

WIN

7 Daily Habits to Help You
Stress Less & Accomplish More

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ONLY

Mark Batterson

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New York Times Bestselling Author

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Win the Day

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MULTNOMAH

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*To my grandparents Elmer and Alene Johnson.
Your legacy of faith bears fruit to the third and
fourth generations—and beyond.*

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Introduction

Day-Tight Compartments

*Almost anybody can accomplish almost anything
if they work at it long enough, hard enough,
and smart enough.*

In 1871, a twenty-one-year-old medical student read one sentence that would change the trajectory of his life. At the time, the pressure of final exams and the prospect of starting a medical practice led to a near nervous breakdown. William Osler was destined to become the most famous medical doctor of his generation. He would organize the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, establish the first residency program for specialty training, and write the predominant medical textbook of his era.¹

The Father of Modern Medicine would even be knighted Sir William by the king of England. Of course, Osler knew none of this at twenty-one. None of us do. All he knew was that he was overwhelmed by what felt like the weight of the world. That's when twenty-two words, written by the Scottish historian Thomas Carlyle, changed everything: "Our grand business undoubtedly is, not to *see* what lies dimly at a distance, but to *do* what lies clearly at hand."²

Forty-two years later, Sir William Osler delivered an address at Yale University on April 20, 1913.³ Despite his distinguished credentials, Osler professed intellectual averageness. His success was not the by-product of innate intelligence or natural talent. What, then, could explain his success? Osler traced it back to the twenty-two words that had

altered his outlook on life. He took those words—“*Do what lies clearly at hand*”—and put his fingerprints on them. Reflecting on his own insecurities and uncertainties, Osler issued a timeless challenge to those students:

Live in day-tight compartments.⁴

“The load of to-morrow,” said Osler, “added to that of yesterday, carried to-day makes the strongest falter.”⁵ It’s true, isn’t it? We feel overwhelmed by yesterday’s mistakes and underqualified for tomorrow’s opportunities. We feel so overwhelmed, so underqualified, that we’re tempted to quit before we even start. And that’s what many people do. Their lives are over before they even begin. They stop living and start dying.

More than a century later, Osler’s words still echo. In a day of endless distractions, an age of ceaseless change, they ring true now more than ever. So many people are so overwhelmed by so many things! We’re paralyzed by things we *cannot change*—the past. We’re crippled by things we *cannot control*—the future. The solution? Osler’s age-old advice is as good a place to start as any: let go of “dead yesterdays” and “unborn to-morrows.”⁶

The secret to Sir William Osler’s success is the solution to a thousand problems. Instead of fixating on things that lie dimly at a distance, concentrate on what lies clearly at hand. Simply put, focus on inputs rather than outcomes. If yesterday is history and tomorrow is mystery, win the day! When you win today, tomorrow takes care of itself. Do that enough days in a row, and you can accomplish almost anything!

How do you win the day? For starters, you have to define the win: *What’s important now?* Identify the lead measures that will produce the results you want. Establish daily rituals that will make your life more meaningful. Break bad habits by establishing good habits; then habit stack those high-yield habits in a way that will pay dividends down the road. In the pages that follow, I’ll unpack all these ideas and many more.

A few months before delivering his day-tight address, William Osler had crossed the Atlantic on an ocean liner. While standing on the bridge of that ship, he had an aha moment. The captain was demonstrating the latest and greatest in maritime technology. He pressed a button that shifted gears, turning parts of that ship into watertight compartments.

Leveraging that machinery as a metaphor, Osler likened each of us to an ocean liner on a long voyage. “What I urge is that you so learn to control the machinery as to live with ‘day-tight compartments,’” he said. “Touch a button and hear, at every level of your life, the iron doors shutting out the Past—the dead yesterdays. Touch another and shut off, with a metal curtain, the Future—the unborn to-morrows.”⁷

This book is all about pressing that button and unleashing the power of twenty-four hours. Burying dead yesterdays can be as difficult as a graveside funeral. Imagining unborn tomorrows involves no less labor than childbirth. But if you want to win the day, there is no other way.

FULLY ALIVE

While teaching at the University of Pennsylvania, Dr. Tony Campolo once turned an ordinary lecture into an unforgettable lesson. He asked an unsuspecting student sitting on the front row, “Young man, how long have you lived?” The student answered his age. Tony responded, “No, no, no. That’s how long your heart has been pumping blood. That’s not how long you have lived.”

Tony Campolo then told the class about one of the most memorable moments of his life. In 1944, his fourth-grade class took a field trip to the top of the Empire State Building. It was the tallest building in the world at the time. When nine-year-old Tony got off the elevator and stepped onto the observation deck overlooking New York City, time stood still. “In one mystical, magical moment I took in the city,” he said. “If I live a million years, that moment will still be part of my consciousness, because I was fully alive when I lived it.”

Tony turned back to the student. “Now, let me ask you the question

again. How long have you lived?” The student sheepishly said, “When you say it that way, maybe an hour; maybe a minute; maybe two minutes.”⁸

How long have you lived? I mean *really* lived. It’s easy calculating age. It’s more difficult quantifying life. Why? Because *time is measured in minutes, while life is measured in moments*. What are those top-of-the-Empire-State-Building moments for you? For most of us, they are too few and far between. When was the last time that time stood still? And if you turned those moments into minutes, how long have you lived?

According to psychologists Matthew Killingsworth and Daniel Gilbert, the average person spends 46.9 percent of their time thinking about something other than what they’re doing in the present moment.⁹ We’re half-present half the time, which means we’re half-alive.

The only way to be fully alive is to be fully present, and the only way to be fully present is to live in day-tight compartments. For far too many of us, life feels like the meaningless passage of time between far too few meaningful moments. And even when they do come along, we take selfies instead of being fully present. We miss the moment because we’re living in the wrong time zone. We’re so fixated on the past and so anxious about the future that we miss the present. Then we wonder where life went.

The future is right here, right now—the eternal now. Heaven is invading earth. Eternity is invading time. Most people falsely assume that eternity starts at some point in the far-off future, and they live accordingly. Eternity is counterclockwise. Eternity is invading time every second of every minute of every hour of every day!

“Every now is an eternity,” said Frank Laubach, “if it is full of God.”¹⁰

COUNT THE DAYS

Long before digital clocks and calendars, an ancient poet said, “Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”¹¹ If you

want every day to count, you have to count the days. How? Try counting backward.

This may seem a little sadistic, but if you're the curious type, pay a visit to deathclock.com. Go ahead—this book will still be here when you get back. Enter your birthday, along with body-mass index, and it spits out your estimated day of death. My favorite feature? You can choose between normal, sadistic, pessimistic, and optimistic settings! The optimistic setting gets me to age ninety-three, which falls short of my goal of living to one hundred. Of course, there isn't an option for *eternal* optimists!

What does it mean to win the day? It's living like each day is the first day and last day of your life, which is both an art and a science. I'll tell stories, cite studies, and share best practices. Together, we'll build seven habits designed to help you *win the day*. This process won't be easy, and it won't happen overnight. But if you put these seven habits into practice, you'll win a lot more days than you lose! You'll learn how to stress less and accomplish more.

In part 1, we'll *bury dead yesterdays*. Memory is both a blessing and a curse. Without it, we'd have to relearn everything every day! The challenge, of course, is remembering right. We have a tendency to remember what we should forget and forget what we should remember. That's how we get stuck in a moment. If you want God to do something new, you can't keep doing the same old thing. The first two habits—*flip the script* and *kiss the wave*—will help you rewrite your narrative and process your pain. If you feel like a prisoner of your past, prepare to be set free!

In part 2, we'll turn the page on the past and *win the day*. Tomorrow may be a mystery, but destiny is not! Destiny is a daily decision. Over time, those daily decisions yield compound interest. If you do the right things day in and day out, God is going to show up and show off. I can't tell you when or where or how. And it'll be on His terms, His timeline! But I do know this: you cannot break the law of sowing and reaping. It

will make or break you. The good news? You are only one decision away from a totally different life! The next two habits—*eat the frog* and *fly the kite*—will help you make the right predecisions and establish the right rituals.

In part 3, we'll flip to the future and *imagine unborn tomorrows*. Show me the size of your dream, and I'll show you the size of your God. The ability to imagine the future is a function of your right brain and is one dimension of the image of God. If you're going to dream big, you've got to think long. The next two habits—*cut the rope* and *wind the clock*—will help you take the right risks and play the long game a little better.

Finally, we'll *seed the clouds* with the seventh habit. The only moment we ever have is *now*—it's now or never! You've got to *learn* like you'll live forever, but you've got to *live* like there's no tomorrow. You are here for such a time as this. You are here for such a place as this. It's time to live that way.

Can I make two recommendations as you board this ocean liner, press the button that shifts your life into day-tight compartments, and embark on this journey?

First, take it one habit at a time. If you try to make too many changes at the same time, the chance of success goes way down. Don't get overwhelmed. Pick a habit—any habit—and go to work on it. Rome wasn't built in a day, right? It'll take consistent effort over weeks and months and years to win the day. I hope this book feels like an old friend that you turn to often.

Second, I'd recommend reading this book with a friend, with a team, or with your staff. You'll certainly benefit if you read it by yourself, but there is synergy when a book is read in community. While holding you accountable, a community gives you a built-in sounding board.

THE TWENTY-FOUR-HOUR RULE

A few years ago, I had the privilege of meeting NFL Hall of Famer Emmitt Smith. Emmitt holds the NFL record for all-time rushing

yards—18,355. That adds up to 10.4 miles on the odometer, and that’s with three-hundred-pound defensive tackles giving him a flat tire every 4.2 yards! How did Emmitt do it? One game at a time, one play at a time, one yard at a time!

During a panel session we cochaired, Emmitt shared one secret to his success. He called it “the twenty-four-hour rule.” Win or lose, Emmitt gave himself a twenty-four-hour window to celebrate the win or lament the loss. Sounds a lot like Osler’s day-tight compartments, doesn’t it? The next day, it was back to business, back to basics. “It never ends,” said Emmitt. “If you play the game to win one Super Bowl or two Super Bowls and then be satisfied, you are playing for the wrong reason. No matter how much you win, you want to win more.”¹²

What if we applied the twenty-four-hour rule to all of life?

I bet we’d gain a lot more yardage and win a lot more days!

I love Emmitt Smith’s unique application, but the twenty-four-hour rule is nothing new. It’s the centerpiece of the most famous prayer of all time: “Give us this day our daily bread.”¹³ Even those who aren’t religious recognize it, perhaps have even prayed it. In his address, William Osler challenged the Yale students to pray that piece of the Lord’s Prayer every day.¹⁴ As the son of a pastor, Osler knew it well. He also knew that praying it every day was much easier said than done!

Can I tell you what I wish it said? “Give us this *week* our *weekly* bread.” Better yet, “Give us this *year* our *yearly* bread.” That would be so much easier, wouldn’t it? That way, we wouldn’t have to depend on God every day. But that, of course, is the point of the prayer. That is its genius.

The Lord’s Prayer is three-dimensional—it helps us nullify past mistakes, navigate present circumstances, and negotiate future challenges. Jesus prayed past tense: “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”¹⁵ You cannot change the past, but you can leverage its lessons. Then you’ve got to pull a *Frozen* and let it go. Jesus prayed future tense: “Lead us not into temptation.”¹⁶ You cannot control the future, but you can make predecisions today that will pay dividends tomorrow.

Finally, Jesus prayed present tense: “Give us this day our daily bread.”¹⁷ We want God to provide *more* so we can trust Him *less*, but He loves us too much to do that. God will never give us more than we can steward, which is one reason time is divided into days. All we have to do is live in the way He intended—in day-tight compartments.

Do you remember the expiration date on manna? *One day*.¹⁸ How about the deadline on anger? *Sundown*.¹⁹ When are God’s mercies made new? *Every morning*.²⁰ How often are we told to take up our crosses? *Daily*.²¹ And when are we told to rejoice and be glad? *Today*!²² The twenty-four-hour rule is everywhere you look! In fact, it’s as old as day one.

There was evening and there was morning, the first day.²³

It’s not insignificant, by the way, that the first day begins with sundown! We’ll rediscover that ancient rhythm when we explore daily rituals, but let’s not get ahead of ourselves.

DO IT FOR A DAY

Remember Tony Campolo’s unforgettable moment atop the Empire State Building? If I live a million years, rafting the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon with a handful of friends will be part of my consciousness forever. The trip doubled as a rite of passage for my younger son, Josiah. We were up at the crack of dawn every morning, trying to beat the heat. Temperatures topped out around 108 degrees every day. Fortunately, the water temperature was roughly half the air temperature, so we cooled off in a New York minute. For five unforgettable days, we rafted rapids, hiked side canyons, and slept under the stars.

When you spend every waking hour on a raft, on a trail, or around a campsite, you have time to talk. During one of those fireside chats, Matthew Barnett asked a question that revolutionized the way I live and the

way I lead. For me, it's on par with the twenty-two words written by Thomas Carlyle and read by William Osler.

Matthew is a friend and cofounder of the LA Dream Center, which has helped tens of thousands of people who find themselves at the end of their ropes. Many of them are trying to overcome life-controlling addictions or rebuild broken lives. No matter what habits they're trying to break or what goals they're going after, Matthew asks them this question:

Can you do it for a day?

There is a simple kind of genius to that question. Why do so many problems remain unresolved? Why do so many bad habits remain unbroken? Why do so many goals remain unachieved? Nine times out of ten, we're so overwhelmed by the size of the problem or the habit or the goal that we give up before we even get started.

Since Matthew introduced me to that question, I've asked it of lots of people facing lots of challenges. No one has ever said no. Not one! Why? Because anyone can do anything for a day! Do you think you can do it for a week? *Probably*. Or a month? *Maybe*. Or a year? *I'm not so sure*. As the timeline gets longer, so do the odds. How about the rest of your life? I won't even answer that one. Can you do it for a day? *Now, that I can do!* The odds of success get greater as the time compartments get smaller. If you get it down to day-tight compartments, anything is possible!

By the end of January, 75 percent of people fail to keep their New Year's resolutions.²⁴ Why? When you think in one-year time frames, the finish is so far away you can't even see it. We'd gain a lot more ground if we focused on habits rather than goals and did so one day at a time.

I have no idea what problem you're trying to solve, what habit you're trying to break or build, or what God-sized goal you're going after. I'm not sure how you define the win, but I know the secret to your success. It was the same for William Osler and Emmitt Smith. You've got to win

the day in front of you! Do so two days in a row, and you've got a winning streak!

Before turning the page, identify a habit—any habit. Set a goal, any goal. Got it? Now let me ask a question. You know what's coming, don't you?

Can you do it for a day?


You know you can! All you have to do is live in day-tight compartments. It's time to unleash the power of twenty-four hours.

P A R T O N E

Bury Dead Yesterdays

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From 1837 until 1901, Queen Victoria ruled the British Empire. Her sixty-three-year reign set the record in Britain, only to be broken by her great-great-granddaughter Queen Elizabeth II. Victoria's name came to define an era, the Victorian age.

Not long after assuming the throne, Queen Victoria fell in love with Francis Albert Augustus Charles Emmanuel. She proposed to him five days after his arrival at Windsor Castle, and they were married on February 10, 1840. The following is her diary entry about her wedding day:

I NEVER, NEVER spent such an evening!! My DEAREST DEAREST DEAR Albert . . . his excessive love and affection gave me feelings of heavenly love and happiness I never could have hoped to have felt before! He clasped me in his arms, and we kissed each other again and again! His beauty, his sweetness and gentleness—really how can I ever be thankful enough to have such a Husband! . . . to be called by names of tenderness, I have never yet heard used to me before—was bliss beyond belief! Oh! this was the happiest day of my life!¹

Talk about the top of the Empire State Building! I think it's safe to say that Queen Victoria won the day on her wedding day. In fact, it sounds like she won the dating lottery! Nine months later, she gave birth to her namesake, Princess Victoria.

The Queen wasn't fond of pregnancy, and she apparently thought that newborn babies were ugly. Nevertheless, she and Prince Albert had—count them—nine children. I'm guessing that dear Albert's "excessive love and affection" had something to do with that.

The royal couple had been married twenty-one years when Prince Albert contracted typhoid fever and died. Victoria entered a period of profound grief from which she would never recover. She had Albert's room turned into a shrine. Every day for the rest of her life, she had the linens on Albert's bed changed, his clothes laid out, and a basin of water poured for his morning shave. She even slept with Albert's nightshirt in her arms.²

When we experience loss, a piece of us dies with the person that passes. But Queen Victoria stopped living altogether. The Widow of Windsor rarely left the palace and wore only black the rest of her life. Queen Victoria died on January 22, 1901, but she stopped living the day Albert died—December 14, 1861. I did the math. That adds up to 14,283 days!

I wish Queen Victoria were the exception to the rule, but you and I know she's not. Most people stop living long before they breathe their last. Why? They become prisoners of their past—past mistakes, past hurts, past offenses. If you live long enough, you will experience profound pain and suffering. There is no escaping this reality. Life is unfair; then you die. I know—slightly depressing. The good news? You can bury those hurts and habits and hang-ups. A new day is gonna dawn! "A change is gonna come!"³

To be fair, we live in a culture that isn't good at grief. Because

we're uncomfortable with it, we often move on too quickly, too easily. You've got to own the pain so the pain doesn't own you. You've got to look it square in the eye and learn its lessons.

There is a genius to the Jewish way of grieving, allotting a pre-determined number of days to different types of mourning. When Job was mourning the loss of his children, his friends sat with him in silence for seven days.⁴ That weeklong mourning period for first-degree relatives is a Jewish ritual called sitting shiva. This is where we've got to give people an extra measure of grace. We give them elbow room, breathing room. You never get over the loss of a loved one. This I know from personal experience. But with God's help, you can get through it and get on with the business of living.

Queen Victoria owed it to her empire to keep living, to keep leading. She owed it to her children. She owed it to Albert. She owed it to herself. When we fail to bury dead yesterdays, we aren't doing a disservice just to ourselves. We're cheating everyone we love, including God. Go ahead and give your dead yesterdays a eulogy. But once you do, let them rest in peace. In this book, there are seven habits dedicated to helping you stress less and accomplish more. The first two habits—*flip the script* and *kiss the wave*—focus on the past. You aren't ready to win the day until you bury dead yesterdays six feet deep.

Habit 1—Flip the Script



*If you want to change your life,
start by changing your story.*

In 1934, the pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta sailed across the Atlantic Ocean on his maiden voyage to the Holy Land. I'm not sure whether it was the same ship William Osler sailed on, but that trip changed his trajectory. On his return trip, Michael King attended a gathering of the Baptist World Alliance in Berlin. While there, he became captivated by the Protestant Reformer Martin Luther. Luther's protestations against the religious establishment of his day inspired King's own convictions related to the civil rights movement. Luther's brave became King's breakthrough!

To honor Luther's legacy, Michael King changed his name to Martin Luther King. He had a five-year-old son, his namesake. Not long after changing his own name, Michael-turned-Martin renamed his son as well. For the rest of his son's life, close relatives still called him Mike. The rest of the world knew him as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.¹

In 1964, a boxer named Cassius Clay began a new chapter of his life with a new name, Muhammad Ali. In 1993, the artist formerly known as Prince changed his stage name to a symbol. The composer Johannes Chrysostomus Wolfgangus Theophilus Mozart altered his name multiple times. Why? It's not just because it was way too long. According to one biographer, "Mozart's constant alterations of his name are his way

of experimenting with different identities.”² You’d be surprised—or maybe not—how many of Hollywood’s household names are nicknames. Vin Diesel is way too cool to be a birth name, right? You are correct. The same is true of Joaquin Phoenix, Jamie Foxx, and Whoopi Goldberg. You can add Elton John, John Legend, and Lady Gaga to the mix.

I have a habit of nicknaming just about everybody I know. The more I love someone, the more nicknames I give that person. It’s amazing our kids even know their birth names, because I gave them so many nicknames! What can I say? There aren’t enough names to capture the dimensions of my love for them. I’d like to think that I’m following in the heavenly Father’s footsteps. God turned Abram into Abraham and Sarai into Sarah. The switch from Jacob to Israel was more than just a name change—it was a new story, a new identity, a new destiny, a new nation. And the apple didn’t fall far from the Father’s tree. Jesus gave nicknames to everyone! My favorite? He called His cousins James and John “sons of thunder”!³

Did you know that God has a unique name for you? The name your parents gave you when you were born is a placeholder. Your real name won’t be revealed until the day you die: “I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.”⁴

What does any of that have to do with winning the day? Or burying dead yesterdays? The difference between success and failure is the stories we tell ourselves. True or false, those stories become self-fulfilling prophecies. If you tell yourself the wrong story, you live a lie. If you want to change your life, start by changing your story.

Why does God give us a new name? It’s His way of flipping the script. And it’s not any old name. It’s actually *His* name. There is an ancient blessing you’ve probably heard a time or two:

The LORD bless you
and keep you;

the LORD make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;
the LORD turn his face toward you
and give you peace.

We usually stop right there, but that's not even the best part. It's the postscript that packs the punch: "So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them."⁵

God doesn't just rename us; He puts *His* name on us. There are more than four hundred names for God in Scripture. Which one does He put on us? All of them! This is how God flips the script. He changes our name, which changes our identity. We get grafted into God's story. God writes His-story—*history* with a hyphen—through us.

If your life isn't what you want it to be, it may be because you're telling yourself the wrong story! Your *explanations* are more important than your *experiences*. Your *stories* are more important than the *situations* you find yourself in.

It's time to flip the script.

Signature Story

Live your life in a way that is worth telling stories about.

On August 22, 1851, Commodore John Cox Stevens and his six-man crew won the America's Cup in a fifty-three-mile regatta around the Isle of Wight. The race was witnessed by Queen Victoria, who reportedly asked which yacht was second. The infamous answer? "Ah, Your Majesty, there is no second."¹ Thus began one of the most impressive winning streaks in history.

The New York Yacht Club, of which Commodore Stevens was a founding member, successfully defended the cup for 132 years. They were undefeated until September 26, 1983, when the *Australia II*, skippered by John Bertrand, ended the longest winning streak in sporting history with a forty-one-second margin of victory.²

That win was a milestone moment for Australia, hailed like a national holiday. Even America tipped its cap to the *Australia II*. It was awarded Athlete of the Year by ABC's *Wide World of Sports*. I'm not sure how a *boat* wins that award, but that's water under the bridge. The question is this: How was the *Australia II* able to do what no one had done in 132 years? A winged keel designed by Dutch engineers certainly gave the Australian team a technical advantage, but that isn't what won the race.

If you haven't tasted victory in 132 years, it's hard to imagine any

outcome other than defeat. The first thing you need to do is convince yourself that winning is possible. How? The answer is the first habit—*flip the script*. You’ve got to rewrite your narrative by telling yourself a different story, a better story.

Several years before the 1983 America’s Cup, the Australian skipper, Mike Fletcher, had read the classic novella *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*. The moral of that story? “Begin by knowing that you have already arrived.”³ Sounds like Stephen Covey’s second habit of highly effective people: “Begin with the end in mind.”⁴ Inspired by *Seagull*’s story line, Fletcher made a recording of the Australian team winning the race. The recording included narration and the sound of a sailboat cutting through the water. A copy of that recording was given to each member of the crew, and they were instructed to listen to it twice a day. They did this—get this—*every day* for three years! Before even setting sail, they had won the race 2,190 times!⁵

How did the Australian team bury a long losing streak? They flipped the flipping script. They told themselves a different story over and over again. They won the race because they won the day—1,095 days in a row!

According to cybernetic theory, there are two types of change. First-order change is *behavioral*—it’s doing things more or less. If you’re trying to lose weight, eating less and exercising more is a step in the right direction. First-order change is effective as a quick fix, but second-order change passes the test of time. Second-order change is *conceptual*—it’s mind over matter. It’s rewriting the narrative.

Change your story; change your life!

RUNT OF THE LITTER

When Bo Eason was nine years old, he drew a self-portrait on a piece of paper. I’ve seen the sketch up close and personal. The stick figure isn’t impressive, artistically speaking. The caption beneath it is what caught my eye: “the best safety in the NFL.”

That is the goal Bo set for himself at the age of nine. There was one small problem with that Goliath-sized goal, and I mean that literally. At Bo's first practice with his high school football team, every player was measured and weighed. Bo was found wanting. He measured five feet tall and weighed one hundred pounds. Based on the coach's expression, Bo Eason had no business playing football.

After practice, Bo said to his dad, "The coach thinks I'm too small to play." Without skipping a beat, Bo's dad said, "Did they measure your heart?" All I want is one moment like that as a father! Talk about nailing the landing, but it gets even better. Bo's dad then told him a story that would flip his script and alter his identity.

Nothing is more valuable to a rancher than his ranch dog. As a former ranch hand, Bo's father would know. The ranch dog does the work of ten men, herding the cattle and getting them where the rancher wants them to go. When a ranch dog has puppies, the rancher identifies the smallest puppy—the runt of the litter—by tying a piece of yarn around its neck. After twelve weeks, the rancher gives away all the puppies except for the runt of the litter. Why? As Bo's dad said, "The runt always has to work harder to survive against its bigger brothers and sisters. Always. The runt becomes the smartest, the fastest, the most determined. Of all the puppies, the runt's heart is the biggest. The rancher stakes his whole livelihood on that fact."⁶

As the youngest of six kids, Bo took his father's message to heart. He would have to work harder, work smarter, and work longer than everybody else! That's when Bo made a contract with himself, vowing to be the first player on the practice field and the last player off it every day. Bo Eason kept that contract for twenty years!

AGAINST THE ODDS

The odds of playing in the NFL are astronomical. More than a million kids play high school football, but there are only thirty-two NFL teams with fifty-three-man rosters. That totals 1,696 spots for a million hope-

fuls! The odds are 1 in 589, less than 0.2 percent. I can almost guarantee that just about everyone who makes an NFL roster weighed more than a hundred pounds in high school, but I bet very few of them have a bigger heart or a better story than Bo.

Bo Eason was the first safety chosen in the 1984 NFL draft, earning All-Pro honors his second season with the Houston Oilers. Remember the contract he made with himself to be the first player on and the last player off the practice field? He kept that contract until he was traded to the San Francisco 49ers. On the first day of training camp, Bo got dressed an hour and a half before practice started. But when he got onto the practice field, Jerry Rice was already there. Of course, coming in second to arguably the greatest receiver in NFL history isn't half-bad.

How did Bo Eason beat the odds? He defined the win: *What's important now?* Then he painted a picture of his preferred future. That's what faith looks like—it's being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.⁷ But setting a God-sized goal wasn't enough. The defining moment was the day his dad flipped the script with a story. Bo Eason owned that story; then that story owned him. It became his signature story—the story that changed his identity and defined his destiny.

"I made that dog's story my story," Bo said. "And I've been telling myself that story ever since."⁸ Bo Eason flipped the script on the high school coach who didn't think he was football material. After a knee injury ended his NFL career, Bo flipped the script a second time by turning his signature story into a Broadway play, *Runt of the Litter*.

What stories are you telling yourself? And where do they come from? Are they helping you or hurting you? Are they accurate or inaccurate? Are they carefully crafted or off the cuff? And who is narrating the story? You? Your parents? Your doubters? Your haters? Or have you given editorial control to the Author and Perfecter of your faith?⁹

"Every person is composed of a few themes," observed C. S. Lewis.¹⁰ Those *life themes* reveal themselves in a wide variety of ways. Sometimes it's during the regular routine of life. More often than not, it's something out of the ordinary. One way or the other, something hap-

pens that strikes a chord at the core of your being. A God-sized dream or God-ordained passion is conceived deep within your spirit. It's the thing that gets you up early and keeps you up late. It's the thing that makes you smile, makes you cry, or makes you pound your fist on the table. Those life themes become the subplots of your life, and they undergird everything you do.

SUBPLOTS

A few years ago, I spent two days with a life coach doing a life plan.¹¹ It consisted of eighteen exercises, some of which I'll share. The first exercise was archaeological, digging into my past. Why? Your destiny is hidden in your history. Lots of clues and cues that can help you win the day.

Everything in your past is preparation for something in your future! God doesn't waste days, especially bad days! My life coach helped me identify forty-four defining moments. Some were as dramatic as the day I almost died from ruptured intestines. I was surprised, however, at how many defining moments were as subtle as the subconscious. Identifying those subplots is one key to flipping the script, so I'll share a few of mine.

When I was kid, I was playing Kick the Can with my friends when my mom rang the dinner bell. That's how we texted before cell phones! We sat down at the dinner table, and I remember saying, "We've got to hurry up and eat because my friends are waiting." I wasn't having a panic attack, but my sense of urgency was acute. We couldn't eat fast enough! Why? I didn't want to keep my friends waiting. I wish it were nothing more than five-year-old FOMO—fear of missing out.

I know that incident sounds totally insignificant. Truth be told? It's the story of my life. Even at five, I felt tremendous internal tension at the thought of letting others down. If there is a twelve-step program for people pleasers, sign me up. I recently shared that subplot with my counselor, including this confession: "I don't want to disappoint anyone

ever.” My counselor said, “That’s an awfully big burden to bear.” Yes, it is! Then he added this: “You know, Mark, Jesus disappointed just about everyone.” Ouch. Trying to please everyone all the time is *not* the Jesus way. Quite the opposite. If you follow Jesus, you’ll offend more than a few pharisees along the way.

Let me share one more subplot, with the goal of helping you identify yours. Around the same time as the inciting incident I just shared, a neighbor-friend knocked on my door and announced that I could no longer ride his banana-seat bike. Why? Because his dad had removed the training wheels. Do not—I repeat, do not—tell me what I cannot do! I marched myself down to his house, got on his bike, and rode it back to my house minus the training wheels! I’ll never forget the feeling of kicking down that kickstand in my driveway, having done something that my neighbor didn’t think I could do. It’s another one of those *top-of-the-Empire-State-Building* or *bottom-of-the-Grand-Canyon* moments.

If you want me to do something, don’t tell me what to do. That’s totally demotivating. Tell me it can’t be done! *You can’t wash the dishes in five minutes. You can’t remember to take out the garbage. You can’t fix the toilet.* I wish I were kidding! Lora has to live with this personality trait, but she has learned my love language! For better or for worse, I love proving people wrong. Especially the so-called experts! It’s not only the way I’m wired; it undergirds this entire book.

I HAVE A HYPOTHESIS

I have a hypothesis. I know, not nearly as notable as Dr. King’s “I Have a Dream.” All right, my hypothesis doubles as my dream: *almost anybody can accomplish almost anything if they work at it long enough, hard enough, and smart enough.*

You are capable of more than you imagine, and I wrote this book to help you prove it to yourself. Your brain has no idea what your body is capable of, and your body has no idea what your brain is capable of.

Once you connect those dots, all bets are off. Following Jesus is less about minding your p's and q's than it is about taking your cues from Christ. What did Jesus say? "With God all things are possible."¹² When you give complete editorial control of your life to Him, *possible* becomes the plotline.

I'd better offer one disclaimer. Please note the word *almost*. If you're five foot seven, genetic factors call into question your dream of playing in the NBA. Be that as it may, may I remind you that Spud Webb won the NBA dunk contest in 1986. *Don't tell me it can't be done!* It has been done, and it will be done again. I won't ignore the genetic and epigenetic challenges many of us have to overcome, and I'll tell you why. Because, contrary to popular opinion, we don't succeed *in spite of* those disadvantages, difficulties, or disappointments. We succeed *because of* them, if we learn how to leverage them. So, once again for good measure:

Almost anybody can accomplish almost anything if they work at it long enough, hard enough, and smart enough.

Yes, you. Not only do I believe it; I'm also evidence of it. I've written books that have sold millions of copies, but according to an aptitude assessment in graduate school, writing is *not* a natural gifting. "Whatever you do, don't write books!" Of course, all I needed was that dare! In retrospect, I'm grateful that writing didn't come naturally. Why? I had to work longer, work harder, and work smarter. If I was going to be a writer, I knew I had to become a reader. So I read three thousand books before I wrote one.

Guess where I discovered the idea of living in day-tight compartments? In a 1944 book written by Dale Carnegie: *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living*. I had no idea at the time, but I was researching *this book* as I read *that book* twenty years ago.

If you have a book in you, I want to help you write it. How? One sentence, one paragraph, one chapter at a time. You can't write a book in a day! Well, I take that back. In 1945, Aiden Wilson Tozer boarded a

Pullman train at the LaSalle Street Station in Chicago and requested a writing table. When that train arrived in McAllen, Texas, the next day, Tozer had a complete draft of an all-time classic, *The Pursuit of God*. If your name isn't Tozer, it might take a little longer!

Tim Ferriss is the author of several *New York Times* bestsellers, and they aren't leaflets. His books are thicker than most phone books! How does Tim do it? "Two crappy pages a day." Tim takes the pressure of perfectionism off himself by focusing on quantity over quality, which is brilliant. He sets a goal that is, in his words, "easily winnable."¹³

Ingmar Bergman, director of Academy Award-winning films, said the same thing in a different way. "Do you know what moviemaking is?" he asked. "Eight hours of hard work each day to get three minutes of film."¹⁴ Two crappy pages. Three minutes of film. You can do this, but you might want to give yourself a daily quota. Don't worry about quality. Good writing is bad writing well edited. If you write two pages a day, you'll have a two-hundred-page book in one hundred days. All you have to do is win the *one* day in front of you, no matter what goal you go after.

MOST LIKELY TO SUCCEED—OR NOT

I was not voted Most Likely to Succeed in junior high or high school. I was voted Best Dressed, which is unbelievable when I look back at my yearbook! I consider myself below average at most things. Like William Osler, I profess intellectual averageness. I have, however, learned how to leverage my weaknesses. If success is the by-product of well-managed failure—and I think it is—then strength is the result of well-managed weakness.

Our subplots reveal both strengths and weaknesses. Signature stories, on the other hand, are almost always born out of crisis, born out of weakness. An obstacle must be overcome against all odds. It's a story line that doesn't just make for a good movie; it makes for a good life. It's the adversities we overcome that make us who we are.

My signature story starts with me waking up in the middle of the night, unable to breathe. My earliest memory is an asthma attack. I was rushed to the emergency room for a shot of epinephrine, and that routine was repeated more times than I care to remember. When asthma is all you can remember, it's hard to imagine anything else. For more than four decades, I suffered from severe asthma. There weren't forty days in forty years that I didn't have to take my rescue inhaler multiple times. I never went anywhere without it—I slept with it under my pillow and played basketball with it in my sock. If you counted all the days I spent in the intensive care unit, they would add up to many months.

Then, on July 2, 2016, I felt prompted to pray a brave prayer. I asked God to heal my asthma, and He miraculously answered. For the record, I had asked God to heal me hundreds of times before. Why He chose to heal me on that particular day, in this particular way, is a mystery to me. But I never lost faith in one simple fact: God is able! Plus, I believe that God honors bold prayers because bold prayers honor God.

There are days, and then there are days that change every day thereafter. The day God healed my asthma is one of those *ever-after* days. A signature story usually centers on a day that begins like any other day; then that day rewrites the rest of your life. I actually keep a running tally, numbering the days I've been inhaler-free.

I have no idea how your story reads right now. I don't know whether it's comedy, drama, or action and adventure. If you don't like your story line, God can change it. He can redeem the loss, recycle the mistake, and rewrite the pain. He can do so in a single day, no doubt. That said, don't wait until your circumstances change to start living your best life!

Despite suffering from severe asthma for forty years, I have biked century rides and run in triathlons. Did I mention my six knee surgeries? Why would I go after those particular goals? Because I love when the odds are stacked against me! If it's easy, what's the point? I want to go after dreams that are destined to fail without divine intervention. I want to accomplish things that I can't take credit for. The harder, the

better! God gets more glory! You need some giants in your life. Why? Without Goliath, you don't discover David.

I have one hundred life goals, which you can download at markbat-terson.com/wintheway. You can also download "Seven Steps to Setting Life Goals." I borrowed a few of my goals from others, and you can certainly do the same with mine. But few things will stretch your faith like coming up with your own life goal list. What do those goals have to do with my signature story? Goal setting is storytelling. It's writing the last chapter first, then working your way backward! Your story will be only as good as the goals you go after.

I know that millions of people have run marathons, but running a marathon is something I couldn't even imagine for most of my life because of my severe asthma. That life goal was a late entry. It wasn't until God miraculously healed my asthma that I added it to my life goal list. In 2017, I ran the Chicago Marathon as a way of celebrating God healing my lungs.

To date, I've accomplished about half my life goals. How have I done it? I didn't run that 26.2-mile marathon the day after setting the goal—that's for sure. That's a good way to pull a hamstring. The first thing I did was download a training plan; then I worked the plan. Six months later, I had completed seventy-two training runs totaling 475 miles. That's how you flip the script. It's not by pulling fairy tales out of thin air! It starts by setting a God-sized goal that stretches your faith. Then you go after that goal one mile, one run, one day at a time.

The bigger the goal, the better the story you need to tell yourself. Of course, you can flip that script. The better the story you tell yourself, the bigger the goal you can go after.

TILT THE TREADMILL

Let me add one more subplot to that signature story.

Have you ever heard the name Emil Zátopek? *Runner's World* called him "the greatest runner of all time," yet few people know his name.¹⁵ I

picked up a biography on Zátópek the day I started training. His story flipped my script and helped me come in first place. I'm kidding! I did not win the Chicago Marathon—not even close. But I did finish the race, and I never lost my breath, which is even more miraculous to me than winning!

On the day I discovered Emil Zátópek, I went home and announced to my family that I would make a movie about his life if it's the last thing I do. Over the next year, I turned his story into a movie script that I am currently shopping. Yes, making a movie is one of my life goals. Why? Because a film called *The Hiding Place* was a catalyst in my own spiritual journey and I want to flip that blessing. I'm not naive. I know that seeing lots of movies doesn't qualify you to make one! That said, God doesn't call the qualified. He qualifies the called. If it's in God's will and for God's glory, it qualifies for God's favor.

I trained for the Chicago Marathon by myself, but I never ran alone! Emil Zátópek was with me every step of the way. His story became my script, and we crossed that finish line together!

If you choose to go after a God-sized goal, you'd better buckle up. Especially if it doesn't fit within your natural gifting! It's like tilting the treadmill to a steep incline. You'll have to work a little longer, a little harder, and a little smarter than everyone else. It will be harder than you hoped and take longer than you imagined. So be it. If you keep walking in the right direction, you'll get where you're going sooner or later!

History is replete with people who have defied incredible odds to accomplish unbelievable things. If you're one of those long shots like John Bertrand or Bo Eason, this book is for you. The stories I share and the studies I cite will redefine what is and what is not possible. But winning the day starts with redefining who you are and, more importantly, whose you are.

For better or for worse, our outlook on life is the by-product of a few experiences. I might add, *unanalyzed* experiences. Do you really think your seven-year-old self was capable of remembering the right way? Or your seventeen-year-old memories are spot on? I'm not even sure I re-

member *yesterday* the right way! Memory is both subjective and selective. If you don't believe me, just ask the fans of opposing teams to give you their opinions right after an instant replay! Memory is a lot like that. Subjective memories get blown out of proportion. Selective memories get subtracted from. And the way we weigh memory is often all out of whack.

A single failure can fashion a defeatist attitude.

A single trauma can amputate pieces of a personality.

A single rejection can destroy someone's capacity to trust.

My point? We need God to sanctify our memories as much as our imaginations.

HISTORICAL REVISIONISM

The story of the Exodus is Israel's signature story. It defined their identity as a free people. Even their calendar revolved around the day God delivered them. The anniversary of the Exodus, the Passover, was a day celebrated unlike any other. God delivered Israel in a single day, but they didn't possess the Promised Land until forty years later. Did you know that the entire journey from Mount Sinai to the Promised Land was supposed to take eleven days?¹⁶ But they traveled for *forty years*! That's 14,589 days longer than their original ETA. What the heck happened?

Getting Israel out of Egypt was easy, relatively speaking. Getting Egypt out of Israel was a different story altogether, and I mean that literally. It took *one day* to get Israel out of Egypt, but it took *forty years* to get Egypt out of Israel. Why? When you've been enslaved for four hundred years, slavery is all you've ever known. Like the crew of *Australia II*, it was hard to imagine anything other than losing. When you've been oppressed for four hundred years, oppression has an epigenetic effect. You can't even imagine a different outcome, a different ending. Parting the Red Sea was simple compared with flipping Israel's script.

Just a few weeks after their miraculous deliverance, the Israelites

started complaining about the manna. If I remember correctly, manna was a *miracle*. The Israelites were complaining about a *miracle*! Unbelievable, right? Not so fast. We fall into the same trap. Isn't marriage miraculous? Children? The human body? The human mind? I bet you've filed a few complaints about each of those.

The nation of Israel filed this official complaint: "We remember the fish we ate freely in Egypt and without cost, the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic."¹⁷ *Seriously?* It was free because *you weren't*. Israel's problem—our problem—is selective memory. If you remember wrong, it's downright debilitating.

We don't see the world *as it is*. We see the world *as we are*. If you want to win today, you've got to start by rewriting yesterday.

When it comes to historiography, historical revisionism is the practice of reinterpreting past events. We need to put this into practice in our personal lives by remembering things the right way. How? From the far side of the cross! From the far side of the empty tomb! You aren't defined by the things you've done wrong. You are defined by what Christ did right—His righteousness. Jesus didn't just break the curse at Calvary's cross; He flipped the script on sin and death forever.

WHOSE YOU ARE

Four decades after the Exodus, the Israelites built an altar at a place called Gilgal. Altars are often the places where we bury dead yesterdays. The Lord said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you."¹⁸ The Israelites were set free the moment they exited Egypt, but sometimes it takes forty years for the truth to catch up with us. Of course, the stigma of systemic racism takes much longer and is much harder to change.

In 1864, the year after the Emancipation Proclamation, Sojourner Truth visited the nation's capital and was shocked by the situation former slaves found themselves in. There were still 122 pages of black codes discriminating against them. Those codes imposed a curfew on

people of color and disallowed black businesses. Black children weren't allowed to swim in the Anacostia River, sit on benches in Center Market, or fly kites on the National Mall.¹⁹ Those codes were eventually changed, but the attitudes behind them and the experiences of them cannot be so easily rewritten. It's much easier rewriting laws than it is rewriting hearts—or stories for that matter!

A hundred years later, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his “I Have a Dream” speech in the shadow of the Lincoln Memorial. Looking back on that day of deliverance, King said, “It came as a joyous day-break to end the long night of their captivity.”²⁰ Yes, it did, but the battle for civil rights had just begun!

When you've been enslaved for centuries, it takes time for your identity to catch up with your new reality. The battle is against the people and the powers actively working against your freedom—and the voice of doubt that calls your God-given dignity and identity into question. In the case of the Israelites, it took forty years. There are no shortcuts. There are no cheat codes. What God says about you has to become your signature story. It wasn't until the Israelites possessed the Promised Land that they finally saw themselves for who they really were—not slaves but God's chosen people.

Many of us see ourselves or see others the same way, according to some old code. There are plenty of people who want to remind us of those old narratives. You've got to let God flip the script. How? Scripture is a good starting point. The goal isn't getting through Scripture. It's getting Scripture through you. The Swiss theologian Karl Barth said, “Take your Bible and take your newspaper, and read both. But interpret newspapers from your Bible.”²¹ I would say the same of your everyday experiences. Over time, your theology conforms to your reality or your reality conforms to your theology. Scripture is more than our script; it's our script-cure. And that's more than a play on words. Scripture confronts the false identities and false narratives perpetrated by the Father of Lies. It reveals the heavenly Father's metanarrative and the unique role that each one of us plays in it.

Abraham thought he was *too old*. Jeremiah thought he was *too young*. Moses thought he was *unqualified*. Joseph thought he was *overqualified*. Gideon had *an inferiority complex*. Jonah had *a superiority complex*. Peter made *too many mistakes*. Nathanael was *too cool for school*. Paul had *a thorn in the flesh*. And King David was *the runt of the litter*.

None of that matters! *Who you are* is not the issue. What really matters is *whose you are*. If you are in Christ and Christ is in you, you are a new creation.²² You are the apple of God's eye.²³ You are God's workmanship.²⁴ You are more than a conqueror, and nothing can change that.²⁵ It is what it is; it is who you are.

There never has been and never will be anyone like you. That isn't a testament to you. It's a testament to the God who created you. The significance of that truth is this: *no one can take your place*. No one can worship God like you or for you. No one can serve others like you or for you. Jesus doesn't just live *in us*; Christ lives *as us*!

Flip the script, and start living your life in a way that is worth telling stories about.

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