation need to be?
- j. How do we know where and how to prepare?

5. Flow

- a. What does it mean to flow around obstacles like water flows around a rock? Share examples.
- b. Do we believe that life happens like light travels, as one long wave with its ups and downs? Why is life like light?
- c. What do we think about this idea of *universal principles*? Are there universal principles that apply universally?

- d. Does it make sense that, since God created the universe, He left His immutable handprint on everything in the universe, from people to music/arts to science?
- e. How do we leverage this universal principle to get closer to God?
- f. What does it mean to “get into flow with ourselves”?
- g. How do we get into flow with God, and what does this require of us on a daily basis?
- h. Can we be in flow with God with sin in our lives? What sins matter and what don't?
- i. Let's review each principle of flow in depth and discuss it. Why is flow considered to be an advanced concept that requires maturity to achieve?
- j. Has anyone ever been in flow?
- k. Why would we want to be in flow with another person, and who?
- l. If we can't get into flow with ourselves, God, or another person or team, is this a bad thing?
- m. Has anyone connected the dots in their lives and perceived how God created a pattern for them?
- n. How do we recognize the patterns God uses in our lives?

6. Fog and Friction

- a. Discuss a period in your life when you were confused or overwhelmed. Share the little details. What led up to it, and how did you get through it?
- b. Discuss a period in your life when you felt “everything that could go wrong did go wrong.”
- c. Why does God appear to make life so hard? Why can’t it be easier?
- d. Humans try to make life as easy as possible and avoid fog and friction. What are some examples of how we try to make things easy, especially in our relationships, and to avoid pain?
- e. When we make things easier or stay where we are to avoid pain, are we undercutting God in our lives?
- f. Discuss a period in your life when you intentionally chose to make your life more difficult to achieve a goal or do what you thought was God’s will.
- g. What does it mean to STAND in your life? Share examples.
- h. Why does God say that, if you are double-minded, don’t expect anything from Him?
- i. Let’s discuss the difference between “good” and “not-so-good” counselors in our lives. Who are the counselors we routinely listen to, and why?
- j. What are the traits of good versus bad counselors?

- k. What do we do when we find ourselves listening to poor counsel? What if it's a family member or close friend?
- l. We risk letting them down if we don't follow their advice. Now what?

7. Gratitude

- a. Why is having an attitude of gratitude so important?
- b. Do we believe that gratitude is the secret to happiness?
- c. How do we show gratitude and God even if we're unhappy with them?
- d. Discuss the idea of "the glass being half empty or half full." How do you measure this in your life? What can you do to change the level of water in your life's glass?
- f. Why is perception so important in life? How do we change the way we perceive or look at things?
- g. Is it true that everything happens for a reason?
- h. Discuss why anger and resentment are the opposites of gratitude. Share examples.
- i. How does gratitude draw God and others closer to you?
- j. How can you be temporarily angry at God or someone yet stay in an attitude of gratitude?

8. Process

- a. Is it true that humans tend to take simple things in life and make them hard? What are examples from your life?
- b. How are processes important in life?
- c. Do we ever do anything without a process? Do we recognize processes in our lives?
- d. Discuss examples of when you successfully completed a process or didn't. Get deep here.
- e. Do we believe that knowing and doing God's will in our lives is a process? How is it a process?
- f. What happens if we get the process wrong? Does this mean we'll fail to do God's will?
- g. Does anyone want to tinker with *The Formula* for knowing God's will? What processes seem right, wrong, or missed?
- h. What prevents you from doing God's will? Have you ever been scared by what God told you to do?
- i. How do we start doing more of God's will RIGHT NOW AT THIS MOMENT? Write something down right now that God is telling you to do.
- j. How can we help each other be accountable for doing God's will, both His FIRST and SECOND wills?
- k. Do we have accountability partners in our lives? How much do we share with them? If you don't have an accountability partner, start assigning them.

Contact Info

$$f(x) = (\text{Together})^3$$

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If you'd like more resources for your journey discovering God's Will, please visit ...

whatisgodswill.com