

Making A Difference

**How to Extend Your Influence
and Transform Your World**

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Foreword by Jay Payleitner

Edited by Dwight Clough

EmpowerGood.com Leadership Series

MAKING A DIFFERENCE:

How to Extend Your Influence and Transform Your World

EmpowerGood.com Leadership Series

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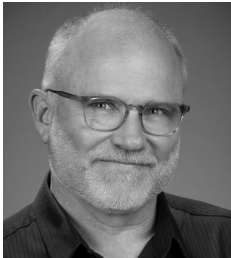
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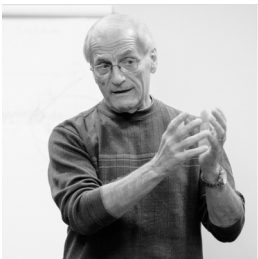
After a decade writing advertising for airlines and beer, Jay would produce thousands of radio broadcasts as a freelancer for Chuck Colson, Josh McDowell, Fathers.com, Heritage Foundation, and Voice of the Martyrs. As he

approached 50, Jay reinvented himself as a national speaker and best-selling author of 25+ books including *The Prayer of Agur*, *52 Things Kids Need from a Dad*, and *What If God Wrote Your Bucket List?* Jay claims his brand is “Never boring. Possibly life changing.” Read the obligatory story at jaypayleitner.com.



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Dwight Clough

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Foreword

Jay Payleitner

I'm excited for you.

By buying, downloading, or stealing this book, you've made a not-small decision. You're making a giant leap toward extending your influence and making a difference. You've said—perhaps inaudibly—*God use me*. At this moment, you're taking to heart Paul's admonition, “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.”¹

But, if you'll allow me, I'd like to clarify a few things about that decision you just made. Three truths I learned the hard way.

#1 Expect the unexpected

First, you have no idea what you're getting into or what's waiting around the corner. That idea in your head to start a ministry, write a book, feed the hungry, make a movie, launch a blog or podcast, preach the gospel in stadiums around the world, or pursue any other noble cause makes God smile. He wants you to chase that dream. But he also wants you to trust him if you suddenly find yourself going down an entirely different path.

1 Romans 12:11 NIV

The Bible is filled with characters who were surprised by God which led them to do unimaginable things like build a giant boat, have a son at age 90, abandon their fishing nets, or get knocked off a donkey and write most of the New Testament. Yes, chase your dream, but jot down Proverbs 16:9 on a sticky note next to your keyboard, “We can make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps.” (NLT)

#2 It all counts

Second, don't dismiss or minimize any of the life experiences you've already had. Because God will use it all. I can look back at the crazy, frustrating jobs I've had and see God working in every twist and turn of my career.

Out of college, my first full-time job was selling photocopiers. I was terrible at it. Following that, I was even worse selling law books to corporate attorneys, lugging a 26-pound briefcase around Chicago's loop.

Reinventing my career path, I spent a decade as a copywriter on Chicago's famed Michigan Avenue. Highlights included writing commercials for Kroger, Corona Beer, and Midway Airlines (featuring Bear's coach Mike Ditka) and also leading the creative team that would name “SunChips” for Frito-Lay. I got canned from two different agencies. Such is the nature of the ad business.

With that closed door, God called me to more important work as the Creative Director for a small agency and recording studio in the suburbs that served Christian ministries and publishers. The fit was perfect, but one year later we

merged with two other small agencies and the creative department moved to Seattle, leaving me again without a full-time job.

My current job is not a job at all. For more than 20 years, I have been a freelance writer, producer, author, speaker, and consultant. Radio production credits include “Josh McDowell Radio” and “Project Angel Tree” with Chuck Colson. Plus thousands of scripts for “Today’s Father,” “Museum of the Bible,” and “Jesus Freaks Radio” for Voice of the Martyrs.

As a speaker, I engage eager audiences at men’s events, marriage retreats, fundraisers, writers’ conferences, weekend services, MOPS groups, and creative training sessions. I’ve spoken at Moody Bible Institute’s Pastors Conference and Iron Sharpens Iron conferences in more than 15 states.

Perhaps most notably, I’ve sold more than one-half million books including *52 Things Kids Need from a Dad*, *What If God Wrote Your Bucket List?*, *The Jesus Dare*, and *The Prayer of Agur*.

To be clear, I can connect the dots from who I was to who I am. Working in outside sales, I learned to keep hustling and endure rejection. As a copywriter, I learned to “write short” and focus on the real needs of real people. Freelancing for ministries, I saw integrity modeled, made innumerable contacts, and somehow got paid for studying biblical principles and sharing how they apply to life. Romans 8:28 is true. All things do work for good for those who love God and are called to his purposes.

#3 Maybe stay in your comfort zone

The third truth learned along the way is that God doesn't want you to be miserable or confused in your career or ministry. He wants you to be happy, do good, and find satisfaction in your work.

I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God.²

You'll find that gift when you finally anchor in God's sweet spot for your life. That's when you will receive the answer to the question we all ask, "What should I do?"

Does finally knowing the answer to that question scare you? It should not. Because God equips those he calls. As a matter of fact, he already has been preparing you to meet the challenge. Ephesians 2:10 expresses it well, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."

You may be surprised to hear God's plan is not about forcing you out of your comfort zone. It's not about suffering for Jesus. It's more about embracing your giftedness. God is not asking you to careen back and forth down a dark unfamiliar highway without GPS, headlights, or brakes.

2 Ecclesiastes 3:12-13 NIV

Listen now. *God wants you to do stuff that comes easy.* If you can dance, dance. If you can write, write. If you can build, build. If you can plant, plant. If you can hug, hug.³

Does that sound obvious? Too many people miss that point. They think that listening to God and following his plan is bewildering. As if God wants us to be confused. They think working for God is tedious, unfulfilling, and back-breaking. As if God wants us to live in despair.

Why is that? Maybe every interaction they've had with God or church has been boring or painful. Maybe they were taught to live in fear of a God who delivers only judgment and wrath. Maybe they think that if something is easy or personally gratifying, it's not worth doing. Maybe no one ever challenged them to chase their dreams. Worse, maybe their dreams were mocked or written off as impractical.

So here is your challenge. Do not be one of those people who perpetually sets aside activities you enjoy because you think you're not worthy or you need to earn the right to be happy. Do not wait any longer for the stars to align before you follow your sweetest dreams. Consider the possibility that you can live in God's sweet spot this very day.

Remember, you are God's workmanship. He has been preparing you for specific good works since before you were born. Recognize and believe that what you enjoy—your natural giftedness—is a gift you can give back to God.

Put another way. Don't exhaust yourself with sweat and study trying to be good at something you don't care about.

3 I develop this further in my book, *The Prayer of Agur*.

Instead, put your best efforts into something you're already good at, and take it to the next level.

Consider for a moment anyone you know—a friend or a hero—who excels at what they do. From the outside looking in, it seems like everything they do is effortless. How do they do that? Well maybe . . . it's because they have devoted their lives to activities that come easily to them. Now it's your turn.

Open your eyes, ears, heart, minds, and soul to what you already know. Be who you are. Claim your title as the one person in the world uniquely designed to be you.

Do what you do best. Do it with excellence. And get ready to give the God the glory.

About Jay Payleitner

After a decade writing advertising for airlines and beer, Jay would produce thousands of radio broadcasts as a freelancer for Chuck Colson, Josh McDowell, Fathers.com, Heritage Foundation, Salvation Army, and Voice of the Martyrs. As he approached 50, Jay reinvented himself as a national speaker and best-selling author of 25+ books including *The Prayer of Agur*, *52 Things Kids Need from a Dad*, and *What If God Wrote Your Bucket List?* With sales of more than one-half million copies. Jay claims his brand is “Never boring. Possibly life changing.” Read more at jaypayleitner.com.

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Part 1: Build the Right Foundation

Chapters 1-6

The most important part of any building is the foundation. Jesus, having worked as a builder, pointed this out. Build on the wrong foundation, He said, and your house will fall.⁴ If you want to make a difference and bring good into your world, there are no shortcuts here—you must lay the right foundation.

Stephen Covey famously wrote, “Begin with the end in mind.” We begin with freelance writer Crystal McDowell’s beautiful summary of the legacy she wants to leave. As you read her words, pause and think about your own legacy. What will it look like?

Do you want God to show up? Do you want to see Him change your world? Veteran missionary and mentor John Henry reveals the secret of what’s behind God-inspired, world-changing movements.

You were designed to make a difference, says author Dwight Clough, but what happens when your desire to make a difference hits a brick wall? What’s going on, and what can you do about it?

Do you want to see lives changed? If you do, then you’ll want to understand how God changes lives. A fresh look at

4 See Matthew 13:55 and Matthew 7:24-27.

the 23rd Psalm uncovers important insights that could save you years of frustration and disappointment.

Left Behind author Jerry Jenkins and ministry leader Mike Halsted round out this section with a critically important challenge: Will we have the sense and the courage to put marriage and family first?

Leaving a Legacy

10 Things I Want To Be Remembered For⁵

Crystal McDowell

My legacy will continue after I've moved onto the next life. I will be remembered for my attitude, presence, words, and actions that left a pleasant fragrance or putrid stench. In order to establish a great legacy, there needs to be an intentional effort every day with the help of the Holy Spirit. There are 10 things for which I want to be remembered by my family, friends, and co-workers:

#1 Legacy of joy in the midst of difficulty

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.” James 1:2-3 NIV

In this life, we are going to have troubles even when we aren't the instigators of it. Rather than attempting to live a trouble-free life, it's much better to expect bumps in the road and dig deep in our spirit to find joy in the midst of it.

5 Reprinted from <https://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/leaving-a-legacy-10-things-i-want-to-be-remembered-for/> ... used with permission.

There's joy that comes from knowing that God is in control of every single situation in our lives.

#2 Legacy of receiving and giving grace

“By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care.” 1 Corinthians 3:10 NIV

God gives us great grace to accomplish His will right where we are. Being on the receiving end of undeserved grace and mercy makes it easier to pass it on to others. Giving grace is the ability to release our loved ones to experience everything God has created them to be and allowing them to make mistakes along the journey without being condemned.

#3 Legacy of encouraging and inspiring others towards greatness

“But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called ‘Today,’ so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.” Hebrews 3:13 NIV

There's always something to bring people down—a discouraging word, a disapproving look, or disrespectful actions. Sometimes we have to bring the joy with us when we show up in the home, work, church, or community. Great personal joy happens within us when other people are inspired by our words and actions.

#4 Legacy of giving my time, treasures, and energy for kingdom work

“But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.” 2 Corinthians 8:7 NIV

As believers in Christ Jesus, our legacy should be one of incredible generosity of our time, money, and energy. We are promised by God that He will supply all our needs and grant our desires according to His will. Our legacy is bolstered when we live unhindered by selfish ambition or hoarding earthly treasures for ourselves.

#5 Legacy of modeling forgiveness

*“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”
Ephesians 4:32 NIV*

It’s much easier to talk and think about forgiving others than actually doing it. However, God gives an incredible freedom to those who choose to forgive those who’ve offended them. Christ’s sacrifice at the cross is most modeled when we forgive as He has forgiven us.

#6 Legacy of unconditional love for my family and friends

“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.” 1 Peter 4:8 NIV

Many of us grow up believing that people love us when we do something worthy of their affection. However God has called us to love unconditionally as He has loved us. Through His grace, the legacy of agape love can reach throughout many generations of family and friends.

#7 Legacy of leading and discipling people to Christ

“Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.” 1 Thessalonians 2:8 NIV

It’s easy to take for granted the amazing gift of salvation given from God the Father through Jesus Christ. Yet every time I share the gospel and witness a transformed life—I’m more determined to reach out to the lost. It takes time and effort to disciple people in Christ, but God gives us the wisdom and strength when we trust in His direction.

#8 Legacy of hearing and doing God’s word

“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” James 1:22 NIV

If I could choose, I would rather leave a legacy of doing God’s word rather than just sitting around accruing knowl-

edge about it. God's word is a powerful motivator to get us moving in the right direction. However it's only possible when I surrender my inability in the flesh and trust the Lord to give me what I need to follow through.

#9 Legacy of doing good and productive work

"...their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work." 1 Corinthians 3:13 NIV

I've gained much satisfaction from giving my best in the work God has given me to do. It isn't always easy and sometimes I'm tempted to quit. However through perseverance and strength from the Holy Spirit, I've accomplished my goals and aspirations in the different seasons of my life to give a good day's work in and outside of the home.

#10 Legacy of looking towards my heavenly home

"But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells." 2 Peter 3:13 NIV

If there was only one legacy I could leave—it would be the hope I have in Christ for eternal life. Every day I must live as if it were the last one on this earth considering the question: what would I bring to heaven? The answer: nothing, except what I did in the name of Jesus leading towards heavenly riches.

What's your legacy?

Everyone leaves a legacy whether they plan to or not. Everything we say or do leaves the imprint of our lives on those around us. As long as there is breath in your body, there's an opportunity to leave a rich legacy of hope. Start your legacy list today and begin to live in the fullness that God created you to experience.

About Crystal McDowell

In addition to being a freelance writer, Crystal McDowell works in the corporate world as a business analyst, teaches a group of women in her church, serves in a prayer ministry, and loves to play tennis. She is the proud mom of an American soldier, 2 college students, and 2 high school students. Learn more at daughtersofthecreator.com.

Convergence:

How Your Prayers Can Make a Difference

John T. Henry

Snow crunched under boots on the walkway leading up to the house as seven men quietly entered Keith and Cherry's home for early morning prayer. Like Jesus' disciples, everyone of us wanted to learn how to pray. We were desperate. We wanted our prayers to make a difference for our families and our futures. Because I was with Youth With A Mission, I had prayed long hours alone and in all kinds of meetings. But this frozen February morning in a dimly lit front room of a pastor's home in New Hampshire was different somehow. As soon as I rolled out of bed at 4:30 that morning, I should have been tired, but my spirit was wide awake. Something was about to happen. Looking down at the shoes in that circle of prayer, I began to hear the whispered voice of God summoning me to something. But I didn't know what. I was about to experience a convergence, a God-moment when everything came together. It didn't matter how cold it was outside; a fire had kindled in my heart. And the fuel for that fire was constructed over time by the old stories I was reading about, by the experiences I was having with new people, and by a fresh hope that what God did many years ago, he was going to do again.

I had just completed my first intensive years with YWAM on the School of Evangelism staff. I had traveled with teams of young evangelists to prisons and schools, college campuses and slums. We distributed bibles to every household in a town outside Mexico City, and we planted a church at 16,000 feet in the Andes Mountains of Peru. We shared the good news with suburban moms in Philadelphia and with addicts and gang members in New York City. Rick, my YWAM Director, asked me to join a pioneer team planting a new YWAM ministry location. He said, "Join us, but bring your own vision." Vision had been stirring in me to minister to university students. Rick encouraged me to take some time on a short sabbatical. While on outreach in the summer of 1987, I met Keith on the Dartmouth College campus. He invited me to do my prayer and research sabbatical with his church, birthed by students, that met at the chapel on campus. I was excited to spend January and February of 1988 meeting with students every day, especially international students.

Nearly every day I met with a different student group, observing how they operated, and joining them for prayer. Long hours were spent in an overstuffed chair between the stacks at the Baker-Berry Library where I researched campus revivals. I had already read about Samuel Mills, a tall awkward student who was in his mid-20s when he enrolled at Williams College during the Second Great Awakening. Looking closer, I found that his fellow classmates scoffed at the religious awakening, so Sam led an off-campus prayer

meeting with four fellow students. Twice a week, they prayed down by the Hoosack River.

The Haystack Prayer Meeting

One humid Saturday in August 1806, Sam and his friends prayed for Asia and for students to be involved in world missions. Sam had gotten hold of a little book published in England in 1792 by the newly formed Baptist Missionary Society. This eighty-seven page manuscript, which has popularly become known as the “*Enquiry*,” was written by a cobbler who made maps of leather and prayed for the nations. This *Enquiry* was a treatise appealing to the Church to use every means possible to reach the lost with the good news of Jesus Christ. Carey is known as the Father of Modern Missions, though missionaries had been active since the day Jesus said, “Go!”⁶ What was new was the “means”; it was the first official Protestant missionary agency that sent and supported Carey’s mission to India.

I stopped reading a moment and looked out the window to take in this remarkable story. Sam read Carey’s little book about world missions, and then he inspired these four young men to join him to pray for something that did not yet exist. Students were not involved in missions at that time. In fact, there were no missionaries sent from North America...not yet. Think a moment about when this happened. Thomas Jefferson was president, Lewis and Clark were exploring the Northwest frontier, and there were only

6 Matthew 28:19

twenty-five colleges in the United States. Theirs were pioneering prayers, asking God for something that did not yet exist.

When Sam and his friends finished their prayer time that hot August day, they started heading back to campus. Then, battered by a sudden fierce summer storm, they had no other choice but to find shelter in a pile of hay in a field. There in that haystack, Sam and his friends thought perhaps God was requiring more of them. So they prayed a prayer of commitment—to become the answer to their own prayers. They responded to Jesus' command to go.

There is a monument at Williams College in the Berkshire mountains of Western Massachusetts. Too few know why that monument stands at the edge of the campus. Most students at Williams do not know the monument is dedicated to a prayer meeting. The monument was erected in Mission Park in Williamstown, Massachusetts in 1867 to honor the five men involved in the Haystack Prayer Meeting.

Changing history

Sam and his friends changed history. They informally began a secret student-led prayer movement, the Society of Brethren, the first intercollegiate group on the North American continent. They transferred to other colleges to lead other students in a commitment to world missions. A few years later, these young men appealed to their church denomination to found the first North American missions

board. By 1810, Adoniram Judson was sent as their first missionary to join William Carey in India.

There is so much more to this story, so much I could identify with as a young missionary. It was not a well-funded organization with powerful leadership that changed history. It was a few students with a simple prayer of commitment that effectively launched the North American Missionary Enterprise.

Standing in that pre-dawn prayer circle, I thought deeply about what a prayer of commitment can do. And my mind raced with thoughts of what happened just days before. I had been meeting with three new friends, students from Ethiopia, India, and Ghana. Though I had no resources or experience, I asked them if they could help me call together a gathering of all 143 international students at Dartmouth College. My friends agreed and invitations went into the students' Hinman mailboxes. And, of course, we prayed.

Reaching the nations right here

A blizzard blew through central New Hampshire that day, and I was concerned it might shut down the event. As I walked through nearly two feet of fresh snow to get to the church hall right off campus, I was surprised to see over 100 international students who brought traditional dishes from their home countries to share. My three friends invited fellow students to perform traditional songs or dances. Then Enoch, from Ethiopia, shared his testimonies, and I gave a simple appeal to receive Christ as Savior. Several responded.

Within days, new believers and seekers from several countries were coming to a new international student Bible study at the church. Future leaders of nations were being touched and transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ. My passion to reach nations was fueled when I learned through experience that you can reach nations right where you are.

When I was in college, I did not know Jesus. I was dedicated to my own pleasures. But I learned a lot about college culture because I had been the president of a big fraternity on a small campus. Pledging a fraternity requires dedication. Even selfishly motivated people can make commitments, such as multiple sleepless nights. Too few know that there are two governments operating on a typical college campus. The daytime is run by the college administration, and the night time is run by the students, especially the students leading big social fraternities. Though I did not learn about God in college, I did learn something about commitment and leadership, both positive and negative.

Don't miss it!

Many people did not notice the Second Great Awakening when it was happening. It was not until years later that people looked back and said, "Hey, that was an awakening!" Many went about their lives, too busy to pay attention to the gatherings in homes and in churches. Distracted or hardened by life, too few had reason to care that their neighbors were being transformed by the gospel. It's so easy to miss the opportunities to experience convergence. We can easily

miss the unreached peoples who have moved into every major city. We could easily miss the opportunity to learn how to pray. Could a similar revival transform the lives of millions of people today without being noticed by the majority? Perhaps. But I believe God is wanting to cause revival fires to transform more than individuals and families, more than a few small businesses; I believe God wants to transform whole school districts and universities, major media outlets, and governments. I believe God will raise up a new generation of leaders, professors, intellectuals, song-writers, authors, film-makers, and journalists. This, I believe, is what Jesus intended when he commanded his followers to “...go and make disciples of all nations...”⁷

Hundreds of missionaries had sailed after the Haystack Prayer Meeting. Missions penetrated new communities and churches were planted from the coastlands to the inlands on every continent. Among them was Hudson Taylor who sailed in 1853 to start the China Inland Mission. Meanwhile, Dwight L. Moody, a shoe salesman from New England, was radically saved and, after working as a preacher and teacher during the Civil War, became an international evangelist. Moody preached in England where seven of the top Cambridge University students and renowned cricketers surrendered their lives to Christ and committed to join Taylor’s mission.

Before sailing to China, these men visited colleges in Great Britain and the United States. One of the Cambridge Seven, C. T. Studd, spoke at Cornell University in Upstate

7 Matthew 28:19 NIV

New York. John Mott, a law student and campus leader with the YMCA, was struck by Studd's admonition, "Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not. Seek ye first the kingdom of God."⁸ Mott's life was ruined for the ordinary. That summer, he attended the 1886 Northfield Student Conference led by Dwight Moody at the Mount Hermon school on his property in Massachusetts.

The Northfield Conference became the launchpad of a new student movement, which was ignited by the prayers of a brother and sister at Princeton University. Raised in India by their missionary parents, Robert and Grace, wrote the Princeton Declaration, a pledge they and fellow students made declaring: "We, the undersigned, declare ourselves willing and desirous, God permitting, to go to the unevangelized portions of the world."⁹ Robert attended the Northfield Conference after committing to prayer with his sister to return with 100 signatures.

A.T. Pierson gave a keynote message that set the missionary tone for the conference, "All should go, and go to all!" Wilder appealed to Moody to host a Meeting of Ten Nations event during the six week long conference. Moody agreed and Wilder found students to represent ten nations. Each made an appeal, like a Macedonian Call, to "Come to...India, Ceylon, China, Japan, etc." And students began to sign the declaration. Among them was John Mott. A photo was to be taken on the final day of the conference with the Mount Hermon One-Hundred, but only ninety-nine of the 251 dele-

8 See Jeremiah 45:5 KJV and Matthew 6:33 KJV

9 <https://archives.yale.edu/repositories/4/resources/250>

gates had signed. Finally, one last student committed, and the photo was taken. Robert and one other student spent the following year traveling from Princeton to 162 campuses. They received 2,106 more volunteers (500 of these were women).

Is this what revival looks like? I wondered.

Every signatory, whether they sailed as missionaries or not, had committed to get trained for missions and also support missionaries through prayer and finances. Among these student volunteers in 1887 were some of the greatest missionary leaders of the twentieth century, including Samuel Zwemer and Robert Speer. John Mott became the General Secretary of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Mission. By 1891, at the First International Convention of the SVM in Cleveland, 6,200 student volunteers from 350 institutions had signed the declaration and 320 had actually sailed to foreign fields. Over 20,000 missionaries sailed from North America over the next 40 years. John Mott chaired the 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conference, where he spoke these words in the opening address, “It is a startling and solemnizing fact that even as late as the twentieth century, the Great Command of Jesus Christ to carry the Gospel to all mankind is still so largely unfulfilled... The church is confronted today, as in no preceding generation, with a literally worldwide opportunity to make Christ known.”¹⁰ Mott was awarded the Nobel Peace in 1946 “for his

10 <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/missions-and-ecumenism-mott/>

contribution to the creation of a peace-promoting religious brotherhood across national boundaries.”¹¹

What do you want us to do today?

I muttered a silent prayer, “If all this began with the prayers of a few students, what do you want us to do today?”

Ice crystals glistened on the windows as street lights pierced through the darkness outside into Keith’s front room. There was a stillness outside and inside. This was my seventeenth day of a complete fast. When Floyd McClung, YWAM’s international director, made the announcement for all YWAMers to fast and pray, it perfectly coincided with my sabbatical, and I was not going to miss this opportunity. My heart was quiet, but also hot with anticipation. I had prepared my heart for a long-burning fire of sober zeal for God’s mission. My mind was racing with the convergence of my research about revivals and student involvement in world missions, my YWAM training and experiences, and the daily meetings and prayers with people who would one day influence nations. So the prayer I uttered that cold morning was like a spark to well-seasoned firewood. I was filled with anticipation that God was going to do something.

Declare it

“Could my prayers really make a difference?” It was at that moment, standing in that small prayer circle in Febru-

¹¹ <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1946/mott/facts/>

ary of 1988, that I believe I heard God whisper to me, “Declare it.” With those two words, God set my heart ablaze, and then called me to believe He will do it again. I knew I still had much to learn, but I leaned in with faith. What else could I do?

Do our prayers change the world? Yes!

Do our prayers change the world? Yes! Though Peter spent three years with Jesus, he still had things to learn about prayer. When Peter was fasting on a rooftop in the town of Joppa, he received a vision of all kinds of animals his people were forbidden to eat. Initially, he resisted. But God was teaching him something new. Peter began to experience the convergence. We can all experience the convergence of focused attention on God’s story, our personal discipleship, and our daily prayers with people. We can commit to become the answer to our prayers by stepping out of our comfortable life and into a life that reaches nations. Because God met him in prayer, Peter was prepared to follow when the messengers of the Italian military leader sent for him. Peter stepped over a threshold, breaking the laws of his culture, to enter the home of a Gentile, something he would never have done without the convergence of his time with Jesus, his experiences in ministry, and the revelation he received while fasting and praying.

Peter wondered, “May I ask why you sent for me?”¹² Cornelius explained, and Peter had his convergence, that mo-

12 Acts 10:29b NIV

ment when everything came together. Like Peter who said to the crowd gathered at Cornelius's house, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right."¹³ I looked up into the eyes of my friends and announced, "God is going to raise up a new student movement to saturate every nation through every vocation with the gospel of Jesus Christ. It will be greater than the Student Volunteer Movement of the last century. And He is beginning this movement today."

This prayer has echoed in my spirit ever since that day. I have shared this story as a YWAM missionary for over thirty years with students, missionaries, and church leaders in nearly fifty countries on five continents. God is indeed at work raising up thousands of nontraditional missionaries from all walks of life, from many nations, to shine the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ in every sphere of influence: families, churches, schools, businesses, arts and sports, the media, and government offices all over the world. But we have not finished the task. He seeks those who will seek Him until everything converges. He seeks those who will pray for the prophetic promise of Habakkuk to be fulfilled: "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea."¹⁴

13 Acts 10:34-35 NIV

14 Habakkuk 2:14

About John Henry

John and his wife Mary have served with Youth With A Mission's University of the Nations since their Discipleship Training School in 1985. John is the founder and former international director of the University's Student Mobilization Centre. He is the creator and director of Converge, a platform to connect and equip students and young adults to serve with partner organizations to complete personalized missions projects. John and Mary have ministered and taught in over 30 countries. They live in Ocean City, NJ.

Visit JohnTHenry.com to connect with John & Mary.

The Gift of Your Influence

Dwight Clough

Throw a stone into a pond; watch the ripples radiate outward. This is a metaphor for life. Everything you say, everything you do creates ripples of influence—felt by others—bringing good or harm that can last—sometimes for eternity.

Our world is messed up.

God is fixing things.

You get to help.

In other words, you are designed to make a difference. You are meant to be a change agent for good in a broken world. Everything in your life is—or can be—used by God to bring healing and help and health and goodness into the lives of others.

Why were you born into this moment in history? Because God has a plan for your life.

Why are you in the family you are in? Why do you have the friends you have? So that God can love people through you.

Why were you given the personality you were given? Why are you the gender you are, the race you are, the nationality you are, the age you are? Why do you have the strengths and weaknesses you have? It's all for a reason.

You have been given a set of life experiences—successes and failures, trials and triumphs, lessons and losses—for a reason.

What is that reason? God intends to use your life for good. God intends for you to bring eternal good into many other lives. God intends for you to influence others for good. You are positioned to bring a unique flavor of God's love and goodness to a specific group of people. In that sense, no one can take your place. You have a mission from God that is yours and yours alone.

Whether you're changing diapers or writing books, sweeping floors or speaking to the multitudes, rescuing people from human trafficking or preparing a tax return, your life is impacting others. As you go about the tasks God has assigned to you, I pray that others might sense in you the life-giving presence of Jesus Christ; I pray His love will flow through you.

I write this because I want to help you extend your influence for good. And there are many ways to extend that influence. You might write a book or make a movie. You might start a blog, or a podcast, or a YouTube channel. You might lobby for a cause, start a ministry, or start a business. You might go on a short-term missions trip or volunteer at a food pantry or a homeless shelter. You might mentor other moms or dads or students. You might write letters of healing and encouragement.

There are many possibilities, but if you look to God, a plan custom-designed for you will begin to coalesce.

What's your dream?

Buried inside you, I believe, is a God-given desire to make a difference. It might be burning in your bones like it was for Jeremiah,¹⁵ or it might be smoldering far away from your everyday awareness. But it is always present.

And no surprise. Jesus “went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil...”¹⁶ As His followers, we also are change agents for good and for healing in our world. We are designed to make a difference, engineered to bring eternal good into many lives.

The exact flavor of your desire to make a difference is unique to you—as it should be. We know from scripture that the eye is not a hand, and the foot is not a nose.¹⁷ God delights in diversity—in this case, a diversity of dreams.

So what's your dream?

I have many. I see a way my nation could empower millions to escape poverty. To that end, I'm working toward creating a film and introducing legislation—not to move us further Left or further Right, but to make us whole.¹⁸

That's one of my dreams. What's yours?

A friend has a son with special needs. The day will come when he can no longer help his son. My friend has a dream: To create a community for adults with special needs where

15 Jeremiah 20:9

16 Acts 10:38 NIV

17 See 1 Corinthians 12.

18 Learn more at <https://youtu.be/Hv-eAaUox5o> or search YouTube for “I decided not to hate you” by Dwight Clough.

each can occupy affordable housing, and each can earn a living, and live with a great measure of independence. A beautiful dream.

Remember Caleb? He was 85 when God moved him into position to take possession of what God had promised him.¹⁹ Remember Samuel? He was a little boy when God started giving him words that shook a nation.²⁰ Esther and Mary were young. Elizabeth and Sarah were old. You're never too old and never too young to have a God-given dream.

What's yours?

Another friend wants to buy a farmhouse and convert it into a center for healing. Another friend wanted to help people in recovery take the journey to sobriety and freedom. He took action on his dream, and the result has been healing for many people. You'll read his story later in this book.

So what's your dream? Or, put another way, what's the legacy you want to leave?

Take a moment.

Write it down.

Lift it up to God.

Every great kingdom endeavor starts with a dream.

The purpose of this book is to help you clarify and cultivate your God-given dream of making a difference, so God can use you to bring eternal good into many, many lives.

¹⁹ Joshua 14:6-14

²⁰ 1 Samuel 3

This matters

You've probably seen the 1946 Frank Capra Christmas film *It's a Wonderful Life*. In the movie, the main character, George Bailey, reaches a low spot in his life, and is contemplating ending it all. Then an angel intervenes to show him the impact his life has made on others—how the gift of his influence saved and enriched many lives. All of this was invisible to him, until the angel revealed it. In the same way I suspect you and I will someday stand in awe as God reveals to us how He has used our lives for good.

At least I hope that's the case.

I believe you and I are accountable before God for how we use the influence we've been given. Our influence matters. It matters to others, and it matters to God.

What will you do with the influence you've been given? Will you cultivate it? Will you invest it for your Father in heaven?

You're carrying around something of incredible value. You have inside you the God who can transform this world. There's no limit to His love, no limit to His power, no limit to His wisdom, no limit to His goodness. If you're like me, you want to bring Jesus to the place of need and watch Him do what only He can do.

In my case, I write books. I want people to read them because I know there are people out there who need to read what I've written. The message in these books could pull some people off the highway to hell and get them on the path to heaven. The message in these books could trans-

form lives, and help discouraged and defeated Christians discover a whole new dimension for experiencing God. The message in these books could help people who are suffering to find hope and healing and help.

So why don't more people read my books? Why don't I have more influence?

If you want to make a difference, you've probably asked yourself the same or similar questions. Of course there are practical things any of us can do to extend our influence. Some of those ideas will be shared in this book. At the same time, sometimes it may seem like there are invisible barriers that keep good people from having the influence they want to have.

What's up with that? What's going on?

I was talking this over with the Lord, and He guided my thinking into the following. When your influence increases, a few things are going to happen. You need to be aware of these things. You need to be ready for them. Let's take a sober look at what happens when your influence increases:

#1 More attacks

When your influence increases, you come up on the radar screen of the enemy. If you are doing the will of God, you will be attacked; it comes with the territory.²¹ And sometimes God won't give you the influence you crave because He knows you're not ready for the attacks that will come. This isn't a reason to be afraid or to hide, but it is reason to

21 See, for example, 2 Timothy 3:12, Ephesians 6:10-20, Job 1:8.

be prudent. You need to understand why these attacks come and what you can do to prepare for them.

Why do attacks come into your life? Two reasons. First, Satan wants to destroy you. To be clear, I don't think he cares one bit about you, but he knows that destroying you will hurt God's heart, and that's what he wants to do. Why do so many Christian leaders fall into moral failure? They were in Satan's cross hairs. He had a plan custom designed to bring them down. And, of course, that's just one of many different attacks the enemy brings. But God also has a reason for allowing attacks to come into your life. He wants to triumph through you. He wants to prove to you and to the world that the faith you placed in God was well placed, that God can stand up to any kind of attack any day of the week.²² God is like: *Bring it on!*

How does Satan get his hooks into you, and what can you do to overcome? You need to understand that the enemy started attacking you a long time ago, back when you were a small child. Over the years, he has done his best to fill your heart with painful lies: *I'm not worth protecting. There's no hope. It's all my fault. I'm garbage. Something bad is going to happen to me. No one will ever love me.* The list of lies is different for each person, but there's a long list, and every one of those lies hurts. Why does he do this? The main reason is this: he wants to offer you a solution to all that pain. And what is that solution?

Sin.

²² See 1 Peter 1:6-7, John 16:33.

So the strategy of the enemy is simple: He wants to stir up pain in your life. His primary way of doing that is deception—skewing your view of reality. Once he has you in pain, he brings along what I call the “devil’s dessert tray”—adultery, porn, narcissism, hedonism, workaholism, doubt, cynicism, anger, whatever. He doesn’t care which dessert you choose, as long as it harms God’s reputation, and causes your influence to bring harm to others.

This is why every time pain comes to the surface in your life, you need to invite Jesus into it. Ask Him for His perspective. Get the soothing, comforting truth from Jesus. Until you receive the comfort God has for you, you are vulnerable. Sin wouldn’t be attractive if it didn’t solve a problem—the problem of our inner pain.

When you’re tempted, and when you stumble, you need to ask yourself: What problem am I trying to solve with this sin? And ask God what He wants you to know about that problem. Get from Him the truth that sets you free.²³

Ripples in the pond. Attacks come because Satan wants the ripples of your influence to bring harm to God’s kingdom. But God is more than willing and able to triumph over all of those attacks if you let Him.

#2 Your mistakes will hurt more people

When your influence increases, your mistakes have greater consequences. We all make mistakes. I do. You do.

²³ John 8:32. I go into this in much greater detail in my book, *Spiritual Self Defense*.

We all do. When people are looking to you for leadership and you make a mistake, they feel the hurt.

Our mistakes come in all different varieties—theological mistakes, political mistakes, leadership mistakes, human relations mistakes, time management mistakes.

I've made many human relations mistakes over the years—said things I shouldn't have, failed to say the things I should have, made jokes at someone else's expense, failed to validate people, and the list goes on and on. Hundreds of times I've needed to apologize. Sometimes I was unaware of the damage I was doing, and didn't find out until months or years later. Ouch!

If you're reading this, and I've done something(s) to hurt you, please receive my sincere apology. I pray that God will heal any hurt I have caused, and send some special kindness to you—a gift from heaven designed just for you.

I've also made theological mistakes. Here's an example: I used to believe that God punished people for their sins by throwing them in hell. I believed that even the tiniest sin would result in God tormenting someone forever with eternal fire. I was quick to add, of course, that Jesus died to pay the penalty for our sins and all we needed to do was accept His free gift of forgiveness and eternal life, and we would escape hell forever.

This is what I taught for a long time.

While there may be some truth in what I believed, there are also several problems with the way I was explaining our path to God. Here's one of them: It makes it sound like the

real problem Jesus came to solve was pacifying an unjust God with out-of-control anger management problems who just wants to torture people for all eternity.

Wait! Time out! No! That is not who God is. Not even close.

God doesn't want anyone in hell. He doesn't want to torment us. It's sin that sends us to hell. Sin is what tortures us for all eternity. Put another way: you can't get into heaven unless you let God remove all sin from you. Some people don't want God to do that. Some people—many people—want sin more than they want God. That is why they will be in hell.

You could explain it like this. A mom is walking with her active two-year-old son next to a busy street. Mom is holding his hand because she knows that he doesn't understand the danger. But somehow he manages to squirm away and run into traffic. The worst happens: he's struck by a car, and, as a result is confined to a wheelchair living in constant pain for the remainder of his life.

Is that wheelchair, is that pain a punishment from Mom? No, of course not. It's a consequence of running into traffic.

The wages of sin is death. If you run out into the busy street of sin, you run the risk of getting run over. God is trying to save us from that. God is doing everything He can to protect us from sin. He knows we don't understand the danger of what we're messing with. But He has us by the hand,

and He's trying to keep us safe. Will we let Him? Or will we squirm out of His grip and run "free"?²⁴

Once upon a time I believed hell was punishment imposed by an angry God. Now I believe hell is the corrosive consequence of sin—sin and hell are two forms of the same thing; and God is trying to rescue us from both. God says, "Don't drink the poison of sin; let me give you living water instead." We decide which it's gonna be.

What I once believed to be true, I now believe to be false. But was I a false teacher? Was I a wolf in sheep's clothing? No, I don't think so. Instead, I was mistaken.

But our mistakes have consequences. In the case of my mistake, I hope people don't miss heaven because they believe the lie that God is a sadist. He is not.

I made a theological mistake. We make mistakes. It's all part of being human.

Sometimes we're craving more influence, but God is saying: Wait a minute. You have some rough edges. Let me trim those for you. Then you'll make fewer mistakes, and that will clear the way for Me to increase your influence.

#3 Your decisions matter more

When our influence increases our decisions have greater consequences. Our decisions affect other people; the greater our influence, the more people they affect.

24 More detail on this in my book, *Am I going to heaven when I die?*

I drove a transit bus for a while. One of the signs on the back of my bus was: “Right turn in front of this bus is illegal.” There’s a reason for this. One day I picked up a rider at a bus stop. As she was making her way to her seat, I was slowly moving back into traffic. Then a van who had been coming up around me on the left, suddenly shot in front of me to make a right hand turn down a side street. I had no choice. I had to slam on the brakes to avoid running into the van. But, in the sudden stop, the woman lost her footing and fell, injuring her back.²⁵

Note the difference: If I’m solo, driving my car around the neighborhood, and need to make a sudden stop, that stop has consequences for me alone. But my decisions as a transit bus driver had consequences for everyone on that bus.

When you lead, people depend on you to make the right decisions. And, as a leader, you will be pressured on every side. You’ll need to stay true to the course God has put you on while at the same time remaining teachable. People are going to pressure you to change direction, to make different decisions. It will take wisdom from above to know when to say yes and when to say no. And it will take courage and grace to say no when someone else is trying to bully or manipulate you into straying from your God-given course.

It takes maturity to lead. It takes courage and strength of character. When I was young, I wanted to have a great ministry. As I grow older, I see the wisdom of God in not giving me a great ministry when I was young. I wasn’t ready for it. I

25 I finished the route and drove her to the emergency room.

needed to grow up. There were many lessons I needed to learn from God before I was ready to lead others.

#4 Your spiritual health (or lack of it) will be replicated in others

Pray for integrity first, influence second.

Or, put another way: Fix yourself before you fix your world.

Jesus said it like this. “Don’t offer to get a speck of sawdust out of some else’s eye when you have two-by-four stuck in your own eye. First get the board out of your own eye, then you can see clearly to help your neighbor.”²⁶ Dr. Elizabeth Pierre writes, “...when our wounds have not been sufficiently processed and healed before entering ministry, we can cause more harm than good.”²⁷

It’s sometimes easy to think that just because we’ve “prayed the prayer” to invite Jesus into our lives, that we’re fixed and whole and ready to go. Wish it were so, but it isn’t.

When we’re messed up inside, we create and lead dysfunctional teams, and we send a scrambled message into our world about the God we claim to represent. God does not have our neuroses. God’s presence is a healing presence. His presence leads to emotional health and spiritual maturity. The more we have God’s heart and God’s mind, the

26 Matthew 7:3-5, author’s rendering

27 Perry, Dwight and Elizabeth Pierre, *Even the Best of Us: Clergy Sexual Failure—The Church’s Hidden Sin*, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2021.

more we can send a clear message of hope and healing to those around us.

Are there people we need to forgive? Let's get on the path toward forgiving them. Let's learn from God and maybe from others what it means to forgive; let's learn how to forgive. For many years, even though I was a Bible-believing Christian, I had no idea how to forgive others. I tried to forgive, but I didn't know how. Then I learned a few simple secrets that completely transformed that part of my life.

Are there old hurts we need to heal? Don't be too proud to get help. Getting help is not a sign of weakness, it's a sign of wisdom. Good people can help you work through the anger and the pain of the past. That stuff is real, and it's present in all of us. Ask God to lead you to the right people. I've needed to get help over the years, and many, many others have as well. In the process I've learned a number of things about personal transformation that aren't commonly taught.

If you want help with forgiving others or personal transformation, visit me at DwightClough.com, and I'll be happy to offer what help I can.

We don't want to export brokenness. We want to find the wholeness that Jesus offers and export that to our world. We don't want to be instruments of harm, but agents of healing. So let's take a long hard look inside before we try to straighten out someone else.

Advancing a cause?

This last point is particularly important for political activists—for those of you who, like me, are trying to advance causes, bring about your best understanding of justice.

If you're willing to listen, let me give you some fatherly advice.

1. Don't get your worldview or your beliefs from an angry person.²⁸ Instead, get the wisdom that is from above: "But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness."²⁹

2. Bad people cannot create good systems. They can't. They pollute everything they touch.³⁰

3. If you think that because you're on the Left or on the Right, that you're automatically sensitive and respectful, and it's just the other side that isn't, you are operating with a huge blind spot. Get to know some people who disagree with you. Listen carefully to them without trying to convert them. Understand where they're coming from before you proceed.³¹

4. Finally this: There can be no peace between people until there is peace within.

I know this to be true because I am a father, and I've raised four children. When my children were young, they

28 See Proverbs 22:24.

29 James 3:17-18 NIV

30 Matthew 7:17-18

31 See James 1:19

squabbled, and then called me in to referee. “Make it fair,” they demanded.

I quickly learned there is no “fair.” What is fair and just for one, is grossly unfair and unjust for the next. When they were demanding that I make it fair, they were really asking a different set of questions:

Do you love me?

Am I important?

Do I matter?

Why do we ask these questions? Because deep down we don’t feel loved. We don’t feel important. We don’t feel like we matter. And we need Someone to tell us that we do, we are.

Yes, there are injustices in this world, and they do need to be addressed. But until we fix what went wrong inside, no amount of justice will ever bring peace.

This is so important and so misunderstood. Internalize this, and it will serve you well in your quest for justice.

Fix yourself before you fix your world. Does this mean that God can’t use you until you are 100% completely perfect inside. No, of course not. But it does mean this: our own transformation, our own relationship with God, our own integrity, our own healing, our own character—we make that job number one.

The oxygen mask principle

Those of you who fly frequently can probably recite this from memory: “If we should experience a sudden loss of cabin pressure, an oxygen mask will appear...please secure your own mask before assisting any children who might be with you.”

I call this the “oxygen mask principle.” You must be able to breathe before you can help someone else breathe.

If we are going to bring Christ’s healing and freedom to our world, we must experience it ourselves. Christ must do a deeper work in us before we can bring a deeper message to our world. Or, as some put it: You must be before you can do.

This is a very different message than “try harder.” Instead, this is the message that says we stop going into denial about our own wounds, that we too have been damaged, that every layer of our soul needs a Savior. It is not just the part of us that sinned that needs Christ; it is also the part of us that was sinned against that needs Him.

God has a plan to bring life, abundance, health and healing to people and to nations through you. But your transformation of your world begins with the transformation of yourself. And that isn’t something you accomplish on your own. It’s something that only happens when you open the doors of your heart to the transforming presence of God.

Do you want to change your world? Allow Jesus to change you. Allow Jesus to love you, heal you, transform you.

Your time will come

None of this is meant to discourage you, but rather to give you a realistic look at what it means to make a difference. Influence is a weighty matter; the potential to do good—or harm—is great. We want to build on the right foundation.

Don't neglect building the right foundation.

While you're building that foundation, be faithful to the assignments God gives you.

David didn't start out as the king of Israel. He started out as the kid brother that nobody took seriously. But while everyone was ignoring him, he was being faithful in the place God put him—caring for his father's sheep. He was already following the advice that would be recorded years later in the book of Proverbs: "Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life."³² And God saw what nobody else could see: that David was becoming a man after God's own heart.³³

Become a man or a woman after God's own heart.

Know this: It isn't our clever ideas that make a kingdom difference. It's the touch of God's Spirit. God isn't impressed with our brains and our talent. Talent is cheap. Lay a foundation of prayer. Build on it a life of integrity. Learn to love. Do this and your time will come.

³² Proverbs 4:23 NLT

³³ See 1 Samuel 13:14.

Years ago I was complaining to God that my life was going nowhere, affecting no one. He brought me to this scripture:

*Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season...*³⁴

And this is what he said to me: “A Dwight tree will yield Dwight fruit in a Dwight season.” In other words: Be patient. Your time will come.

Peter offers this advice: “Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.”³⁵

Lay the right foundation, and your time will come.

About Dwight Clough

Dwight Clough is developing EmpowerGood.com to awaken the hidden potential of the church and support the “unknown kid brother who will one day be king.” He is the author of *What It Means to Follow Jesus*, *Spiritual Self Defense*, *Bible Made Easy*, *Rethinking Our War on Poverty*, *The Gift of Transformation*, *What I Believe About You*, *Am I Going to Heaven When I Die?* and other books. Connect with Dwight at

34 Psalm 1:1-3a NIV

35 1 Peter 5:6 NIV

DwightClough.com and learn more about his endeavors to end poverty at WeWillEndPoverty.com.

Will you join me in praying that God will raise up a generation of kingdom builders with wisdom from above, who understand and practice personal transformation, and love with God's love?

Understanding Personal Transformation

Dwight Clough

If you're in any kind of ministry or advancing any cause where you hope to see people grow and change, and if you don't want to spend your time pounding your head against the wall, then understanding how personal transformation works will save you many headaches.

When we talk about transformation, many people imagine setting goals and achieving them, starting new habits, dropping bad practices and acquiring good ones. But these varieties of continuous improvement are not transformation, at least not in the Christian sense of the term.

True transformation is metamorphosis—the caterpillar to butterfly switch from one identity to another. It is humanly impossible, yet many Christians try, try, try to make it happen without success. It cannot be accessed via hard work—even hard work with a “Jesus, please help me!” prayer tacked on the end. It requires a completely different process.

The secrets of transformation are found throughout the Bible, but I'll point them out here in this familiar passage of the 23rd Psalm:³⁶

36 Quoted here from the NASB.

1 The LORD is my shepherd, I will not be in need.

2 He lets me lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside quiet waters.

3 He restores my soul;

He guides me in the paths of righteousness

For the sake of His name.

4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I fear no evil, for You are with me;

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

You have anointed my head with oil;

My cup overflows.

6 Certainly goodness and faithfulness will follow me all the days of my life,

And my dwelling will be in the house of the LORD forever.

Here are eight insights from this short Psalm.

#1 If you're trying to be your own shepherd, you can't experience transformation. Many people are doing this. They imagine that by trying hard they will conquer that addiction, save their marriage, fix their life. They're following different recipes for self improvement—three easy steps to patience or whatever. While there may be wisdom in some of these recipes, transformation cannot be achieved with human effort. The Psalm says, "The LORD is my shepherd." Sheep are utterly dependent on shepherds. Without shepherds, sheep die. Until we come to the place where we un-

derstand our complete dependence on the Lord as our shepherd, we cannot be transformed.

#2 Everything we need, we get from God. The Psalm says, “I will not be in need.” Peter puts it this way: “His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life...”³⁷ Note that He has already given it to us. We may need to figure out how it works, but it already belongs to us. It’s part of the package you get when you become a child of God.

“What would Jesus do?” ... God doesn’t start there. He starts in a different place. He takes all the jagged pieces of our fractured souls, and He gently mends them back together to make us whole...

#3 Our souls get restored first (verse 3). Many people are trying to skip this step. It’s messy. It’s uncomfortable. It’s scary. But it’s necessary. There’s a reason God brings us to green pastures—we need to learn to rest. There’s a reason God brings us to quiet waters—we need to learn to receive life-giving nourishment from Him. Many people are running around trying to figure out “What would Jesus do?” God doesn’t start there. He starts in a different place. He takes all the jagged pieces of our fractured souls, and He gently

37 2 Peter 1:3a NIV

mends them back together to make us whole. Don't try to skip this step. Don't rush past it. You need the soul healing presence of God in your life. You cannot do good before you experience good. You cannot love until you experience love.

There's a reason Paul writes, "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit..."³⁸ Why? You can't have righteousness without peace and joy. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace...³⁹ This comes as a package. God fixes what's broken inside, and then our behavior changes because our whole perspective has changed. Too many people are trying to change their behavior first. It doesn't work that way. Let God heal your hurts, fix your past, bring His soothing comfort into your life, and grant you His perspective on everything that went wrong in your life. Invite Him into the mess. Let Him make you whole.

#4 God transforms us to protect His own reputation (verse 3). Like it or not, we are God's representatives. You are Jesus to your world. That's one reason why "...it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose."⁴⁰ God is guiding us in paths of righteousness. We are in His school. He is the Teacher. We are the students. He is the Master. We are the apprentices. He is in charge of this process. We look to Him to guide us, and we can have confidence that He knows what He's doing.

38 Romans 14:17 NIV

39 See Galatians 5:22-23.

40 Philippians 2:13 NIV

#5 No death can take away the life God has given us (verse 4). We will pass through the “valley of the shadow of death.” It will be a valley. It will be dark. We will feel the shadow. But nobody has the power to take away the life God has given us. The lifelong transformation that God brings about in us puts us in step with this reality. Remember what David said when he saw Goliath? “Who is this punk? What makes him think he can defy the armies of the living God?”⁴¹ God is on mission to grant us His perspective on all things. When we see everything through God’s eyes, we start living a confident, triumphant life despite the very real pain we may experience.

#6 God is totally confident (verse 5). When I was a child, I was sometimes bullied. What one thing would totally take away any fear of those bullies? My dad showing up. If my dad was there, those bullies couldn’t do anything to me, and they knew it. God is so totally confident that He unpacks a picnic lunch for us in full view of all of our enemies. Meanwhile, they stand around, watching, powerless to do anything at all about it.

#7 God has given you a mission (verse 5). God Himself anoints your head with oil. What does that mean? It means you have been chosen. You have role. You have a battle to win, a territory to conquer,⁴² a job to do, a life to build, a mission to accomplish. God has chosen you.

#8 This life can’t contain all the good God has for us (verses 5-6). The cup of this life isn’t big enough to contain

41 1 Samuel 17:26, my own rendering

42 Yes, of course, we’re speaking figuratively.

the full measure of the love of God. We only get a taste of it. That's why God designed us for eternity. That's why He invited us into His family. That's why He gave us a place in His home and in His heart.

~ * ~

Rule keeping. Goal setting. Trying hard. Those things are shadows of the real thing—the true transformation that God has for us. I'll leave you with this final thought: In Revelation 3:20, Jesus tells us that He is knocking at the door. That doesn't just happen once; that happens throughout our lives. Today. Right now. Find the door where Jesus is knocking, and invite Him in.

About Dwight Clough

Dwight Clough is the author of *The Gift of Transformation*, *What It Means to Follow Jesus*, *Am I Going to Heaven When I Die?* and *Spiritual Self Defense: How to use the Christian faith to defend yourself against anxiety, anger, addiction and all kinds of bullies* available on Amazon or at Kim51.com. Visit bit.ly/forgive2 to access his online course on how to forgive others.

Family First⁴³

Jerry B. Jenkins

The Left Behind series has succeeded beyond any expectations. But when I think of success, I think of something I learned as a young man before Dianna and I had children. I was working at Scripture Press. I interviewed four or five middle-aged men (about twice my age), each on a different topic, each for a different story.

One question, however, came up in every interview. “Do you have any regrets?” I asked.

To a man, they all said the same thing. “I wish I had spent more time with my kids when they were growing up.”

These were good men, their children good people. None of their kids had left the faith or gone off the deep end. But the men shared the same sorrow; something precious had been lost and could never be recovered.

I told Dianna, “I think God is trying to tell me something. If I get to that age and have the same regret, I’ll be without excuse.”

So even before we had our first child, Dianna and I set a policy: From the time I came home from work until the time the kids went to bed, I would do no writing or office

43 Reprinted from Shaw, Thomas A. and Dwight A. Clough, *Amazing Faith: Stories of Christians in Defining Moments*, Chicago: Moody, 2003. Used with permission.

work. I would be there for my children. Dianna also made that time a priority. I did all my writing between nine o'clock and midnight, after the kids went to bed. And we maintained that policy for all three boys.

When our neighbor came home from work, his kids ran to him, hugged him, celebrated him. I felt jealous. My kids were taking me for granted.

Then it hit me. He was celebrated because his kids never knew when he was going to be home or for how long. My kids considered it normal for me to be there every day to play with them. In reality, they were paying me the highest compliment.

The benefits of our policy were all mine. I was there when all three of my boys received Christ. I heard firsthand the funny things kids say at different ages.

When my youngest son's fifth-grade basketball team lost a game, he told me, "It wasn't fair. The other team had a player with hair under his arms."

I said, "That doesn't sound fair. How old was he?"

"They said he was only twelve," Mike said, "but he's already been through poverty."

I wouldn't trade moments like that.

The result has been great friendships with our boys. Like all kids, they sometimes disagreed with us or argued with us, but they never once questioned our motives, because maintaining that policy proved to them how much they meant to us.

Eldest son Dallas puts it like this: “You didn’t just tell us we were your top priority. You proved it every day.”

To me, that is success.

About Jerry Jenkins

Jerry Jenkins is the author of 198 books, 21 of those having reached the *New York Times* best seller list, with more than 72 million copies sold.

He teaches writers at JerryJenkins.com.

Marriage Before Ministry

Mike Halsted

After spending years going from one bad relationship to another, I learned that I struggled with codependency. In 2008, I decided to recommit my life to God, and in doing so, I decided I would no longer seek romantic relationships. Instead, I would find love in community, especially in my church. Everything in my life would be centered around God, and I would begin living every day to the fullest as an act of worship. My life was marked by clarity of purpose, and my life was simple. I entered a time of personal growth that included transformational prayer, resolving pain from the past, AA-type meetings, finding mentors, surrendering emotional baggage, and hearing God's voice. I accepted singleness as a blessing rather than a curse, and I was overjoyed with life. At the time, I was thinking marriage and family would be incompatible with my service to God. And I feared marriage would bring isolation because surely I would need to give up all the wonderful friends, my service to the church, and a ministry I had joined.

Then one day in 2010, I met Johanna. I was blown away by the light Johanna carried and the freshness in her spirit. There was this unmistakable inkling; it felt great to be around her; I was drawn to her. But, because of my past experience, I was cautious. I chose to get to know her in the

context of a community of believers, without all the drama and confusion that came in the past when I acted impulsively with these feelings. I was learning about God's plan for purity. Through scripture and good sermons, I began to see God's ways as a gift, as beneficial to me. And I began to realize that having a marriage partner didn't need to mean throwing away the friends, the ministry, my service to the church, and my blossoming relationship with God.

Our friendship grew, and three years after meeting Johanna, I confessed to her I liked her more than a friend. I made it clear that I wasn't asking her for physical intimacy; rather I would see Johanna as God's daughter, and I would be accountable to God for her heart. (I had made a compact with God, I would never again toy with a women's heart.) Our courtship was not hurried and was beautiful. We walked in purity together during our engagement and once married, the marital love we shared also felt pure.

But what about ministry, service to the church, and my circle of friends? Would I need to give all that up for the sake of the marriage? I put that question to God, and the answer that came back was a resounding "NO." However, putting God first also met putting my marriage first. Our marriage came before ministry, before the church, and before friends.

In the first year of our marriage, I significantly reduced my involvement in our ministry, so Johanna and I could spend more time getting to know each other in the context of our new marriage. I am still learning how to be the best husband I can be, and I feel accountable to God for my be-

havior as His child first, a husband second, family third, followed by work, church, and ministry. And sure, I'm a work in progress just like everyone. I am still working on my time management and the art of delegation, and sometimes the ministry places more demands on my time than might be healthy for my marriage. However, Johanna knows our marriage comes before ministry. This alignment has paid off. God has blessed our ministry tremendously, and I believe He continues to sustain and grow the ministry because of this decision.

By the way, we don't put marriage ahead of ministry *so that* the ministry can thrive. It's not a transaction or a deal we make with God. Nor is putting marriage first a duty or a drudgery. Marriage and ministry are not at odds with one another. Instead, as we take in the love of God, His priorities become our priorities. We want what He wants.

Sometimes those of us in ministry can be tempted to put marriage on the back burner. You might think you need to dump your marriage to keep your ministry afloat. But it's just the opposite. How many ministries do you see that are failing because the marriages of the leaders are crumbling! You might think putting marriage before ministry would hurt the ministry, but I think God has blessed our ministry because we made the decision to put our marriage first.

God's plan is for our benefit. It's like being celibate before marriage. We may not want to be. But it's beneficial. And it will be for our good. This carries through with all things. Follow God's plan—He has a way of making things work out.

I pray your life will be a living witness to God's grace, His beneficial plan, and His purpose to love Him first in our lives. Please pray for me that God will continue to bless our ministry, Serenity Home, and that His alignment will continue to manifest itself in our marriage.

About Mike Halsted

Mike Halsted is the founder and director of Serenity Home, a sober living ministry for residents in recovery in Madison, Wisconsin. You can find out more at his Serenity Home Sober Living Facebook page [Facebook.com/serenity-homemadison](https://www.facebook.com/serenity-homemadison) or by calling 608-501-HOPE (4673).

Part 2: Dream to Reality

Chapters 7-11

What does it look like to move from dream to reality? Author Dwight Clough outlines what your journey will look like including how you clarify your calling and how to confront and overcome the “I can’t” in your life.

Do you want to make a difference? Get used to taking risks. Author, speaker, and singer J.P. Olson explains what it means to take a kingdom risk.

How do you start a ministry? YouTube ministers Kristen Clark and Bethany Baird share the five-step process that empowered them to start Girl Defined and gain 158,000 subscribers.

Recovery home ministry founder Mike Halsted reviews the steps God took in his life to move him from jumbled dreams to a ministry that is making a difference in many lives.

Your journey is unique to you. That’s why we round out this section with a survey. We want to know your story, and we want to discover how we can support you in it.

Your Dream to Reality Journey⁴⁴

Dwight Clough

Foundation

It begins here. A house is only as strong as its foundation. Don't neglect laying the right foundation.

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” ~ Jesus⁴⁵

Your foundation consists of these four elements:

44 Adapted from the Empower Good Group Study Curriculum, 2009. Used with permission.

45 Matthew 7:24-27 NIV

#1 Connection to God

“Apart from Me you can do nothing.” ~ Jesus⁴⁶

The closer you are connected to God, the bigger difference you are poised to make.⁴⁷

#2 Personal wholeness

You will replicate who you are. If you are spiritually and emotionally healthy (or unhealthy), you will spread your level of health to those around you.⁴⁸

#3 Connection to the community of faith

You are stronger when connected with other believers. Other believers can validate and encourage you when you’re discouraged; they can help you see and correct your blind spots; they have wisdom you don’t; and they need you.

#4 Relationship priorities

God first, family second, everything else (your dream, your ministry, your business, your work, your books, whatever) third. This is how it works. Ignore this at your own peril.⁴⁹

46 John 15:5 NASB

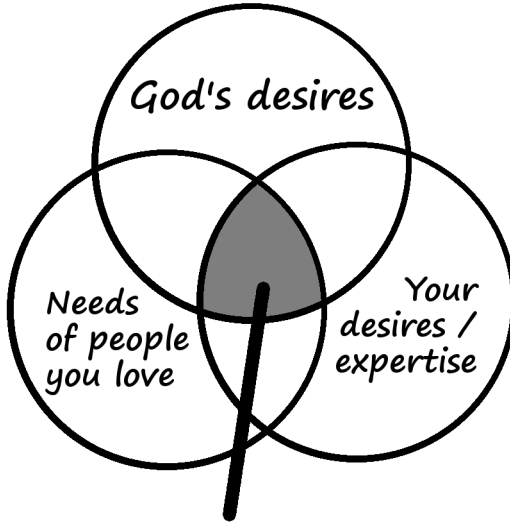
47 See John Henry’s chapter, “Convergence: How Your Prayers Can Make a Difference.”

48 See chapters 3 & 4: “The Gift of Your Influence,” and “Understanding Personal Transformation”

49 See Jerry Jenkins’s chapter, “Family First.”

Clarification

The next step is clarifying your calling. This involves three elements:⁵⁰



Your calling is here

#1 Knowing what God wants

How well do you know God's mind? How well do you know His heart? Are you a student of God's word, the Bible? Are you learning from other believers? Have you obtained the wisdom that comes from above?

50 Thanks to Pastor Joseph Steinke for bringing this into focus for me.

“But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.” ~James⁵¹

#2 Knowing what you want

God works through your God-given desires and dreams. He works through your personality—through your unique set of strengths and weaknesses.⁵² He also works through your redemptive experiences—the places where He has healed your hurts, fixed your mistakes, forgiven your sins. He works through your vulnerabilities.

“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” ~ Jesus to Paul⁵³

#3 Knowing how it helps

We can't help people until we take the time to understand them.

“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak...” ~ James⁵⁴

51 James 3:17-18 NIV

52 Great tools exist to help clarify your gifts, strengths, and potential. If you would like to know more, please mention this when you complete the survey at EmpowerGood.com.

53 2 Corinthians 12:9 NIV

54 James 1:19 NIV

Faith

Faith is the process of discerning the presence, the power, the will, and the timing of God. When you are fully in tune and in agreement with all of that, then no obstacle can stop you. From a human perspective, your journey of faith looks like this:

- I can't
- I wish
- I hope
- I'll try
- I can
- I'm working on it
- I will
- I am

Faith is the process of discerning the presence, the power, the will, and the timing of God. When you are fully in tune and in agreement with all of that, then no obstacle can stop you.

Confronting “I can’t”

When God commands us to accomplish the impossible, the hardest part is dealing with what’s inside of our own heads. We need to confront the “I can’t” inside.

“I can’t” comes in many varieties.

“I can’t” might mean: “I don’t yet know how.” This is an information challenge; a learning assignment. For example, I don’t yet know how to manage a multi-million dollar corporation. But I can learn.

This is where we all start. There was a time when Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson didn’t know how to act, J.K. Rowlings (Harry Potter) didn’t know how to write, Elvis Presley didn’t know how to sing.

One of the greatest gifts we can have is knowing the limits of our own understanding. It saves us from foolish mistakes, and places us in the position of a learner. To be in the position of a learner is to be in the position of strength.

I’ve been told that some Asian languages have no word for “talent.” Why? Because in their understanding, mastery doesn’t flow from talent. Rather, it flows from diligent study, from years of hard work. The point? Not knowing how is part of the journey. It’s a starting place for growth.

Sometimes people are afraid to ask questions, afraid to admit ignorance, afraid that they will “look stupid.” Let me encourage you. There are many, many people who are more than willing to answer your questions and who will respect you for asking them.

“I don’t know how” is never a dead end. It may be a detour while we learn, or it may be an invitation to partner with someone who does, or it may be an opportunity to connect with the One who gives wisdom “generously to all without finding fault.”⁵⁵

Remember: God has surrounded you with mentors, coaches and advisers who would be happy to help you.

“I can’t” may mean: “This is not the right assignment for me.” This is how we discover God’s amazing plan for us. I can’t sing worth listening to. But that’s okay. I’ll just cross singing off my “to do” list.

“I can’t” could mean: “I know my own limitations.” This is a networking challenge, an opportunity to connect with those who can. I can’t program in C#. While I could probably learn, there are good people who already know how. I can work with them.

“I can’t” could mean: “I don’t believe it’s possible.” This is a faith challenge, an opportunity to experience the Almighty, the God who can. I had less than \$100 in the bank and zero credit when I set out to make an offer on a million dollar blighted property. Impossible? Sure. But, by God’s grace, we bought the property, spearheaded a redevelopment plan, and sold it for a profit. God is not limited by our impossibilities.

“I can’t” might mean: “This is beyond human ability.” If so, this is an invitation to partner with God. For example, I can’t transform anyone. I don’t have the answers most of the

55 James 1:5 NIV

time. But I carry the Answer with me. And He does the transforming.

Every “I can’t” opens a door—if we understand what it really means. God gives us impossible assignments because He enjoys tagging along while we go about doing them.

Planning

Planning is the process of breaking your dream into bite-sized pieces, little steps that move you toward your ultimate objective. Sometimes all the pieces of the puzzle are clear at the beginning; more often, they are not. Dreams take us into uncharted territory, and we might not be able to discern all of the steps. That’s usually not a problem. If we walk with God, He shows us where to put our feet.

“Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it.’” ~ God through Isaiah⁵⁶

But walking with God does not exempt us from learning from mentors and advisers. The Bible is clear: “Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.”⁵⁷ From a human perspective, our planning journey will probably look something like this:

- Clueless—but not so clueless that you forget to ask God for direction and others for advice
- Objectives—breaking the big goal into smaller goals

56 Isaiah 30:21 NIV

57 Proverbs 15:22 NIV

- Refined by research—doing your homework
- Step-by-step timetable—where it gets exciting—translating imagination into real life
- Documented process—experience with proven results

For many dreams, planning and execution involve building a team. That means learning everything you can about team building and leadership.

Many dreams also involve some form of marketing. Among other things, that could involve researching and defining your market, your message, and your media followed by putting a plan in place, testing, and fine tuning to get the results you want.

Execution

Plans mean nothing without execution.

“In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” ~ James⁵⁸

Years ago I worked as a parole officer. This was my first real job after college. When I started, I worked with an experienced parole officer. I saw how he did things, and I learned from him. But the day came when I was on my own. It was a little scary at first, but it was a necessary step. In time, I became an experienced parole officer, and I started training others.

58 James 2:17 NIV

You gotta take that first step. You gotta launch the boat if you expect to cross the sea.

And know this: When you take action, you will make mistakes. It comes with the territory. But that's okay. Do your best to repair the damage, learn from your mistakes, and move on. I tell people who want to write books: Don't write one. Write a half dozen. Why? Because your first book probably won't be all that good. (Sorry, but it's true.) Mine certainly wasn't. But you'll get better as you go along.

Don't give up. A friend shared this on Facebook:

“And even if God has a glorious, grand plan for you, it may look like a lost cause while you are in the middle of it.”⁵⁹

How very true! Just before David became king, his followers were threatening to kill him.⁶⁰ It's not how many times you get knocked down that matters, it's how many times you get back up. If you're trying to do anything of any significance, you're gonna get beat up. Shake off the dust. Smile. Tomorrow is a new day.

Multiplication

The final and most productive stage of your journey is multiplication. It's taking what the Lord has done in you and through you, and replicating it in the lives of others. This may involve mentoring or coaching others. It may involve investing time, money or other resources in kingdom build-

⁵⁹ Lisa Hilfiker Mensink, Facebook, used with permission.

⁶⁰ See 1 Samuel 30:6 and context.

ing ventures. It may involve creating / offering resources that others can use.

If you've led a small group, can you teach others to lead a small group? If you've started a ministry, can you teach others to start ministries? If you've started a business, can you teach others to start a business?

Multiplication often involves learning new skills. There's a world of difference between knowing how to repair plumbing, for example, and teaching someone else how to repair plumbing. Those are two very different skills. However, the effort to learn those skills can be richly rewarding.

Throughout our journey we will look for opportunities to be mentored, to befriend, to mentor others.

About Dwight Clough

Dwight Clough was the originator of the Empower Good course designed to help people launch their God-given dreams. He is developing EmpowerGood.com to help good people make a difference.

Taking a Kingdom Risk

God Is Looking for Kingdom Builders and Harvest Hands

J.P. Olson

God is looking for kingdom builders and harvest hands. Who can build God's kingdom and bring in His harvest? Risk takers, bold warriors, people who are sold out for Him. I am a believer that God's kingdom expands when we take risks for the gospel of Jesus Christ. While Satan is on a recruiting mission, God is looking for risk takers who will stop Satan in his tracks.

Risk takers are willing to kick fear aside and take on challenges, regardless of the outcome. They say yes without hesitation. And when a situation seems hopeless, they trust God's guidance even more. If ever we are going to stand for the kingdom of God as risk takers, bold warriors, prayer warriors, and intercessors who are interceding for the world, the time is now.

I have always considered myself a risk taker. Not that it always worked in my favor—there were times that it did not. However, I have always believed people who live on the edge have the best view. Although most people are stopped by their fears—fear of rejection, fear of failure, or even fear of success, people who live on the edge, such as me, understand that facing fears and taking risks are critical to moving forward.

People who live on the edge have the best view!

Society defines “living on the edge” as “living a dangerous and/or unusual everyday life.” From a humanistic view, it is taking responsibility for your own beliefs and not accepting another’s view of the world simply because they are in positions of influence or authority. I remember a sermon on “living on the edge.” In that sermon there was a quote by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenges and controversy.”

Today, as I minister, I look at risk taking from a slightly different perspective than before. Risk taking is using better judgment. I believe God is looking for more risk takers. People sold out for Him. **That doesn’t mean we take foolish risks**; rather we walk by faith. I believe Jesus’ disciples were risk takers, those that lived on the edge.

Everything in this life is a risk. You are given only two options: (1) Take the risk and expect results, or (2) do not take a risk and expect nothing. When we do not take risks, we miss out on what God is doing in our life. We miss out on seeing God work. We miss out on a testimony. We miss out on a blessing. If you think about it, it is riskier not to take risks.

Abraham was a risk taker; he was the father of risk takers. First, before he was Abraham, he was Abram. The LORD

said to Abram, “Leave your country, your relatives, and your father’s family, and go to the land I will show you.”⁶¹ He had no clue where he was going. When God changed his name to Abraham, he took another risk. God asked him to sacrifice his own son. When Abraham trusted God enough to obey, God prevented him from killing his own son. God had a plan. Did Abraham know that plan? No, he did not. But he had faith, and God blessed him for his faith and obedience. He was a risk taker.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were risk takers. These figures from the biblical book of Daniel were bound and thrown into the fire unafraid. Inside that fire, Jesus stood with them. Their faith was rewarded; they stepped out of the fire unharmed.⁶²

Esther took a risk when she spoke up to the king. She could have perished, but she took the risk anyway and saved her people.⁶³ The men with leprosy took a risk when they entered the camp of the Arameans. But God used their risk to save a city.⁶⁴ The servant with the five talents took a risk when he put them to work and earned five more. But he was commended by his master for doing so.⁶⁵

Rahab was a risk taker. The Bible describes Rahab as “a harlot.”⁶⁶ We hear sermons and sermons about Rahab, her

61 Genesis 12:1 NCV

62 Daniel 3

63 Esther 4-7, esp. 4:16

64 2 Kings 6-7, esp. 7:3-11

65 Matthew 25:14-30

66 Joshua 2:1

lifestyle, but her past sins fade away when we see how she risked her own life to help Joshua's men spy out the land. Rahab not only hid the men on her rooftop, but she also lied to the king's men who asked about them.⁶⁷ God had a plan for Rahab. She could have lost everything including her life. But, because she took a risk, instead of losing her life, God saved her and spared her family.

Abigail was a risk taker. Her name means "the joy of her father." When she offered the best gifts to David, she brought joy to her Heavenly Father. Abigail had the wisdom described in Proverbs 21:14: "A gift given in secret soothes anger."⁶⁸ She presented her gifts to David in the most submissive, respectful way. She bowed down in his presence⁶⁹ to ask forgiveness on behalf of Nabal. Abigail sacrificed and risked her relationship with her husband to defuse a deadly situation. And God honored her courage by bringing justice upon Nabal while keeping David free from the burden of "needless bloodshed."⁷⁰

I have found that people like to stay in their **safe zone**. But when you take a risk, you need to be in the **faith zone**. The safe zone is your comfort zone,⁷¹ it is what is familiar to

67 Joshua 2:4

68 NIV translation

69 1 Samuel 25:23

70 1 Samuel 25:31

71 Editor's note: In the foreword, Jay Payleitner wrote, "You may be surprised to hear God's plan is not about forcing you out of your comfort zone." Yet here, J.P. Olson encourages us to step out of our comfort zone. Are these two authors contradicting each other? I don't think so. Jay is reminding us that our God-

you. People like to hide in the familiar. It feels safe. Fear will stop you from stepping outside what is familiar to you. It all ties together, we are comfortable with the familiar. There's that word again: comfort.

Are we comfort seekers or risk takers?

Here are some scriptures for further study:

*"For God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and love, and self-control." 2 Timothy 1:7
MEV*

*"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." John 14:27
NIV*

*"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."
Philippians 4:6-7 NIV*

About J.P. Olson

J.P. Olson is a woman on a mission. Her risk taking adventure of faith has placed her on a journey which has allowed her to use her God-bestowed gifts as a vocalist in

given passions and desires are here for a reason: God wants to use them in His plan for our lives. J.P., on the other hand, is reminding us that along the way we will be stretched—we will grow, and that process will take us out of our comfort zone.

coordinating and conducting gospel music workshops, speaking engagements, teaching and preaching throughout the United States and internationally, from Australia and New Zealand, to France other areas of Europe, and to the continent of Africa.

In addition to being an author, speaker, and singer, J.P. Olson is a devoted wife, mother and grandmother. She is involved in community organizations and supports such causes as homelessness, international missions with an emphasis on ending the AIDS crisis, world hunger, and human trafficking.

Learn more at TheWordWithJPOlson.org.

Five Step Guide to Starting Your Ministry⁷²

Kristen Clark and Bethany Baird

You have a passion to reach people. Maybe you want to advocate for orphans. Maybe you want to end human trafficking. Maybe you want to reach young women and help them understand God’s design for womanhood. Whatever God has called you to do, you want to figure out how to make it happen.

The cool thing is this: because of the day and age we live in, it is totally possible for you to reach people you never could have reached 100 years ago. Technology (Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest—there are a million outlets) empowers you to reach the people you were meant to reach and make the difference you were meant to make.

We receive many messages and emails from people just like you who have a passion to reach people and are wondering how to take that desire and turn it into a ministry.

While we don’t have all of the answers, we have learned a lot along the way. We hope this chapter will help you figure out this process.

We officially started GirlDefined Ministries back in 2014. But our passion didn’t start then. When we were younger in

72 Adapted from “The Christian Girl’s Guide to Starting a Ministry,” youtu.be/C_h5PzvBgeg ... used with permission.

high school, we had a passion for working with girls, but it wasn't until we were in our mid-20s that we decided to take that passion and get serious about it. We have this passion to help young women—what are we going to do with it?

That's when we sought counsel, formed a vision, developed a plan, and decided what is this going to look like. Are we gonna do this as an official ministry? Or is it going to be more of a hobby? We worked through that. We prayed. God led us to start GirlDefined Ministries to help modern women understand God's timeless design for womanhood.

Just as we had a strong desire to reach young women, so also your ministry is going to come from the heart God has given you. Your ministry is going to come from something you've probably been passionate about for a long time. And now you're standing on the edge like we were—*Okay, I want to do something about this, I want to make it official, I want to get consistent, I want to get serious ...* and we love that. We love it that you have a heart for ministry, and you want to pursue ministry in a more intentional way.

In Matthew, we read this encouraging passage:

Then he [Jesus] said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."⁷³

There aren't that many who want to reach out and teach the gospel, preach the gospel—there aren't many people doing that.

73 Matthew 9:37-38 NIV

But the harvest is plentiful ... There are so many opportunities. There's so much you can do.

We want to commend you and encourage you.

God has given you a passion. He's given you a desire to reach a certain people group, to minister ... and we love that.

In this chapter we're going to give you five practical steps you can take as a laborer who is wanting to be faithful to start a ministry right now.

These are the exact steps we took to start GirlDefined Ministries.

Step #1. Write down your “what”

What is it that you're specifically passionate about? Our what is this: *Helping modern girls understand God's timeless design for womanhood*. That's a very small nutshell that describes exactly what we're passionate about. So you need to figure out your what.

What passion has God given you? Is it orphans? Is it human trafficking? Is it helping the elderly? Is it helping modern girls?

This is a big deal. You need to figure out your what. Take time to pray over this. And try to narrow it down to a tiny little nutshell like we did. This will be the first step to starting your ministry.

First step: Write down your what.

Step #2: Narrow your niche

This is so important because if you're like us, you might have a lot of passions. *I could do this ministry. And this one. And this one.* And pretty soon you're spinning 100 plates, and you don't know what you're doing any more.

You only have so much time and so many resources ... so it would be really wise to narrow your vision, narrow your passion, decide just what is and who is my niche—who is the group I'm going to be ministering to?

For us: There are a lot of girls out there in the world in many different countries embracing many different religions. So what is our niche? As we thought about our passion, we chose to focus specifically on young Christian women. We want to help young Christian women understand God's design from a biblical perspective—His design for our lives as women. That's our niche. We've narrowed it down. It's not guys. It's not the elderly. It's just this specific group of people. That helps us know who we're ministering to. We can create content and videos for that specific audience.

For you: You need to decide: Who is your niche? You need to clearly define who you want to reach, and stick to ministering to that group of people.

Then, once you have your what and once you have your niche ...

Step #3: Seek outside counsel

This is huge. We don't naturally do that. We have an idea, and then we take off with it. We go for it—full speed ahead. When we started GirlDefined, we decided that we're not going to do what we've done in the past and just run ahead at a million miles an hour. We decided we're gonna slow down, and we're gonna seek outside counsel. Here's why: We know the Bible is all about seeking wisdom, seeking counsel. There's wisdom in numbers. We decided we needed to get help, to get an outside perspective.

Where did we start? The first people we met with—once we had our what and once we had our niche—were our parents and the people closest to us. We said, “We've been praying about this. Here's our idea.” We started by seeking wisdom and counsel from the people who know us best and who love us most.

But then we didn't stop there. We went out and sought counsel from people who have been doing this way longer than we have. We don't have all the answers. None of us do. So we did research.

One of the books that helped us the most was *Platform: Get Noticed in a Noisy World* by Michael Hyatt.⁷⁴ I recommend this book all the time. It was amazing for us.

Not only did we seek biblical counsel from those around us, we also sought practical counsel. Okay, what are the practical steps toward starting a ministry?

74 amzn.to/2sMoEvC

We encourage you, once you have your ideas, once you have your niche, to pray, to seek outside counsel, to do the research that will help you propel forward in a successful way.

Step #4: Choose your platform

This takes you back to who are you ministering to. Who is your niche? Once you know that, then you'll know where to find these people. For us: young Christian women. How do we reach them? Where do young women spend a lot of their time? On social media! So for us it was really a lot of trial and error to discover which social media platforms would be best for us. We didn't start with every platform. We started with a blog and with Facebook. It has been really helpful for us to have a blog because we're writing content for young women. So with a blog comes an email sign up. That was also really important to us.

We tried Twitter, but as we got into it we discovered that Twitter was not as popular among young women. So we didn't put our energy into something that wasn't working. Instead, for us personally, we discovered that YouTube was an awesome platform to reach the young women we wanted to reach. Pinterest was also popular.

For you: You need to decide: Who am I ministering to? And where are these people going to be at? What's going to be the best platform, the best outlet for me to reach them—for me to minister to them?

That's something you will need to think about. You'll need to do some research. We suggest you look at other ministries that are similar to what you're passionate about and see what they do. What platforms are they using? People who have gone before you—what have they done? Take those tips and tricks from them.

So rather than try to do everything, rather than trying to be on every single platform out there, just pick a few. Research. Learn from others. Then pursue and build your platform where it makes sense for the people you want to reach.

Step #5: Be consistent

This is huge. This is the hardest one. When we originally had a passion for reaching young women, we dabbled with a blog, and tried to figure out what we were doing. But we were not consistent. It was honestly more like a hobby. We did it when we had time—and you rarely have time. That's fine if this is a hobby. But if you're like us—if you want to do this as a real ministry—you need to be consistent.

When we got serious, we came up with a plan—a schedule. For us, that looks like this: We post to our blog on Monday and on Friday. And we post a video on Wednesday. Those who follow us probably know our schedule. They've probably figured out our routine. For us, it's an amazing schedule to follow. We have a plan. We know where we need to be consistent. We don't post five days a week. Three is doable.

For you it might be one day a week. Maybe it's every two weeks. Maybe you send out an email update once a month. You need to decide: *What is doable for me?* Start small. You can always go bigger. But choose something that's doable. And be consistent. Get in the habit. Do it! Figure it out, and be consistent.

These five steps were the steps we took to start GirlDefined Ministries. And even now, we still adhere to these things. We want to encourage you, regardless of where you are at in the process—if it's just an idea, or if you're ready to jump in and make it official ... we want to challenge you to go back to Step #1, and decide: What is my what? What do I want to do? Write it down in a nutshell, and from that build your vision.

About Kristen Clark and Bethany Baird

Kristen Clark and Bethany Baird are sisters, lifelong friends, and the founders of GirlDefined Ministries. They are passionate about God's beautiful design for womanhood and love sharing this message through blogging, speaking, and mentoring young women. They are the authors of three books for young women: *Girl Defined*; *Love Defined*; and *Sex, Purity, and the Longings of a Girl's Heart*. Learn more at GirlDefined.com.

Making A Difference Case Study

Mike Halsted

Note: Somewhere around 2008, Editor Dwight Clough worked with the leaders of a rapidly growing church plant in Madison, Wisconsin to create a course called Empower Good. The purpose of the course was similar to the purpose of this book: to help people clarify their dreams, extend their influence, and use their lives to further God's purposes.

Mike Halsted's story

I started knowing this: I wanted to follow God's will in my life. And I knew that responding to what God was doing in me was going to be something of action, something of mission. But prior to coming into Empower Good, I really didn't know what that was. I knew I wanted to be a missionary of some kind, but I needed clarity around my goals.

At an early age I decided I wanted to be an adventurer. I wanted to live life like Indiana Jones, or be like a character from a Joseph Conrad novel—*Heart of Darkness*. I dreamed of going to unexplored foreign lands. I even felt a sense of urgency because I feared by the time I got overseas there would be no unexplored land for me to discover. I wanted to experience glory and adventure by hacking my way through the jungle to find indigenous peoples who needed my help.

I knew I would need to fund my dream in some way. To make foreign exploration possible, I began purchasing rental properties. My idea was this: Use the income from those rentals to be this man of the bush abroad.

As time went on, I began attending an evangelical church because I had a crush on a woman who attended there. Soon I modified my plan to include mission work—I would become a missionary adventurer. I felt proud of my desire to be one of the extreme. I liked the attention I could draw by telling others about my dream and how I would combine all my sports and other hobbies into my plan to go abroad.

One dream died; another began

I met Dwight Clough in 2008. He was sponsoring a course called Empower Good. The course offered students a methodical way of looking at themselves through God's eyes and exploring His plan and purpose for their lives. While going through the Empower Good course I took a deep look at myself. I looked at the foundation of how God built me and what He's given me. As I did, I realized my dreams were misplaced; they were, in a way, selfish and indulgent. While it's okay to want adventure, my dreams of adventure seemed more aimed at glorifying myself than at glorifying God.

But then I experienced a life-changing moment. At the end of the course, I was explaining how I understood the importance of bringing my life experience, gifts, and desires in alignment with God's love and heart for our futures. As I went on with my report, one of the instructors said,

“Michael, by what you are describing, it sounds like God is pointing you toward local missions.” When I heard “local missions,” I felt a sense of loss. What about my desire to go abroad? Would I really need to settle for “local”? But then God spoke to me through Pastor Joe Steinke: “Okay, Mike, you want to be a missionary. Based on your report, you are pointed to local missions.”

I didn’t know it at the time, but things started to line up. Sometimes the things God has given you in life indicate where God wants you to go. While I had a vision of becoming a rich landlord so I could be financially independent and work as a foreign missionary,⁷⁵ God had a different vision.

God spoke to me: *Mike, you amassed these properties for personal gain. I’m going to show you how you can use these properties in your desire to follow Me, how you can use these properties to glorify Me, locally, here in your city.*

What would that look like? For a time, I toyed with the idea of partnering with a ministry that brought families out of homelessness. I could use my properties to provide next-phase housing.

About that time Dwight introduced me to a missionary couple who were in the recovery ministry. A new dream began to form in my mind. I could use my homes to support people who are coming out of drug and alcohol addiction. That was personal for me as I was just stepping away from a

75 I wasn’t really thinking about the godly concept of having people support my mission—and how that can be a blessing for me and for them—I wanted to be independent Joe.

dysfunctional relationship with someone who struggled with addictions. I could sense God bringing things together.

About this time, God did something amazing. The neighborhood where my rental properties were located was riddled with drugs and alcohol. The houses around our properties were open air drug dealers. But on June 10, 2010, a sixty-person SWAT team brought down the whole block. They closed off the top of the street and the bottom of the street. They arrived in those big vans that said SWAT on them, wearing flak jackets and carrying assault rifles. They swarmed into those two drug dealer houses, and brought them down.

Between that and our ministry to bring sobriety to our community, God took what was bad and flipped the neighborhood upside down, creating a place where addicts could stay clean and restore their lives. God completely changed the character of that block. Instead of using and selling drugs, residents were now focused on staying sober.

What would you do if you knew you could not fail?

How our ministry began

Even though I had this new ministry idea, at first I was intimidated by the idea of opening my homes to recovering addicts and alcoholics. I didn't know how the ministry would work.

But since I knew these missionaries who were already in the recovery ministry, I figured, *Hey, this is the best of both worlds. I'll allow the experts in recovery home living to run this ministry, and I'll provide the properties and the support.*

When you're starting a mission, it's never good to be a lone ranger. It's always good to have a team around you who have been there, done that. That's why we say it's better to join someone who is already doing a mission than try to reinvent the wheel. That was another principle we learned in Empower Good. I worked with the missionary couple for a while, and one of my homes became an extension of their ministry.

One day, I was walking from my bedroom into my living room, and God hit me with a vision. It was a vision to take care of people who were running from the darkness and trying to find the light. For the next four hours in tears I processed this vision, coming to a better understanding of God's calling on my life. God was defining me. God was touching me—so clearly and so powerfully. I knew I had been placed in the recovery home ministry. My homes would be used for persons to use as a launching pad to restart their lives in sobriety—a place where the souls, lives and relationships could be restored.

After this vision, my involvement began to change. I became more than the landlord. I became involved in the lives of our residents. When relapses happened, I was there to sort it out with our residents. I made tough decisions about who could stay and who needed to leave. I became part of

the ministry and started relationships with those I was renting to. We started “doing life together.”

Meanwhile, the couple leading the ministry and I came to a mutual decision: it was time for me to launch out on my own.

This is when Serenity Home was born.

Figuring it out

Since the missionary couple was no longer in the picture and we had formed our own entity, I needed to figure out how to take the ministry to the next level. I felt like God was leading Serenity to be different—to be a safe place to *live*, not just a place to *stay*. For a while, it was trial by fire. But in the months that followed God opened up more opportunities for growth and Serenity doubled in size. (All of my properties are adjacent to one another.) The opportunity to buy a home at a huge discount came along, and I found a woman who was capable of becoming the a director for the women.

My own home became a sober living facility, and I learned first hand what it's like living in a recovery home. This was another concept I learned in Empower Good. The best ministries are led by those who have lived within the community they are serving.

The financial aspect of this ministry

Some people in the recovery home ministry are accused of being in it for the money. Not Serenity Home. Yes, finan-

cially, the tenants pay the mortgages and the expenses. But we don't draw an income from the ministry at this time. Serenity Home is not currently designed to be a full-time career for anyone. I work a full-time government job, and my wife, Johanna, works as a nurse—our employment pays our own bills. My mortgages are paid for, and that's an investment that will bear fruit someday if and when we decide to sell. Meanwhile, we serve a group of people that struggle financially. In the last ten years, we've only raised rents once (a modest increase). Serenity Home is a bare-bones ministry operating on a shoestring budget.

Because of Covid, sometimes I take a hit, where we don't have enough money to pay the bills, and I end up taking money out of our own personal funds to make ends meet. But, in the end, God will take care of us. He always has, and He always will.

Someday soon I will spend more time, effort and energy growing Serenity. For now our marriage and my government job come before Serenity Home. This has proven to be a healthy choice. However, retirement is near and we're in the process of filing our 501(c)3. We believe Serenity is ready to become an official non-profit. We believe Serenity will continue to grow slowly and beautifully, and we will continue to listen to God's direction along the way.

Where we are now

Serenity Home continues to grow in different ways. We now have 28 people living in four homes. The only thing

stopping it from growing is my ability to delegate and create new leaders. Our reputation among the recovery community is growing, and we are known to be a resident- and community-centered ministry. We're truly missional. We're relationship based. And it continues to be this amazing thing—I can't even tell you—it's been absolutely incredible.

When God is in something, it blows up. Serenity Home has done nothing but blow up ever since we started. I don't feel like I've had a whole lot to do with it. God keeps pouring into it, helping it survive, helping it grow, helping people change, helping people get clean.

Early on in the Empower Good course, we were confronted with this question: What would you do if you didn't have any obstacles in your way?

I found out when God is in something, the obstacles don't matter. God can overcome any obstacle.

About Mike Halsted

Mike Halsted is the founder and director of Serenity Home, a sober living ministry for residents in recovery in Madison, Wisconsin. You can find out more at his Serenity Home Sober Living Facebook page [Facebook.com/serenity-homemadison](https://www.facebook.com/serenity-homemadison) or by calling 608-501-HOPE (4673).

Empower Good Survey

How can we best help you? Taking a few minutes to answer a few questions will help us better help you.

Please complete this survey at EmpowerGood.com⁷⁶

- No name or mail required (unless you want to share it)
- No sales pitch—we just want to get to know you better so we can serve you better
- No cost, no credit card

All questions are optional, but encouraged...

1. What are you doing (or what do you want to do) to make a difference? ... Making a difference can take many forms: starting or directing a ministry, volunteering, starting or operating a business, authoring a book, creating a film or an online community, starting a blog or YouTube channel, advancing a cause, and the list goes on. What about you? What are you doing (or what do you want to do) to make a difference? Include as much detail as you want; we love hearing hearing your story! And if you're still working on figuring it out, that's fine too—we would love to hear your process.

⁷⁶ If you prefer pen and paper, mail your response to Empower Good Survey, c/o Dwight Clough, PO Box 670, Wyocena, WI 53969.

2. Where are you in your journey to make a difference?

Examples: I don't know what to do to make a difference, but I'd like to find out. I have a dream. I have a plan with a timetable. I'm up and running. My endeavor has achieved sustained success. I'm looking to mentor others.

3. Where do you need help?

Examples: Help figuring out who I am and what I'm called to do. Help clarifying my vision or mission. Help with ministry skills (such as leading someone to faith). Help with relationship or leadership skills. Help creating a strategy. Help forming a team. Help creating an entity. Help raising funds for a ministry or capital for a business. Help monetizing my efforts or getting sales. Help with personal transformation, spiritual growth, emotional healing. Help writing or publishing a book. Help spreading the word. Emotional and prayer support. That's just a partial list. Where do you need or want help?

4. Do you want us to contact you if we are able to identify people or resources that could help you? If yes, please

enter your name and email address here. (Please double check your email for accuracy.)

5. What would you like to see added to this site and/or in future books in the Empower Good Leadership Series?

6. What's your financial model? Examples: The people I serve (will) provide the funds. People other than those I serve (will) provide the funds. I (will) finance this myself. I need help figuring this out. Money isn't an issue.

7. How would you describe your spiritual journey or your relationship with God?

8. When it comes to making a difference, how would you describe yourself? Examples: I'm on mission. I'm advancing a cause. I am (or I am becoming) a Christian leader. I have something of value to offer my world. I want to make a difference. I have a dream. I want to change my

world. I want to make a difference. I'm a change agent. Leaving a legacy is important to me. God has a specific assignment for me to complete before I die. I am a ministry pioneer. I am a ministry leader.

9. If there was a way (examples, print directory or online community) **to connect you with others** who are working to make a difference, **would that be of interest** to you? Would you like to be connected with others who can help you make a difference?

About EmpowerGood.com

We're in the process of relaunching this website to meet the needs of you, our reader. Thanks so much for completing our survey at EmpowerGood.com! This will help us determine what kind of community to build and what kind of resources to make available.

Part 3: Skills to Extend Your Influence

Chapters 12-19

One of the most powerful ways to make a difference is bringing the right people together. Connector Kerri Kane explains how.

Social media makes all of us next-door neighbors. But how do we navigate this space if we want to bring good into our world? Public relations and marketing expert Laura Gallagher takes the mystery out of building a social media presence.

Your efforts to make a difference will probably place you behind the podium sooner or later. But public speaking ranks as one of the biggest fears for most people. How do you wrestle that fear to the ground? Discover seven hacks that will help you stand confidently in front of a group of any size.

How do you build a team of volunteers to help you achieve your God-given vision? How do you fund your cause or your ministry? Relational development specialist and best-selling author Jerry Twombly lifts the veil and shares secrets that have enabled him to help ministries and nonprofits large and small.

Starting a nonprofit ministry isn't the only path open to those who want to bring good into their world. Author,

copywriter, and business consultant Steve Roller explains what it takes to not only survive but thrive as a solopreneur.

Want to write a book? Who better to explain how it's done than 21-time *New York Times* best-selling author Jerry Jenkins. Follow his 20-step process, and your book will get done.

Can a new and unknown author have any hope of getting published? Author, ghostwriter, and publishing consultant Dwight Clough opens the back door to success.

Divine Connections

Kerri Kane

In my younger years and well into my adult life I struggled with a feeling of brokenness and unworthiness. I knew God was always with me, but I never allowed myself to slow down to really hear His voice to know the plans he had for me. It was much later with the help of my friends and family of faith that I learned to allow Him to be a part of my everyday life. As I allowed Him in, He showed me unconditional love, mercy, and grace. One of the outcomes of that was discovering my God-given gift of bringing people together to create “Divine Connections.”

How does that work? I’m glad you asked. Here’s how God uses connections to accomplish His purposes:

#1 Divine friendships

Two people working together can accomplish what either one working alone cannot. This came into focus during my early years of marriage and parenting. My goal was to have a loving happy family, but for some reason I was unable to reach that goal on my own. In order to achieve this goal, I was going to need God’s help first, and then also the help of someone who had gone before me. The Lord answered my prayer and brought the right people into my life. These

friends of faith spoke truth to me. “Seek God’s will first,” they told me, “then love your neighbor as yourself which of course starts with your husband and children. When you put God and family first, everything else will fall into place.” That was the best advice I had ever been given! As God showed me how to put that advice into practice, I was on my way to having that loving, happy family I always wanted.

#2 Connecting people allows God’s work to move forward...

Some time ago a group of amazing folks came to me wanting to purchase a building to convert into a homeless shelter. At first I thought of them as just another real estate client. But during this time, God was healing me and teaching me to serve and give graciously. The leadership team and the volunteers became like family to me. We found a building. (Tears of joy at that closing!) When they were trying to figure out how to get the funds to accomplish the vision God had given them, God reminded me of some friends who ran a family foundation. That connection forever changed the trajectory of this ministry. In addition, I ended up working closely with them for over three years, helping them find the people they needed to accomplish the task God had given them. God used these connections to not only change the lives of homeless women and children, but also to change me.

Here’s another example: Bravebird, an award-winning film production company, relocated to our area. Of course,

being new, they didn't know many people. They needed to find actors and people who could give them access to locations where they could shoot. I put them in touch with people that helped them carry forward their God-given mission.

#3 Follow God's leading...

The right connections can bring about beautiful results. How do you create those connections? Follow God's leading. If God's Spirit is in us, then it's pretty simple: He will direct our conversations with others—if we let Him. God will bring the right people into our lives in the right place at the right time. Sure, there are times when I'm afraid to speak up, especially when I am in the presence of someone who seems more knowledgeable or more successful than me. But then God reminds me to stay focused on Him. It's like He's saying, "Kerri, look at Me. Don't look at others. Don't look at yourself. Look at Me." When we look to Him, He gives us the courage to speak up when we need to speak up, and the wisdom to not speak when we need to stay quiet. Ultimately, God always reminds me that people are people. It doesn't matter how much or how little they have. If we treat everyone with kindness and respect, things have a way of turning out well.

#4 Chemistry and trust

Is there any way to know whether two people we connect will have the right chemistry with one another? Sometimes. If we know both parties well, we get a sense for who they

will feel comfortable with and who they won't. Getting to know people really pays off here. Get to know their character, understand what makes them tick.

Creating "Divine Connections" means building authentic relationships. We're building trust with other people. It's about being real and being vulnerable. That means we need to be people of integrity. We should search for others who are on the same page, share the same moral compass, and who are rowing in the same direction. We want to connect people who have similar ethics, morals and values. We are looking to connect people who are generous with one another, who can learn from one another, and who are working toward a common goal. We want to give value to every relationship by making meaningful and positive connections. Building relationships takes time. It cannot be rushed because trust takes time to establish.

#5 Some ground rules

When is it okay, and when is it not okay to put two people in touch with each other? We should never connect two people without their permission, because this violates trust. It's important to value privacy. If someone trusts you with a phone number, email, or some other contact information, you should never give that out without their permission. This way you maintain trust, respect, and privacy.

When I connect two people, I try to make it easy for them. I usually start by sending separate texts to each one (or calls or emails depending on the person). I never pass

contact information on to the other party until I have permission.

I'm an extrovert. In my mind, the more the merrier. However, it's not fair to someone else who is expecting one-on-one time with me to suddenly bring more people into the meeting than she/he was expecting. However, sometimes, if both parties are willing, I will schedule a lunch meeting and invite them both. That way we all can get on the same page to see if some benefit can come from this new relationship.

We live in a fast-paced world. It is easy to get impatient and try to rush things. But we must not do that. Especially if we want to create meaningful relationships. We need to slow down and spend less time talking and more time listening to others but most importantly to God. If we don't take the time to discern we might accidentally try to create connections that God never intended.

#6 The bird dog principle

Everybody needs what I call a "bird dog." They need someone in their court cheering for them, believing in them, empowering them, connecting them with other people who can help them. You can be that for someone.

#7 And sometimes, it is just fun!

When Shelter from the Storm Ministries needed to renovate their new building, the first step was demolition. Since

I had friends in two local high schools, God gave me this fun idea: a friendly competition. We got the varsity and JV football teams from both high schools down to the job site. These football players came with their fathers—dads and sons working together. The challenge: Which team could tear down the most walls? The newspaper got wind of the event, and the ministry gained valuable publicity in the community. And, needless to say, we all had a great deal of fun.

Do you have a God-given gift for connecting people to create meaningful relationships? If so, you may completely change the trajectory of someone's life and help further God's purposes here on this earth.

About Kerri Kane

Kerri is a Madison WI real estate agent, recruiter and master networker. She enjoys working with local organizations to help promote mental health and wellness. She has been married for 26 years and has four amazing children. Kerri loves people and strives to make a difference in the lives of her family, friends and clients through sharing her time, life testimony and the love of Christ.

Connect with her at KerriAKane.com.

Using the Power of Story in Social Media to Become a Change Agent

Laura Gallagher

Will a social media presence empower you to make a difference?

Other change agents like yourself use social media to:

- Share their work
- Encourage and connect with others
- Become a more effective fundraiser
- Connect with potential donors and existing donors
- Recruit volunteers
- Become a thought leader
- Create community
- Give others the opportunity to find their work, cause, or story
- Stay up to date on what others are doing
- Be an encouragement

Plus countless other reasons that are varied, both personally and professionally.

There were 3.81 billion social media users worldwide in 2020. Social media usage is up 9% from the previous year. Considering that there are 4.54 billion internet users, more

than 80% of internet users are on social media. Eight out of 10 Americans are on social media.⁷⁷

In 1989, when I started my company, there were very few ways to get a message out. You could use broadcast media or take out a print ad. You could do a mailing or buy a billboard. The channels to reach an audience were few.

All of that changed with the internet. Everyone who wants a channel to share their story and connect with others anywhere around the world can now do so. Anyone can have a megaphone. Whether people are listening or not is another question.

Essential ingredients

This is where good storytelling, creating interesting content, and planning are needed. Having a clear strategy to incorporate these efforts can also be helpful.

The challenge isn't beginning. It's easy enough to set up a social media account. The real work comes after the introduction.

Like other relationships in real life, you'll need to keep the conversation going, which takes time and a basic understanding of storytelling, as well as how your content will benefit the reader. For those who are working for a non-profit or ministry organization, you'll also want to create a social media plan.

A social media calendar is a great place to start. Think of the highlights, main events, and evergreen parts of your

⁷⁷ Source: Omnicore Social Media Benchmark Report

brand story. Begin by outlining those in a calendar format and then use a tool such as HootSuite to write and schedule your content in advance. You'll likely be incorporating video into your plan and calls to action such as "sign up for our newsletter," "learn more," and "register for our upcoming event."

You are 80 times more likely to accomplish something if you write it down. To have a real impact and become more than "just a person with a presence" but one with influence, you'll need a plan and a compelling story. One important point, however: This story isn't about you. You're inviting them to change *their* story for the better as well providing an invitation to join you on a mission, whatever that mission may be.

A character in a story

A decade ago, I went to Portland, Oregon, to Donald Miller's "Storyline Conference." Donald Miller is the best-selling author of the book *Blue Like Jazz*. The Storyline Conference was something new he was trying. I was one of the lucky ones who got to be part of one of his early workshops in San Francisco. Bob Goff, author of *Love Does* spoke at the conference too. Don told us about his "aha" moment when he realized he wasn't living a good story. He then invited us to look at our own lives as a story and ask, "If you were a character in your own story, what would you do next?" He then added, "What would keep it interesting?" and "How would the character change, for the better?"

From that point on, I began thinking of myself as a character in a story. If every day, I'm turning a page, what happens next to the character? "What will keep their interest?" "What constitutes a plot change?" "Who does the character want to be in the story of their own life?" Additionally, in every great story—from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* to *Forrest Gump*—there are fascinating characters who go on the journey as well. Who are these characters in your own life? Are you surrounding yourself with the right people for where your story is taking you next?

Essentially, this is what we do on social media. Our presence on social media tends to reflect the "best parts" of our lives, but not our whole life, which in reality, can be mundane and boring. Additionally, we don't want to journey alone; the purpose is to bring others into the story as well. Who do you want to attract? How can you help them? What can you give them that will make THEIR story more interesting, compelling, and infinitely better than before?

These are great questions to ask when you're developing your social media presence.

Who will you be in the room?

In 2017, I became Wisconsin's Ambassador to the United Nations for Women's Entrepreneurship Day, a global economic empowerment movement for women, by women. As part of my role with the movement, I produced a top-tier, sold-out conference in 120 days two years in a row. My primary vehicle to reach women in business and leadership

throughout Wisconsin was content creation, the generation of material—both written and visual—that would draw the right people to the event in a short amount of time. We sent 24 email campaigns in year one. We started a Facebook page for the event and ran a digital advertising campaign featuring video invitations from leaders in different sectors of the economy—from technology to manufacturing. We also cross-promoted with our sponsors sharing social media content with them for posting on their social media pages. On my personal page, I tagged every advisory board member, every speaker, and every volunteer. We worked it from all possible angles and highlighted the contributions others were making. It was the largest day-long economic empowerment summit in North America.

One of the challenges that some may need to overcome is the idea of being too self-promotional. It can help to think of being on social media as merely being in a crowded room. Who will you be in the room? How can you be helpful? How can you be kind? How can you provide value? On social media, the same basic principles apply as in any social situation.

Know your audience

When writing for your audience, it's best to know them well before you begin. Again, it's like you are already friends in real life. What do your friends like to do, think, and know? What tone works best for them? What are they most likely to respond to?

“It resonates because it isn’t just my story, it is their own story.”

For example, there’s a Facebook group for my hometown of Warren where people share memories. When I visit, I often write a short story about Warren and share it with the members. They love it because this is their hometown too. It resonates because it isn’t just my story, it is their own story. As I write about places that were ordinary 40 years ago, others are also transported back in time. We reminisce together through the comments. The articles are then shared with their friends. What’s remarkable to me is that many people also enjoy the stories when I post them on my personal Facebook page. It shows that one small town in America can have this special connection to all the others. We were all children once, too, and remember when things were less complicated. In this way, I’m creating more than a digital connection, but a true connection to another person’s heart and soul.

Professionally, at The Creative Company—the PR and Marketing firm I founded over 30 years ago—we begin most work by developing a brand’s customer persona. We give this “person” or persona a name to help us clarify our messaging and content. “Will this resonate with Susan?” “Will Susan like this?” “Will she share it with her friends?” “Will Josh think this is funny?” “Will he be more likely to donate as a result of seeing this post?” “Will Josh feel better after reading it?”

As you're developing your social media presence, your audience's needs must be front and center.

Attract, don't repel

Remember that listening is more important than telling and being the kind of person in the room who others want to know more about is better than being the person who is always drawing attention to themselves. It's no different than being at a party. You don't want to be that person flexing their intellectual or spiritual muscles by showing everyone how fantastic you are. Rather, by taking a position of humility and curiosity, you'll find more fruit for your labor.

As is true in every crowded room, there are often conversations you would like to leave. Your goal in developing a social media presence is not to repel people but attract them.

Relevant Magazine published a list of 15 Things Christians shouldn't do on social media in September of 2020. The list includes becoming caught up in every outrage wave, spiritual bragging, acting like you have it all together, and being too partisan.

The online Christian

There is a cultural tension about the use of social media. One of the more interesting challenges is how a Christian shares their faith on social media. I live in Madison, Wisconsin, one of the more secular cities in America. Faith is

increasingly becoming something to be suspicious of, it seems, so how does a Christian go forward?

In *Spiritual Conversations in the Digital Age*, produced in partnership with Lutheran Hour Ministries, Barna Research asked American adults how they discuss spirituality online. Through posts, comments, and profiles, many Christians believe that technology and digital interactions have made evangelism easier. They found that three out of 10 (28%) share their faith via social media, and almost six out of 10 (58%) non-Christians say someone has shared their faith with them through Facebook. So it is possible.

Social media can be a very useful tool for good. As we see every day, people are becoming influencers simply by being themselves, sharing their knowledge, and inviting people into the story.

All of this takes time, effort, creativity, commitment, and probably a financial investment in digital advertising.

Advertising and trends

Social media advertising, with the on-point messaging and a strong strategy, can be very effective. According to the special Covid-19 Edition of The CMO Survey, social media has become essential to marketing. The survey reports that social media spending increased from 13.3% of marketing budgets in February 2020 to 23.2% in June 2020—a 74% lift. Meanwhile, spending on traditional advertising is projected to decline.⁷⁸

78 <https://cmosurvey.org/results/>

We began doing social media content creation at The Creative Company in 2008, during the last recession. Through the National Retail Federation's annual Big Show featuring the largest brands in the world, we were able to see that the future would be digital. This has now come to fruition as digital advertising is more prevalent than ever. The advances of smartphone technology, as well as increased Wi-Fi speeds, has meant that many Americans are increasingly connected with their handheld devices. Families no longer gather around the television set to watch the evening news on one of the four broadcast news stations. Each person chooses what they want to watch, and to a great extent, when they want to watch it.

This gives those who want to reach a niche audience a fantastic opportunity to do so with a smaller investment. It makes what was previously not possible just a little more than a decade ago, entirely achievable today.

Making it work for you

Some final points to consider: If you have a website for your personal brand, cause, business, or ministry, you will want to drive some social media traffic to your website. Through Google Analytics, you'll be able to see which social media channels are the most effective for you.

Which leads to the final question: What channel is the best for social media? My answer is straightforward: the one that works.

About Laura Gallagher

Laura Gallagher is President of The Creative Company, a public relations and marketing firm in Madison, Wisconsin. She is also the author of *#180in120—How to Recharge Your Business in 120 Days*. Recently, she launched Mathetria Press, a publishing company for women, by women. Laura is the Wisconsin 2019 SBA's Women in Business Champion of the Year and one of fewer than 100 women to be recognized by the State of Wisconsin as a Trailblazer. You can order her book on Amazon or at LauraGallagher.us. Use Code "MAKEADIFFERENCE" and get 20% off. To learn more about The Creative Company, visit TheCreativeCompany.com. To get the best marketing insights, sign up for a free subscription to our newsletter. To get updates about Laura's ministry work and the launch of her newest venture, visit MathetriaPress.com.

7 Hacks to Overcome Fear of Public Speaking

Dwight Clough

Terrified of speaking in front of a group? Here are some hacks that will help.

#1 Use the fear to connect with God

Fear is, admittedly, an unpleasant emotion. But it is also an opportunity for God to do something amazing inside us. When you feel fear, hear the sound of Jesus knocking at the door, saying, “I know that fear is in there. Let Me come in and take care of it for you.”

How?

You have a public speaking engagement on your calendar. As you think about that appointment, what emotions are you feeling? In particular, what negative emotions are you feeling? Find a quiet place where you won't be disturbed and focus on those feelings.⁷⁹

What comes to mind as you let yourself feel those feelings? Don't worry if what comes to mind doesn't seem related, just see what memories and thoughts are connected with these negative emotions.

⁷⁹ If you're a survivor of trauma or have mental health issues, then you may want to do these steps in the presence of a trained counselor or prayer minister.

Next, ask yourself: What feels true? (Not what *is* true, but what *feels* true—big difference.)

Once you've identified the gut-level beliefs that correspond to those negative emotions, then it's time to let Jesus do what only Jesus can do. Simple prayer: "Jesus, here's what feels true—_____ [fill in the blank]. What do You have for me? What do You want me to know?"

Then wait, and see what changes inside. Jesus might speak to you in some dramatic way. Or you might experience a quiet, barely perceptible shift in thinking. Or Jesus may show up some other way.

Once you've sensed that Jesus is finished with what He wants to do, then you can take a fresh look at that public speaking appointment. How does it feel now? What's changed?

The key to this hack is to repeat as necessary. You might clear up all your fears the first time, but, more likely, it will take several times over a period of days, weeks, or longer to root out all of those fears. No worries. Take your time, and enjoy the journey. Jesus loves doing this transformation inside us.

I've done this hack many, many times with many different negative emotions, and the outcome has been truly miraculous. I'm not the same person I used to be. I'm able to relax and enjoy life. I feel a deep sense of peace. Everything has changed for me.

#2 Pray for your audience

The nice thing about praying for the people who will hear you speak is this: It changes your focus from your performance to their benefit. I get the best results speaking when I devote about half my preparation time to praying for my audience. Those are the times when I feel like God truly shows up, and something supernatural happens.

#3 Have something to say

What message can you bring that will add value to the lives of the people in your audience? Think it through. Write it down. Talk it out with someone. Be clear in your own mind about what you're going to say, and have whatever notes you need on hand so you can stay on point.

A side note here: Know how you're going to end. Have that part planned out. Some people get up in front and seem to figure out in the middle of their speech that they don't have an exit strategy. As a result, they keep talking. That soon becomes uncomfortable for everyone. Don't let that happen to you. Have the end planned out.

#4 Learn how to tell stories

There is an art and a science to story-telling. Learn everything you can about it. Here's why: People relate to stories. Facts, statistics, profound ideas—those things go right over their heads; people tend to zone out. But they tune in to stories. And let me tell you, it is a beautiful experience to

feel the energy in the room when everyone in the audience is with you. Learn how to tell stories. Get good at it. If you do, you'll start to love speaking in front of a group, and audiences will love to hear you speak.

#5 Embrace nervousness as energy

When I speak before a large group, I'm always grateful for a little case of the nerves before I speak. Here's why: I know that nervousness will go away once I start talking. But being keyed up gives me a little more energy, and that energy gets translated into the connection that forms between the audience and me. Many professional speakers get nervous before speaking and have learned to welcome and embrace that nervousness.

#6 Pause before speaking

Once you get up front, give yourself and give your audience a moment to breathe a breath before you start speaking. It just helps everyone—including you—to relax.

#7 Talk to one person at a time

Whether you're speaking to ten people or 10,000 people, talk to one person at a time. Pick out someone in the audience, look him or her in the eye, say a few words—maybe a sentence or two—and then pick out another person. Something magical happens for you and for your audience when you do that. You're no longer speaking to a sea of faces;

you're speaking to another human being. It helps you connect. And the people in your audience are going to walk away saying, "I felt like she/he was speaking directly to me."

~ * ~

Those are seven hacks that I've found helpful. Other people may have other ideas that also help. Here are my thoughts on three other ideas that I've read or heard:

Humor: People often recommend humor as a tool to help with public speaking. Nothing warms up an audience and dispels tension in the room like a handful of jokes to get people laughing, right? Yes and no. Some people have a gift for humor and it works well for them. Others don't. Be who you are. And remember: What one person finds funny, the next person can find offensive, so tread carefully. There's nothing worse than offending your audience, and then needing to crawl out of that hole while you're up in front.

Underwear: I've often heard people say: "Imagine everyone in the room with nothing on but their underwear." Thank goodness I'm not a visual thinker because I don't want to visualize that at all. If that helps you, then, I guess, more power to you. But a room full of people clad only in their underwear would not make me feel any more comfortable at all. Not by a long shot.

Toastmasters: Many people have joined Toastmasters and found that helpful. Since I never joined Toastmasters, I can't speak from personal experience, but people I respect recommend it highly.

About Dwight Clough

Dwight got his start in public speaking way back in high school when he joined the debate and forensics team. “I was terrible,” he says. “But I was stuck because I also enrolled in the debate class, and I couldn’t get out of it. However, my mom kept telling me what a good job I was doing (liar!), and after a while, I started believing her. Then something amazing happened. I actually got good at it. In fact, I became one of the best high school debaters in the state.” Dwight auditioned for and won the opportunity to be the graduation speaker at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. He has spoken before groups ranging in size from five to 2,500. More information on Dwight at DwightClough.com.

Working With Volunteers to Carry Out Your God-given Vision

Jerry Twombly

“We need to raise more money!”

Nonprofits have taken a hit in 2020. Many of them are down 30% or more. Most have laid off employees, and barring a major turnaround, future prospects are not promising.

These ministries “need” more money, but, in many cases, the money isn’t out there. If you are seeking to start, grow, or even maintain a ministry, you will probably face this reality: While it is possible to raise funds for your ministry, in order for you to thrive or even survive, you will need to figure out how to do more with less. Money just isn’t available in the same quantity that it once was. And what’s true in North America is true even more throughout the rest of the world.

For many ministries, this will mean using volunteers to do what staff once did.

Is that possible?

The good news is this: Yes, it is. But only if it’s managed properly.

What can volunteers do?

What can volunteers do?

It turns out, they can do plenty. Years ago a thriving Christian organization employed a professional on their leadership team. He was a “rock star,” a mover and shaker. He was so valuable, that this nonprofit happily paid his salary of \$100,000 per year.⁸⁰ He was someone who brought incredible value into that organization. Or so they thought.

But after a time, the inevitable happened. His reputation spread, and someone else offered him \$125,000 per year to come and work for a different group. He accepted. He was recruited away.

As this ministry went to pick up the pieces, they made a surprising discovery. All this work that they thought this professional was doing wasn’t being done by him at all. It was all being done by a team of volunteers he had carefully cultivated.

Right at that point, the leadership of this organization made a strategic decision. They kept the volunteers, but they didn’t replace the “rock star.” They even offered some compensation to the volunteers which was mostly rejected. “We don’t need to be paid,” they said. “We love what you’re doing, and we just want to be part of it.”

The Christian organization continued to thrive without the expense of this professional on their team.

So, yes, volunteers can be used by God to accomplish amazing things in your ministry.

⁸⁰ Unusually high for nonprofit salaries at that time.

So we need to recruit volunteers, right?

No, not really. Not so fast.

The problem with recruiting

Sometimes the worst thing you can do is ask for volunteers.

Why?

You might get some!

Here's an example of what I mean: A ministry needed help planning new facilities. They didn't have the money to hire a consulting firm, so instead they put out a mass appeal for volunteers. Unfortunately, they recruited all the wrong people. The volunteers came to the table lacking the expertise needed to cope with the issues involved in this planning process. On top of that, some of them attempted to dominate the process with their own personal agendas. It became necessary for the ministry to "fire" most or all of these volunteers, resulting in hurt feelings and broken relationships. It was a mismatch. It never should have taken place.

There's a right way and a wrong way to develop a group of volunteers. Mass appeal is usually the wrong way.

Linkage

Instead we need to come back to a basic principle in Christian ministry, the principle I call linkage. Linkage means this: *The closer you are connected to someone, the*

greater the likelihood they will engage with you in your ministry. Relationship is key.

Here's why: Relationship vets volunteers. You want to work with people you know, trust, and believe in. The better you know someone, the more you can answer questions like these: Does this person have the character required for this volunteer role? Does he have the people skills? Does she have the technical expertise? Is she fully on board with our vision? Or is he likely to push his own agenda? Is she a team player?

But perhaps you need a volunteer to fill a role, but you don't know anybody who would be a good fit for that role. How do move forward?

Here's where you use a tactic I call The One Hour Task Force.

The One Hour Task Force

Here's how it works: You need a volunteer with specific expertise that you don't have. Let's say, for example, that you need a volunteer to help with event planning. As you network with your friends and colleagues, you ask them, "Who do you know who knows a lot about event planning?" Once you've been introduced, you can call this person and say, "I don't know how to do event planning. Could I buy you lunch? I would love to pick your brain." Most of the time people will receive this as a compliment, and will be delighted to spend an hour with you sharing their advice.

Please note: You haven't asked this person to volunteer for anything. You're simply getting together so that you can learn from this person.

During the meeting, you are sizing this person up. You're getting a feel for what they might have to offer your organization. If nothing else, they are providing you with valuable information on a topic in which you might not be well versed. But, once the relational connection has been made, they might be willing to help in other ways as well.

This is where you bridge.

The biggest mistake in development is the failure to bridge.

The biggest mistake in development is the failure to bridge.

What do I mean by "bridge"?

To bridge means to offer your audience opportunities to engage. In this case, you might say something like this:

"Before we go our separate ways, let me share with you our vision and four or five things we're doing. We believe that it's not okay for a family to be sleeping on the streets. While there are homeless shelters and other ministries and services for the homeless, we're the only entity in this county specifically focused on getting homeless families into permanent safe, affordable housing. Many of our families have preschool children, and living on the streets is no place for a little child. Getting homeless families off the

streets is a big job, but we partner with good people like you to make it happen. Here are some of the things we're working on right now. We're planning a fundraising gala next summer, and we need to put together a team to make that happen. I could see you being on that team and even possibly leading that team. We're planning a number of workshops in the spring to inform leaders and interested community members about the reality of family homelessness and what we're doing to bring it to an end. We're looking for people to attend, and a good person to take care of the logistics to make this happen. We're slowly growing our group of monthly donors who are supporting us at all different financial levels. And we have a monthly newsletter that we make available for free to anyone who would like to follow our ministry. Could I send you the newsletter? Do you have an interest in any of these other opportunities? Do you know of anybody who might be interested in our ministry that we should talk to?"

The role of volunteers

Volunteers are indispensable to ministry. They always have been, and are so much more in our current economy. But volunteers need to be properly cultivated. Start with relationship. That comes first. Once you have established a relationship with a potential volunteer, make sure you carefully match the opportunity with the person. Avoid using mass appeals. Offer specific roles to specific people, ideally in a one-on-one meeting.

There's an old African proverb that says, "You walk faster alone, but farther together." With the right team of volunteers, your ability to make a kingdom difference can be multiplied many times.

About Jerry Twombly

As a fundraising and ministry development consultant for 50 years, Jerry Twombly has served nearly 3,500 different non-profits in all 50 states of the United States, 7 provinces of Canada, and over 20 countries throughout the world. His clients have included The Salvation Army, Habitat for Humanity, Campus Crusade for Christ, Focus on the Family, as well as thousands of smaller ministries and non-profits. Jerry has authored ten books including the industry bestseller: *Funding Your Vision: New Hope for Non-Profits*. He can be reached jerry@cdppro.com.

Raising Funds for Your Ministry Avoid These Fatal Assumptions⁸¹

Jerry Twombly

Successful nonprofits usually don't use the term "fundraising." Instead, they use the word "development." Development is a broader term encompassing your strategy to obtain the resources you need to carry out your mission and achieve your vision.

Development is built on a foundation of simple but powerful principles.

1. Lead with vision, not with need. People run from need, but they're attracted to vision.

2. Relationship is the key to everything. You can't raise money without making friends.

3. You need to take steps to develop the right kind of relationships.

4. Millions of dollars that could be going to good ministries are lost because ministries fail to bridge; at critical moments they fail to present opportunities for engagement.

5. You must assign meaning to each gift and each level of giving.

81 Adapted and reprinted from Twombly, Jerry, *10+6 Fundraising Secrets: 10 Things Successful Fund-Raisers Know...that the Rest in the Profession Don't! And Six Things You Can Do Now to Survive in a Crisis Economy*, 2020; available on Amazon.com.

6. Never assume your audience “gets it.” They don’t.

7. Cynicism to euphoria—you choose how your donors experience your ministry.

8. Provide cubbyholes so partners understand how to engage.

9. Ask questions; it’s the greatest compliment.

10. The most important rule in development is linkage: *The closer you are connected to someone, the greater the likelihood they will engage with you in your ministry.*

Never assume they “get it”

While there isn’t room in this chapter to expand on all 10 principles,⁸² let’s take a closer look at #6: Never assume your audience “gets it.” They don’t.

The other day I was leaving the airport in my pickup truck. I had left the day before on a very early flight to Minneapolis and was returning home late the next day. Earlier in the day I had called home several times to check on things. I told my wife I would be landing a little after 10 p.m.

As I pulled out on High School Road adjacent to the terminal, I passed a gas station. I happened to glance over to check the price of gasoline and noticed my wife sitting in

82 For a more complete understanding of these core principles, please see Jerry Twombly’s recent books: *How to Raise the Money You Need for the Causes You Love: Secrets from a Master Fundraiser* and *10+6 Fundraising Secrets: 10 Things Successful Fund-Raisers Know...that the Rest in the Profession Don’t! And Six Things You Can Do Now to Survive in a Crisis Economy* available on Amazon.com.

her car in the station's parking lot reading a book. Quickly I turned in to discover she was there waiting for my call to be picked up. I assumed since I had taken the truck, she would know I would drive it home!

I regularly make assumptions. I assume that the chef didn't add salt to my food; that the gasoline tank is always full, that every day is going to be a good day to fly, that I will never become sick, and that absolutely everyone will love my latest idea.

And when I speak, I just assume everyone grasps the significance of every word I utter. I can't even contemplate someone might not be enamored with my topic and transfixed by my delivery. I totally expect that millions will clamor to download their free copy of my e-book.

Assumptions. We all make them but there are two that are fatal to effective development!

Clarity: My audience understands my message. The first of these is the assumption that when we say something of great importance, everyone to whom we are speaking clearly understands what we just told them. If you believe that, you've never had a teenager live in your home!

I can't even remember the number of times I must have told my two teenage sons (and, believe it or not, they have successfully grown into adulthood!) that a certain behavior was totally inappropriate. It just isn't cool to belch at the table! Yet despite my appeals to act gentlemanly, there would be those occasions where they would do exactly what I had admonished them not to do.

“Great fundraisers assume that everyone to whom they speak didn’t comprehend the message they just shared!”

But what was more amazing, when confronted, they would have this “deer in the headlights” look as if to say, “You’re kidding, Dad. You mean you said something about that?”

Despite all our good intentions and all the mediums we use to communicate something in a way that’s inviting and comprehensible, you must assume that the majority of people to whom you might speak simply don’t get it.

And to some degree that’s understandable. We live in a complex world that sends messages in so many different ways that we’ve become somewhat calloused to all of them. It takes interest to listen and energy to digest information.

And that brings us to the second wrong assumption.

Process and Analyze: My audience knows how to convert my message into next steps.

And this assumption is subtler than the first. It is the reason why so much of good fundraising activity is fruitless. We may have spoken with passion and shared flashy-colored brochures to support our case. We may have done just about everything right but the one wrong thing we did was assume that those listening were going to take the energy to try to process what we just told or gave them.

Processing and analyzing information is something most people reserve for what is of specific interest to them. For instance, medical students expend an immense amount of effort to conduct research and to learn, realizing that simply being able to reiterate accurate answers to test questions will do little to help someone on the brink of death. And what it is they garner from books is initially practiced in labs and eventually experienced in real-life situations through innumerable supervised rotations in a hospital.

That takes dedication and energy. And that's in short supply for most people with whom you will be sharing your vital message.

“Great fundraisers have learned to think for people.”

These fundraisers are successful because they don't assume that anyone will take the energy to try to determine the next steps being asked of them. They will often bring closure to a presentation by saying something like, “If our need is something that intrigues you, let me share with you four different things you might want to consider.” They go on to precisely share specific action steps that will lead to a more involved partnership between the individual and your organization.

And great fundraisers know that you never ask someone to do something without giving them what they need to conveniently do it. Providing a pen and an envelope is simple,

in fact, simply profound. It's the little things that will make all the difference in the world.

I've found it helpful to sit down before going into a meeting with a prospective donor and write down on a sheet of paper my response to this hypothetical question, "If this meeting is totally successful, what do I want to see accomplished?" When I answer that question, it helps me to determine what I will say and the steps that need to transpire to move my prospective organizational partner from where they are to where I would like them to be.

There's one assumption that is certain in this business of raising money: If you assume people understand what you just told them and will eagerly expend the energy to process and analyze it, then you can assume that very little of significance will ever take place.

About Jerry Twombly

As a fundraising and ministry development consultant for 50 years, Jerry Twombly has served nearly 3,500 different non-profits in all 50 states of the United States, 7 provinces of Canada, and over 20 countries throughout the world. His clients have included The Salvation Army, Habitat for Humanity, Campus Crusade for Christ, Focus on the Family, as well as thousands of smaller ministries and non-profits. Jerry has authored ten books including the industry bestseller: *Funding Your Vision: New Hope for Non-Profits*. He can be reached jerry@cdppro.com.

The Missing Link to Solopreneur Success

Steve Roller

A single tear rolled down his unshaven face. Finn sat in his Aeron desk chair and reflected on where he had come from and everything he had accomplished the past seven years. He remembered the night he told his wife, Emma, that he was quitting his job as VP of Marketing to start his own creative ad agency.

Finn recalled their “date nights” in those early years of working for himself. Friday nights meant frozen pizza and watching YouTube videos at home because their credit cards were completely tapped out with business expenses. Emma never complained, and even made it romantic by lighting a candle and breaking open their favorite ginger beer.

There were many weekends of work, including Sunday afternoons, something he had said he’d never do. Sundays were supposed to be a day of rest and for family, not for locking himself in his office. He thought the extra hours would shake the anxiety of not knowing where next month’s mortgage payment was going to come from. It didn’t.

I knew it was going to be hard slogging in the beginning, Finn remembered thinking at the time, *but I had no idea we’d be stretched thin like this.* Thankfully, Emma stuck with him, and believed in him.

His clients did, too. In fact, sitting here now, it suddenly hit Finn. He was always good at what he did, even from the beginning, but there were certainly other agency owners doing the exact same thing who were just as good. He gave his clients great service and always delivered quality work... like he should, and just like everyone else.

He worked hard, was smart, and knew how to connect with people. He got results for his clients, which is one big reason they stayed, and why he was now settling into a very comfortable life.

This note, though, hit him upside the head and pulled on his heart strings at the same time:

Finn– I wanted to thank you for connecting with us a few years ago. It's been a wild ride, as you know, and KGN is now poised to become THE industry leader this year! You've done fantastic work for us, which we expected. We credit a lot of our success to the campaigns you created.

There was something else you brought to the table, though, something I haven't seen at this level in all my years of working with outside companies and independents like you. I couldn't put my finger on it until now, but you have...

(To be continued)

Running your own business is simple. You take stock of your skills and experience. Pick something you're good at and enjoy. Look at the marketplace, do an assessment, and find the gaps. Put together an attractive website and hang

out your virtual shingle. Identify your ideal client, craft a compelling message, and find a way to get it in front of your target audience. Sit back and wait for the leads and sales to start flowing in.

Simple, right? Not quite.

I'm obviously being facetious. We all know being a solo-preneur is not for the faint of heart or risk averse.

Since 2009 I've been successfully self-employed, and I wouldn't have it any other way. I have a thriving copywriting business, I founded the lively and engaged Cafe Writer community, and I help other writers parlay their writing skills into a business. It's a good thing it's going well because I'm not sure if I could get a regular job at this point. I'm unemployed, and if you're reading this, maybe you are, too.

I don't mean we couldn't get a job if we wanted to. It's simply been my experience that once you taste the sweet nectar of working for yourself, being an employee doesn't cut it anymore. Being your own boss is less stifling and more rewarding, at least it is if you can make it financially. There's something immensely satisfying about creating something from the ground up, and knowing the results came from your industriousness and ingenuity.

Whether because of economic forces beyond your control or by choice, if you're working for yourself instead of for "the man," I applaud you. It takes time, skills, money, and perseverance to succeed as a solopreneur. I wrote an entire book about 11 big ideas to stand out and thrive in this erratic world we live in, and you know what? I missed one big factor. I completely overlooked the missing link to making it on

your own because I was too close to the topic and my own situation. I also assumed everyone naturally had this key ingredient. They don't.

Before I reveal it, let me challenge you to think about it and see if you can guess what this missing factor is.

First, the 5 Essentials to Solopreneur Success:

- An identified target market with a need or a problem.
- A product or service that solves that problem.
- A compelling message. It has to be compelling in order to stand out these days amongst the noise.
- A way to get that message in front of people on a consistent basis.
- An ability to connect with the good prospects and get them to buy.

Then, of course, you have intangibles like perseverance and thick skin (the ability to take criticism and negative feedback).

It also helps if you have a service-minded attitude and enjoy people.

But there's one key above all, assuming you have these other essentials in place, and it's what got Finn to the prominent position his business was now in...

*"I couldn't put my finger on it until now, but you have **enthusiasm**, my friend! That's it. We could have gone with any number of other agencies or individuals. We chose you and we stuck with you since*

then because you have something we rarely see: genuine enthusiasm.

*I don't know if it's inherent or learned, and it doesn't matter. You have enthusiasm for your work, for your craft, for your clients, for us. From where I stand, you seem to have enthusiasm for **life itself**, and it's sorely missing these days. Thank you for being YOU, Finn. You're a gem, and we're honored to be able to work with you.*

Sincerely,

Dan J." (one of Finn's best clients)

I believe the missing link to solopreneur success is **enthusiasm**.

Enthusiasm for what we do, for our clients and customers, for serving others.

Enthusiasm for sharing our God-given talents with the world.

The Greek word "enthousiasmos" means "possessed by God" or "inspired." It literally means "God within"!

Think about that. In addition to everything else you're doing as a solopreneur, consider infusing even more enthusiasm into the mix. Give it a whirl and see.

Would your peers notice? Would your clients notice? Would you stand out in a business world of straight-laced, unemotional, transaction-based interactions? Absolutely.

I believe we each have special gifts and that we were designed to serve. I believe we were meant to impact others,

and we can best do that if we're operating intentionally with a high level of enthusiasm.

A friend and mentor of mine, Robbie Sondag, once said, "*Strive to be the most enthusiastic person you know.*"

Good advice in business, good advice in life.

This is what I want for you:

- I want you to figure out how you can use your gifts and talents to serve others.
- I want you to work hard and do all the things necessary to get your message out there and attract the right clients.
- And I want you to infuse *enthusiasm* into every aspect of your business and life.

As you do, you will impact others like you never thought possible.

The world needs you, more desperately than ever.

About Steve Roller

You can find Steve Roller at SteveRoller.com and his books on Amazon. For a free pdf copy of his book, *The Freelancer Manifesto: 11 Big Ideas to stand out and thrive*, email him at steve@cafewriter.com.

How to Write a Book Everything You Need to Know In 20 Steps⁸³

Jerry B. Jenkins

So you want to write a book. Becoming an author can change your life—not to mention give you the ability to impact thousands, even millions, of people.

But writing a book isn't easy. As a 21-time *New York Times* bestselling author, I can tell you: It's far easier to quit than to finish.

You're going to be tempted to give up writing your book when you run out of ideas, when your own message bores you, when you get distracted, or when you become overwhelmed by the sheer scope of the task.

But what if you knew exactly:

- Where to start...
- What each step entails...
- How to overcome fear, procrastination, and writer's block...
- And how to keep from feeling overwhelmed?

You can write a book—and more quickly than you might think, because these days you have access to more writing tools than ever.

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The key is to follow a proven, straightforward, step-by-step plan.

My goal here is to offer you that book-writing plan.

I've used the techniques I outline below to write nearly 200 books (including the Left Behind series) since 1973. Yes, I realize writing over four books per year on average is more than you may have thought humanly possible.

But trust me—with a reliable blueprint, you can get unstuck and finally write your book.

This is my personal approach to writing a book. I'm confident you'll find something here that can change the game for you. So, let's jump in.

Part 1: Before you begin writing your book

You'll never regret—in fact, you'll thank yourself later—for investing the time necessary to prepare for such a monumental task.

You wouldn't set out to cut down a huge grove of trees with just an axe. You'd need a chain saw, perhaps more than one. Something to keep them sharp. Enough fuel to keep them running.

You get the picture. Don't shortcut this foundational part of the process.

Step #1. Establish your writing space.

To write your book, you don't need a sanctuary. In fact, I started my career on my couch facing a typewriter perched

on a plank of wood suspended by two kitchen chairs.

What were you saying about your setup again? We do what we have to do?

And those early days on that sagging couch were among the most productive of my career.

Naturally, the nicer and more comfortable and private you can make your writing lair (I call mine my cave), the better.

Real writers can write anywhere.

Some authors write their books in restaurants and coffee shops. At my first full-time job at a newspaper, 40 of us clacked away on manual typewriters in one big room—no cubicles, no partitions, conversations hollered over the din, most of my colleagues smoking, teletype machines clattering.

Cut your writing teeth in an environment like that, and anywhere else seems glorious.

Step #2. Assemble your writing tools.

In the newspaper business, there was no time to handwrite our stuff and then type it for the layout guys. So I have always composed at a keyboard and still write my books that way.

Most authors do, though some handwrite their first drafts and then keyboard them onto a computer or pay someone to do that.

No publisher I know would even consider a typewritten manuscript, let alone one submitted in handwriting.

The publishing industry runs on Microsoft Word, so you'll need to submit Word document files. Whether you prefer a Mac or a PC, both will produce the kinds of files you need.

And if you're looking for a musclebound electronic organizing system, you can't do better than *Scrivener*. It works well on both PCs and Macs, and it nicely interacts with Word files.

Just remember, *Scrivener* has a steep learning curve, so familiarize yourself with it before you start writing.

Scrivener users know that taking the time to learn the basics is well worth it.

Tons of other book writing tools exist to help you.

So, what else do you need?

If you handwrite your first drafts, don't scrimp on paper, pencils, or erasers.

Don't shortchange yourself on a computer either. Even if someone else is keyboarding for you, you'll need a computer for research and for communicating with potential agents, editors, publishers.

Get the best computer you can afford, the latest, the one with the most capacity and speed.

Try to imagine everything you're going to need in addition to your desk or table, so you can equip yourself in advance and don't have to keep interrupting your work to find things like staplers, paper clips, rulers, pencil holders, pen-

cil sharpeners, note pads, printing paper, paperweight, tape dispensers, cork or bulletin boards, clocks, bookends, reference works, space heaters, fans, lamps, beverage mugs, napkins, tissues ... you name it. Last, but most crucial, get the best, most ergonomic chair you can afford.

If I were to start my career again with that typewriter on a plank, I would not sit on that couch. I'd grab another straight-backed kitchen chair or something similar and be proactive about my posture and maintaining a healthy spine.

There's nothing worse than trying to be creative and immerse yourself in writing while in agony. The chair I work in today cost more than my first car!

If you've never used some of the items I listed above and can't imagine needing them, fine. But make a list of everything you know you'll need, so when the actual writing begins, you're already equipped.

As you grow as a writer and actually start making money at it, you can keep upgrading your writing space.

Where I work now is light-years from where I started. But the point is, I didn't wait to start writing until I could have a great spot in which to do it.

Part 2: How to start writing a book

Step #3. Break your manuscript into small pieces.

Writing a book feels like a colossal project, because it is! But your manuscript will be made up of many small parts.

An old adage says that the way to eat an elephant is one bite at a time.

Try to get your mind off your book as a 400-or-so-page monstrosity.

It can't be written all at once any more than that proverbial elephant could be eaten in a single sitting.

See your book for what it is: a manuscript made up of sentences, paragraphs, pages. Those pages will add up, and though after a week you may have barely accumulated double digits, a few months down the road you'll be into your second hundred pages.

So keep it simple.

Start by distilling your big book idea from a page or so to a single sentence—your premise. The more specific that one-sentence premise, the more it will keep you focused while writing.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves. Before you can turn your big idea into one sentence, which can then be expanded to an outline, you have to settle on exactly what that big idea is.

Step #4. Settle on your BIG idea.

To be book-worthy, your idea has to be killer.

You need to write something about which you're passionate, something that gets you up in the morning, draws you to the keyboard, and keeps you there. It should excite not only you, but also anyone you tell about it.

I can't overstate the importance of this.

If you've tried and failed to finish your manuscript before—maybe more than once—it could be that the basic premise was flawed. Maybe it was worth a blog post or an article but couldn't carry an entire book.

Think *The Hunger Games*, *Harry Potter*, or *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. The market is crowded, the competition fierce. There's no more room for run-of-the-mill ideas. Your premise alone should make readers salivate.

Go for the big concept book.

How do you know you've got a winner? Does it have legs? In other words, does it stay in your mind, growing and developing every time you think of it?

Run it past loved ones and others you trust.

Does it raise eyebrows? Elicit *Wows*? Or does it result in awkward silences?

The right concept simply works, and you'll know it when you land on it. Most importantly, your idea must capture you in such a way that you're compelled to write it. Otherwise you'll lose interest halfway through and never finish.

Step #5. Construct your outline.

Writing your manuscript without a clear vision of where you're going usually ends in disaster.

Even if you're writing a novel and consider yourself a Pantser⁸⁴ as opposed to an Outliner, you need at least a basic structure.

You don't have to call it an outline if that offends your sensibilities. But fashion some sort of a directional document that provides structure for your manuscript and also serves as a safety net.

If you get out on that Pantser highwire and lose your balance, you'll thank me for advising you to have this in place.

Now if you're writing a nonfiction book, there's no substitute for an outline.

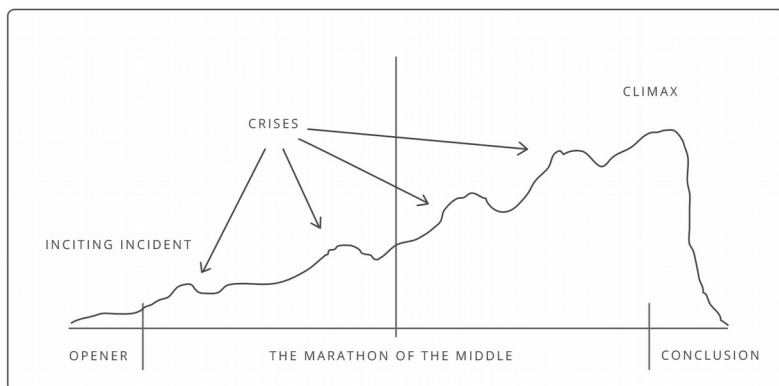
Potential agents or publishers require this in your proposal. They want to know where you're going, and they want to know that you know. What do you want your reader to learn from your book, and how will you ensure they learn it?

Fiction or nonfiction, if you commonly lose interest in your book somewhere in what I call the Marathon of the Middle, you likely didn't start with enough exciting ideas.

That's why an outline (or a basic framework) is essential. Don't even start writing until you're confident your structure will hold up through the end.

84 Those of us who write by the seat of our pants and, as Stephen King advises, put interesting characters in difficult situations and write to find out what happens.

You may recognize this novel structure illustration.



Did you know it works—with only slight adaptations—for nonfiction books too? It's self-explanatory for novelists; they list their plot twists and developments and arrange them in an order that best serves to increase tension.

What separates great nonfiction from mediocre? The same structure!

Arrange your points and evidence in the same way so you're setting your reader up for a huge payoff, and then make sure you deliver.

If your nonfiction book is a memoir, an autobiography, or a biography, structure it like a novel and you can't go wrong.

But even if it's a straightforward how-to book, stay as close to this structure as possible, and you'll see your manuscript come alive.

Make promises early, triggering your reader to anticipate fresh ideas, secrets, inside information, something major that will thrill him with the finished product.

While a nonfiction book may not have as much action or dialogue or character development as a novel, you can inject tension by showing where people have failed before and how your reader can succeed.

You can even make the how-to project look impossible until you pay off that setup with your unique solution.

Keep your outline to a single page for now. But make sure every major point is represented, so you'll always know where you're going.

And don't worry if you've forgotten the basics of classic outlining or have never felt comfortable with the concept.

Your outline must serve you. If that means Roman numerals and capital and lowercase letters and then Arabic numerals, you can certainly fashion it that way. But if you just want a list of sentences that synopsizes your idea, that's fine too.

Simply start with your working title, then your premise, then—for fiction, list all the major scenes that fit into the rough structure above.

For nonfiction, try to come up with chapter titles and a sentence or two of what each will cover.

Once you have your one-page outline, remember it is a fluid document meant to serve you and your book. Expand it, change it, play with it as you see fit—even during the writing process.

Step #6. Set a firm writing schedule.

Ideally, you want to schedule at least six hours per week to write your book.

That may consist of three sessions of two hours each, two sessions of three hours, or six one-hour sessions—whatever works for you.

I recommend a regular pattern (same times, same days) that can most easily become a habit. But if that's impossible, just make sure you carve out at least six hours so you can see real progress.

Having trouble finding the time to write a book? News flash—you won't *find* the time. You have to *make* it.

I used the phrase *carve out* above for a reason. That's what it takes.

Something in your calendar will likely have to be sacrificed in the interest of writing time.

Make sure it's not your family—they should always be your top priority. Never sacrifice your family on the altar of your writing career.

But beyond that, the truth is that we all find time for what we really want to do.

Many writers insist they have no time to write, but they always seem to catch the latest Netflix original series, or go to the next big Hollywood feature. They enjoy concerts, parties, ball games, whatever.

How important is it to you to finally write your book? What will you cut from your calendar each week to ensure

you give it the time it deserves?

A favorite TV show?

An hour of sleep per night? (Be careful with this one; rest is crucial to a writer.)

A movie?

A concert?

A party?

Successful writers *make* time to write.

When writing becomes a habit, you'll be on your way.

Step #7. Establish a sacred deadline.

Without deadlines, I rarely get anything done. I need that motivation.

Admittedly, my deadlines are now established in my contracts from publishers.

If you're writing your first book, you probably don't have a contract yet. To ensure you finish your manuscript, set your own deadline—then consider it sacred.

Tell your spouse or loved one or trusted friend. Ask that they hold you accountable.

Now determine—and enter in your calendar—the number of pages you need to produce per writing session to meet your deadline. If it proves unrealistic, change the deadline now.

If you have no idea how many pages or words you typically produce per session, you may have to experiment before you finalize those figures.

Say you want to finish a 400-page manuscript by this time next year.

Divide 400 by 50 weeks (accounting for two off-weeks), and you get eight pages per week.

Divide that by your typical number of writing sessions per week and you'll know how many pages you should finish per session.

Now is the time to adjust these numbers, while setting your deadline and determining your pages per session.

Maybe you'd rather schedule four off weeks over the next year. Or you know your book will be unusually long.

Change the numbers to make it realistic and doable, and then lock it in. Remember, your deadline is sacred.

Step #8. Embrace procrastination (really!).

You read that right. Don't fight it; embrace it.

You wouldn't guess it from my number of published books, but I'm the king of procrastinators.

Surprised?

Don't be. So many authors are procrastinators that I've come to wonder if it's a prerequisite.

The secret is to accept it and, in fact, schedule it.

I quit fretting and losing sleep over procrastinating when I realized it was inevitable and predictable, and also that it was productive.

Sound like rationalization?

Maybe it was at first. But I learned that while I'm putting off the writing, my subconscious is working on my book. It's a part of the process. When you do start writing again, you'll enjoy the surprises your subconscious reveals.

So, knowing procrastination is coming, book it on your calendar.

Take it into account when you're determining your page quotas. If you have to go back in and increase the number of pages you need to produce per session, do that (I still do it all the time).

But—and here's the key—you must never let things get to where that number of pages per day exceeds your capacity.

It's one thing to ratchet up your output from two pages per session to three. But if you let it get out of hand, you've violated the sanctity of your deadline.

How can I procrastinate and still meet nearly 200 deadlines?

Because I keep the deadlines sacred.

Step #9. Eliminate distractions to stay focused.

Are you as easily distracted as I am?

Have you found yourself writing a sentence and then checking your email? Writing another and checking *Facebook*? Getting caught up in the pictures of 10 Sea Monsters You Wouldn't Believe Actually Exist?

Then you just have to check out that precious video from a talk show where the dad surprises the family by returning

from the war.

That leads to more and more of the same. Once I'm in, my writing is forgotten, and all of a sudden the day has gotten away from me.

The answer to these insidious time wasters?

Look into these apps that allow you to block your email, social media, browsers, game apps, whatever you wish during the hours you want to write. Some carry a modest fee; others are free.

- *Freedom* app
- *FocusWriter*
- *StayFocusd*
- *WriteRoom*

Step #10. Don't shortcut your research.

Yes, research is a vital part of the process, whether you're writing fiction or nonfiction.

Fiction means more than just making up a story.

Your details and logic and technical and historical details must be right for your novel to be believable.

And for nonfiction, even if you're writing about a subject in which you're an expert—as I'm doing here—getting the facts right polishes your finished product.

In fact, you'd be surprised at how many times I've researched a fact or two while writing this blog post alone.

The last thing you want is even a small mistake due to your lack of thorough research.

Regardless of the detail, trust me, you'll hear from readers about it.

Your credibility as an author and an expert hinges on creating trust with your reader. That dissolves in a hurry if you commit an error.

My favorite research resources:

World Almanacs: These alone list almost everything you need for accurate prose: facts, data, government information, and more. For my novels, I often use these to come up with ethnically accurate character names.

The Merriam-Webster Thesaurus: The online version is great, because it's lightning fast. You couldn't turn the pages of a hard copy as quickly as you can get where you want to onscreen. One caution: Never let it be obvious you've consulted a thesaurus. You're not looking for the exotic word that jumps off the page. You're looking for that common word on the tip of your tongue.

WorldAtlas.com: Here you'll find nearly limitless information about any continent, country, region, city, town, or village. Names, monetary units, weather patterns, tourism info, and even facts you wouldn't have thought to search for. I get ideas when I'm digging here, for both my novels and my nonfiction books.

Step #11. Start calling yourself a writer.

Your inner voice may tell you, "You're no writer and you never will be. Who do you think you are, trying to write a book?"

That may be why you've stalled at writing in the past.

But if you're working at writing, studying writing, practicing writing, that makes you a writer. Don't wait till you reach some artificial level of accomplishment before calling yourself a writer.

A cop in uniform and on duty is a cop whether he's actively enforced the law yet or not. A carpenter is a carpenter whether he's ever built a house.

Self-identify as a writer now and you'll silence that inner critic—who, of course, is really you.

Talk back to yourself if you must. It may sound silly, but acknowledging yourself as a writer can give you the confidence to keep going and finish your manuscript.

Are you a writer? Say so.

Part 3: The book-writing itself

Step #12. Think reader-first.

This is so important that that you should write it on a sticky note and affix it to your monitor so you're reminded of it every time you write.

Every decision you make about your manuscript must be run through this filter.

Not you-first, not book-first, not editor-, agent-, or publisher-first. Certainly not your inner circle- or critics-first.

Reader-first always.

If every decision is based on the idea of reader-first, all those others benefit anyway.

When fans tell me they were moved by one of my books, I think back to this adage and am grateful I maintained that posture during the writing.

Does a scene bore you? If you're thinking reader-first, it gets overhauled or deleted.

Where to go, what to say, what to write next? Decide based on the reader as your priority.

Whatever your gut tells you your reader would prefer, that's your answer.

Whatever will intrigue him, move him, keep him reading, those are your marching orders.

So, naturally, you need to know your reader. Rough age? General interests? Loves? Hates? Attention span?

When in doubt, look in the mirror.

The surest way to please your reader is to please yourself. Write what you would want to read and trust a broad readership agrees.

Step #13. Find your writing voice.

Discovering your voice is nowhere near as complicated as some make it out to be.

You can find yours by answering these quick questions:

- What's the coolest thing that ever happened to you?
- Who's the most important person you told about it?
- What did you sound like when you did?

That's your writing voice. It should read the way you sound at your most engaged.

That's all there is to it.

If you write fiction and the narrator of your book isn't you, go through the three-question exercise on the narrator's behalf—and you'll quickly master the voice.

Here's a blog I posted that'll walk you through the process: jerryjenkins.com/voice-in-writing/

Step #14. Write a compelling opener.

If you're stuck crafting the perfect opening line for your book, you're not alone.

And neither is your angst misplaced.

This is not something to put off and come back to once you've started the rest of the first chapter.

Oh, it can still change if the story dictates that. But settling on a good one will get you off and running.

You'll not likely write a more important sentence than your first, whether fiction or nonfiction. Make sure you're thrilled with it and then watch your confidence—and momentum—soar.

Most great opening lines fall into one of these categories:

1. Surprising

Fiction: "It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen." —George Orwell, *1984*

Nonfiction: "By the time Eustace Conway was seven years old, he could throw a knife accurately enough to nail a chip-

munk to a tree.” —Elizabeth Gilbert, *The Last American Man*

2. Dramatic Statement

Fiction: “They shoot the white girl first.” —Toni Morrison, *Paradise*

Nonfiction: “I was five years old the first time I ever set foot in prison.” —Jimmy Santiago Baca, *A Place to Stand*

3. Philosophical

Fiction: “Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” —Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*

Nonfiction: “It’s not about you.” —Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*

4. Poetic

Fiction: “When I finally caught up with Abraham Trahearne, he was drinking beer with an alcoholic bulldog named Fireball Roberts in a ramshackle joint just outside of Sonoma, California, drinking the heart right out of a fine spring afternoon. —James Crumley, *The Last Good Kiss*

Nonfiction: “The village of Holcomb stands on the high wheat plains of western Kansas, a lonesome area that other Kansans call ‘out there.’” —Truman Capote, *In Cold Blood*

Great opening lines from other classics may give you ideas for yours.

Step #15. Fill your story with conflict and tension.

Your reader craves conflict, and yes, this applies to non-fiction as well.

In a novel, if everything goes well and everyone agrees, your reader will soon lose interest.

Are two characters chatting amiably? Have one say something that makes the other storm out.

Some deep-seeded rift in their relationship has surfaced—just a misunderstanding, or an injustice?

Thrust people into conflict.

That keeps your reader's attention.

Certain nonfiction genres won't lend themselves to that kind of conflict, of course, but you can still inject tension by setting up your reader for a payoff. Check out current best-selling nonfiction to see how writers accomplish this.

Somehow they keep you turning those pages, even in a simple how-to title.

Tension is the secret sauce that propels your reader to the end.

And sometimes that's as simple as implying something to come.

Step #16. Turn off your internal editor while writing the first draft.

Many of us perfectionists find it hard to write a first draft—fiction or nonfiction—without feeling compelled to make every sentence exactly the way we want it.

That voice in your head that questions every word, every phrase, every sentence, and makes you worry you're being

redundant or have allowed cliches to creep in—well, that’s just your internal editor.

He or she needs to be told to shut up.

Deep as I am into a long career, I still have to remind myself of this every writing day. I cannot be both creator and editor at the same time. That slows me to a crawl, and my first draft of even one brief chapter could take days.

Our job when writing that first draft is to get down the story or the message or the teaching—depending on your genre.

It helps me to view that rough draft as a slab of meat I will carve tomorrow.

I can’t both produce that hunk and trim it at the same time.

A cliché, a redundancy, a hackneyed phrase comes tumbling out of my keyboard, and I start wondering whether I’ve forgotten to engage the reader’s senses or aimed for his emotions.

That’s when I have to chastise myself and say, “No! Don’t worry about that now! First thing tomorrow you get to tear this thing up and put it back together again to your heart’s content!”

Imagine yourself wearing different hats for different tasks, if that helps—whatever works to keep you rolling on that rough draft. You don’t need to show it to your worst enemy or even your dearest love. This chore is about creating. Don’t let anything slow you down.

Some like to write their entire first draft before attacking the revision. As I say, whatever works.

Doing it that way would make me worry I've missed something major early that will cause a complete rewrite when I discover it months later. Rather, I alternate creating and revising.

The first thing I do every morning is apply a heavy edit and rewrite to whatever I wrote the day before. If that's ten pages, so be it. I put my perfectionist hat on and grab my paring knife and trim that slab of meat until I'm happy with every word.

Then I switch hats, tell my internal editor to take the rest of the day off, and start producing rough pages again.

So, for me, when I've finished the entire first draft, it's actually a second draft because I have already revised and polished it in chunks every day.

THEN I go back through the entire manuscript one more time, scouring it for anything I missed or omitted, being sure to engage the reader's senses and heart, and making sure the whole thing holds together.

I do not submit anything with which I'm not entirely thrilled.

I know it will still go through an editing process at the publisher, but my goal is to make my manuscript the absolute best I can before they see it.

Compartmentalize your writing vs. your revising and you'll find that frees you to create much more quickly.

Step #17. Persevere through the middle.

Most who fail at writing a book tell me they give up somewhere in what I like to call The Marathon of the Middle.

That's a particularly rough stretch for novelists who have a great concept, a stunning opener, and they can't wait to get to the dramatic ending. But they bail when they realize they don't have enough riveting stuff to fill the middle.

They start padding, trying to add scenes just for the sake of bulk, but they're soon bored and know readers will be too.

This actually happens to nonfiction writers too.

The solution should actually come in the outlining stage, being sure your middle points and chapters are every bit as valuable and magnetic as the first and last.

For novelists, know that every book becomes a challenge a few chapters in. The shine wears off, keeping the pace and tension gets harder, and it's easy to run out of steam.

But that's not the time to quit. Force yourself back to your structure, come up with a subplot if necessary, but do whatever you need to so your reader stays engaged.

Fiction writer or nonfiction author, The Marathon of the Middle is when you must remember why you started this journey in the first place.

It isn't just that you want to be an author. You have something to say. You want to reach the masses with your message.

Yes, it's hard. It still is for me—every time. But don't panic or do anything rash, like surrendering. Embrace the challenge of the middle as part of the process. If it were easy, anyone could do it.

Step #18. Write a resounding ending.

This is just as important for your nonfiction book as for your novel. It may not be as dramatic or emotional, but it could be—especially if you're writing a memoir.

But even a how-to or self-help book needs to close with a resounding thud, the way a Broadway theater curtain meets the floor.

How do you ensure your ending doesn't fizzle?

Don't rush it. Give readers the payoff they've been promised. They've invested in you and your book the whole way. Take the time to make it satisfying.

Never settle for *close enough* just because you're eager to be finished. Wait till you're thrilled with every word, and keep revising until you are.

If it's unpredictable, it had better be fair and logical so your reader doesn't feel cheated. You want him delighted with the surprise, not tricked.

If you have multiple ideas for how your book should end, go for the heart rather than the head, even in nonfiction. Readers most remember what moves them.

Part 4: Rewriting your book

Step #19. Become a ferocious self-editor.

Agents and editors can tell within the first two pages whether your manuscript is worthy of consideration. That sounds unfair, and maybe it is. But it's also a reality we writers need to face.

How can they often decide that quickly on something to which you've devoted months, maybe years?

Because they can almost immediately envision how much editing would be required to make those first couple of pages publishable. If they decide the investment wouldn't make economic sense for a 300-400-page manuscript, end of story.

Your best bet to keep an agent or editor reading your manuscript?

You must become a ferocious self-editor. That means:

- Omit needless words
- Choose the simple word over one that requires a dictionary
- Avoid subtle redundancies, like “He thought in his mind...” (Where else would someone think?)
- Avoid hedging verbs like *almost frowned*, *sort of jumped*, etc.
- Generally remove the word *that*—use it only when absolutely necessary for clarity

- Give the reader credit and resist the urge to explain, as in, “She walked through the open door.” (Did we need to be told it was open?)
- Avoid too much stage direction (what every character is doing with every limb and digit)
- Avoid excessive adjectives
- Show, don’t tell
- And many more

When do you know you’re finished revising? When you’ve gone from making your writing better to merely making it different. That’s not always easy to determine, but it’s what makes you an author.

Step #20. Find a mentor.

Get help from someone who’s been where you want to be.

Imagine engaging a mentor who can help you sidestep all the amateur pitfalls and shave years of painful trial-and-error off your learning curve.

Just make sure it’s someone who really knows the writing and publishing world. Many masquerade as mentors and coaches but have never really succeeded themselves.

Look for someone widely-published who knows how to work with agents, editors, and publishers.

You’ll find many helpful mentors online. I teach writers at JerryJenkins.com.

You have what it takes to write a book

Writing a book is a herculean task, but that doesn't mean it can't be done.

You can do this.

Take it one step at a time and vow to stay focused. And who knows, maybe by this time next year you'll be holding a published copy of your book.

About Jerry Jenkins

Jerry Jenkins is the author of 198 books, 21 having reached the *New York Times* best seller list, with more than 72 million copies sold.

Publishing Options for Unknown Authors

Dwight Clough

I'll write the perfect book. A publisher will love it.⁸⁵ I'll sell a million copies. I'll retire, and live the rest of my life on a tropical beach.

If you've ever entertained some version of that fantasy, welcome to the club. But if you've ever attempted to author a book, then reality hits. Writing a book is not easy. (Thanks, Jerry Jenkins, for the excellent chapter on how to do it.) Writing the perfect book is even harder. Not counting books I've ghostwritten for others, I've written over twenty, and none of them are perfect. Selling a million books is like winning the lottery—it happens, but don't count on it. And getting a publisher to publish your book if you're new and unknown—well, good luck!

Most publishers won't look at a query letter much less a manuscript if it doesn't come from an agent. And many agents won't even talk to you unless you have a platform—a following numbering in the thousands. What's a new and unknown author to do?

Here's the good news. There are more publishing options available today than ever before.

Here's the bad news: Some of those options are terrible.

85 The publishers who didn't publish it will be jealous.

Let's take a closer look.

#1 Vanity publishers

These are the publishing houses that solicit you. They put out ads saying they're looking for new authors. Glowing testimonials of unknown authors just like you show their printed book and everybody is full of smiles.

Here's what they don't tell you. Most of these places are a rip off, if not a total scam. (Yes, even the Christian ones.) First, you pay them thousands of dollars to work with them. They may or may not offer editorial services which may or may not be any good. Sure you'll get a pretty book cover (which you could have obtained elsewhere for a couple hundred dollars). You'll get a few copies of your book for free. After that, you'll need to pay an inflated price for more author copies, if you can order them at all. They will claim to offer marketing services, but those marketing services are usually worthless. They'll promise to pay royalties, but don't count on ever receiving a dime. Even worse is the contract you sign without reading. It usually takes away all your rights to the manuscript. That means they own your book, and you cannot legally republish it anywhere else ever. On top of that, some of them even make you sign away your rights to any future books you might write.

Believe me, I've heard one horror story after another about these "Christian" (and secular) vanity publishing houses.

Do I even need to say this? Stay away!

#2 Big name publishers

These are the houses—Christian and secular—who work with big name authors and pump out best sellers year after year. Convincing them to work with an unknown author is like an ant fighting with a school bus.

Have you fallen for the myth: “If I just write a great book, publishers will line up at my door..”? Sorry, it doesn’t work that way. Publishers are business people. Big name publishers work with big name authors because that limits their risk and maximizes their return. Even if the big name author writes a dud, it will probably sell enough copies to make a profit. But if the unknown author writes a gem, making money on it is still an iffy proposition.

Does that mean the quality of your writing doesn’t matter? No, of course it matters. Write the best book you can write. But know that the quality of your book is only one factor in the whole publishing equation.

If you’re a new and unknown author, and unless you have an agent or a friend inside one of these big name publishing houses, I wouldn’t waste much time chasing them.

#3 Niche or specialty publishers

Here you have a chance, depending on you and your book.

Niche publishers sell to a specific market—drone operators, police K-9 handlers, Vietnam veterans, antique doll collectors, or whatever. If you have credibility within that

market, if your book in their wheelhouse, if you're trying to reach the same readers they market to, then it might be worth your while to explore working with them. What they offer you is an established channel of distribution to the readers you are trying to reach. They have experience selling to your readers; your interests and theirs are aligned.

A niche publisher can be a great way to reach a tightly defined market. As compared to self publishing, these publishers will take a bigger slice out of the pie, leaving you with less money per book sold. But their reach into the market you want to sell to should mean that you sell more books.

Any time you publish, read the contract carefully. If you don't understand it, get the publisher to explain it to you—better still, hire a literary attorney to explain it to you. If it isn't a win for everyone, don't sign it.

Be aware that small specialty houses often do not offer advances. In some cases, I've seen them charge fees to authors for such things as editing or typesetting. If a book is only gonna sell a couple hundred copies, they want to be careful not to lose money on the project.

If you're going to work with one of these publishers, pay attention to their submission guidelines and their author guidelines. They usually don't have a whole lot of patience with authors who ignore their instructions.

By the way, never assume that your publisher is going to do all the book marketing for you. No. It doesn't work that way. You, the author, will do the heavy lifting when it comes

to marketing. A good publisher will help you, but they won't do it for you.

I've published with a few Christian publishing houses. In each case, I had a contact who acted as a go-between. My experience overall with them has been positive.

#4 Do-it-yourself self publishing

Here, you are in charge of everything. You write your book or hire a ghostwriter to write it for you. You edit your book or hire an editor to edit it for you. You design your book cover or hire a graphic designer to create one for you. You convert the interior and the cover into printable files. You purchase your own ISBN, and create your own bar code. You may form a publishing company, a separate entity such as an LLC under which you publish. You contract with a printing company to print a given number of copies. You arrange to get your book on Amazon if you want it on Amazon. You promote your book. You sell it on your website, at events (like speaking engagements), or work to get it in bookstores or other outlets.

Expect to invest anywhere from several hundred dollars to tens of thousands of dollars depending on how you want to go about this. On the flip side, 100% of the profit is yours—you don't share that pie with anyone.

If you have business savvy and if you can afford to lose everything you invest in this, then this can be a good option for some authors. It gives you maximum control over your

book project. If you're thinking of doing this, I recommend you read a number of books on self publishing.⁸⁶

I've published a couple of books this way. Now that publish-on-demand is available, do-it-yourself self publishing is not my first choice, but I still had a positive experience with it. I worked with two printers: Images Plus in Madison, Wisconsin and Total Printing Systems in Newton, Illinois. Total Printing Systems specializes in short-run book manufacturing.

If you're going to self publish, pay particular attention to the design of your book—both the cover and the interior. This is where most new authors mess up big time. Great book, poor packaging. Nobody reads it. People assume it's no good.

#5 Publish on demand

In my opinion, this is the best option for most new and unknown authors. Let me explain how it works.

Like do-it-yourself publishing, you write, edit, and design your own book (or hire people to do that for you). However, here's the difference. You don't need to print any given number of copies of your book up front. You can print zero, 17, 128, four, 972. Each book is manufactured when you need it.

86 Examples: *The Well-Fed Self-Publisher* by Peter Boweman, *The Self-Publishing Manual* by Dan Poynter, *1001 Ways to Market Your Books* by John Kremer.

There are two major players in the publish-on-demand world: Ingram Spark and Amazon.⁸⁷ I prefer working with Amazon. In my experience, they are much more author friendly.

With Amazon, you start by creating a free publishing account at kdp.amazon.com. You'll need to enter bank and tax information so they can pay you. When you're ready to publish, you upload your printable files along with additional information. Assuming there are no issues with your files, Amazon will approve your book for publication in a day or two. Then people can purchase your book on Amazon and/or order your book at a bookstore.⁸⁸ In addition, you can purchase any number of author's copies at any time at a steep discount. If you want, you can sell those author's copies and/or give them away.

Not only can you create a paperback book on Amazon, but you can also convert your book into a Kindle e-book.

When people buy your book or e-book on Amazon (or at a bookstore), a couple months later Amazon pays a royalty into the bank account you entered when you set up your publishing account. Royalties per book here are typically higher than royalties you would receive with a traditional publisher.

I've helped many new authors publish this way, and I've published a number of my own books this way. I'm happy with the process. It works for me. However, be aware that

⁸⁷ Create Space has been folded into Amazon Kindle.

⁸⁸ Depending on the selections you make during the publishing process.

Amazon isn't going to do anything to promote your book for you. You need to do that yourself.

#6 Create your own e-book

A final option available to new authors is to create your own e-book. You can sell it or give it away on your website or elsewhere online. It's pretty easy to convert a word processing document into a pdf and/or an epub file; then—presto!—you have an e-book. One option might be to give away part of your book for free, and then ask readers to pay if they want to read the rest.

I've done some of this with mixed results. I haven't fully explored the many platforms out there where you can sell your own e-book, but you may want to look into that.

Choose the option that works best for you

When I first started writing books years ago, I only had one option. I typed up my manuscript, sent it off to a publisher, and waited three months for a rejection letter before packaging it back up and sending it out again. Now things have changed. Publish-on-demand has leveled the playing field and made it possible for new and unknown authors to get their books in print. It's still up to you to write a book worth reading, and marketing that book still falls on you.

If you have a story or an idea that will add value to your readers and make our world a better place, I pray that these

options will open a door for you to make a difference for good.

About Dwight Clough

Dwight Clough has authored over 20 published books, and has assisted dozens of new authors to write, rewrite, edit, and/or publish their books. He specializes in Amazon publish-on-demand publishing. More information about publishing options can be found at DwightClough.com/your-book/

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A Prayer

Father in heaven

*Show me the door where Jesus is knocking;
grant me the courage to let Him in.*

Be welcome here.

Be honored here.

*Be who You want to be;
do what You want to do.*

I linger here.

*Allow me to experience the full measure
of the love You have for me.*

*Grant me the wisdom
that comes from above.*

*And so fortified
with Your life, Your love, Your presence,
hand me, please, my assignment.*

*You and me—
let's go out and bring light into this dark world
and eternal good into many, many lives.*

This is gonna be fun!