Get A Life!

It is all about you
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Acknowledgments

Everyone who has contributed to my life should be listed here. You might even know some of these people, but they might not want you to know they know me. My parents, siblings, teachers, coaches, ministers, mentors, bosses, coworkers, neighbors, enemies, detractors, supports, sponsors, clients, friends—all to some degree have added to me, even if it was through subtraction. Truthfully, I have been blessed more than the average bear by having had great people in my life at every stage. And, of course, God, the Author of life, gets major kudos.

But I do want to single out a few people who have made substantial contributions to this particular project. My literary agent (actually my only agent), Mark Sweeney, believed in this book from the get-go and helped me believe too. He also helped a publisher believe enough to produce it. Speaking of publishers, I want to thank the whole B&H gang (Len Goss, George Williams, John Thompson, Craig Featherstone, Lisa Parnell, Robin Patterson, Steve NeSmith,
David Schrader, David Woodard) for creating the opportunity for people to have this book.

Most especially, I want to thank my wife Cathy and our two daughters Jessica and Susanna for helping me get a life and making the one I have so worth living.

Finally, I want to thank you for the contribution you are making to the world. I hope that in some way I can help you have conversations with yourself that help you become more you. We all need you.
How to Use
Get a Life!

This book is a combination of information, inspiration, and perspiration (first on my part and now on yours). Its approach ranges from “you need to know” to “you can do it!” to a swift kick in the pants to get your attention and get you going.

You can engage this material in several possible ways:

**Read only.** Reading this book will help you with some information, insight, and motivation. That certainly has value, especially if you get some ideas and fresh perspectives on your life that you can think about.

**Workbook/journal.** Throughout the material I pose questions to help you process what you’ve just read or to help you look for things in your life or figure out what to do next. I left space in the book itself for you to write out your responses. If you work through the questions in the book and record your answers, you will create a journal of your
experience. Capturing your thoughts in this way can be a powerful way to synthesize input into action.

*With a partner.* There are many advantages to working through this material with another person. This can be a spouse, a friend, or a colleague—someone with whom you can be open as you talk about your life. The benefit of this approach is that you create accountability to another person, something that will probably help you stay with it. Plus, you will gain the perspective of another person on these issues for your life.

*With a group.* You can work through this material with a group of two or three other people. This could be a lot of fun. Pace your way through the material to allow everyone adequate time to get in on the discussion. I would love to come up on a group of people at a coffee shop working through *Get a Life!* If I do, the coffee’s on me!
You didn’t ask to be born. You can’t get out of dying. What you do in between you do have some say over. Why not choose to live? Why not get a life?

Who wouldn’t want to live? Apparently, a lot of people! What they are settling for is a pale imitation of real living. They squander away their shot at life and wind up looking back across their years with a sigh of “if only”: “If only I could do it all over again” or “If only this or that hadn’t happened” or “If only I had had a few breaks along the way”—or some similar excuse for why their lives didn’t turn out to be the life they wanted.

Many people simply postpone living. It’s not that they don’t want a life. They just keep putting it off. They are going to get around to it someday. “Once the kids are grown” or “Once we get through this situation” or “Once we finish . . . whatever”—or any number of indeterminate futures seem to take precedence over living. The trouble with this attitude is that it ignores a fundamental truth:
the way you are living today is how you are living life. None of us get today back. We can choose to defer living until some circumstances are met, but that means every day until then is another lost day of life.

There are those who hand their lives over to other people. They do this in a number of ways. For most this comes in the form of allowing other people to decide our lives for us—our parents, our spouse, our kids, our friends, our boss, and even our enemies. We try to live up to or live down their expectations.

Another form of life avoidance is to blame other people for the life we have. Our parents messed us up. Our company cheated us out of a promotion. Our spouse ruined our self-esteem. This approach reflects a failure to take responsibility for one’s own life. While many of us have significant setbacks dealt to us by other people, we ultimately have to decide if we are going to cede to these people and those circumstances the final word on our lives.

Some people refuse to live because they have fears. Death is certain. Living requires risk. Still others fritter away their lives through distractions that seem always to keep them from focusing in on the main thing: living. It is possible to fill up a life with all kinds of activities that in the end just wear us out but leave us with nothing close to anything that resembles a life.
Some people simply give up on life. For any number of reasons they decide not to live. They may signal their decision in obvious ways through emotional or even physical withdrawal. Or they may put up a front of normal activity on the outside, while slowly dying on the inside. The lights go out but they don’t expire, cursed to exist without living.

Do any of these descriptions fit you? Do you often wonder, Where am I missing it? as you reflect on your life. Do you keep hoping that life will somehow happen to you? Are you haunted by a nagging doubt or a burning fear: Is this all there is?

Then it’s time for you to get a life!

This book is an invitation for you to take a look at you, for you to have some honest conversations with you, for you to take time for you to make sure you get a life while you are hanging around on this planet. This book is all about you because when it comes to getting a life it really is all about you. It’s about whether or not you are going to do the hard work that’s involved. It’s about taking responsibility for the hardest thing you’ll ever do: really live.

The issue is not that we don’t have the chance to live. Fact is, we have more choices of how to live our lives than any humans before us. Yet we seem unprepared to deal with these options. The result is unintentional living. Evidence of this sad waste of life is all around us—lives without direction
or a center. People not only living lives of quiet desperation but loud emptiness. People feeling overwhelmed or frazzled, just doing the best they can, busy but not vibrant—lives filled full of stuff but not full-filled. People leaving the table of life unsatisfied, still not sure what would have “hit the spot” since they don’t know what the spot is.

The secret to living life is to live it. But that’s the hard part. Because real living requires intentionality. An intentional life is a journey guided by asking and answering the right questions. Five questions help us frame the discussion of our lives.

1. Why am I here?
2. What is really important to me?
3. What is my scorecard?
4. What am I good at?
5. What do I need to learn?

This book is designed to help you pursue these questions. While you may need more time in answering these questions than simply reading through these pages, at least you will know what to focus on in the days ahead that will set you free to really live.

You might as well know (you’ll figure it out anyway) that I come from a faith perspective that greatly influences my take on all this. I believe that when you talk about life, you’re talking about the most precious thing there is—you! That’s why I say this is all about you. And I didn’t decide this. God did. My faith tradition
(I am a Jesus follower) holds the fascinating belief that God intends for you and me to enjoy abundant life. That’s what Jesus said he came to bring to humankind. Further, the Bible declares that God made you. You are his dream. The ancient Hebrew Scriptures say that God created human beings in his image. That means that when God wants to take a look in the mirror, he takes a look at you. He is looking for his reflection in you. You are not God, but you have been uniquely crafted to be like him in many ways. Including the power to choose life.

So—you have a decision. You can keep hoping somehow to stumble into what you are looking for. Or you can decide to go for it! If you choose to get a life, get ready to ask yourself some hard questions. Real living comes at a price. But you will never meet a person who really is living that feels the price is too great.

What do you say? What have you got to lose? Or find? Except your life!
So, you want to know the meaning of life?

Join the crowd! Everyone from Socrates to Billy Crystal has been looking for an answer. People look to their parents, their teachers, their pastors, their friends, their therapists, anyone who might have an idea. You probably bought this book to get help with the answer.

Before we get to the main “why” question, let me ask another question: Why do we ask the why question?

Cats don’t ponder their existence. Neither do monkeys or dolphins. Human beings seem to be uniquely afflicted with the quest for meaning. Could this haunting quest itself be some sort of clue to life’s meaning? I think it is.

You are not here accidentally. Accidents would have no reason to search for a reason for being. You are here by design. And because you are, you ask for meaning.
When we ask ourselves “why?” we assert meaning over randomness. Meaning implies intentionality. Intentionality implies design. Design begs for a designer. I believe that an intelligent designer stands behind the universe. And behind you. The nagging question of your life’s purpose points you beyond yourself to your designer. To God. The quest is a homing beacon he has put in your spirit. When you search for life, you search for him. When you discover the reason for your life, you will discover God right in the big middle of it!

This is what the Hebrew creation narrative means when it reveals that people are created in the image of God. This sets human beings apart from the rest of creation. You are not just part of the circle of life. You are special.

I believe you were created on purpose . . . for a purpose. I think that’s why you have a hunger for meaning. Our desire to understand the reason for our being is a fundamental part of what it means to be human. This quest for meaning in life is a spiritual journey. That is why a lot of what I say in this chapter has spiritual overtones.

When challenged to investigate their life purpose, many people get nervous. It has nothing to do with an allergic reaction to a spiritual search. It’s just they don’t feel particularly creative or innovative. They struggle to know what to say. They feel they should be able to articulate their life story in depth, complete with chapters and subheadings.
Relax! I’ve got some good news for you. You don’t have to feel pressure to invent anything or come up with anything clever. Since we are intentional creations of God, we do not invent our life mission; we discover it. When you adopt this perspective, life becomes a journey of discovery, an adventure into the meaning and mission of your life.

This book is designed to help you make the discovery of your life mission. The format is an extended conversation. I talk awhile, and then I let you talk awhile. You get a chance throughout the book in the “Your Turn” sections to weigh in with your responses. Several key ideas provide the basis for the discussion you are about to have with yourself (and with anyone else you want to include in the conversation).

- Your life has purpose, whether or not you know it. However, your best shot at enjoying life to its fullest is to engage it with intentionality. Knowing your life mission will lend direction to you.
- God is already at work on your life purpose. The fact that you may not recognize it or are able to articulate it yet has not kept him from pursuing it in you.
- Your life purpose does not have to remain a mystery. You can discover it if you learn how to look at your life through a filter designed to help you “connect the dots” of your life mission.
- Discovery is not a linear process. Feel free to work this book like a crossword puzzle. Fill in what you
You have some clues sewn into your life that point to your life mission or purpose.

You may need to go on to other parts of this book and come back to this question later, or even last.

- Life purpose is not static in its expression or in how you experience it. It is a developing story line complete with chapters and twists and turns in the plot development. It takes several decades for a life story to take mature shape. How you are living out your life mission in your twenties will be different than in your forties or fifties. However, the basic theme or plot carries through.

- This discovery process is not about cobbling together a set of words and then calling it a life mission statement. It’s more important to have a life mission without an articulated statement than to create a mission statement without really possessing a sense of life mission. Obviously, the best combination is for you to know both your life purpose and to be able to articulate it.

**YOU HAVE SOME CLUES**

You have some clues sewn into your life that point to your life mission or purpose. Let’s take a look at some of these. As you do, you may be able to “connect the dots” and see a pattern that is there.
Passion

You get really excited about some things. They might be certain causes or particular activities or great dreams. These things create energy in you. When the topic of your passion comes up, you suddenly get fired up! Your passion never loses its appeal, no matter how much exposure you have to it.

Just today I listened to a radio interview of a musician who is trying to break into a new market with his particular genre of music. The interviewer questioned the artist about numbers of CD sales, the requirements of promoters to cover their risks of investing in the band, and the grueling challenges of being a concert musician. The artist answered these questions with obvious lackluster enthusiasm. Then the journalist shifted the commentary. Suddenly we heard the artist performing. The journalist commented, “But when he is on stage, there’s no thought of profit margins and promotion. It’s about the music.” A final sound byte cut back to the musician, who said: “I love what I do.” His voice was now animated. Life sparkled through him as he talked about seeing people enjoy his music. The difference in his voice told me that we were now into his passion!

Did you get that? There is a difference between work and passion.

Don’t misunderstand something critical at this point. Passion doesn’t always have to show up in public fireworks. It can just as easily be demonstrated by a quiet conviction...
that fuels a person’s determination. It might move a person to engage street kids who have been abandoned by everyone else. It might cause a researcher to work late into the night looking for the cure to a disease or searching for data that will validate her theory.

Passion distinguishes people from the pack. People with passion stand out from other people who are involved in the same work or activity without it. For the latter, it’s just a job or something they have assigned to them. For the people operating from passion, it is an expression of who they are and what makes them tick.

My wife recently had to move both of her aging parents into a special-care Alzheimer’s unit. There is one nurse she loves to talk to on the phone when she calls to check on them. Why? Because, as the nurse puts it, “I just love being here.” And it shows! While many of us (if not most) would recoil from dealing with demented people all day long, this lady looks forward to it. That’s what passion does for you.

Some people, like that nurse, express their passion through their job or vocation. Others have developed hobbies to give outlet to their passion. Still others adopt causes or serve as volunteers on weekends in churches, schools, or service agencies. They work for a living, but the passion is where they come alive.
YOUR TURN
What makes your heart beat faster?

What brings you energy?

What captures your attention?

TALENT
Talent matters. One reason it matters is because it provides a significant clue to your life mission.

The trouble is, our culture works against your coming to understand and to develop your talent. Our culture focuses on our weaknesses, not our strengths.

If a kid comes home from school with four A’s and one C, what is the discussion typically about? See what I mean?! Or, let a child demonstrate remarkable talent at a piano keyboard. Often, we tell that young talent to try to “balance out” with some other pursuits. Balance is a