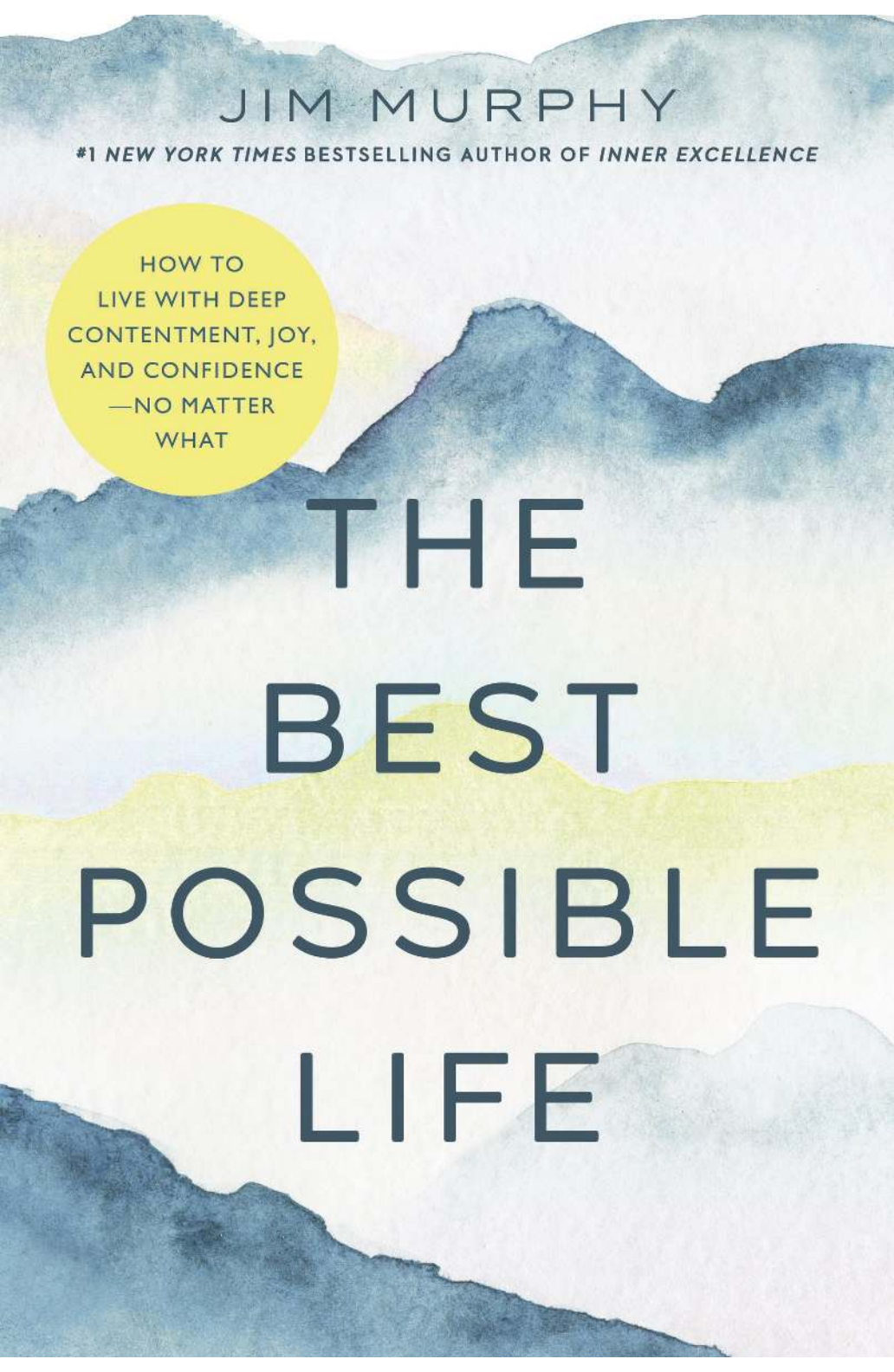




JIM MURPHY

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *INNER EXCELLENCE*

HOW TO
LIVE WITH DEEP
CONTENTMENT, JOY,
AND CONFIDENCE
—NO MATTER
WHAT

THE
BEST
POSSIBLE
LIFE

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The Best Possible Life

How to Live with Deep
Contentment, Joy, and
Confidence—No Matter What



J I M M U R P H Y

The Best Possible Life: to overflow with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

*For my sister Naomi T. Murphy
The one who taught me how to smile
and be grateful—no matter what.
See you soon.*

My Lord God,

I have no idea where I am going.

I do not see the road ahead of me.

I cannot know for certain where it will end.

nor do I really know myself,

and the fact that I think I am following your will

does not mean that I am actually doing so.

But I believe that the desire to please you

does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire

in all that I am doing.

I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.

And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,

though I may know nothing about it.

Therefore will I trust you always though

I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.

I will not fear, for you are ever with me,

and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

— Thomas Merton, Trappist Monk

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If you want to build a ship, don't drum up the men to gather wood, divide the work, and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea.

— Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Introduction

The word vocation comes from the Latin vocare, to call, and means the work a man is called to by God. There are all different kinds of voices calling you to all different kinds of work, and the problem is to find out which is the voice of God rather than of society.. The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.

— Frederick Buechner

In May 2023 I went on a boat trip with a couple friends. We sailed away from civilization for a few weeks and had time to examine our lives—without the noise and busyness and prime deliveries that so easily distract us from the beauty and grace of a simple life, lived on purpose.

We got to experience solitude—that place where fear meets hope and a decision needs to be made. In this tension-filled space, we must consider who we are, the path we're on, and what's possible in our lives. Of course you can skip over the decision—to be courageous or not, to face your fears or not—and jump to

the next task, the closest distraction... and avoid the call of your heart, the one that's longing for depth and meaning and fullness of life. But you know at some point, of course, a solitary moment will find you again.

On the days we were anchored, there was always excitement for what adventure awaited. For me, the great adventure was to sit in that floating office and dream big dreams, to imagine possibilities, and see what, at the end of the day, the God of the starry universe might reveal to me.

It was on one of those days that I felt called to share my deep gladness with what's now more than ever, the world's deep hunger.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020, the world has become a different place. It's a 24/7 world bursting with busyness and anxiety—and very little community. It's a world filled with fear, dissension, and isolation. There's a deep hunger for connection—real heart-to-heart, meaningful relationship, with the kind of love that's fearless and forever.

You were created for that kind of relationship, the out-of-this-world kind where the love is unconditional and fully reliable. It's your deepest need—to be loved so powerfully by someone so solid and stable that you can rest secure, with the deepest contentment, joy, and confidence—no matter what.

In the busyness and stresses and comparisons we face, it's easy to lose sight of what's possible, of the life you were created for.

This book is about that life that awaits. It's about a love you can feel in your heart that enlivens every experience, everything you think, feel, and do. It's about having courage, facing fears, and acting on your longing for depth and meaning and fullness of life. It's your calling. *The Best. Possible. Life.*

My story

On April 1, 1991, I took off my Chicago Cubs uniform for the last time. My dynamic vision had somehow left me—important for hitting a 90 mile-an-hour baseball—and my minor league career was over. The cheering was done. So was the love and acceptance. It was April Fool's day but this was no joke.

Nineteen years later, I found myself sitting on the curb in sunny and cold Denver, Colorado with my mind racing and nowhere to go. Just like that day, nineteen years earlier, it felt like my life was over. Except this time, it was much worse.

It was February, 2010 and I had spent my life savings and was \$90,000 in debt. My credit cards were maxed out and I had no money in the bank. I moved to the desert to live in solitude, to confront my fears and hopes and dreams. I wanted to make sure that when it came to the end of my life, that I had fully lived.

I ended up spending 50-60 hours a week doing writing and research for a book, for five years straight (two and a half years in the Arizona desert), ironically, about how to have peace and confidence under pressure. And now the pressure was caving in on me. We were in the middle of a recession and on that day in Denver, I couldn't see a future. My knees were shaking and my mind was

spinning out of control. I had an I-could-fall-to-the-ground sort of anxiety; the trip to the mental hospital kind.

I thought, *"You've put all your eggs in one basket. Sure the book (Inner Excellence) is in bookstores around the world, but you've got no money to hire someone to market the book, you don't know how to do marketing, and you don't like to promote yourself. If no one hears about the book, no one will buy the book, and if no one buys the book, the bookstores will pull it off their shelves, and you'll be a total failure and everyone will know it. And of course no pro athlete will hire a failure to coach them... So you'll have to get a regular job, but in this recession, nobody's gonna hire a failure. Not the corner mini-market, not 7-Eleven, nobody. You're gonna die alone in the streets."*

Looking back I can see what happens when you isolate yourself and one negative thought leads to another (even if they're absurd), with no one to question the voice in your head, no one to assure you that you're ok.

When my knees started to shake in Denver, I called my friend Ricky Scruggs and asked him what to do. He said, "Find a homeless person and help him." Right around the corner a homeless person was playing a full-sized harp for donations. (You know how those harpists seem to be everywhere.) I looked in my wallet and I must have taken a cash advance from one of my maxed-out credit cards, because there was \$100 in there. I gave it to him.

I went back to where I was staying to run on the treadmill, hoping to clear my mind. After the run I returned downtown and found a Starbucks coffee shop and place to sit. I stared into the abyss, just trying to make it through the day. Then the homeless harpist walked in.

He walked past me, stopped in his tracks, then turned around and said, "Are you the guy that gave me that money?" I said yes.

He thanked me and left, only to return with a card, a bracelet he made, and a box of chocolates. He gave all three to me.

Before I go on, there's a detail you should know. When I was writing *Inner Excellence*, I asked my friend Jennifer if she could take a look at it and make sure it lined up with the Bible. She read the manuscript and asked me, "Have you heard of the word Zoe? It's mentioned in the Bible many times. Zoe is the Greek word for life—absolute fullness of life; to be filled with vitality. I think that's what your book is about," she said.

"Yes! I replied. "My whole life I've chased success and numbers and status, when what I've always really wanted was to feel fully alive."

So I began to orient the book around the idea of pursuing absolute fullness of life and letting everything else be added to you. Rather than focusing on developing external skills to be successful, I discovered a profound idea: if you develop the person first—their inner world—their skills will be maximized in every area and their entire life will transform.

In the Starbucks on that long, anxiety-filled day, I opened the homeless harpist's card. It read,

Thank you so much for caring for me.

*Love,
Zoe*

My heart skipped a beat.

"Your name is Zoe??" I asked.

"Yes," he nodded.

I asked him if he knew what his name meant. He said no. I told him it means absolute fullness of life and I just spent five

years writing a book about it. I signed a book for him and never saw him again.

That was the beginning of the most extraordinary, transformational, miraculous year of my life. When I think of my life, I think of pre-Zoe and post-Zoe. Before that mind-spinning, anxiety-filled day in Starbucks, and after.

A few weeks after meeting Zoe I had another extraordinary experience. I was in North Vancouver, B.C. and a stranger I just met began telling me about my life. He said, “You’re a coach aren’t you? You’re banging your head against the wall because you have all these goals but you’re not getting anywhere.” I was thinking, *Yes, you’re exactly right, but how do you know this about me?*

After a while a gal named Jamie, who I also didn’t know, walked over and handed me a picture of a kite she had just drawn.

“What’s wrong with this picture?” she asked.

“Your kite doesn’t have a string,” I replied.

“That’s right. That kite is you. You’re like a kite without a string; a slight breeze would blow you away,” she said. Incredibly, that’s exactly how I felt. I was so weak emotionally—lost and adrift. The weight of the world was on my shoulders. I had a million things to do and no idea how to do them. My life felt helpless and hopeless.

These two strangers seemed to know all about me at a time in my life when it felt like no one did. They prayed for me and my life began to change. It was April 1, 2010, April Fool’s Day, nineteen years to the day after I hung up my Cubs uniform for good.

They invited me to a bible study that night and I felt God telling me, “*There’s nothing you’ve ever done or could ever do that would change how much I love you.*” The feeling in my heart transformed from the heaviness of a Mack truck to the lightness of a gentle breeze.

That night, I said a short, heartfelt prayer:

God, I give you my life. I don't care what you do with it, I just want your peace. I surrender my life to you. If you want me to give up coaching and all my possessions, move to Nepal and volunteer in an orphanage the rest of my life, I'll do it. I don't care what it is, just tell me what to do.

That simple prayer changed the direction of my life. It marked the beginning of a slow but steady journey towards recovery: getting back on my feet, gaining inner strength, and most importantly, embracing a whole new way of living. I gave God control of my life and started learning to hear his voice and let him lead the way. No more self-reliance (well... much less anyway).

In the next year and a half, I had more unexpected, amazing experiences, with more strangers telling me what God told them to share with me. The most memorable message-from-God-through-a-stranger moment came in the summer of 2011. I was at my friend Tarun's house in North Vancouver, about to leave, when his mother called on video from India.

"Tell your mom I said hello," I said walking out the door.

"Hey Jim, my mom's friend wants to talk to you," he replied.

So, I sat in front of the laptop and heard words I'll never forget. This lady thousands of miles away whom I had never met said,

"God wanted me to tell you a few things... Everything you've been going through has been training for you. God's going to bring people from all over the world to work with you. He's going to bless you, it's going to happen soon, and you're going to know it's from God."

Very specific words about my life and how it was about to change.

A few weeks later, early in the morning, I was half awake when I heard a voice say, "Jim, are you ready? Things are going to happen fast."

I said, “Yes, God, I’m ready.” Before I finished that sentence my alarm went off. I thought, *Hmm, maybe he’s serious.*

Several weeks later I was contacted by Jude O’Reilly, a golf caddie in Dublin, Ireland, who worked for a Swedish professional golfer named Henrik Stenson. He said, “I just read *Inner Excellence*, can you talk to my boss? He could really use your help.” So, I flew to Sweden in the Fall of 2011 and started to work with Stenson.

Several weeks later I got a call from Tiger Woods’ coach, Sean Foley. He read *Inner Excellence* and asked if I could meet with him and his client, Hunter Mahan, who had been struggling. So, I flew to California and met with them, and started to work with Mahan.

A couple weeks later I received a call from David Novak, the CEO of YUM Brands (Taco Bell, KFC, and Pizza Hut). He said he read *Inner Excellence* and would like to work together. Novak also sent the book to some of his executives in Europe and I started to work with them as well.

I flew to Geneva, Switzerland and led an *Inner Excellence* off-site retreat for the leaders of KFC Germany, Spain, Netherlands, and a handful of others. We shared an incredible time together, discussing *Inner Excellence* principles and clarifying the vision for their lives. We’re still friends to this day.

A few months after we began working together, Mahan won a PGA Tour event, and then he won the World Championship (Match Play) a few months after that. Stenson also turned things around and in 2013 went on to win the FedEx Cup (PGA Tour end of season championship).

I’ve been coaching professional athletes and executives around the world ever since (as well as leading *Inner Excellence* retreats), and now I get to share the source of everything good in my life, what I’ve learned and how I learned it, with you.

This book, *The Best Possible Life*, shares with you how to connect directly with the source of love, wisdom, and courage, and live with *absolute fullness of life*. You'll learn how to become your true self, the one in sync with the flow of resonance, grounded and connected to the creator of the universe. You'll see how that one decision to surrender my life to God completely changed my life for the better in every way, and how it can do the same for you. *The Best Possible Life* is about who God is and therefore who you are, what he's doing in the world and how you can join in.

Thanks for joining me on this incredible journey.

Love Jim

PART I



Your Story



1

The Great Need

The day Chris Baldwin arrived at Lake Youngs Elementary was a normal day for everyone, except two of us: Chris and I. Chris arrived in the middle of the school year and he was the new kid. I was the fastest kid (well, in my grade anyway). So that meant one thing: new kid had to race fastest kid to see if there was a new fastest kid.

At Lake Youngs, being fast and athletic was a very desirable attribute. Winning the race with Chris would be quite significant: Perhaps I would get the love and acceptance I desperately craved. Like most humans, my entire life has been one long journey wanting you to love me, to say how great I am, to introduce me as, “This is Jim. He’s smart and fast and he’s done this and that,” and other various *you-should-be-impressed*-type phrases that bring raised eyebrows of adoration. My win on the playground years ago meant I could still feel good about myself. That’s kind of how life is, isn’t it? We think the next achievement or status will get us the love and acceptance we desperately desire.

My life has been punctuated by moments where I’ve received the love I’ve craved, and so many where I haven’t. The missed

moments of love and acceptance created a filter over my eyes that narrowed my vision, seeing more of what I've missed than what I've been given. It's formed an armor of self-protection, where I've been triggered by reflections of rejection and memories of mistakes that translated into uncaptured opportunities, or worse.

The thing is, I'm human, which means I have a subconscious mind designed to protect me, so, it remembers the wounds I've received to guard against future ones. I also have a heart that longs for love and an ego that wants to be praised and adored. Most of all, I've got a deep need for something this world cannot fill, and I've unknowingly spent most of my life searching for ways to fill it. All my fruitless efforts have created a fear of rejection that's been hard to shake.

This... is my problem.

This... is every human's problem.

In grade school I was smart and fast, but it was never enough to give me love that was unconditional. It was *always* conditional, dependent on how fast I ran or the grades I got or the popularity I gained (or failed to gain). I was constantly trying to get you to think well of me, so I could feel good about myself.

This self-consciousness continued into adulthood, and so when you speak, I think about how it impacts my life—or doesn't, and why would you tell me then? I've always thought about *my* goals, *my* dreams, *my* fears, *my* family, *my* self. I want to be a good guy, I do, but most of my life has really been about my needs and desires and people who've lined up with those needs and desires (bingo) and those who haven't (sayonara).

I'm not saying this is good or I liked it, I'm saying I've gotten caught up in self-absorption, endlessly trying to improve my life with better results and circumstances, so I'll feel better about myself and so you'll respect me, even though it's a never-ending treadmill.

The truth is, all my striving has been an effort to feel accepted and secure, so I can stop comparing and feel so loved that I can finally, fully rest.

That sort of love and rest is what we're created for, that our hearts beat for. Without it, we spend far too much time consumed by the three major symptoms of a compulsive, harried life: over-thinking, negative thinking, and self-conscious thinking (concern for what others think).

Take myself, for example. I've thought way too much about my life and what I want but can't control, and how I don't know how to fix things in my life and I don't know what you think of me or if you like this book or if perhaps after reading this sentence you'll throw the book across the room and it will poke someone in the eye and they'll be maimed for life and you'll tell them it was my fault and I'll feel bad and maybe because of it I'll never write another book and at least that way I'd never write a sentence again that was so long and self-centered, and at least you could rest knowing you would never waste another minute of your life with this garbage and you could live a peaceful life with your dog and your life would be so much less violent.

It's exhausting.

What about you? Have you ever overanalyzed things, perhaps about what other people think? Have you ever gotten caught up in negative, self-conscious thinking? Have you ever felt that something's missing, that all your striving has only delivered temporary happiness, surface-level satisfaction?

Something *is* missing. It's the non-judgmental, ever-expanding vision of beauty and joy that's available to all of us, when we get out of our own way, when we let go of our petty quibbles and offenses taken, when we accept the love and connections that are

YOU'VE REACHED THE END OF THIS FREE EXCERPT

Keep going.

Get the full book, *The Best Possible Life*,
and continue the journey.

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