

**THE  
BEST POSSIBLE LIFE**

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

**JIM MURPHY**

"I love this book! It's outstanding. In every way. True, engaging, meeting people where they actually live, speaking the way of Jesus without preaching "at" people, honest, hopeful ... on and on." – Darrell Johnson, Ph.D., Teaching Fellow, Regent College, Author, *The Beatitudes*

"I'm obsessed with this book!" – Michaela Blanchet, gymnast, North Carolina State University, 2012-2016

"*Best Possible Life* is absolutely going to change lives. Most digestible and impactful book I've ever read." – Carson Foster, Team USA, Swimming

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, dissent, 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 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 (you know how those harpists seem to be everywhere) with his cup out. I looked in my wallet and I must have taken a cash advance on one of my maxed-out credit cards, because there was \$100 in there. I put it in the cup.

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 the book *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, real and genuine; 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 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 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

## Chapter 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 meant to fill us with meaning and amazing moments. Our own minds confine us and we miss so much.

Our minds become a lens that sees the world through all the rejections and mistakes we've made. It's fed our ego's fears and increased the need to be liked and get likes.

We all live in our own worlds, the ones we've imagined. The truth is, I don't see the world as *it* is, I see the world as *I* am. You don't see the world as it is, you see the world you've built in your mind, story by story, and now it's 100 stories high.

The world you see is a reflection of your inner world and the story you've been telling yourself with all the memories, mistakes, and melodramas that have become your life. It can be scary navigating a story with so many tall tales and countless disappointments and failures crowding the rear-view mirror.

When all our pursuits—even the successes—bring only fleeting fulfillment and ultimately return empty, we don't know what to do. So we do the opposite of what we should—we get more consumed with ourselves and our stories. This, of course, only magnifies the problem.

The self-in-the-center lens through which we see the world is distorted, reflective, and immensely biased. What we see is the result of the ever-changing filter that has interpreted all the experiences we've ever had. For example, when I walk into Starbucks, I only see what impacts my life, and what I see first (perhaps subconsciously), are potential threats and then possible mates and then probable waits in line that I really don't have time for.

The problem is, you and I, and all the other humans, are born with a nature that's been infected. The biggest challenge we face, in performance and in life, is fear. *At the root of fear is a virus of the heart: self-centeredness.*

Self-centeredness, in our discussion, is a natural preoccupation with self that limits our vision and stunts our growth. It's putting yourself in the center of the world and seeing everything from how it impacts you, your family, your work, your life. It's like being a baton in the conductor's hand of the most amazing orchestra in the world and the whole time thinking you're an

incredible dancer with flawless rhythm. The self-in-the-center life becomes a dark filter of pride that limits your vision and stunts your growth.

Perhaps you think you're not self-centered, certainly not as oblivious as a baton in the conductor's hand, thinking you're the center of attention. However, consider this: is not everything you think, say, and do based on your experiences, your goals, and your beliefs? When you've gotten upset, was it not generally something that was yours that was threatened?

The problem of self-centeredness is that it imparts an inaccurate view of the world, where *you're* the subject of the story, the one who succeeds or fails and makes his or her own decisions. The subject of a story, as you may recall from grade school, is the central idea or theme around which the story revolves. It's totally natural (and logical) to view yourself as the subject of your life story and of course to have a sense of pride about it (this is a good thing, right?) The truth is, however, that you're part of a much larger story—a story you're in, but that's not *about* you.

Making your life story about yourself is like a honeybee that doesn't realize it's part of a colony with a daily guided mission, or a branch that doesn't realize it's part of a vine. Your life is one part of a larger life, just like your hand is one part of your body. You need the arms, legs, heart, and all the parts, to be whole.

The heart is the control center of the human, in charge of disbursing life throughout the body. The lifeblood reverberating through humans is love—the red essence of mortality. *We're made whole through love, and love is an interconnectedness with God and others that we cannot, sustainably, live without.*

If you don't know how you're connected and nourished and filled with life, you'll constantly be searching, disconnecting, and isolating yourself. You may end up feeling like a kite without a string, where the wind is whipping and wild.

To see yourself as the subject of your life story is the fundamental human error. It's a mindset that hijacks our hearts and leaves us continually scrambling to build walls and systems and gather achievements and possessions so we can be secure. But we never get secure that way—especially when we stop to think of all the things that are out of our control and all the dangers and possible perils that we can never do enough to mitigate.

Living this self-as-the-subject life puts us on a path of compulsive busyness trying to do what we cannot. We're trying to fit in and stabilize ourselves in an unstable world obsessed with achievement and appearances... constantly trying to appear in everyone's feed when what we desperately need is to be fed ourselves—the real food, real drink, and real nourishment that can only come from unconditional love and connection.

We become zombies, driving in our metal coffins, going to jobs we don't love so we can buy things we don't need, in order to compare well with others who are doing the exact same thing.

We have this deep need for unconditional love and acceptance, and since it's a chase-your-tail-endless-treadmill-pursuit that never delivers, we end up driving ourselves crazy trying to figure out how to be the person that says the right thing and has the right connections and accomplishments. This creates a cognitive mishmash that messes with our psyche and we lose track of who we are or should be.

100 years ago, American sociologist Charles Cooley described the human condition like this: *I'm not who I think I am; I'm not who you think I am; I am who I think you think I am.*

In other words, the person I present to the world is based on who I think you think I am, or should be. It goes like this: I imagine how I appear to you and everyone else, then I picture what you think of me and how you might judge me based on how I've presented myself, and then I act in response to that perception.

What Cooley shared with us is that we're all deeply connected. How we see those connections defines who we think we are and impacts everything we do. Our entire lives flow out of our interconnectedness. We live in a network of connections that starts with God and flows into people and work and the environment. It all impacts our thoughts and feelings and how we see the world.

Talking Heads lead singer David Byrne described our interdependence this way:

*"There's a sense that you're making these decisions about your life or what you want to do or say and that they're all coming from you. But they're not! Who you are at any given moment is defined by the social context. We're not quite ants, but we're social animals. To pull one ant away and say, 'That ant decided to do that!' No. We do things because we're part of a larger community.*

The truth is, you were created to have deep, meaningful relationships, and even more, for glory. Glory (as you'll see in the glossary), is the brilliance and beauty of infinite, inherent worth. A life of glory is one that has no comparison, filled with fullness of life. This sort of glory, this sort of life, is a profoundly interconnected one—with God, others, yourself, and nature, and even your work.

In this deeply connected community, unconditional love is the common bond, and from love comes joy. Joy is a deep sense of well-being, freedom and gratitude, independent of circumstances; it's harmony, excitement, and resonance that surpasses understanding.

The deepest need of the human heart is for the unremitting connectedness of unconditional love; and even more, for the glory that shines so bright, no darkness could ever put it out. If you don't realize your immense need for God and others to live the life you were created for, you'll take the world on yourself, which is a disconnected-tossed-in-the-wind existence. It's like living in solitary confinement when you're meant for so much more.

## Chapter 2

### The Two Extreme Challenges

*"The world is broken and remains that way, in spite of our efforts to help it. This is beautiful, in a way, because it breaks us of our self-dependency. In a world that refuses to be healed, we must face the fact that we are not the heroes of our stories. It teaches us to rely on something bigger than ourselves and teaches the source of true compassion." – J. Goins*

In our self-absorbed lives, human life can be defined by two extreme and irresolvable challenges:

1. The extreme challenge of living in a broken world.
2. The extreme challenge of navigating a broken world that you cannot fix, especially without the deep love and connection you were created for.

Over time, these two major adversities are an incredible gift if they help you slow down and think deeply about the meaning and purpose of your life. Then, with God's grace, you may realize one crucial thing: *You were created for more than anything the world can offer.*

The truth is, you're going to die—you and everyone close to you. One by one, you'll see them face the ultimate truth of life on earth. And before it gets to be your turn, I hope and pray you'll stop long enough to think deeply for yourself about these words you're about to read.

No matter who you are or how much success or money, friends or followers you have, every night, when the lights go out, it's just you and your creator, alone in the dark. In that darkness, if you think deep enough, you'll realize your immense inadequacy and insufficiency and the utter lack of meaning in the world. Our inability to fix the broken things in the world, especially the fear and division, and the broken things in our own lives, creates a sense of despair, if we're really paying attention.

Many of us never think about this, because deep down, we don't want to. It's too scary. Thus many of us never realize our lack of deep connection and contentment. Instead, we keep ourselves very busy and very distracted.

It's only by busyness or distraction, often by great things like meaningful work or meditation, social connections or success, that we can forget the void that begs to be filled. American philosopher Henry David Thoreau said,

“Those destined for greatness must first walk alone in the desert.” Often it takes separation and solitude for extended periods of time to fully face our fears and emptiness.

One of the greatest challenges we have is too many thoughts, from too many concerns, about too many things. In our anxious minds we must stay busy, because busyness keeps us from facing our deepest needs that we don't know how to fix.

The life you were created for is a life that goes well past the distractions of wealth and sex and temporary pleasures that too often sidetrack us. You were designed to live connected to the deepest need of the human heart: unconditional love and acceptance. As humans we're born with a deep desire to be fully known and fully loved, especially by someone of great significance. Unconditional love, not tied to achievement, allows you to fully relax, let down your guard, and stop trying to be someone the world can love.

Most people, perhaps unknowingly, spend their entire lives trying to earn that love.

Think about your own life for a moment. What goals have you set and why do you want to accomplish them? Isn't it because you think (and hope) they will bring you great satisfaction, a real sense of achievement so you can feel good about yourself and have a sense of security no matter what the future holds?

What if you spend your whole life chasing your dream but never achieve it? Or perhaps worse, what if, with countless hours of sacrifice, you do achieve it, but the payoff turns out to be temporary, empty, and meaningless?

The problem is that once you achieve your dream (if you ever do), your heart still doesn't have what it needs most. And it's not like you can rest on that achievement. Once you achieve great success, more people will expect more things from you—and you may not be able to deliver. The expectations never end.

It's a broken world filled with broken people—all trying to do enough to be enough, but it's never enough. Some folks may come across as well put together, highly educated, and ultra-accomplished, but each of them has wounds and fears and the same deep need for love and acceptance that we all have.

We're all striving to be the person that's loved and accepted, favored and followed. The problem is that everyone's too busy with their own issues to really see each other. So we spend our lives competing for affection, trying to build ourselves up so we'll be seen as lovable, but we're constantly rejected (often by people we don't know), and so we push harder. This turns into a constant back and forth feeling of being inflated or deflated, depending on our current situation and results and how we feel about it. Or, perhaps more accurately, how we feel others feel about it.

We're all in desperate need of nourishment for our souls, a lifeline of unconditional love that doesn't depend on what we say or do, what we have or achieve. It's just that that's not something the world offers. It's like trying to guess a five-letter word in six attempts or less—and not being allowed to use vowels. You'll never get it with those restrictions. We're continually trying to be real and yet we're being really inauthentic. We're living artificially-un-intelligent, trying to navigate an Instagram-BeReal-please-see-me-social-comparison world where everyone's trying to find love without the heart to do it.

As hard as we try on our own, we may get brief bouts of happiness, tiny tastes of wonderment, but our deepest desires continue to go unmet. This is because we're born with a heart that longs for glory, for unhinged joy, in a world that can't deliver. If we don't find it in our work, we'll try to find it in possessions or status or a person. But there's no work or status, no possession or person that will meet your soul's greatest desire. Every person is human, and every human is broken.

Everyone but one, that is. The One who created the earth and came down to look us in the eyes and invite us to love Him with the love that He gives us, the everlasting kind. *This* is your invitation.

It's an invitation to fill the deepest need of your heart: unconditional love. Like a clock without batteries, you'll always have an emptiness in your heart until you choose to accept the love of the one who created you for a relationship with Him. Accepting God's love changes everything in your life: it gives you a deeper connection to yourself, to others, to your work, and to nature. No matter how much time goes by, nothing will ever change at your core until you connect to the source of power for which you were created.

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### **Everybody worships** (sidebar/box)

"In the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship.

And an outstanding reason for choosing some sort of God or spiritual-type thing to worship — be it J.C. or Allah, be it Yahweh or the Wiccan mother-goddess or the Four Noble Truths or some infrangible set of ethical principles — is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things — if they are where you tap real meaning in life — then you will never have enough. Never feel you have enough. It's the truth.

Worship your own body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly, and when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally plant you. On one level, we all know this stuff already — it's been codified as myths, proverbs, clichés, bromides, epigrams, parables: the skeleton of every great story.

The trick is keeping the truth up-front in daily consciousness. Worship power—you will feel weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to keep the fear at bay. Worship your intellect, being seen as smart—you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out. And so on.”

– David Foster Wallace, *This is Water*, 2005 Kenyon College Commencement Address

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## Chapter 3

### The Ultimate Dream

“In order to discover the character of people we have only to observe what they love.” — St. Augustine

What’s your ultimate dream? What if you could have a ten-million-dollar house on the water, completely paid off, and have all the normal cares and concerns of the person who owned that house? Would you take it? Of course you would. On the other hand... would you rather live in an apartment, paycheck-to-paycheck, for the rest of your life, with no savings, but... be guaranteed deep contentment, joy, and confidence, every day until you die?

For myself, most of my life I wouldn’t hesitate—I’d take the house in a heartbeat. Of course, there’s no right or wrong answer to this question, just a way to consider what’s in your heart, and what it beats for.

Say, like me, you chose the house. Perhaps it would bring you many amazing experiences and great parties, and you’d feel so loved. But, maybe it wouldn’t.

To help with your decision, consider this: What if no one could ever see your beautiful house besides you? And what if no one could even know you had it—would you still choose it? Isn’t the reason you want that beautiful home so you can have people over and have these great get-togethers where everyone loves you and is so grateful for you, so you could feel... deep contentment, joy, and confidence? If that’s so, why not go directly for what you want most?

Most of us spend our lives pursuing an illusion, striving for some seemingly great thing that we think will make us happy. Instead however, our version of success, even if we get it, often leaves us empty, like a house that’s not a home. What if you found out that pursuing the wholehearted life you were created for gives you the best chance to have what you deeply want, including a gorgeous home?

What you’ll find, as you continue to read, is that what takes the most space in your heart—what you worship—determines everything else about you. We all worship; the question is who or what you worship. We all want an amazing life with the freedom to do what we want. But what is that life? More specifically, what’s the best possible life for you and how do you get it?

I've always wanted to live The Best Possible Life; the only thing that's changed is how I define it. When I was younger, I thought the best life was one where I was hitting home runs and making millions of dollars. I wanted to be the person that I thought every girl would love and every guy would dream of being.

What I've since learned, however, is that what I've always really wanted is to feel fully alive. I just figured that was the way to do it. I thought that if I could set myself up with really good life circumstances by getting really great results, I could have an amazing life. I envisioned that life being one with incredible experiences, captured through a combination of great friends, great situations, and perhaps some great challenges. Maybe it would be hitting a home run to win the World Series and having a big house on the water that people raved about. Then, I figured, I would feel really good about myself, and hopefully, feel really good when I'm *with* myself, and my thoughts.

Now I've come to realize that absolute fullness of life is completely independent of circumstances. You can have the most amazing moments in the most mundane settings, or the most anxiety-riddled or depression-filled feelings amidst the world's most glorious ocean views. So it's not the situation or circumstance. It's not the result or success or trophy. It's what's in your heart—and when *what* you love with all your heart is the most empowering thing in the universe, well, then fullness of life becomes *your* life.

Thus, part of living The Best Possible Life is to learn what to love and what to let go of. It's learning to have the right structure and the proper boundaries—around your thoughts, desires, and loves—that will bring fullness of life.

For most of us, our feelings and desires have been running our lives. We have limited ability to resist desires, especially around social media and work. We struggle to stop working or checking our phones because we fear we might fall behind or miss out.

According to a study by Hofmann, et al (University of Chicago, 2012), the average adult spends approximately eight hours per day feeling desires, three hours resisting them, and half an hour yielding to previously resisted ones. In other words, we spend a lot of time and energy managing our feelings and desires and we're not great at directing them to empowering ones. What the authors of the study found is that self-control is more about building good habits so they'll replace bad ones rather than using willpower.

The most powerful way to create good habits is to elevate our desires. We need to know what's best for us so we can love it the most. We can start by figuring out what you've been chasing so far. What's the real reason you've been doing what you do? What's the bottom line? Perhaps the most common desire when I speak with someone about what they want most is freedom.

Freedom is awesome, but what does having freedom actually mean? You might think that freedom means having the most options, but too many choices often causes anxiety. The American fast-food chain *In-and-Out Burger*, for example, showed us that *fewer* options often creates more excitement and a better experience than a restaurant with countless options. Not only does too many choices often cause anxiety, it misses the point of freedom itself.

What most of us long for when we think of freedom is deeper and broader than having multiple options to craft happy moments. We want to feel connected to a vision, secure in who we are, engaged in something that makes us feel alive. We want a deep sense of well-being that creates an inner lightness, a buoyancy that keeps us spirited in our mission, thriving in our purpose. True freedom allows us to live free from self-protection and social comparison, inspired by and devoted to a vision beyond ourselves.

This sort of freedom allows us to reject disempowering desires and embrace empowering ones. For this to happen, we need to live according to our true design, with the proper restrictions and environment. If you "free" a fish from water and put it on the grass, it loses the constraints and limitations it needs to live a full life (or any life). We're like the fish—certain restrictions are necessary for us to live an extraordinary life. We can't just indulge in all our impulses, giving in to every pleasure or desire. That would dissipate our energy and scatter our resources. Our life force needs to be directed down a path that's powerful and permanent.

So we need to reject some desires and embrace others. We need to let go of our attachment to what we want but can't control. Besides, you have your plans and goals, but how often are your desires actually what's best for you? When you realize that you don't know what's best for you (circumstance-wise), then you can begin to walk in love and not fear, and stop clinging to what you want but can't control.

The clinging part is the problem. We cling to what we want because we feel our identity and security is riding on it. We've placed our foundation and sense of self in something unstable. When we come to the unsteady moments in life, we think about our desires and fears and how we can't

control the outcome. We think, “Who will I be if I fail, lose my job, or get rejected?”

When we cling to this narrow view of our lives, we don’t take the risks we need to live bigger, fuller lives. “In order to hit the best shot of your life, you need to be willing to hit the worst,” says Teddy Scott, PGA Tour caddie to world #1 golfer Scottie Scheffler. To be your best in golf or baseball, wrestling or writing a novel, you need the freedom to fail.

Most people spend their entire lives pursuing temporary satisfaction and fleeting feelings of happiness because they’re trying to navigate a broken world without the proper resources. Their lives get consumed with chasing success or money or numbers—running after the wind—even though they’re created for so much more. They’re all over the place because they’re not sure what will last and what will pass.

The one thing that lasts, that determines everything you think, say, and do, is your heart. Your heart is where inner peace and inner strength, joy and self-control all fade or flourish. Your heart is where your greatest dreams and biggest fears are. Get those two opposites (your dreams and fears) in your heart to join forces, structured within the boundaries of your true self, and you’ll have the freedom to live with fullness of life.

In short, your heart is the key to everything you want—in this life and the next. Here’s something that may help:

*Your heart needs a great devotion, something deeply meaningful to attach to, otherwise it will grab on to the next closest thing, which is personal happiness.*

The pursuit of happiness leads us to try to control what we cannot (continuously trying to get good circumstances so we can get good feelings) as well as trying to protect what we have. It’s a life of self-protection that leads to fear. To get out of this fast track to fear is to have a heart that sees beyond the self, a heart connected to what’s powerful and permanent.

Since the human default is self-centeredness, our hearts need training. Heart-focused training is the most important thing you’ll ever do. By training your heart, I mean training it to pursue what’s most empowering, to love most what’s best for you, so you can drop the barriers of self-protection and self-absorption.

It’s similar to training your appetite to love eating what’s best for you. You don’t need to train yourself to love carrot cake or chocolate chip cookies; it’s

easy to want those things. The training you need is the training to choose the broccoli and brussels sprouts, to not go just by taste but by long-term effects. It's the same with your heart. You don't need to train it to love comfort or pleasure; you need to train it to love what's going to have the most beneficial impact on your life, no matter how difficult or painful.

And this does require training, because a naturally self-centered heart won't train on its own. We have egos that see the world through a filter of self-protection and self-enhancement. Our hearts and egos don't see actual reality or truth; we see *our* reality and *our* truth. That kind of seeing can be severely limiting. (Note: When I say ego, I mean that part of your mind that's always comparing, always threatened, and never satisfied).

As humans, we're easily deceived by our hearts. We're told to follow our hearts—and that can be a great thing—but not if your heart is in the default mode (divided), leading you on a self-centered journey towards fear.

What if you felt with all your heart that you need to try fentanyl, or smoke pot to make yourself happy, or have unprotected sex with someone you just met? You'd feel it as true—but it would be wrong. At any given time, your heart may be 100% leading you toward a life of pain and misery—which is why your heart needs training.

American Anglican pastor Dr. John Yates III explains:

*"There's a trend in the adoration of authenticity: 'You be you. Follow your heart (even if it lacks awareness of others). I am who I am. Keeping it real. I refuse to fake it. I'm just being authentic...'*

There's just one problem with this, as Dr. Yates continues: *"The human heart is corrupt, deceptive, and self-destructive... When we pursue every passing affection in an attempt to satisfy the longing of our hearts, we rocket down the road of self-destruction."*

Your identity—your true self—is to have a heart that's filled with sacrificial, unconditional love, a love that doesn't come from you or anyone else in this world. It comes from a single source—the creator of the universe—and there's an endless supply. With this kind of love, you're free to dream great dreams, to pursue uncharted waters.

To be your true self is to let go of your past failures and inadequate desires (the ones that dissipated your energy and joy), and align your truth with capital-R Reality and capital-T Truth. For this to happen, we need to cast off all that's held us back.

To live the ultimate dream is to let go of our limited desires and the stories we've created about ourselves. You'll need to ask yourself some hard questions that perhaps you've don't want to ask or haven't wanted to face.

- Are you willing to let go of who you've been to become someone you've never been before?
- Are you willing to face feelings you've never faced before?
- Are you willing to sit in the discomfort, keeping the walls of protection down (the ones that isolate you), and learn to get comfortable being uncomfortable?

It's hard, maybe the hardest thing you've ever done—but it's worth it. Because the Reality is, the story of your life is far greater than you've ever imagined.