

P R O P O S A L

THE POWER TO CHANGE TODAY!

21 Secrets To Creating An Invincible Spirit And A Satisfied Life

By Gregory Dickow

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"That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil — this is the gift of God."

-Ecclesiastes 3:12-14-

The telling words of Mick Jagger echo the feelings of countless people: "I can't get no satisfaction-- though I try, and I try, and I try..."

How many of us go through our days feeling *dissatisfied*--sometimes even believing that our lives have little purpose or meaning?

Perhaps money, time, or love seem to be in short supply. Maybe we don't have the body we'd like, the job of our dreams, the ideal mate, or the perfect circle of friends.

Or perhaps we're facing a serious health challenge, a family crisis, or battling demons of the past.

So consumed are we by all this, our days may be filled with stress, worry, frustration, and even despair.

What faith can give us the strength to prevail? And how can we break free from emotional and spiritual discontentment?

In *The Power To Change Today*, **PASTOR GREGORY DICKOW**, founder of the popular Chicago-based Life Changers International Church, makes his literary debut with an inspirational book offering 21 secrets to creating an invincible spirit and a satisfied life.

Both spirit-centered and practical in its distinctive reflections on life, this 220-page book offers a compelling vision for conquering negativity and achieving breakthroughs towards successful living, gratifying relationships, vibrant health, creative purpose, and a deep connection to God.

The obstacle to such fulfillment, he believes, has little to do with external conditions.

"The real battle people face is the one between their ears," says the Pastor, whose Christian-based message blends real-life stories, a dynamic interpretation of the Bible, and a philosophy uniquely his own.

"What you think and the way you think will determine the quality of your life. Your mindset frames your attitudes, which determine your decisions, which lead to your actions, and establish your habits, your character, and ultimately your

destiny. I always say: *'Think Right, Live Right.'* So the first step in creating a happier life is winning the battle of the mind!"

Among its lessons, *The Power To Change Today* reveals the keys to mastering emotions, skillful decision-making, taking charge of your future, seeing the "invisible," vanquishing destructive thoughts, conquering bad habits, and eradicating stress forever.

Direct and emotional in its narrative, *The Power To Change Today* is much more than a typical self-help book. It not only includes a full discussion of spiritual and common-sense wisdom, but also reveals the dramatic story of Gregory Dickow's personal journey--his painful early years, the crisis of faith in his teens, and the miracle conversion that followed, leading to his emergence as an original thinker and spiritual leader.

In the tradition of Joel Osteen's *Your Best Life Now* and Rick Warren's *The Purpose-Driven Life*, *The Power To Change Today* offers inspired, user-friendly techniques for achieving a life filled with passion, power, and the ability to "live on purpose."

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A uniquely magnetic speaker, Pastor Dickow has been described by CNN's Larry King as "the man" in Chicago, a rising evangelical star who reaches millions through his syndicated TV show, CHANGING YOUR LIFE, and daily live radio broadcast, ASK THE PASTOR. In these programs, and in his weekly sermons and live WebCasts, the 42-year-old father of five communicates spiritual principles in a warm, relaxed style--disarming listeners with his down-to-earth storytelling, introspection, wit, and fresh approach to Scripture.

Whether speaking to a congregation of several thousand in back-to-back Sunday services at his main church campus--a \$30 million complex set on 30 acres in Hoffman Estates, Illinois--or to an audience of millions in his TV ministry, Gregory Dickow consistently delivers a message punctuated with empathy, wit, and a deep understanding of human nature.

Discussing such subjects as relationships, finances, faith, death, addiction, divorce, suffering, healing, sexuality, and parenting, the Pastor's perspective on our spiritual selves is unique:

- **On Change:** *"The mistake religion makes is trying to tame people to its rules from the outside in. Believe me, you can take a pig and clean him up, put a tuxedo on him, curl his little pigtail, and put cologne on him--but as soon as he finds mud, he's going to jump right into it because he's still a pig! People change from the inside out--not*

the reverse."

- **On Feelings:** *"A feeling is not a fact. Yet we 'fall in love' and become attached to fear-based emotions. You know what I mean--feeling hurt, resentful, sorry for ourselves, insulted or angry. These feelings easily deceive us and lead to bad decisions. I advise you to FALL OUT OF LOVE WITH YOUR FEELINGS. Don't stay married to them. Get a divorce. I'll show you how."*
- **On Seeking Validation:** *"We live in a performance-oriented society where people are constantly vying for attention and approval. Why else do teenage girls lose their virginity so easily? They long for validation and the affection of a man--to tell them that they're beautiful and loved--even if the guy doesn't mean it. You are loved unconditionally because God calls you His child. Until you know that, the search for affirmation is a winding, endless road leading you far from your true home."*
- **On Being Satisfied:** *"How many people believe that 'IF ONLY I had the perfect job, mate, or enough money' then I'd be happy. But in a study of lottery winners, the overwhelming majority of them were no happier than before. The "right" job, marriage, or circumstance cannot guarantee a satisfied life. The answer is found in these simple yet profound words of the Bible: "Show us The Father" that is all we ask. Then we shall be satisfied."*
- **On infidelity, to a woman facing the betrayal of her husband:** *"I'd pray for him to get ants in his bed, to be strung by a nest of bees. Just kidding! Release revenge. See him as you loved him first. Forgive him. And if that doesn't do it--call your lawyer."*
- **On Prayer:** *"Try writing a letter to the President and see what happens. I wouldn't hold my breath for a reply. But write a letter to God and you'll get a definite answer. Before you even pick up your pen, God has already written you back, for the Bible is a book of love letters directly from Him. That's how I think of it."*
- **On Feeling Inferior:** *"I've often said royalty destroys inferiority. God is the King of the Universe--and once you know you're his child (a prince or a princess)--you no longer walk timidly with fear, or compare yourself to others. You're free to reign over life rather than be ruled by it, for you have dominion over your body, your emotions, and your decisions. That's real freedom."*
- **On Facing The Unknown:** *"Don't be afraid of the dark. I'm talking about times when we feel the darkness of uncertainty, times when God's presence seems miles away. I like the story about the little boy who is told by his Mom to go outside to get a broom. 'Mama, I don't want to go out there. It's dark.' She smiles: 'You don't have to be afraid of the dark, darling. Jesus is out there and He'll protect you.' The hesitant boy thinks for a minute, cracks open the door, peers out into the darkness, and yells: 'Jesus, if you're out there, would you hand me the broom!?' We need to learn to trust God in time of uncertainty. He can and will lead us out of the dark into the light."*
- **On Achieving Anything:** *"If you could take it or leave it--plan on leavin' it! You've got to want it or it isn't going to happen. Persistence is everything."*

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Combining astute observation with skillful use of metaphors and imagery, Pastor Dickow's trademark message is always delivered with what he terms a *practical takeaway*.

"If you look at a Duncan Hines chocolate cake mix, there's always the picture of that finished cake on the front of the box. It looks mouthwateringly delicious. But it's only when you turn the box over that you find the directions about how to make the cake. That's me. I'm the back of the box guy. I tell you the steps needed to produce what's on the front. So whether it's answered prayer, a happier home, a successful future, or peace of mind you're after, I can actually show you a recipe to get you there."

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About the Author: Gregory Dickow

"As a counselor, teacher, and pastor, if there's one thing I could give you--it's the knowledge that YOU ARE LOVED. This is the good news, the gospel, the heart and soul of all 21 secrets to an invincible spirit and a satisfied life."

Pastor Gregory Dickow, for Church, is the popular host of a ministry that reaches 625 million people, dubbed "the man" by CNN's *Ask The Pastor*--a highly-rated weekly, which gives callers the most personal way, challenge and empower themselves to become

A native of Detroit, Michigan, after attending a Bible study in his youth. His spiritual journey he immersed himself in God's Word, spent summers on the mission and training young men and

Pastor Dickow and his wife, in 1993. From its modest start in Illinois, the non-denominational, ethnically-diverse congregation expansion of the church and embrace the needs of thousands

In the fall of 2004, Gregory Dickow new world headquarters in Illinois, located on 30 acres, incorporated Center, a 1,000 seat multipurpose, fully-equipped radio and TV



The \$30 million campus also houses the Valeo Academy, a dynamic day school from kindergarten through eighth grade. With Grace Dickow as Principal, the school focuses on an individualized approach to a classic curriculum, educating the next generation to walk in the character and power of God.

Gregory and Grace Dickow, married for 18 years, consider their five children the greatest reward of their lives.

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MARKETING & DEMOGRAPHICS

THE POWER TO CHANGE TODAY! is targeted directly to:

- a Christian based-audience, which in the U.S. today accounts for \$4 billion in annual sales of religious books and products
- a general Inspiration & Self-Help audience—a secondary market of 126 million Americans who annually spend \$580 million on self-improvement books.

TELEVISION AND RADIO: An established media presence, Pastor Gregory Dickow communicates spiritual principles in a warm, relaxed style--disarming listeners with his down-to-earth storytelling, introspection, wit, and fresh approach to Scripture. His TV and radio broadcasts are detailed below:

TV

- “Changing Your Life” reaches a potential 625 million viewers weekly
- Aired on Trinity Broadcast Network, Inspirational Network, DayStar
- Satellite Network.

- Also seen on The Church Channel, WACX-Orlando, WCLF-Clearwater, PAX-Chicago, WSFJ-Columbus, KVTN-Little Rock, KGEB-Tulsa.

RADIO

- “Ask The Pastor” is a 5-day-a-week live interactive program
- Aired in Chicago during prime drive-time, reaching up to 14 million
- 1.1 million Web Site hits monthly

INTERNET

- **1.1 million Web Site hits monthly**
- **Live interactive broadcasts of both TV and Radio programs**
- **Window Media and Real Player Capacity**
- **<http://www.gregorydickow.org>**

DEMOGRAPHICS: The demographic breakdown of Pastor Dickow’s TV audience by sex, age, ethnicity, and religious denomination:

Sex

- 77% female, 23% male

Age

- 10% 26-35
- 22% 36-45
- 34% is 46-55
- 34% 55+

Ethnicity

- 56% Caucasian
- 34% African American

Religious Denomination

- 23% from a non-denominational Charismatic background,
- 23% Baptist,
- 19% Pentecostal,
- 12% non-denominational Evangelical,
- 8% are Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran, and Episcopal
- 15% Other

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP: Distinguished as one of the largest racially diverse congregations in the nation. Life Changers International has approximately 8,000 active members attending three back-to-back Sunday services in Hoffman Estates, Illinois. The demographic breakdown of church membership is as follows:

- 60% Caucasian
- 30% African-American
- 10% Hispanic / Asian
- 55% female; 45% male

CHURCH CAMPUS: Situated alongside I-90, Chicago’s Northwest Tollway, Life Changers Church includes:

- \$30 million, 160,000 square-foot complex located on 30 acres
- 3,000-seat sanctuary
- 400-seat World Prayer Center
- 1,000-seat multipurpose gymnasium
- Leadership training center
- Radio studio
- TV broadcast center
- Valeo Academy, a day school from kindergarten through eighth grade

VIDEO & AUDIO MEDIA:

Through Gregory Dickow Ministries, thousands of CD's and DVD's are distributed worldwide, many of them also available on the ministry's website.

Breaking the Power of Inferiority
What to Do When You Feel Like Giving Up
The Power to Change Anything
Financial Freedom: Strategies for a Blessed Life
Security in an Insecure World
How You Can Hear the Voice of God Today
Mastering Your Emotions
Power Attitudes
Framing Your World with Your Words
How to Be Happy Again
What's Stopping My Harvest?
What To Do When Heaven Seems Silent
Mastering Your Money
School of Prosperity
Flesh, You're Fired
Lord, What's Taking So Long?
How to Handle Setbacks, Letdowns & Disappointment
Walking in the Spirit
Absolute Freedom from Anger
How to Pray and Get Results
Love Thyself
Winning the Battle of Your Mind
The Heart of Thankfulness: The Gateway to God's Blessings
The God of a Second Chance
The Blessed Home & Family
Successful Parenting
Living the Blessed Life
Discover the Treasure in You
Biblical Manhood
Finding God's Purpose & Fulfilling It
Simple Secrets to Unlocking Real Wealth
Honor: The Key to Heaven's Unlimited Supply
Not Guilty
Conquering Stress Forever
Fear Not
The Purifying Process of the Holy Spirit
Healing the Father Fracture
Falling Out of Love with Your Feelings

The Root to a Prosperous Life: A Firm Foundation for Future Success
Overcoming the Trials of Life
Bringing Out the Greatness in You
Holy Emotions!
Why Wait?
Don't Be Afraid of the Dark
Kingdom Living
Living Life to the Full
Supernatural Success: You Cannot Fail!
When You Need a Harvest
When God Shows Up: What to Do When You Need a Miracle
Relationships: How To Make Them Work
Building Your Marriage God's Way
Rebuilding Broken Lives
The Force of Love
Taking Charge of Your Family's Future
No More Unanswered Prayers
Righteousness: The Sleeping Giant Within You

TABLE OF CONTENTS OUTLINE

The Power To Change Your Life Today! is organized into four major sections, each containing five secrets--plus an Introduction and an Epilogue, which features Secret #21.

Introduction **A Reason to Live: An Awakening To Purpose**

PART I: THE SOURCE OF TRUE POWER

- SECRET #1: BE-LOVED
- SECRET #2: BELIEVE
- SECRET #3: BE EXPECTANT
- SECRET #4: BELONG
- SECRET #5: BE STILL

PART II: FROM THE INSIDE OUT

- SECRET #6: KNOW YOURSELF
- SECRET #7: LOVE YOURSELF
- SECRET # 8: CONQUER YOURSELF (Forgive Yourself)
- SECRET #9: FALL OUT OF LOVE WITH YOUR FEELINGS
- SECRET #10: DISCOVER THE GREATNESS IN YOU

PART III: FRAMING YOUR WORLD

- SECRET #11: TALK TO THE PROBLEM—NOT ABOUT IT
- SECRET #12: PLANT A SEED
- SECRET #13: BE ON THE GIVING SIDE/BE A BLESSING (forgiveness)
- SECRET #14: FIND YOUR CALLING IN YOUR CONQUERING
- SECRET #15: BE DEFINITE (Grateful)

PART IV: SMILING AT THE FUTURE

- SECRET #16: SEE THE INVISIBLE
- SECRET #17: LEAVE YOUR COUNTRY
- SECRET #18: DON'T BE AFRAID OF THE DARK
- SECRET #19: EXPECT ANOTHER CHANCE
- SECRET #20: TAKE A SECOND LOOK

Epilogue

- SECRET #21: SELAH

-SAMPLE CHAPTER- A REASON TO LIVE

-An Awakening To Purpose-

"Many of us spend our whole lives running from feeling--with the mistaken belief that you cannot bear the pain. But you have already borne the pain. What you have not done is feel all you are beyond that pain."

-Khalil Gibran-

When I was a little boy, I decided to run away from home.

I guess some people might view that as just a daydream that every kid has from time to time. But in my case, it was a reality. I *needed* to get away.

And I was only eight years old! The sadness I felt inside was just too much for

me to bear. And I didn't know what to do with that pain.

I was trapped in what I now think of as an emotional storm. Anger erupted like lightning; fear chilled our hearts; and the tense atmosphere was a constant threat that hovered over us like a storm cloud.

To say that tempers flew *high* at our house, that there was little laughter or love, is an understatement. The fighting was *intense*. My mother, who was born in Iraq, was violently expressive throughout our entire childhood--verbally abusive--belittling and badgering my sister and me and browbeating my father, using the worst cuss words you can imagine. I learned them all at an early age.

When traveling together in the car, my mother would curse and scream at all of us. For what? About what? I don't really know. My brother and sister would later tell me that the yelling and screaming would continue late into the night, even after I was asleep.

Making matters worse, our very dysfunctional Middle Eastern household had an even larger problem--the absence of any physical tenderness or care. I can't remember ever being embraced by my parents. Hugging, kissing, and the words "I love you" were as foreign to our house as Russian or Chinese. And I really can't explain this lack of affection, though I know how much I desperately longed for it.

Maybe it was because I was the baby--the youngest of three born in quick succession--and therefore a burden to my mother. She must have been exhausted taking care of us all and trying to succeed in business. I can only imagine the pain that must have been stored up inside her--the loneliness and abuse she must have endured to behave the way she did.

But analysis didn't matter back then. I felt unloved, rejected, and more than anything--lonely, primarily because I *was* alone. Both of my parents worked late--often until nine or ten-o'clock. We'd come home from school to an empty house, fix ourselves a snack, and later make our own dinner. Sure my siblings were around, but that's not what fills up a little kid's heart and need for belonging. It's the attentive love from a parent that makes all the difference.

By the time my parents noticed how sullen and withdrawn I was, I resented them even talking to me. As I think back on it, there was probably a window of opportunity for them to touch me, reach out, and give me a sense of value. But when that didn't happen, I just shut down completely.

How many of us have felt cut off and disconnected from our own families--not physically alone but isolated, not ignored but alienated? For me, the depth of

loneliness I felt was an aching sense of being *shut out* from love--trapped in an angry house with no ally.

I realize that there are people out there who experience far worse in their lives--childhood sexual abuse, physical illness, total abandonment, and every form of tragedy. Yet, growing up in an atmosphere devoid of love is its own form of deprivation and suffering. And the soul of every human being is fragile and needs nurturing. It brings to mind the telling words of Mother Teresa, that "loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty."

My father, though a clinical psychologist, was a passive man who didn't seem to have the insight or authority to deal with my mother's pain and inability to control herself. Nor did he protect us from this abuse. He himself was dominated by her--and I vowed that I would *never* allow myself to be controlled that way.

But as a boy, I had no choice about it. There was little but ugliness, blame, and disharmony at home. Although we came from a predominantly Islamic culture, we were actually raised Catholic. I had always had an awareness that there was a God, but I didn't know anything about the Bible. We were what you'd call C&E Catholics--we went to church on Christmas and Easter and that was about it. There was no true connection with God in my life, no example of love at home to support a Christian sense of faith and hope.

I'm embarrassed to say that I hated my siblings--and vice-versa. We were always at each other's throats. Why? First of all, I hated them because I hated myself--and whatever we feel inside shows up in our disposition toward others. Also, because I saw my parents as weak, angry, and distant, I had little respect for them, which was reflected in my lack of respect for my siblings. And because my brother and sister got along better with each other than with me, my animosity toward them only increased.

I always say that the proof of love is generosity; while the absence of it results in selfishness. And you can only give what you have--which in my case was hatred. And give it I did! All three of us fought to get our own way and voice our needs in an aggressive, mean-spirited way. James Chapter 3 reveals this truth as it says, "What is the source of quarrels and fighting among you? Seeking your own desires."

So my older brother would chase and beat me; and my sister and I would pass one another in the hallways at school and glare at each other with disdain.

Although I started out as a tenderhearted little boy, I learned very quickly that I

needed to protect myself. I began to build a shell around me that nothing could penetrate. In contrast to my mother's emotional outbursts, I became *unemotional*, shy, detached and unexpressive. While she was domineering-controlling and judgmental--I was timid and felt almost invisible, disappearing into the background. I felt there was something innately wrong with me, which is a horrible thing for any kid to feel. I was defective and painfully self-conscious. And I felt *observed but not approved of*--watched but not accepted. To be that introspective, at such a young age is a burden that no one should carry.

And so it is that my emotional make-up was a result of that affection-starved environment. As you'll see later, our emotions can and do determine the outcomes of our lives; and at this point in my life, dark emotions were clearly shaping my future.

Here I am today, a pastor, a public speaker, but back then I was so shy that I could hardly say a word. I just pushed down all my pain until that day I finally decided to run away.

My plan was to jump out the bedroom window and leap about ten feet to the ground. I figured I could absorb the impact and make my escape. Sure I had no money, no knowledge of life beyond our subdivision, but I didn't care. I was a stranger in my own house, so why *not* run away?

Then something stung my heart--the obvious. And it hurt me, for as I packed my little bag with a couple of T-shirts and underwear, I suddenly realized...

I had nowhere to go.

* * * * *

Have you ever felt like that?

You wanted to escape...but didn't know what to do.

Perhaps you've been in a relationship or a job situation that was intolerable, that you really wanted to escape. But you were afraid or didn't know how. At that time in my young life, I couldn't get away. So without realizing it, I learned how to stuff it all down into my little heart and just cope with it.

How many of us have felt so lost or crushed or sad that all we could do was push down our pain and fear? A lot of people don't dig down inside their hearts to fix that pain. Instead, they remain broken, damaged, and wounded.

But as Jesus said in Luke 4: "The Spirit of the Lord has anointed me to preach the

Gospel to the poor and to heal the brokenhearted, to set at liberty those who are bruised.” It would be quite some time before His anointing would break through the despair and allow my healing to begin, for what happened in my home made no sense to me. But at the time, a sad and sick heart was being born.

And though I never did run away, I did soon find a way to escape my pain.

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By the time I was ten, I was a fearful, insecure little kid. And more than anything--I was an outcast.

For starters, I was taunted with crude remarks about my name--*Dickow*. Of course, most of us are teased about *something* during the time we're growing up. But you're not much of a target with the name *Smith* or *Jones*. With my name, considering the anatomical connotation in it, you can only imagine the possibilities!

So I hated the name. And I hated myself--beginning with my looks. I had no front teeth during most of the time I was growing up. It started in the third grade, when one of my front teeth was knocked out on a teeter-totter. After that, I was taken to an incompetent orthodontist who advised my parents to extract the adjacent, healthy tooth and move the eye teeth over with braces to fill in the space.

Two years later, they took the braces off my teeth. The remaining teeth went back to their original positions--and I wound up with a gap in the middle of my mouth, which remained until twelfth grade. (Until *twelfth* grade!) It was the worst. There I was, a dark-skinned Middle-Eastern kid in an “all-white” school in Detroit with no front teeth, a prominent nose, and big lips. I was a fearful, skinny kid, easily picked on and often threatened. Kids would pass me in the hall and shout out insults and my self-consciousness just grew.

We all know that every kid wants to find friends and fit in--and part of succeeding at that is *blending* in, being like everybody else. And it's an unfortunate reality that we get some of our value from *how we look and perform*. Years later, I would teach that there's human love--and divine love. Human love is the *love of the lovely*. The more beautiful you are, the more desirable. But divine love is God's love--having value and beauty no matter how you look or act. And there was nothing divine happening at our school.

Also, in 1980, at the time of the Iranian hostage crisis, because of our family's ethnic background, we were lumped together in people's minds with TERRORISTS! And though I was Iraqi rather than Iranian, nobody distinguished between the two. I was painfully aware of the stares and whispers and felt paralyzed by what I

imagined people thought of me--which was probably worse than the reality of it. This only increased the hatred I felt for my nationality and family. And though my parents wanted me to learn our native language, I never did.

Let's just say that, for all these reasons, I despised myself. In fact, I can remember looking into the mirror when I was in eighth grade and saying out loud "I *hate* you!" as I'd hit myself across the face with my fist.

It was only a matter of time before I began acting out this self-hatred toward others. Although I was shy and introverted, I was seething inside. So the anguish and humiliation I felt began expressing itself in anger, cruelty, and harshness toward others, particularly toward my brother and sister. Even a game of Monopoly or Go Fish would turn into all-out war. And since my parents were out of the house at work, we were completely unsupervised and would be screaming, yelling, and hitting each other.

I can now see that all this rage was a reflection of the "dis-ease" evident in our household, which resulted in intense self-hatred. To say I had no self-worth is an understatement. I felt I didn't have *anything* going for me. My sense of confidence wasn't just at the bottom of the barrel; it was *underneath* the bottom.

Yet, I had a good memory and was smart enough to slide by without even applying myself much--so I got all A's and B's in school. How does an outcast kid with no confidence or self-esteem manage to get such good grades? Fear! I already felt like a loser--so the idea of failing at school was unthinkable. I had to maintain some sort of pride.

Besides keeping up my grades, I was also athletic--but too insecure to enroll in any organized sport until tenth grade. That's when I tried out for football. But on the first day of practice, I remember the coach coming up to the kid right next to me, saying: "You look great out there, fantastic agility!" But he walked right past me like I was the water boy. Whatever! I thought, 'maybe I'll just pull a joint out of my pocket and start passing it around to everyone.' I'd get his attention that way! In truth, this was yet another crushing blow to my already non-existent self-worth. Just one word of encouragement or affirmation would have kept me coming back. But that was the end for me. Besides, I thought playing football would interrupt my drug life.

Yes, that was my escape route.

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With a control-freak mother and all that abuse at school, it was no surprise that I

gravitated toward the “troublemakers,” other outcasts like me. We'd escape down to the creek near our house and smoke, drink, and taunt the neighbors with curses and vulgarity--just to prove we were cool. Can you say JD?--Juvenile delinquent.--and I was fast becoming one.

It was in ninth grade when I started experimenting with drugs--mostly marijuana and alcohol. And how ironic that these drugs actually elicit paranoia and only accentuate fears and insecurities. But, for me at least, I had found some way to “check out.” Marijuana became *the* great escape from all the pain, fear, and insecurity I'd felt. It was a high that seemed to last forever--and it was also one of my only ways of making friends. I smoked it by myself, with my brother (which actually gave us something in common, and we stopped fighting when we were high), and with a few of my relatives--so it was a family affair. My parents knew about the smoking to some degree, but they were distant and didn't have a clue about what to do with me, so there was no discipline at home.

While some kids were into varsity sports, the school newspaper, and glee club, my hobby was collecting smoking paraphernalia--pipes, bongos, and rolling papers! My only “extra-curriculars” were smoking and drinking--getting stoned, stupid drunk, and acting crazy. Let's just say you won't find my name in the yearbook under “most likely to succeed.” Perhaps if there had been a section “most likely to die stupid” I would have made it.

By the time I was a junior in high school, I was what many would consider, clinically speaking, an alcoholic. I was drinking daily, blacking out, and coming home at lunchtime just to get drunk. I'd then go back to school inebriated. How did I pull this off? Since I had an hour for lunch and nobody was ever home--I could just slip away, driving back and forth from school in my 1970 Pontiac Catalina “muscle” car, which I bought for \$300!

Where did the money come from? Ironically, I always had a job. Even though I was drinking, I couldn't just wither up and die--and felt driven to succeed at *something*. I started as a dishwasher at fifteen, then became a cook, and was soon running an entire kitchen as assistant to the chef at a country club.

My motivation was to make my own money and break free from being dependent on my parents. By working, I had found a way to detach--to not need anyone. And working kept me away from the storm at home. It also gave me a temporary feeling of importance, of being grown up, which set me apart from the other kids at school who were still reliant on their parents. Now I had enough

money to stay high and try to entertain the ladies, though I garnered little interest! Needless to say, as my drug use continued, my grades in school began to erode, for my schedule was hardly conducive for studying.

Most nights, I'd work until 1 a.m., then, on weekends and summers, I'd go out and get high, and come home at 4 a.m. I was fast developing a new persona--the cool, macho guy holding a cigarette (or a joint) in one hand and a beer in the other. Picture this: I had long hair past my shoulders, wore a leather jacket and sunglasses, and had no front teeth! Talk about Mr. Macho. Yeah, right.

Though it was around 1980, I was into dark music of the 60's and 70's--Black Sabbath, The Who, Led Zeppelin, and the Beatles' White Album--drug music. I'd blast the sound way up and could get high just *listening* to "Revolution Number 9" [from The White Album]--as if I had smoked three or four joints. That's how susceptible I was to the spiritual world of mysticism and to mind-altering states.

By this point, I was known as a druggie, partier, and burnout--and those were my good points. I had zero confidence and no knowledge of God's love.

Clearly, I was headed toward an early grave or disaster. That was my future.

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THE DARKEST DAY

"Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters."

-Genesis 1:2-

When I was almost sixteen, something horrific happened. It was a tragic event, so unexpected and brutal, that it led me to deep sadness and searching. But it was also a sign that things were about to change. The Holy Spirit was hovering over my life even as darkness filled my heart.

On the first day of school of my junior year, I found out that one of my best friends, Randy, had committed suicide. His Mom called at 3 a.m. that night looking

for him, only to later find out that he had shot himself. He was found in a ditch next to his father's shotgun. He had blown his head off. I had just spoken with him the day before.

All my life I'd been such an unemotional person, but I felt Randy's death in the core of my being. I just wept. It was the first time I can remember crying as a teenager. A few days later, when I was getting drunk at a weekend party with some of Randy's friends, one of the guys said, "Wow, that Randy really had balls to take his own life." I felt the well of emotion rising up inside me again, was close to sobbing, but I held it back, not wanting to break down in front of anyone. I thought to myself, "I don't have the guts to take my life, but I don't want to live either."

Randy's suicide was my first experience with death--and the grief I felt was beyond any pain I'd known. No one in my family, *nobody* at all in my world, had ever died, much less someone my own age. And I couldn't *understand* it. Nor was there anyone in my world to talk to about it. Here was this kid that seemed to have *everything*. He was handsome, popular, and athletic, and had a pretty girlfriend. He seemed to have it *all* going for him. And here I was a lonely, rejected, dejected kid with nothing going for me. I figured if he could kill himself at fifteen, what's going to stop me from doing the same thing? I wasn't far from being the next on the list.

Why? Because I had no reason to live.

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A GLIMMER OF HOPE

"When it is dark enough, you can see the stars."

-Charles A. Beard-

American historian

(1874-1948)

Randy's death set into motion a hunger inside me to find *something*...though I didn't know what it was. It was more than a year later before I even understood what was happening to me.

But I knew that there was something *missing* in my life that would give me a *purpose*. And I can see now that a seed had been planted, that Randy's death was a catalyst for an awakening.

The Bible says in John 12:24 that when a grain of wheat falls to the ground and

dies, it brings forth much fruit. So as crazy as it sounds, it's almost like Randy's death began to bear fruit in my own life.

But not right away. The next year was one long party to dull the pain--drinking and doing drugs, while trying to find friends, get girls, and be happy--anything I could do to fill up the emptiness inside of me.

Then one night, just before my senior year, a coworker at the country club, Rich, confronted me as we walked outside from the kitchen to the garbage dumpster.

Rich had always been different from any of the other guys I was hanging out with. He was cool, yet he'd talk about Jesus and being "born again." That was the first time I'd ever heard that term.

I'll never forget what he said that night. "Greg, what are you going to do when Jesus returns and you've got that joint in your hand?" And I thought, "Oh, man, this is it, I'm going to go to hell. I know I am."

A few weeks later, Rich came up to me again and asked, "Man, why don't you come to a Bible study with me?"

I thought, "Which one of us is on drugs? Me or him?" But I was intrigued by the invitation, and for sure had nothing to lose. So I went.

There were about twenty people sitting around in a cozy family room, many of them in their twenties, sharing Scriptures from the Bible and singing. They weren't phony or strange. In fact, they seemed humble yet confident that they had "met" Jesus Christ and had a real relationship with him. I could see that they were genuine, kind, and warm--so different from anything I'd known.

However, I didn't think this was for me. I'd been happy to accommodate my friend Rich by attending the group, but I wanted to get out of there as soon as I could. I needed a smoke!

Afterward, as everyone was talking and having refreshments, I made my way to the door. Just then, the wife of the man who had led the Bible study stopped me: "Did you enjoy yourself, dear?" And I politely answered, "Ohhhh, yes! Thank you for having me." I was just out the door as she grabbed my arm. "Won't you just tell my husband that you enjoyed yourself?"

"Sure," I mumbled.

So I walked over to this gentleman and said, "Thanks for having me. I enjoyed the meeting."

And out of the blue, he grabbed my hand and asked: "Son, are you saved?"

"From what?" I thought.

I didn't know what it meant to be saved. And he opened up the Bible, turned to First John 1:9 and said: "You see right here. It says: 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'"

And I'm thinking, "I gotta go, man, I'm meeting my buddies for beer at the 7-Eleven. So can you speed this up?"

But in reality, I told him, "You don't know who I am or what I do. I could *never* be cleansed from all my sins."

"Oh, yeah, you could. All you have to do is pray right now."

My heart began to beat rapidly. I suddenly felt as if the world had stopped and all of Heaven and Hell were focused on me. I clearly remember being torn in two--one force pulling me forward to pray and open my heart to God, the other telling me: "Get to the 7-Eleven!" I actually heard a voice in my head tell me, "If you start praying with this man, you're turning your life over to the devil!"

I knew right then that this was a battle for my soul. And I could go either way. Let's think: *7-Eleven or heaven?*

The irony is that my life was already turned over to the devil--filled with fear, insecurity, and drugs. All this had such a stronghold over me that I could actually convince myself that receiving Jesus Christ as my Savior was a bad thing!

Time stood still. It seemed like forever. I didn't know if I should. So I said to this man, "No, I really don't want to pray because even if I accept Jesus into my life, I'll probably never be able to live up to it."

"You don't have to worry about that," he wisely responded. "Once you invite Him into your heart and into your life, *He'll give you the power to change.*"

This is where many people stumble. They think they first have to clean up their act, have it all together, and then they can serve God. But it's really the other way around. Once you surrender to Him, He changes *you*.

"All right," I told him. "I'm going to go ahead and try this. He then took me by the hand and led me in prayer. I was saved! That night, I had received Jesus Christ into my life. Everything was about to change.

On my way out the door, one of the women actually gave me her Bible as a gift. "Here, I want you to have it." And it was the first Bible I'd ever owned.

I took it with me in the car that night as I headed over to the 7-Eleven to buy beer and meet my drinking buddies. (I guess not everything was going to change, yet.) "Hey, guess where *I* was tonight? You'll never believe it." I shocked them all when I pulled out the Bible and held it up. "I was at a Bible study! Tonight I got saved."

I didn't even know what being saved fully meant, but I was uncharacteristically bold and didn't care what they thought. Drunk as I was about to get, that was the night that I became an evangelist! And although my life didn't change overnight, something supernatural had happened to me.

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Was being invited to that Bible study fate, destiny, or coincidence? I'd say it was all three of those things and more. It was the providential hand of God, divine intervention. And it was God's mercy too--because that night I could just as easily have gotten so drunk that I crashed my car--and died, or killed someone else.

This was my turning point--dramatic and real. If God could do this in my life, he could do it in *anybody's* life. And it had all started with the death of my friend Randy. The grief for him had, in a strange way, opened something up in my heart that had been previously shut tight. As Leon Bloy, the French novelist and poet, wrote: "*There are places in the heart that do not yet exist; suffering has to enter for them to come to be.*" My heart was now open. And without quite knowing it yet, I'd found my reason to live.

FROM THE INSIDE OUT

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may...do the will of God."

-Romans 12:2-

Everything in my life didn't change at once. Not at all. I still had most of my bad habits and bad attitudes--and my leather jacket! And I never went back to that Bible study. But I did start going to church on Sundays with my friend Rich. He had converted me--though unfortunately, in some ways, I had also helped convert him.

Rich and I would now *both* go out and get drunk. And then, in remorse afterward, we'd talk about how wrong it was and how we needed to change and start getting serious about serving God.

It was a predictable cycle: After a night of partying, I'd come home and open up the Bible and lose myself in it while still in that altered state of mind. The next night, I was off drinking again. And I went through this cycle for almost a year. I can see how torn I must have been. As it says in Matthew 26:41: "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

Somehow the pivotal experience of going to that Bible study had penetrated my *heart*--though my head and body were not yet cooperating.

I was not only still drinking and using drugs, but was also selling drugs on a

small scale, all the while trying to be a Christian. One time, I stole a vial of marijuana that, unbeknownst to me, had been laced with LSD or angel dust. My heart started beating so rapidly that I thought for sure I was going to die. I remember praying: "God, save me."

Another time, after getting drunk and high with a close friend, Kevin, we went over to a young girl's house to "have fun," and wound up stealing things from her house, like flashlights (because her father was a fireman) and steaks (because we were chefs and into food.) We were just stupid! Trying to make our escape, we were pulled over by an overzealous police officer, a Barney Fife, who through his brilliant investigatory skill concluded that he had in his clutches not two teenage punks but Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid.

We were arrested. My father came to get me at the police station and we later worked out a deal with the judge, who put me on a one-year probation. She warned that if I committed *even the smallest offense* during that time, she'd reopen the case and I'd be tried for larceny.

You may be wondering how a young man who had just been converted a year earlier could still be doing drugs and getting into all this trouble. But isn't that the case for so many of us? Maybe your challenge was not as extreme as mine. But we all struggle in living out this Christian life. Our spirits want to do one thing, but our minds and bodies lead us in another direction for many reasons, which we'll talk about later.

But even with the threat of a possible jail sentence, I still couldn't change. It wasn't long after that I was pulled over yet *again* by the police, this time for speeding. I'd just purchased two ounces of marijuana, and as the police cruiser came up behind me, I thought, "This is it. My life is over. I'm going to jail. I'm ruined." So I started praying again: "God, if You'll just get me out of this, I'll serve You. I'll surrender my life to You."

Haven't we all been there? We keep making mistakes and wanting God to rescue us. We've all prayed that prayer. "God just get me out of THIS one!"

By some miracle, the officer never found the marijuana, which was hidden in my thick down ski vest. He told me that he could have arrested me for speeding, reckless driving, passing in a right-hand lane, and drag racing. "But you know what, kid?" he said. "I don't know why, but I'm going to just give you a ticket for speeding and let you go."

I'd been rescued by God on a number of occasions--given one chance after

another--but that was the night I finally told myself: "This is IT! It's time to surrender my life to God." But even saying it, I hadn't surrendered quite yet. I kept hearing the words of the man from the Bible study: "God will change you." Clearly, I couldn't do it myself.

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Little by little, the Bible became my refuge--a retreat that I could escape to when I needed relief from my everyday life. By day, I was still the partier, drunk, and joker; but at night, I was the Bible student-- lying in bed, reading, immersing myself in the word of God.

And it was during this time that my desire to get high and drunk finally began to lift. Why? Because I was feeling stronger *without* it. I was filling up on something better--like an empty gas tank filling up on God's word. And His words were powerfully soothing and comforting to me.

In fact, there's a scripture in Proverbs 18 that says, "The words of your lips will satisfy me, Lord." And it was true. I found that God's words actually brought me the satisfaction that drugs, alcohol, and people never did. The more that His words got into my soul, the more they began to win over the battle between darkness and light.

One night I remember driving home with a beer in my hand, stopping the car in front our house, and saying out loud, "Lord, this is the last drink I'm ever going to have. It's over."

Then I poured it out. And that was the last drink I ever took--though I did continue smoking the marijuana. (Hey, I couldn't give everything up.) But within just a few months, I stopped smoking too. I was finally ready to surrender. Why? Because I felt a total dissatisfaction with my old way of life, my teenage crimes included.

I started going to church regularly and serving God, really living the Christian life that I had proclaimed. I became intrigued by the life of Jesus because He showed such mercy and compassion to broken people who had fallen and who were in sin, no different than me. I became much more tolerant and understanding of people and their pain, my own included.

I remember my sister Renee noticing the change in me. Keep in mind, this was someone who hated me and knew what I was like.

"Greg," she said, "whatever it is about your life that's different, I need it in my life!"

And so, she allowed me to share my faith with her. I told her about the Bible

study, about Jesus becoming the Lord and Savior of my life. It became a bond between us and transformed our relationship. The best part about it was that Renee got born again too!

I also began sharing my experience with all my party buddies. And just as soon as I did, many of my old "friends" predictably started to disassociate from me. But that was O.K. I just continued reading that Bible every night, not because I felt like I *had* to--but because I really wanted to grow. By this time, I had started college, entering an entirely new life, free from the chaos of my teens.

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How did all this happen? Like most change, it was a very slow process, like the entrance of spring, an awareness, gradual and so subtle, that I couldn't see it all at once. But one day, I looked around and my world was completely different. As it says in Proverbs 4:18: "The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn. It grows brighter and brighter until the full day."

Nobody could have forced me into this faith. I had to be ready for it.

And that's why I believe that **people change from the inside out**, not the reverse. As I've said, my way of living changed as I planted the seed of God's word inside of me. That seed contained a new power, passion, and purpose for my life. As it is written in Philippians 2:13: "For He is all the while in work in us, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

As I yielded to God's word, it gave Him *access* to change me. The mistake religion so often makes is trying to make people conform to its rules *from the outside in*. That's when religion can be powerless, self-righteous, and exclusive. I needed the power of God, not religious rules, to experience God's will for my life.

I always say, "You can take a pig and clean him up, put a tuxedo on him, curl his little pigtail, and put cologne on him--but he's still a pig. Just as soon as he finds mud, he's going to jump back in, because he hasn't changed on the inside."

My way of living changed because I now had a greater *cause*. I believe that some people live *be-cause* and others *by* cause. *Be-cause* is just existing. That was the old me. Yes, I was breathing. I was alive. But I was lost.

But now, I was starting to live *by* cause. I had a true connection to God and began to believe that I had *value*--that I was *worth* something. I'm not talking about being self-assured because you look good, or have advanced degrees, or money in the bank. I had none of those things. I'm talking about feeling a sense of genuine confidence and self-acceptance. I didn't get that worth from my parents, friends, or

school. It ultimately came from the love of GOD. And everything grew from that inner conviction.

In fact, I can now see that the transformation of my life on the *outside* was a total result of what was happening to me on the *inside*. So often, we believe that our happiness is dependent on changing external circumstances or changing someone *else*; but I learned that when I changed, things began to change around me. As I changed, so did my relationships.

As God's love filled me, I began reaching out to the many people in my life that I had hurt or mistreated, asking for forgiveness and making things right. As it says in Isaiah 1:18: "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

I can tell you that making amends to those you have hurt and forgiving those who have hurt you is the fast train to real freedom and peace.

First and foremost, this began with my immediate family. And I knew that reconciling with them was not dependent upon *them* changing. My parents, who separated and divorced when I was in my teens, eventually became intrigued by my Christian conversion, though they were, for a long time, perplexed and confused by it. In fact, we were estranged in every sense of the word for years.

But when they decided to remarry 12 years later, I was shocked when they called and asked me to perform their wedding ceremony. I can see now that this was their way of reconciling and reaching out to me. It was so ironic that although their parenting had left their children in a damaged condition before God's rescue, they were now turning to me to mend some of the pieces of their own lives. This truly touched me and I knew the healing had begun. They were married on the beach of Lake Michigan and their ceremony was really sweet.

Although our relationship today may not be perfect, few are; but the hurt, abuse, and pain are a thing of the past. And my parents could not be prouder of what has transpired in my life. They are now able to show my children some of the love they were unable to offer me. It only proves that as we change, we can have a profound effect on others.

I'm also happy to report that my brother is not chasing me with sharp instruments, or trying to kill me! In fact, now we're able to laugh at the things that we would have cried at before. And my sister is an active member of my church along with her husband and three children. So yes, we *can* change and it begins with a love that doesn't always come from a parent or a spouse-but rather from the One

who alone holds the key to our heart, our heavenly Father.

Perhaps for many of you reading this right now, there were times when you needed love and didn't get it, times when affection, support, and approval were in short supply, times when you felt self-conscious--*observed but not approved of*, just as I had as a boy. But by understanding and feeling God's love, the miracle of change will become a reality.

In my own case, I can tell you that while my spirit changed immediately, my mind and emotions remained in their wounded, ignorant condition for some time. The change was slow but steady--and only made possible by applying the word of God to my thought life. As it says in John 3: 2: "Beloved, I wish above all things that you would prosper and be in health even as your soul prospers."

And that's what I learned. **The conditions of our external life will always reflect the internal condition of our soul.** So gradually, as I fed my soul with God's word, my life was transformed, from the inside out.

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WHEN MIRACLES HAPPEN

"The whole course of human history may depend on a change of heart in one solitary and even humble individual- for it is in the solitary mind and soul of the individual that the battle between good and evil is waged and ultimately won or lost."

-M. Scott Peck-

As I look back at the emotional turmoil of my early years, I can see that surviving that pain was a significant accomplishment.

But survival wasn't enough. I had to be healed.

And so might you.

In all of our lives, to experience the love and fulfillment we deserve, there has to be a desire to *recover, to be set free* from pain and to *change* the negative attitudes and emotions running our lives, a subject we'll talk about in a later chapter.

So rather than remaining a prisoner of pain, we need to find the willingness to let go of it, to surrender it, to look over the horizon to a land of promise, confidence, and joy.

Just as the Children of Israel left Egypt--the bondage of their past--we must release pain and old ways of thinking in order to emerge from the wilderness. And it doesn't have to take forever. Remember, though the distance from the wilderness to the promised land was only an eleven-day journey, it took the Children of Israel forty years to get there!

Why? Because they were so stubborn and resistant to change-- and because, as

we'll see later, they didn't have faith in the love of God.

Aren't you ready to turn your "forty-year" delay into a eleven-day journey? In Deuteronomy 2:3, God says to the Children of Israel: "You have circled this mountain long enough."

And so it is that one of the most important ingredients for change is the desire to make it happen. And nothing's going to change until a "should" becomes a "must." In fact, even using the word "should" limits and prevents us from doing what we already know we need to do. And it all begins with the goal to be free.

It reminds me of one of my favorite stories from John Chapter 5 when Jesus comes upon the Bethesda pool in Jerusalem, where miracles would happen. An angel would come and stir the waters every so often and whoever got into the pool first would be healed from whatever their affliction was. Jesus came upon a man who had been lying by that pool for *thirty-eight years*, languishing in the same ill condition.

He asked him: "Do you want to be made well?"

And the man's response: "Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool."

His answer is an *excuse*. In thirty-eight years, couldn't he have developed some friendships with people who would have gladly helped him *into* the pool? Or, over all those years, couldn't he have crawled to the edge of it and waited for the stirring of waters, falling into it to be healed?

How many of us have languished by that same "pool," stuck, bored, unchallenged, or wallowing in old habits and negative attitudes? How many stagnate in jobs or relationships that no longer serve them? There are many things we *can* do if we really want to be healed.

The support of friends is important, yes. But change often happens not when we have the ear of loved ones--but when we make the *decision* to do what needs to be done.

Jesus didn't give the man sympathy. He told him: "Arise, take up thy bed and walk."

You know how the story ends. The man stopped making excuses, got up and was made whole.

That's when the miracles happen--when a noble thought becomes an action, when a good idea becomes a necessity. **You don't have to wait for somebody else to give you a miracle.** To paraphrase what God told Moses, in Exodus 4:4: "Put forth

thine hand, and take it by the tail." And so it is that you have in your own hands the power to change your life today, right now, but you've got to take it by the tail. To get you there, first we must discover...

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THE CONVICTION WE NEED MOST

"The supreme happiness in life is the conviction that we are loved."

-Victor Hugo-

Sometimes I wish my life hadn't happened the way it did. I wish I would never have felt that desperate loneliness and desire to run away from home. I wish I had developed skills of compassion and love through my parents' own example. And I wish I could have escaped my pain sooner.

But it didn't happen on the timetable I would have liked. It reminds me of the little boy who comes upon an egg and watches this little chick trying to fight its way out of the shell.

The chick works feverishly--squirming and struggling to escape, progressing around the shell and pushing on the large end of it. Although it takes twenty-one days for chicks to hatch, the boy doesn't know this. So, feeling sorry for the little creature, (and not knowing it's only the seventeenth day), the boy decides to help the chick out. So he breaks open the shell.

And to the boy's surprise, and dismay, the little chick dies. Why? Because that chick was created to emerge from the shell only when, through its struggle, it developed enough strength to survive, a process timed perfectly by God.

It was the same in my life. Out of all my early struggles, something miraculous emerged from that shell of pain that I was trapped in. I wrestled to break free from it for years. But it was only with my awareness of God's love and my need for Him that I was finally released from that bondage and able to emerge whole.

Had I never experienced the troubled childhood that I did, perhaps I'd still be lost today. Don't get me wrong. It wasn't God's will for me to suffer; but what the Devil meant for harm, God turned around for good.

By enduring the reality of what *did* happen, I became more sensitive to other people's pain and better equipped to offer compassion and understanding. And that's all *because* I've felt the same pain myself. Strength came from my struggle.

Maybe in your life, you have reason to feel bitterness or regret--but in the midst of your struggles, you too can discover significance and purpose.

Why do I say this? Because adversity can shape and develop our character,

giving us the inner strength we need to face any challenge. Just as a weightlifter can only build muscle by resistance training, we can only find triumph by persevering with courage, faith, and hope.

Perhaps the story of the chick will speak to many of us who attempt to escape struggle by taking the expedient route--by running away, or numbing ourselves, or living in regret, anger, fear, or resentment.

Some people stay in their pain forever--not realizing that pain can be a necessary bridge to an island of change.

And that's why I always say: **Your calling is found in your conquering.** Whatever adversity you face is so often exactly where you'll find your calling or purpose.

I survived loneliness, rejection and feeling completely unloved; I conquered a life of inferiority and self-hatred. And in this conquering, I found my calling to empower others to conquer and create the life that they truly want.

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In this rather personal chapter, which began with the story of my wanting to run away from home, I hope you might recognize something precious and vulnerable inside you--your own version of that little child who had nowhere to go. He saw no refuge or hope, not until the day he found the love of God--which had always surrounded and protected him, even though he didn't know it.

It reminds me of the story of the man who, one night, had a dream in which he saw two sets of footprints in the sand, both tracing the path of his life. One set were his; the other God's. And as the dream progressed, he noticed that at the most difficult times of his life, when things were the worst, one set of footprints disappeared.

So he asked: "Lord, how could You have left me when I needed You most? Why did You forsake me?" And the Lord calmly replied, "My child, I have always been with you. When you saw just one set of footprints, it was then that I *carried* you."

And so, although you may face hard times or great adversity, *you're not alone*, for God is always there to support and carry you, even though you may not realize it. As it says in Hebrews 13:5: "I will never leave you or forsake you."

So as we set off on our journey in the pages ahead, if there's one thing I hope to give you, it's the true knowledge that **YOU ARE LOVED**--accepted, approved of, and treasured by God. **This is the good news, the gospel, the heart and soul of all 21 secrets to true fulfillment.**

As I've already told you, I grew up in a home with no true love, which left me all

the thirstier for it. Like someone stranded out in a desert for days on end--the thing they most crave is water. *That's* how thirsty I was for love. And I believe that all the sins of my youth originated from this vacuum; this absence of love.

I think **every human being longs to run into the arms of a loving mother or father and pour out their heart, knowing that they won't be judged, rejected, or abandoned.** This unconditional acceptance and connection is what I longed for and finally found in God. That's what it means when the Bible says, "He will wipe every tear from our eyes."

And that's what truly happened to me. It wasn't the first day I got saved; not the first year. But as I prayed and talked with Him, heard His voice, and caught the glimpse of God as love, I was captivated. He saw my flaws, shortcomings, and sins, and He *still* loved me.

When you know you're loved, this *conviction* can pull you through *anything*, no matter how far you fall, no matter how many mistakes you've made, no matter what your upbringing.

It was this love that gave me a deep abiding confidence that can never be shaken from me again. It was only when I knew that love that I became invincible in this life. I don't mean "invincible" in the arrogant sense of the word, for I'm not a self-made man. It was the love of God that healed and changed me. For the first time in my life, after my conversion at seventeen, I felt that *love had broken through*, that I had finally found meaning and purpose in my life. This was not a mental realization but a "top-of-my-head-to-the-soles-of-my-feet" conviction that *I was truly loved*.

I felt like a little kid whose father makes him feel significant by taking off the entire day and spending it with him. I felt like I mattered to God, like His arms were wrapped around me, that His eyes were focused solely on me. It's like He cleared his entire schedule to fix my life and make me His.

That's what changed me.

His love was like a dam bursting, like the waters of a river that had been blocked up and then suddenly released, unleashing streams of affection, love, and unconditional approval through my heart and changing the very core of my being. He saw *everything* in me--the good, bad, and ugly--and most of it, at first, was ugly. Yet he *still* approved of me.

I soon noticed that rather than being self-absorbed, as I'd always been, I was now absorbed in *Him*. And it wasn't until I experienced His love that I finally had hope--and felt like I was needed.

I wouldn't trade that for anything in this world. It was like waking up from the longest dream.

And it reminds me of the song *Until Your Love Broke Through*, written by the fathers of contemporary Christian music, Keith Green and Randy Stonehill.

*All my life I've been searching for that crazy missing part
And with one touch, you just rolled away the stone that held my heart
Like waking up from the longest dream
How real it seemed
Until your love broke through*

I guess you could say that, in the end, this entire chapter is really a love story that began the first day Jesus came into my life and God became my father--not just my Lord.

I see so clearly that the decision to go to that Bible study twenty-five years ago was just the beginning of that miracle. Taking that one action was like throwing a stone into a pond and watching the ripple effects of it radiate out for years.

I invite you now to turn the page and discover the secrets about changing your world to *the way you want it to be*. And my wish for you, more than anything, is that you experience the unfailing love of God--and find your own true reason to live.

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P R O P O S A L CHAPTER SUMMARIES

*Following the format of the sample chapter-- "A Reason To Live"--all subsequent chapters in **The Power To Change Today** will likewise feature personal anecdotes, biblical parables, and real-life stories and lessons drawn from the Pastor's extensive library of teachings and personal experiences.*

These include vignettes and illustrations taken from his radio and TV broadcasts and from years of one-on-one counseling. All of these resources together will collectively illustrate the practical principles described below in each of the 21 secrets to an invincible spirit and a satisfied life.

PART I: THE SOURCE OF TRUE POWER

Tapping into the Source of God's love, all things become possible.

- **SECRET #1: BE-LOVED**

The love of your heavenly Father is the only thing that can truly fulfill you.

The difference between success and failure is, so often, *confidence*. And the one thing that separates victory from defeat? Faith. Both confidence and faith spring from the true knowledge that you are loved--accepted, approved of, and treasured by God. In this knowledge, you are strengthened to face any adversity or challenge--for His Love never fails. This love gives you the courage, faith, and persistence you need to overcome *anything*.

This profound concept of *being loved* is the secret to *every* good thing that has ever happened to me. When I discovered God's love, it set in motion the confidence and faith I needed to walk in His will. It became like a *magnet* that drew His blessings and purposes into my life, comparable to the law of attraction.

We often hear the word "beloved" used in the context of a funeral or a wedding, e.g., "dearly beloved, we are gathered today to witness the joining of these two in holy matrimony." But in the context of this chapter "beloved" is understood as a term of endearment that God uses about us.

My intention in sharing this secret is to help the reader embrace something that cannot be earned. In the spirit of the Nike mantra, "Just do it!" When we allow ourselves to receive the unconditional love of God, our attitudes toward ourselves and others change, and we begin to shake off the performance anxiety that so easily drives us to stress, unrealistic comparisons, and self-derision.

- **SECRET #2: BELIEVE**

Faith always finds a way, so have confidence in God and His limitless blessings and ignite that faith with passion, experiencing His power in your life.

Faith carries in it the energy to create good, just as fear brings with it an energy that can create bad. The proverb says, "What a man fears will come upon him." I'm reminded of the miracle of Peter walking on the water, and the force that *stopped* him. As Peter climbed out of the boat and walked on the water, the Bible says in Matthew 14:30, "But when he saw the wind, he became afraid and he began to sink."

Here we see that **what we believe has everything to do with our ultimate destiny.** While fear will stop God's miracle and block the flow of good in life, faith does just the opposite. When we *see* a promise from God's Word (there are over 7000 promises in the Bible), we set our focus on it, we *believe*, and we begin to *rise* victoriously in the midst of whatever we are facing. That's how faith triggers God's miracle action in our lives.

Since we were created with an innate capacity to believe, why not focus our faith on the good news of what God *can* do, rather than the bad news of what we *can't*?

"Believing" is not something we do just when we're young, or when we feel optimistic. **Believing needs to become a habit, something we do as a CONTINUAL action.** This is the secret to unlocking satisfaction in our lives. In this section, I'll show you how to unleash an active belief that will attract all the good that life can bring you.

- **SECRET #3: BE EXPECTANT**

Expect a miracle--think, ask, and dream for it and it shall be yours

Something good is going to happen today. The question is: Is it going to happen to you? Regardless of your life circumstances or your mood, when you wake up to a brand-new day, the phenomenon of EXPECTATION is a powerful force. What we *anticipate* and *look forward* to are predictors of what will actually happen in any 24-hour period. We can choose to live in expectation or regret, and regret leads to continual disappointment. But, *expectation leads to manifestation*.

So, is your expectation a good or a bad one? Is your prognosis based upon faith, optimism, patience, affection, gratitude, forgiveness, or courage? Or is it driven by fear, resentment, blame, jealousy, worry, or guilt?

We learn here that the secret to a satisfied life is the power of *positive expectation*—the polar opposite of fear. Too many times, we *lower* our expectations because we dread disappointment. This self-protective tendency is our enemy, the devil, which wants to block us from expecting something better for ourselves. The result is a *powerless* life, i.e. an unsatisfied one.

When a woman is pregnant, we say she's "expecting." She has something inside of her, growing, and she prepares for it. She may buy furniture for the nursery, decorate the room, and read all about how to raise a baby, long before the baby is born. But she knows it's coming. Her attitude and actions correspond with her expectations.

In the same way, we need to know that God's blessings--success, joy, and contentment-- are on their way! Answers are coming. Solutions are coming.

So get pregnant with expectation! And never abort your expectation before the birth of your dream.

- **SECRET #4: BELONG**

Tap into your birthright--unconditional acceptance and approval from the One who counts.

We all know the feeling of being on the *outside*, looking in. As a kid, I was always one of the last picked at recess for kickball or baseball. That sense of being rejected and excluded, dismissed, or passed over profoundly shapes how we view ourselves. Rejection can be incredibly painful--one of the worst feelings any of us ever face. It can make us timid and impotent in life, or alternately overly aggressive or ambitious.

The secret to recovering from this sense of rejection and isolation is realizing that we BELONG to God: that He picked us first, not last, that He wants us on *His* team. We are energized by His acceptance. Now we become powerful because we belong.

Isn't it true that people enjoy gossip because it makes them feel like they're in the "inner circle?" Here I show you how to *live* in the "inner circle" of God--which will drive away all fears and insecurities.

Instilling this deep sense of approval and acceptance is the job of every mother and father--making their children feel special, important, and included. Unfortunately, many of us grew up without this affirmation. As a result, we experience what I call a "father fracture." Something is broken in our soul—and can only be fixed when we are correctly connected to the only One who can give us the complete acceptance, approval, love, and sense of belonging that constitutes this, our most, primal need. That One is our Heavenly Father, who can heal you

everywhere you are hurting. In this chapter, we will HEAL THE FATHER FRACTURE.

- **SECRET #5: BE STILL**

You have the ability to hear and recognize the voice of God. So be still and know that He is God.

Prayer is not just *talking* to God; it's *listening* to him too. The voice of God is, in fact, the most powerful voice, as it says in Psalm 29:

"The voice of the LORD is majestic;

The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;

The voice of the LORD shakes the desert;

The voice of the LORD strips the forests;

The voice of the LORD strikes with flashes of lightning."

In order to hear His voice, we need to slow down and shift attention away from our incessant schedules. Why not pull over to the metaphorical "side of the road" and take the time to breathe, pray, and reflect?

In school, we're taught to read and write, but no one really teaches us how to *listen*--though it's the secret to successful communication in all relationships.

Instead, so many of us distract ourselves with our telephones, TV's, pagers, computers, I-pods, e-mail--anything to maintain the constant buzz of distraction and stimulation. All this gives us a feeling of significance and a temporary high that can only be sustained with even greater distractions.

But imagine this: the God of the universe has the humility to spend time with you--to speak to you! Who gets the better end of that deal? Instead of clamoring to know all about the rich and famous, let's take the time to get to know Him who alone possesses immortality and who alone can give us the strength we need as we commune with Him.

Like any living being, we must inhale and exhale in order to survive. To maximize our spiritual lives, it's no different. **Prayer is breathing in the spirit of God so that we have something valuable to exhale**, i.e. to give, throughout our day and throughout our lives. Prayer is an exchange with God: As we listen to Him, we exchange our weaknesses, and He gives us His strength. We exchange our lack, and He gives us His sufficiency. We exchange our limitations, and He gives us His boundless love and unlimited bounty.

Life becomes less of a struggle and more of a pleasure. You become focused on the things that matter, and you run the race God has called you to, with His strength and great expectation.

PART II: FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Satisfying, lasting change begins from within as we transform our mindsets and master our emotions.

- **SECRET #6: KNOW YOURSELF**

Everything changes when you discover who you really are.

The highest wisdom of the ancient Greeks was expressed in just these two words--KNOW YOURSELF--and so it remains today. The more you know and

express your authentic self, the more meaning and fulfillment you will have in your life. If you want spiritual and personal growth--a new or better relationship, a more fulfilling job, greater abundance, more peace of mind--then it all starts from the inside out.

Jesus was tested in the wilderness when the Evil One, the tempter, presented this challenge to Him: "If you be the Son of God, command that these stones be made into bread..." His motive was that Jesus doubt himself, which he never did.

But in our own lives, how often do we yield to self-doubt, to second-guessing ourselves, thus undermining our confidence and strength? This habit keeps us limited and weak. We don't dream big, because we feel so small inside. We don't attempt noble causes, because we feel inferior or insignificant.

When a person is born again, he or she becomes a treasure of power, wisdom, strength and virtue. **Discovering our good in God is the difference between success and failure in life, between victory and defeat.**

In the epic military manual *The Art Of War* the sixth-century B.C. Chinese author Sun Tzu reveals the three secrets to winning any battle: "Know yourself, know your enemy, and know your weapons." Without knowledge of who you are, what you're capable of, and what you're made of, you will limp through life purposeless, without vision or passion; whereas knowing yourself will lead to a bold, happy, and healthy life.

- **SECRET #7: LOVE YOURSELF**

You can be happy and content with your life when you know God loves you.

Jesus said that one of the greatest commandments of all was to *Love Your Neighbor as Yourself*. But how many of us really *do*? About 60% of teenage girls (who are bombarded daily with images of skinny models and actresses) believe they're overweight and unattractive. This alarming plague of self-hatred fosters low self-esteem as these girls compare and despair, trying to attain an impossible standard, which often leads to depression, eating disorders, and addiction.

When anyone feels inferior (whether it's over their looks, financial status, education, etc.), they often seek to escape reality or create a false self, thereby protecting themselves from fear, loss, and emotional pain. Forget about *loving* themselves; they don't even *like* themselves!

Why else do fashion models starve themselves? Why are millions having plastic surgery? Why are many so driven to accumulate material possessions? It's all because they feel they are lacking on the inside--inadequate and incomplete.

But if we really love ourselves the way God intended us to (not in a self-absorbed or egotistical way), the natural result would be self-respect and an outpouring of encouragement and love toward others. And how we treat others will be a direct reflection of our view and treatment of ourselves.

We reveal the secrets to destroying self-hatred, forever stopping the cycle of condemnation and guilt in order to discover our true and God-given value. The result will be the greatest relationships you could ever imagine.

God told Israel that they were His special treasure (Exodus 19:5)--and this is the knowledge that makes us invincible.

- **SECRET # 8: CONQUER YOURSELF**

If you control yourself, nothing else can control you.

One of my favorite Proverbs, 16:32, is, “Better is a man who rules his *own* spirit, than one who captures a city.” Imagine the power it would take to capture New York or Paris--quite an incredible army! Yet the Bible praises and rewards the man who can conquer himself over any who can capture such a great city. Why would that be?

Therein lies the power of our thoughts, for **it is not the devil or demon that defeats us, but our own unconquered mindsets and unbridled desires.** That’s why I always say that one of the greatest achievements in life is the ability to control *yourself*.

By “self” I mean your thoughts, emotions, body, and possessions. It’s a logical sequence: Our thoughts control the outcome of our actions; our actions frame our habits; our habits shape our character; and our character determines our destiny.

So if we want a great destiny, we must confront the reality of our thought life. This chapter is based on the trio of teachings: “Winning the Battle of Your Mind,” “Flesh: You’re Fired!” and “How to Get Control of Yourself.” The secrets to achieving this mastery include: being filled with the spirit; taking an inventory of what you already have; feeding your soul; setting the course of your life with your words; and accepting your stewardship as God’s property.

- **SECRET #9: FALL OUT OF LOVE WITH YOUR FEELINGS**

Let your emotions work for you instead of against you.

We all have emotions, but—so often—they have us! A feeling is not a fact. Yet we “fall in love” with certain negative feelings that can sweep us away. You know what I mean--feeling hurt, resentful, sorry for ourselves, insulted, or angry.

These fear-based emotions easily deceive us and lead to bad decisions. Sure, it may feel good in the moment to seek revenge; or to impulsively express a volatile mood; or to give into physical desires, throwing ourselves metaphorically “into the wind.” But in the end, impetuous indulgence of a temporary feeling may leave us with bitterness, regret, or disappointment.

We need to accept that our feelings are unpredictable, sometimes wild or almost schizophrenic--one minute up, the next down. “They” don’t care about the consequences of their expression. They just want to be heard!

So in this chapter, **I advise you to fall out of love with your feelings! Don’t stay married to them. Get a divorce.**

I’ll show you how to *Master Your Emotions*, rather than them mastering you. I often say: “*Don’t do what feels good; do what produces good.*” If you follow the steps laid out here, you will be able to harness your emotions and make them work *for*, rather than against you.

- **SECRET #10: DISCOVER THE GREATNESS IN YOU**

Become the person that God created you to be.

The story is told about a father who, as he lies dying, gathers his two sons close to him and whispers: “The back lot, the back lot.”

For years, the sons believed that their father had hidden a fortune of gold somewhere on the family property. So as soon as the funeral is over, the sons rush home and begin turning over every inch of soil on their ten-acre lot, but to no avail. They find nothing and become bitter that they had worked so hard for no purpose, and believe that their father had misled them.

Suddenly it dawns on the older brother that “since we’ve readied the field, let’s plant corn!” Four months later, they do find gold in the back lot, in the form of a very plentiful corn harvest!

This is the story of our lives: **Instead of finding that treasure of gold “out there,” we have to realize that our true treasure lies within**--that God has planted greatness inside each of us--potential talent, power, wealth, and purpose—just waiting to be discovered.

This is the “garden of Eden” that will flower and flourish if we plant the right seeds and cultivate them. It doesn’t come easily in the form of a pre-existing treasure, but it’s unlocked by hard work, discipline, persistence, and faith.

As we follow the steps included in this section, we discover our God-given treasures, and we release the greatness within.

PART III: FRAMING YOUR WORLD

Building a bridge to the world around you, creating the world God wants you to have.

- **SECRET #11: TALK TO THE PROBLEM—NOT ABOUT IT**

Speak the word, talk to yourself.

Have you ever noticed how distracted we can become by the relentless rush of our own thoughts? It’s almost like we become hostage to the hypnotic, constant stream of mental chatter. These thoughts play a large role in creating our mood, our feelings, and in many cases, our reality. But enough is enough! It’s time to take control of our life, and to start talking *to* ourselves and to our problems, rather than just listening!

In Mark 11:23 Jesus said: “Whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will come to pass, he will have whatever he says.”

How many of us face “mountains” in our lives that seem immovable? The more we think about them and the more we let them talk to us, the bigger they seem to get. The secret to conquering any challenge is what I call *framing your world with your words*.

As it says in Proverbs 18:21: “Death and Life are in the power of the tongue.” Our tongue has the power to hurt and to heal, to destroy and to create. We use words to order food off a menu, to negotiate business deals, to begin relationships.

So why should it surprise us that God has wired us to set the course of our lives with our words? How many husbands have discouraged the “mood” for lovemaking by using insensitive words to their wives? Conversely, through warm, sensitive, kind words he can create an atmosphere that will lead to love.

God has given us the POWER to create the life we want using positive, faith-filled words. This isn’t just positive thinking; it’s doing what we were born to do to get the results we’re all looking for.

Proverbs 18:20 says “A man is satisfied by the fruit of his lips.” Notice this word “satisfied.” The satisfaction we are looking for in life IS IN OUR MOUTH. I want to show you the things you can *say* to create the world destined by God to be yours.

- **SECRET #12: PLANT A SEED**

Everything God does begins with a seed.

The Bible says in Genesis 8:22: "As long as the earth remains, there will always be seedtime and harvest." All living things--human life included--begin with just a seed from which a miracle occurs.

And in framing our world, there's nothing more profoundly true than the wisdom of Galatians 6:7-9: *We reap what we sow.*

If you plant seeds of love--living with kindness, patience, and care--those precious seeds will grow into friendship, affection, gratitude, and trust. Conversely, if you plant seeds of fear--treating those around you with suspicion, sarcasm, irritation, and resentment--you will reap the same in return. And if you don't like the harvests in your life, you have to change the seeds you're sowing.

Whether you want to succeed financially, have more emotional peace of mind, or better relationships—your harvest is in your seed. The words we speak and the actions we take constitute the seeds that will lead to our harvest. And whether we're aware of this process happening or not, like the law of gravity, it's working at all times.

Many people have told me how desperate they are for intimate relationships and a circle of close friends. This is not something you have to pray or hope for. It's actually within your control, something you can "sow." BE A FRIEND and you will have friends. BE LOVING--and you will have love. Proverbs 18 says, "If you wish to have friends, show yourself friendly."

The satisfied life is not obtained by accident or luck--but by planting specific seeds that will result in a harvest of fulfillment and realized dreams.

- **SECRET #13: BE ON THE GIVING SIDE/BE A BLESSING**

He that bringeth a present findeth the door open

It sometimes seems as if there are two kinds of people in this world--givers and takers. Takers are people who embody the "hitchhiker mentality," wanting someone else not only to drive the car but pay for the gas! This is the guy who eats out of your refrigerator, swims in your pool, listens to your CD's, and otherwise lives off your income. He takes anything he can--and too many of us allow him to take us for a ride.

I'm not saying we shouldn't be generous to people who are truly in need of our charity and care, those who are genuinely trying and struggling to get by. But you can either give that guy a fish or you can give him a pole and point him to the pond.

Living on the giving side is not just about being charitable, generous, or handing over your time, money, or possessions. ***Giving is not what you do; it's who you are. It's a state of being.***

To succeed in life, remember these four words: ADD VALUE TO OTHERS. When you gauge what you can *contribute* to a situation, how you can add value, you will always be blessed and satisfied. God told Abraham he was going to bless him richly in Genesis 12 and tells him why—"So that you can be a blessing."

So being on the "giving side" really translates as: Be a blessing. Live to give, and have the nerve to serve, and you will never lack any good thing all the days of your life. This becomes easy when you realize how precious people are to God. What you do for others will always come back to you. As Jesus said in Luke 6:38, "Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over."

- **SECRET #14: FIND YOUR CALLING IN YOUR CONQUERING**

Nothing will truly satisfy until you do what you were born to do

The #1 question people ask me is this: How can I find God's purpose for my life?

My answer: **Your calling is found in your conquering.** What do I mean? Usually, during the first half of our lives, each of us faces a great number of adversities--physical, emotional, and spiritual. The challenges you overcome are often the starting place for discovering what you're truly meant to do. Overcoming adversity gives you the strength to help others who may face similar challenges.

I grew up in a difficult family situation and as a result experienced incredibly low self-esteem. I felt unloved and rejected. So as a teenager I turned to drugs. I was lost.

But when I discovered God's love for me, I found worth, significance and purpose. I overcame my deep-seated emotional pain and therein found my calling. Had I not, by God's grace, overcome these challenges, I would not have been capable of leading others to overcome their own demons.

But it takes courage to turn our greatest challenges into a gift that we can offer to others. Instead, we so often settle for the status quo. We take the path of least resistance, or make a truce with our vices, weaknesses, and infirmities. *But it is in the overcoming of a thing that we find our calling and purpose.*

Everyone knows the story in Samuel 17:45, where David faced a giant that taunted both him and the armies of God. This giant Philistine threatened the very existence of the nation of Israel. What did David do? With five smooth stones and a sling, he defeated the giant. But did you know that as a shepherd boy he had been faced with a lion threatening his flock? He conquered the lion. At another time, a bear came for his sheep. Again, he vanquished the bear. He had found his calling in his conquering. HOW? He defeated whatever was right in front of him.

Don't attempt to achieve all your life goals today. Conquer what is right in front of you! Rule your desk, and you may one day own the entire company. Start by feeding one child in Africa, rather than taking on the world's starvation. Likewise, lose a few pounds, clean out the closet that you've been avoiding, take that class that you've been meaning to take online.

Conquer what is right in front of you!-- and before you know it, you may find yourself right in the middle of God's perfect will for your life--a complete and satisfied life.

- **SECRET #15: BE DEFINITE**

The quality of your life is determined by the quality of your decisions.

Life is one long series of decisions, one after another. Some are of them are small, seemingly inconsequential, while others may yield life-altering results, their benefits rippling through our lives for decades.

Years later, we look back and only then realize: "That was the best decision I ever made!" Was making it pure calculation, or was it largely a matter of luck, fate, or serendipity?

Whether it's a seemingly trivial decision, like starting up a conversation with a stranger on a bus, or an important one, like choosing a mate, undergoing a medical test, or a career change, the ability to make smart choices is a fundamental life skill.

That's why I say: ***Life is not made up of chances--but choices. The quality of your decisions will determine the quality of your life.***

Under fear, alarm, and pressure, we're often driven to making rash, imprudent decisions that will lead to defeat. For example, someone under enormous financial

pressures, in a desperate attempt to alleviate the problem may decide unwisely to cheat, steal, or lie to get what he needs.

There is a remedy. God has laid out in His Word the simple, yet profound strategy for making wise, powerful and productive decisions that will ensure your victory. Here we learn about the wisdom of *pausing and refusing* to make hasty decisions, instead following a sound, thorough, and effective course of action. We see the options, review the consequences, and examine what the Bible has to say about the subject. By doing so, we position ourselves to become an invincible decision-maker, which will, every time, lead to good in life.

PART IV: SMILING AT THE FUTURE

Anticipating the future with happy expectation, for God has created us to grow in unexpected ways.

- **SECRET #16: SEE THE INVISIBLE**

For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities--His eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.--Romans: 9:21

Every great leader, artist, or inventor has had to “see it” on the inside before he or she could produce it on the outside. The final outcome is always the result of this inner vision, which begins in the imagination.

For example, most would have seen just a block of stone, but Michelangelo saw DAVID. When everyone saw British troops outnumbering (5 to 1) and crushing the overmatched American colonies, General George Washington envisioned victory and a liberated nation. When some might just have seen a bush in the heat of the desert, Moses saw and heard God! Seeing the invisible, he was able to do the impossible.

And so it is that another secret to creating an invincible spirit is the ability to see light in the midst of darkness, to see calm in the midst of the storm. This refined vision, this ability to “see” is one of the most powerful tools at our disposal. Our imaginations open “windows” to creativity, joy, and love.

There are two such “windows,” the vertical and horizontal, which are both vantage points that allow us to gain perspective. The horizontal window is our practical view of our world--our actual environment, our prevailing reality with all its limitations. And then there's the vertical window--our God-given view of the world that gives us the ability to think and see things the way He does, a perspective from heaven's point of view. This is the realm of *possibility*.

I will show you how to “raise your periscope” and see things above and beyond what you have ever seen before, so you can bring to fruition what you have always desired--a life of endless possibilities.

- **SECRET #17: LEAVE YOUR COUNTRY**

I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. Genesis 17:6-8

Abraham--the great Patriarch of Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike--began as a wandering nomad, living, as his relatives had, by taking advantage of someone else's harvest. He started out as a “taker,” with no land of his own and no future. He was destined to repeat the same pattern of failure until he learned this secret and

heard God tell him, "Leave your country, your kindred, and your father's house, to a land I will show you." That's when everything began to change for Abraham.

How many of us have limitations, weaknesses and invisible fences that hold us back from growth and realizing our potential? Our shortcomings are shaped by the upbringing we had and we therefore settle for a life "handed down" to us by our fathers and mothers.

Here we discuss leaving behind our "homeland"—the country of our old habits, relationships, constrictions, perceptions, prejudices, and fixed mindsets. **We must leave our country—the people, patterns, and proclivities of our past that weigh us down.** Why? Because most human dissatisfaction is the result of passively accepting life as it is, as we inherit it, fearful to break away from old behaviors that define and limit us—and hem us in, even though they provide a level of security and comfort.

Abraham became a legendary leader because he knew and lived this secret. God took a "nobody" and made him a "somebody," transforming a life of mediocrity into a spectacular one.

Take the limits off, release God's blessings, and experience His power in your life. Are you ready for your *breakthrough*?

- **SECRET #18: DON'T BE AFRAID OF THE DARK**

Perfect love casts out all fear.

As children, most of us remember waking up in the middle of the night and being afraid of the dark, right? But turning on a light and hearing the soothing words of a parent did much to comfort us and chase away the monsters.

Many of us have been programmed to believe that darkness is bad and light is good. But an orphan child in Cambodia is no more comforted during the day than he is at night—his pain at having no parent remains the same.

My children sleep in rooms not very far from mine. And whether the light is on or it's pitch dark, their safety is assured. Why? Because I am still "there" whether they see me or not.

As children of God, even though we may not see Him, He is still present. Psalm 125 says, "He is *an ever-present* help in a time of need". What a comfort to know this. **When I feel Him and when I don't, He still IS. When I see His hand in my life and when I don't, His Hand is still on me!**

I show you how to drive your deepest fears away. We all face the dark—times when we don't know what to do or where to go. There seems to be no light, no answer, and no peace. Here, we learn that when we feel the darkness—those hopeless, lonely, fearful, uncertain feelings—there's no need to panic. Isaiah 12 tells us what to do: "I will trust, and I will not be afraid." Notice the progression of this verse. First he says, "I will trust". This is an act of the will; a choice to trust in the midst of darkness and uncertainty. THEN he says the result will be: "I will not be afraid."

So don't fight for the light. Learn to trust that He is still there. Hebrews 13 says, "I will NEVER leave you nor forsake you. I will not relax my hold on you." We take his hand by following His words. The Bible says: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

- **SECRET #19: EXPECT ANOTHER CHANCE**

For though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again.

How many of us could use a second (or a third) chance in life? Maybe we need another opportunity to mend fences with our children, or our spouses, or our bosses. Or perhaps there are those who suffer profound losses--the death of a loved one, a divorce, bankruptcy—and they need to start all over again.

The great radio legend Paul Harvey was asked how he had succeeded for so many years working in such a competitive business. His response: “ I just kept getting up every time I fell.”

Jesus said to forgive 70 times 7. So God is not just the God of second chances, but of third and fourth and fifth chances too.

In this chapter, we see that it's never too late to start over again to be healed.

Consider Abraham and Sarah, who were 99- and 90-years old when they had their FIRST child! Consider the man who languished at the pool of Bethesda for thirty-eight years until he finally walked again. And what about the thief on the cross, crucified right next to Jesus, who spent his entire life in crime, but in his dying moments heard these eternal words from Jesus, “This day, you shall be with me in Paradise.”

If God is so gracious in offering people multiple chances, why do so few of us step forward to take one?

It's because we're buried in guilt and remorse about the mistakes we've already made. Here we learn that **the first step to finding a second chance is letting go of regret.** Let me show you how to enter a place I like to call *The Land Of Beginning Again!*

- **SECRET #20: TAKE A SECOND LOOK**

Find your mission as you walk in Gods' perfect will for your life.

When we wake up first thing in the morning and look into the mirror, how many of us are unhappy with what we see? We immediately take action to change it. We shave, shower, put make-up on, fix our hair--and then we take a second look. (OK, some of us take a third or fourth).

This time around the view is quite different and we feel much happier.

Similarly, as we implement each of the secrets that precede this one, our vision of ourselves changes dramatically. What we see in the mirror of our minds is quite different from what we used to see. We have a new, revitalized *identity* that leads to a transformed life.

In this chapter, we see that your identity is the distinctive way you see yourself, your self-image, the character or personality you view as uniquely your own. It also defines what you're worth and what you feel you can do. It's your individual stamp, mark, or engraving. **How you view yourself will determine your happiness more than almost any exterior circumstance or condition of your life.** That's why I always say--*identity produces destiny*—which, of course, also directly leads to the decisions we make (in Secret 15.)

Here we find the pathway to our indelible identity, first by spending time with God. The Bible says in Genesis 39 that though Joseph was sold into slavery, he became a prosperous man because God was with him. Likewise, as we spend time with God, putting Him first in our lives, His mission, His meaning and His methods begin to penetrate our hearts and minds, and our lives begin to take a course that reflects Him. So in this chapter, I invite you to: Take a second look. I think you will like what you see!

EPILOGUE

- **SECRET #21: SELAH**

We live our lives in both reflection and anticipation. As we reflect wisely, we anticipate limitlessly.

Do you ever feel stressed out? Who doesn't?! It's a national epidemic. A recent Gallup poll reported that 80% of workers feel marked stress on the job, nearly half of them admitting that they need help managing this stress. It's no surprise that billions are spent on anti-anxiety and anti-depressant medications, accounting for nearly one-third of all prescriptions written in the U.S.

We learn that there are six major causes of stress: uncertainty about the future, unresolved conflicts, unrealistic comparisons, financial difficulties, health concerns, and unconfessed sin. The result of all this stress? Nineteen million Americans suffer from depression, 65% of the population is overweight, 50% of marriages end in divorce, and 16 million people are using illegal drugs.

While there are countless articles and self-help books written about stress *reduction*, here we find about how stress *destruction*, i.e. the solution to it. That's why *The Power To Change Today* features as its final secret *Selah*--which means "stop and listen." Derived from the primitive Hebrew root *Calah*--meaning "to hang" or to weigh or measure--*Selah* is cited seventy-one times in the Psalms. In essence, *Selah* is designed to thank God for the good He has done.

Be thankful for where God has brought you. You may not be where you want to be, but thank God, you are not where you used to be!

We see that *Selah* is the secret to mastering all twenty of the previous secrets, for it is the pathway to *pause and reflection*. We need to *interrupt* our busy lives to gain perspective and peace. Instead of being *reactive* we need to be *reflective*. **Instead of being absent in the moment, we need to savor it. Instead of feeling burned out and exhausted, but also guilty that we're not doing enough, we need to slow down and take a breath.** You learn to relax and enjoy your life. Worries fall away and even your body is renewed. You experience less stress and improved health. At last, you're liberated from the tyranny of all that stress, free from it to experience the peace and prosperity of a truly SATISFIED life.

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