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AN ENEMY CALLED AVERAGE

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JOHN MASON

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AN ENEMY CALLED AVERAGE

JOHN MASON

An Enemy Called Average
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Published by Insight International, Inc.
contact@freshword.com
www.freshword.com
918-493-1718

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Originally published in 1990 by Insight International, Inc.
40th printing

Over 600,000 in print

ISBN: 978-1-890900-87-8
E-book ISBN: 978-1-890900-91-5

Printed in the United States of America

Read what leaders are saying about
John Mason and his book:

"John Mason wrote a very good book that I recommend you read: *An Enemy Called Average*. I learned from this book: 'Know your limits, then ignore them. The most unprofitable item ever manufactured is an excuse. Don't sit back and take what comes. Go after what you want' " (excerpt from her book, *A Leader in the Making*).

Joyce Meyer, Minister and Best-selling Author
Fenton, MO

"The originality and practicality of John Mason's words and wisdom are a proven commodity which makes every new book of his a celebrated event...Read and prosper!"

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"John, you have really hit the target with your excellent book *An Enemy Called Average*. Mediocrity continues to plague business, ministry, and personal performance. Your book, with its bite-sized nuggets, helps break this cycle and helps provide positive direction and insight to any organization or individual. Congratulations on a really outstanding book!"

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Dick Mills
Dick Mills Ministries
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"I found it to be thought provoking, impressive, and inspirational. We are with you in your war against mediocrity."

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"Next to the Bible, *An Enemy Called Average* is my favorite book of all time! I keep it in my briefcase to refer to it. I've read it at least 15 times and learn something new and motivating each time. John Mason outdid himself with this one! It is da bomb! If you read this book, take heed, and if it doesn't make a significant difference in your life...then something is wrong! I've told anyone who would listen about it. Peace & happy reading...Rock on!"

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"*An Enemy Called Average*, an excellent title."

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“I want to encourage you to keep producing books of this sort. They are greatly needed to motivate believers to a more effective and dynamic Christian lifestyle.”

Robert Walker, Founder
Christian Life Missions
Lake Mary, FL

Dedication

I am proud to dedicate this book to my beautiful wife, Linda, our four wonderful children—Michelle, Greg, Mike, and Dave—and my two sweet daughters-in-law, Brittany and Kelley.

To Linda, for your steadfastness and love.

To Michelle, for your smarts and ability to organize a mess like me.

To Greg, for your faith and patient perseverance.

To Mike, for your resourcefulness and fearless approach to life.

To Dave, for that contagious smile and how we love to watch sports together.

To Brittany and Kelley, for your love for my sons and your love for the Lord.

Your support, help, encouragement, sense of humor, and prayers sustain and bless me every day.

Thank You

A very big thank you to these special friends who helped make this updated and expanded version available to people everywhere.

Roger and Rose Bruhn
Chris and Linda Busch
Roger and Carla Chasteen
Rick and Shelley Fenimore
Bob and Karen Fouch
Harold and Bev Herring
Danny and Carrie Kittinger
Mike and Chris Loomis
Kent and Bev Mattox
Brian and Judy McConnell
Steve and Gina Merritt
Bill and Carrie Mulder
Rick and Karen Pearson
Tim and Sandy Redmond
Lee and Sharon Rettedal
Bobby and Linda Robinson
Nasir and Anita Siddiki

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Acknowledgments

It is impossible to write a book like this one without the help of “foundational-level” people. Special thanks to:

Mike Loomis, who always offers a timely word of encouragement.

Tim Redmond, whose insight and advice have been invaluable.

Pastor David Blunt, my faithful friend and spiritual connection.

Introduction

Mediocrity is a region bound on the north by compromise, on the south by indecision, on the east by past thinking, and on the west by a lack of vision.

I went to bed one night knowing I had a speech to give early the next morning. When I awoke, the first thought on my mind was not “What time is it?” or “What will I wear?” Instead, it was the phrase “an enemy called average.” In that moment before my feet hit the floor, I knew that God had given me the title for the book that had been stirring within me for so long a time. I even called that morning’s speech, “An Enemy Called Average”!

This book is written for people who what to quit…so they won’t. And for people who want to go to another level …so they can!

Each of us has been given a certain mixture of abilities and opportunities that make us unique. No mixture is insignificant. Those matchless qualities that God has placed within all of us cause us to yearn to be above average and extraordinary.

God led me to write this book in a *nugget* style in order to deliver as much meat as possible in an enjoyable, easy-to-read format. Because there are fifty-two nuggets, this book can be used as an excellent weekly devotional or for personal development.

In Genesis 3:9, God asks Adam, “Where are you?” He is still asking that question of each of us today. Where are we in regard to God’s plan for our lives? Where are we concerning the gifts and talents He has given us?

It is my prayer that as you read this book, you will allow the Holy Spirit to reveal God’s plan for you and to inform, exhort, and correct you so that you will bound past every area of mediocrity and find total fulfillment in your life.

PART I:
Looking Inward

NUGGET #1

Your Least Favorite Color Should Be Beige

Exciting, innovative, transforming, productive…words that will never be associated with beige. Rather, beige implies lukewarmness, indifference, neutrality…attitudes no one wants to be around.

Here's a great opportunity: choose to be a person who is on the offensive, not the defensive. Never try to defend your present position and situation. People who live defensively never rise above average. Decide to be on the offensive, to take the initiative. Lukewarm, indecisive people are never secure regardless of their wealth, education, or position.

Never let your quest for "balance" in life become an excuse for refusing the unique, productive, invading move God directs you to take. Many times the attempt to maintain balance is really just an excuse for remaining lukewarm. Three times the Lord said to Joshua, "Be strong and courageous" (Josh. 1:6,7,9). I believe He is saying that to each one of us today.

When you choose to live on the offensive, the atmosphere of your life will begin to change. If you don't like the tone of your life, choose to take the offensive position and watch what happens. "Taking the offensive" starts by making an inward decision that inspires an outward action.

When you choose to act on the offensive, keep all your conflicts impersonal. Fight the issue, not the person. Speak about what God within you can do, not about what others are incapable of doing. You will find that when all of your reasons are defensive, your cause will almost never succeed. A basketball team

that never takes a shot never wins a game.

Thinking on the offensive and taking the initiative are the master keys that open doors of opportunity in your life. Create a habit of taking the initiative and *never start your day in neutral*. Every morning when your feet hit the floor, think on the offensive, move forward, and take control of your day and of your life.

Pulling back and thinking defensively usually enhances a problem. Intimidation always precedes defeat. If you aren't sure which way to go, pray and move toward the situation in faith.

Be like the two fishermen trapped in a storm in the middle of a lake. One turned to the other and asked, "Should we pray or should we row?" His wise companion responded, "Let's do both!"

That's taking the offensive!

NUGGET #2

Growth Comes from Building on Talents, Gifts, and Strengths—Not by Solving Problems

I'd like to ask you an important question: Is God finished with you?

It may feel like He's given up on you or that He could never use you like you once thought He could. But there's something deep inside of you that says, "God has put me together a certain way, on purpose for a purpose."

Forgotten or neglected in many people's lives are the gifts God has placed within them. It's amazing how people can devote their entire lives to fields of endeavor or to professions that have nothing to do with their inborn talents. In fact, many spend their lifetimes trying to change who God has made them. They ignore their God-given composition while constantly seeking to change their natural makeup. Instead, each of us should recognize our innate gifts, talents, and strengths and do everything in our power to build on them.

One of the most important facts you can discover about God's gifts and calling in your life is that they are permanent and enduring. Romans 11 tells us that "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (v. 29 KJV). The Greek word translated "repentance" in this verse literally means "irrevocable." Really grab ahold of this. Let it fully sink in.

Incredibly, God does not take away the gifts and calling He's given you. Even if you've never done anything with them, even if you've failed time and time

again, God's gifts and calling are still resident within you. They are there this very day. Simply choose to do something with them, beginning right now.

Gifts and talents are really God's deposits in our personal accounts, but we determine the interest on them. The greater the amount of interest and attention we give to them, the greater their value becomes. God's gifts are not loans; they are always deposits. As such, they are never used up or depleted. In fact, the more they are used, the greater, stronger, and more valuable they become. When they are put to good use, they provide information, insight, and results that cannot be accomplished in any other way or from any other source. The Bible tells us this encouraging news, "God has given each of us the ability to do certain things well" (Rom. 12:6 TLB).

Each of us should make full use of all the gifts and talents that God has bestowed upon us so that we do not abound in one area while becoming bankrupt in another. There is a saying, "If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to treat everything like a nail." Don't make that mistake; use all of the gifts God has given you.

Never underestimate the purpose of the gifts within you. Gifts and talents are given to us not only so that we can fulfill to the fullest the call in our own lives, but also so that we can affect the souls who are attached to those gifts. There are people whose lives are waiting to be affected by what God has placed within you. So evaluate yourself. Define and refine your gifts, talents, and strengths. Choose today to look for opportunities to exercise your unique, God-endowed, God-ordained gifts and calling.

NUGGET #3

The Nose of the Bulldog Is Slanted Backwards So He Can Continue to Breathe Without Letting Go.

—Winston Churchill

Persistent people begin their success where most others quit. Here's a simple key to success in any area of your life: be known as a person of persistence and endurance. One person with commitment, persistence, and endurance will accomplish more than a thousand people with interest alone. "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us" (Heb. 12:1). The more diligently we work, the harder it is to quit. Persistence is a habit—so is quitting.

Never worry about how much money, ability, or equipment you start with; just begin with a million-dollars' worth of determination. Remember this: it's not what you have, it's what you do with what you have that makes all the difference. Many people eagerly begin "the good fight of faith," but they forget to add patience, persistence, and endurance to their enthusiasm. Josh Billings said, "Consider the postage stamp. Its usefulness consists of the ability to stick to something until it gets there." We can learn a lot from that little ole stamp.

In 1 Corinthians the apostle Paul wrote, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that

your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (15:58 NKJV). Peter tells us, "Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless" (2 Peter 3:14 NKJV). And wise Solomon points out, "Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings" (Prov. 22:29 KJV).

Far Easterners plant a tree called the Chinese Bamboo. During the first four years, they water and fertilize the plant with seemingly little or no results. Then the fifth year, they again apply water and fertilizer—and in five weeks' time the tree grows ninety feet in height! This begs the question, did the Chinese Bamboo tree grow ninety feet in five weeks or five years? The answer is, it grew ninety feet in five years. If at any time during those five years the people had stopped watering and fertilizing the tree, it would have died.

Many times our dreams and plans appear to be faltering. We are tempted to give up and quit trying. Instead, let's continue to water and fertilize those dreams and plans, nurturing the seeds of the vision God has placed within us. We know that if we do not quit, if we display perseverance and endurance, we will also reap a harvest (Gal. 6:9). Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, "By perseverance the snail reached the ark." Let's be like that snail.

NUGGET #4

We Can Grow by Our Questions as Well as by Our Answers

Here are some important questions we should ask ourselves:

1. What one decision would I make if I knew it would not fail?

2. What one thing should I eliminate from my life because it holds me back from reaching my full potential?

3. Am I on the path of something absolutely marvelous, or something absolutely mediocre?

4. If everyone in the United States of America were on my level of spirituality, would there be a revival in the land?

5. If I'm ungrateful for what I have, how can I be happier with more?

6. Does the devil know who I am?

7. Has failure gone to my head?

8. Am I running from something, or to something?

9. What can I do to make better use of my time?

10. Would I recognize Jesus if I met Him on the street?

11. Who do I need to forgive?

12. What is my favorite Scripture for my family, my career, and for myself?

13. What impossible thing am I believing and planning for?
14. What is my most prevailing thought?
15. What good thing have I committed to do that I have quit doing?
16. How have the people I respect earned that respect?
17. Am I known for the promises I don’t keep?
18. What would a truly creative person do in my situation?
19. What outside influences are causing me to be better or worse?
20. How old is my attitude?
21. Does my reach exceed my grasp?
22. Am I becoming ordinary?
23. In what areas do I need personal development?
24. What gifts, talents, or strengths do I have?
25. What is one thing I can do for someone who has no opportunity to repay me?

NUGGET #5

Don't Ask Time Where It's Gone; Tell It Where to Go

All great achievers understand the value of controlling their time. They know that we human beings have been created equal in this respect: every one of us is privileged with twenty-four hours a day. What we do with each day matters.

Give your best time to your most challenging situation. It's not how much you do that matters; it's how much you finish. Here's a key: Say *no*. Saying yes when you should say no is one of the biggest reasons for wasting time. One of the most valuable sayings ever coined was, "Don't spend a dollar's worth of time for ten-cents' worth of results."

Make sure to take care of the two most vulnerable times in your day—the first thing in the morning and the last thing at night. It's amazing how much these two times influence the whole day. Be sure to fill them with productive words and actions.

If you are saying, "I could be doing big things if I weren't so busy doing small things," then you need to take control of your time. The greater control you exercise over your time, the greater freedom you will experience. Moses prayed, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" (Ps. 90:12 KJV). The Bible teaches us that the devil comes to steal, to kill, and to destroy (John 10:10), and this verse applies to time as well as to other areas of our lives. The enemy desires to overflow us with ideas, worries, people, pleasures, and misdirections that "kill, steal, and destroy" valuable time.

I often hear people say, “I’d give anything to be able to…” If you have said this, you should adopt the “6 x 1 = 6” leadership principle. If you want to write a book, learn to play a musical instrument, become a better tennis player, or anything else that’s important to you, then devote to it one hour a day, six days a week. Sooner than you think, your desire will become reality. You can accomplish many things in 312 hours a year! Just a commitment of one hour a day, six days a week is all it takes.

We all have the same amount of time each day. The difference between people is determined by what they do with the amount of time at their disposal. Don’t be like the airline pilot flying over the Pacific Ocean who reported to his passengers, “We’re lost, but we’re making great time!” Remember that the future arrives an hour at a time. Gain control of your time, and you will gain control of your life.

NUGGET #6

Obey the Ninth Commandment

The Ninth Commandment can be summarized in one statement: “You must not lie” (Ex. 20:16 TLB). Each Christian should be a person of unquestionable integrity. Gray is never right.

Hope built on a lie is always the beginning of loss. Never attempt to build anything on a foundation of lies and half-truths. It will not stand. Never expect God to bless a lie.

It has been said that it should be easy to make an honest living because there is so little competition. Only a person with honesty and integrity can be accurately motivated or directed. Lying will always distort your ability to see God’s guidance in your life. It will cause you to take steps that are not right for you. Lying will cost you more in the long term than it will save you in the short term.

Lying easily becomes a habit. A person who lies once will lie again with less effort. Lying is a trap. No one has a good-enough memory to be a successful liar. T.L. Osborn said, “Always tell the truth, and you never have to remember what you said.”

In Proverbs we read, “Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal truthfully are his delight” (12:22 NKJV) and “A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies shall perish” (19:9 NKJV).

In Colossians the apostle Paul admonishes us:

> Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him. (3:9-10 NKJV)

The Bible mentions seven results of lying. If you lie:

1. You will attract liars into your life (Prov. 17:4).
2. You will lack understanding (Ps. 119:104).
3. You will never enjoy permanent results (Prov. 12:19; 21:28).
4. You will end up in bondage (Gal. 2:4).
5. You will be punished (Prov. 19:5).
6. You will become a fool (Prov. 10:18).
7. Your lies will come back upon you (Ps. 7:14-16).

Little white lies grow to be big black lies. Determine to be free from the bondage of breaking the Ninth Commandment; determine to always tell the truth.

NUGGET #7

A Man with One Watch Knows What Time It Is; a Man with Two Is Never Quite Sure.

—Anonymous

Indecision is deadly. Some of the most miserable people are those who can never make a decision. When the mind is in doubt, it is easily swayed by slight impulses, opening the door to many wrong decisions. Many times indecision causes things to go from bad to worse. The middle of the road is a dangerous place to be.

We believers should be the most decisive of all people. Leaders should have wills, not wishes. The Bible says, “A double minded man is unstable in all his ways” (James 1:8 KJV). An indecisive person allows instability to creep into every area of life. If we don’t decide what is important to us, we will do only what is important to others. A greater degree of wishful thinking leads to a greater degree of mediocrity. Being decisive, being focused, and committing ourselves to the fulfillment of a dream greatly increases our probability of success while closing the door to wrong options.

Our challenge? To be decisive dreamers. Harry Truman once said, “Some questions cannot be answered, but they can be decided.” Even when we do not have all the facts available, we usually have all the facts needed to make a decision. The Bible says to let the peace of God rule in our hearts (Col. 3:15). The Amplified version tells us to let the peace that comes from Christ act as an

umpire in our hearts. God's peace can say "safe" to an idea or say "out" to a relationship.

If you are neutral on spiritual matters, eventually you'll find yourself operating against heaven. Thank God we serve a decisive Lord. He has given us His peace and His Word so that we can make wise decisions. We should not be the kind of people who claim that God has told us one thing this week and the very opposite next week. God does not change in such quick degrees, nor does He ever direct anyone to act contrary to the good sense and sound judgment shown in His Word.

God wants us to be decisive. As His children, we should be like our heavenly Father, with whom there is "no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17 KJV). We should be people of deep conviction. If the devil controls our will, he controls our destiny. But if God controls our will, then He controls our destiny.

The choice is ours. Let's be decisive. Don't be a person who says, "My decision is maybe, and that's final."

NUGGET #8

Don't Consume Your Tomorrows by Feeding on Your Yesterdays

Get rid of any "loser's limp" you're still walking around with! As followers of Jesus Christ, you and I need to break the power of the past which dominates our present and influences our future.

Jesus said, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62 NKJV). If we are not careful, we will allow the past to hold us. The more we look backward, the less we are able to see forward. The past does not determine what God can do for us today or tomorrow.

That is the beauty of the Christian life. Even when we fail, we can ask for forgiveness and be totally cleansed of and released from our past actions. Whatever the past holds against you can be broken. It is never God who holds us back. We hold ourselves back by allowing the past to keep us from living to the fullest in the present and future. Failure is waiting around the corner for those who live off of yesterday's successes and failures. Choose to be forward focused, not past possessed. Learn to profit from the past while investing in the future.

The apostle Paul wrote:

> Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,
>
> I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 3:13-14 KJV)

The key here is “forgetting those things which are behind” in order to reach for “the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” To fulfill your calling in Christ, you must first forget past failures and mistakes. Today is the day to shake off the shackles of the past and to move forward.

The past is past.

NUGGET #9

The Best Time of Day Is Now

Procrastination is a killer.

When you kill time, you begin to kill ideas and directions God has placed within you. The Living Bible's version of Ecclesiastes 11:4 says, "If you wait for perfect conditions, you will never get anything done."

The first step to overcoming procrastination is to eliminate all excuses for not taking immediate action.

The second step is to be less busy! Everyone is always on the move. People are moving forward, backward, and sometimes nowhere at all as though they are on a treadmill. The mistake most people make is thinking that the main goal of life is to stay busy. Such thinking is a trap. What is important is not whether you are busy, but whether you are progressing. The question is one of activity versus accomplishment.

A gentleman named John Henry Fabre conducted an experiment with processionary caterpillars, so named for their habit of blindly following each other. In his experiment, Fabre placed these tiny creatures in a circle. For twenty-four hours the caterpillars dutifully followed one another around and around and around. Then, Fabre placed the caterpillars around a saucer full of pine needles (their favorite food). For six days, the mindless creatures moved around and around the saucer, finally dying from starvation and exhaustion even though an abundance of choice food was located less than two inches away.

For all their activity, the caterpillars accomplished nothing.

Christians need to be known as those who accomplish great things for God—

not as those who simply talk about it. Procrastinators are good at talking, not doing. Mark Twain said, “Noise produces nothing. Often a hen who has merely laid an egg cackles as though she has laid an asteroid.”

Let’s be like the apostles. Still today, they are not known for their policies, procedures, theories, or excuses, but for their *acts*. Many people say they are waiting for God, but in most cases God is waiting for them. The cost of growth is always less than the cost of stagnation. As Edmund Burke said, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”

Occasionally you may notice someone who doesn’t do anything, yet seems to have some success in life. Don’t be deceived; things are never as they appear. Remember the old saying, “Even a broken clock is right twice a day.” As Christians we are called to make progress—not excuses.

Procrastination is a tool of the devil to hold us back and to make us miss God’s timing in our lives. “The desire of the lazy man kills him, for his hands refuse to labor” (Prov. 21:25 NKJV). The longer we take to act on God’s direction, the more unclear it becomes. So take action…now.

NUGGET #10

Fear and Worry Are Interest Paid in Advance on Something You May Never Own

Fear is a poor chisel for carving out tomorrow. If you're worried about tomorrow, I have good news for you: Worry isn't reality! Worry is really the triumph of fear over faith.

There is a story about a woman who cried profusely while standing on a street corner. A man came up to her and asked why she was weeping. The lady shook her head and replied, "I was just thinking that maybe someday I would get married. We would later have a beautiful baby girl. Then one day this child and I would go for a walk along this street, and my darling daughter would run into the street, get hit by a car, and die."

It sounds like a pretty ridiculous situation—weeping because of something that will probably never happen. Yet we act this way when we worry. We blow a situation out of proportion that might never come to pass.

An old Swedish proverb says: "Worry gives a small thing a big shadow." Worry is simply the misuse of the creative imagination God has placed within us. The word "worry" is derived from an Anglo-Saxon term meaning "to strangle" or "to choke off." There is no question that worry and fear choke off the positive creativity God gives us.

When fear rises in our minds, we should expect the opposite in our lives. We

should expect faith to rise in our hearts to shield us against worrisome thoughts.

Things are seldom as they seem. “Skim milk masquerades as cream,” said W.S. Gilbert. As we dwell on matters beyond our control, a negative effect sets in. Too much analysis always leads to paralysis.

The Bible says, “Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved” (Ps. 55:22 NKJV). Never respond out of fear, and never fear to respond. Action attacks fear; inaction reinforces it.

Don’t worry and don’t fear. Instead, take your fear and worry to the Lord, “casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7 NKJV). Worry is a route that leads from somewhere to nowhere. Never let it direct your life.

NUGGET #11

Our Words Are Seeds Planted in Other People's Lives

What we say is important. The Bible says that "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12:34 NKJV). We need to change our vocabulary; we need to speak words of life and light. Our talk should always line up with the Word of God.

We Christians should be known as those who speak positively; those who speak the Word of God into situations; those who speak forth words of life.

We shouldn't be like the man who joined a monastery where the monks were allowed to speak only two words every seven years. After the first seven years had passed, the man met with the abbot, who asked him, "Well, what are your two words?"

"Food's bad," replied the man.

Seven years later the clergyman asked, "What are your two words now?"

"Bed's hard," the man responded.

Seven years later—twenty-one years after he entered the monastery—the man met with the abbot for the third and final time. "And what are your two words this time?" the abbot asked.

"I quit."

"Well, I'm not surprised," the cleric answered disgustedly. "All you've done since you got here is complain!"

Don’t be like that man; don’t be known as a person whose only words are negative.

If you are a member of the “murmuring grapevine,” you need to resign. Our Lord instructed His disciples, “Do not murmur among yourselves” (John 6:43 NKJV). The apostle Paul exhorted the believers of his day:

> Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world. (Phil. 2:14-15 NKJV)

Contrary to what you may have heard, talk is not cheap. Talk is powerful! What we say affects what we get from others and what others get from us. When we speak wrongly, we diminish our ability to see and hear the will of God.

NUGGET #12

Versus

We make decisions every day. We are daily confronted with options where we must choose one or the other; we cannot have both. These options may include:

- Growing better versus bitter
- Decisiveness versus indifference
- Enthusiasm versus lukewarmness
- Saying “how I can” versus “if I can”
- Saying “get up” versus “give up”
- God-led risk versus man-made security
- Overcoming evil versus tolerating evil
- Standing out versus blending in
- How much I get done versus how much I attempt to do
- Development versus stagnation
- Obtaining versus complaining
- Peace versus strife
- Choice versus chance
- Determination versus discouragement
- Growth versus death

- Demanding more of ourselves versus excusing ourselves
- Doing for others versus doing for ourselves
- Opposing darkness versus coexisting with darkness
- Progressing versus drifting
- Priorities versus aimlessness
- Committing versus trying
- Accountability versus irresponsibility
- Action versus activity
- Solutions versus problems
- More of God versus more of everything else
- Selected to be in *Who's Who* versus asking, "Why me?"

NUGGET #13

Keep Your Feet on the Rock When You Reach the End of Your Rope

I believe when God sees someone who doesn't quit, He says, "There's someone I can use." So don't give up!

In Galatians 6:9 we are told, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

God does not quit. It's impossible for Him to do so. In Philippians 1:6 the apostle Paul wrote about "being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." There are several important points in this verse. The most crucial is the fact that God doesn't quit. Therefore, we can have great confidence that He will complete the good work He has begun in us. He will see us through every step until we reach our ultimate destination.

One of the best scriptural examples of a person who did not quit is Joseph. He had many reasons to justify giving up. When he was trapped in the pit where his jealous brothers had thrown him, I'm sure he said to himself, "This isn't the way I dreamed my life would work out!" Later, he had an enormous opportunity to become discouraged and quit when he was thrown into prison for a crime he didn't commit. Again he could have said to himself, "This is not right! I'm not supposed to be here." Although Joseph did not understand the steps the Lord led him through, he remained true to his God. Despite the trials he faced, he did not quit. Eventually the dream that God had given him became reality. Joseph was

elevated from a prisoner to a prime minister in one day!

It isn’t always easy, but there’s no greater life than that of following the Word and the will of God. Most people quit when they’re on the verge of success, often when fulfillment is at their fingertips. There is only one degree of difference between hot water and steam. Only you can decide not to lose.

Luke 18 records the story Jesus told about the persistent widow. Verse 1 says, “Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them they should always pray and not give up.” The psalmist David tells us, “Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass” (Ps. 37:5 NKJV).

The only way we can lose is to quit. Quitting is a decision we make that can keep us from reaching God’s goals in our lives.

NUGGET #14

A Goal Is a Dream with a Deadline

In Habakkuk the Lord tells the prophet, “Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it” (2:2 NKJV). This Scripture reveals the key to successful goal setting.

The vision must be written. When you keep a vision in your mind, it isn’t really a goal; it is nothing more than a dream. There is power in putting that dream on paper. When you commit something to writing, commitment to achievement naturally follows.

God wrote His vision for us in the form of the Bible. He doesn’t rely only on the Holy Spirit to guide us; He put His directions in writing. When the vision is written down clearly, “he may run who reads it.”

The key word is “run.” God desires that we run with the vision for our lives. As long as we’re running with the vision, we won’t turn around. When we walk with a vision, it’s easy to change directions and go the wrong way. We can’t stroll to a goal.

In Proverbs 24 we read: “Any enterprise is built by wise planning, becomes strong through common sense, and profits wonderfully by keeping abreast of the facts” (vv. 3-4 TLB). Simply stated, effective goal setting provides an opportunity to bring the future to the present. That way, you can run with it today. You will find that achievement is easy when your outer goals become inner commitments.

Even though we have the Holy Spirit, we still need to prepare; He just makes

us better equipped to do so. God doesn't desire for us to be disorderly or to waste funds. That's why proper planning is so important. Plan for potential. Believe for God's biggest dream. When you plan, look to the future, not to the past. You can't effectively drive forward when you're looking out the rear window.

Always involve yourself with something bigger than you are because that's where God is. At its beginning, every great success seemed impossible.

We all have opportunity for success. Having a bad life requires as much energy as having a good life, yet most people live meaningless lives because they never decide to write down their vision and then follow through. If you cannot see the mark, you cannot press toward it.

"Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established" (Prov. 4:26 NKJV). You will find that what you learn on the path to your goals is actually more valuable than achieving the goal itself. Columbus discovered America while searching for a route to India. Be on the lookout for the "Americas" in your path. Put God's vision for your life on paper and begin to run with His plan.

NUGGET #15

Smile—It Adds to Your Face Value

Christians should be the happiest, most enthusiastic people on earth. In fact, the word “enthusiasm” comes from the Greek word *entheous*, which means “God within” or “full of God.”

Smiling—proof that you are happy and enthusiastic—is always a choice, not a result. It is a decision you must consciously make. Enthusiasm and joy and happiness will improve your personality and people’s opinion of you. It will help you keep a proper perspective on life. Helen Keller said, “Keep your face to the sunshine, and you cannot see the shadow.”

The bigger the challenge you’re facing, the more enthusiasm you need. Philippians 2:5 says, “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.” I believe that Jesus was a man who had a smile on His face and a spring in His step.

Our attitude always tells others what we expect in return.

A smile is a powerful weapon. It can break the ice in tough situations. You will find that being enthusiastic is like having a head cold; both are very contagious. A laugh a day will keep negative people away. As enthusiasm increases, stress and fear decrease. The Bible says that the joy of the Lord is our strength (Neh. 8:10).

Many people say, “Well, no wonder those people are happy, confident, and positive; if I had their job and assets, I would be happy too!” Such thinking falsely assumes that successful people are positive because they have a good

income and lots of possessions. But the reverse is true. Such people probably have a good income and lots of possessions as a result of being positive, confident, and happy.

Enthusiasm always inspires action. No significant accomplishment has ever been made without enthusiasm. In John 15:10-11 we have a promise from the Lord that says, “If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”

The Lord’s joy and love are yours—so smile!

NUGGET #16

An Alibi Is Just a Lie

Quitting, giving up, failing, and even judging—all of these begin with an excuse. Never allow an obstacle in your life to become an alibi. “You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things” (Rom. 2:1). We Christians should be people who make progress, not excuses.

There have always been people who have made up excuses to the Lord. Some knew their alibis weren’t true, while others actually believed their own excuses.

Jesus told a parable of the great end-time banquet and the men who were invited to the Lord’s Table:

> But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, “I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.”
>
> Another said, “I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.”
>
> Still another said, “I just got married, so I can’t come.” (Luke 14:18-20)

These men made excuses and missed out on salvation. All of them made the mistake of believing their alibis rather than God.

Moses and Gideon made excuses to the Lord, yet they recognized that their excuses were not the truth. When the Lord sent Moses to Pharaoh, Moses said:

> O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you

> have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.
>
> The Lord said to him, ‘Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.’ (Ex. 4:10-12)

When the Lord asked Gideon to save Israel from her invaders, Gideon argued:

> But Lord…how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.
>
> The Lord answered, ‘I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together.’ (Judg. 6:15-16)

Do not hide behind an excuse. Jesus said, “If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin” (John 15:22). An alibi will always keep you from completing the assignment God has for you.

Recognize an excuse for what it is—a lie.

NUGGET #17

Don't Quit After a Victory

The two most common times people quit is after a defeat and after a victory. If you recognize this fact, you will stop less and go farther.

Robert Schuller says, "Don't cash in; cast into deeper water." Do not stop after a success; keep the forward momentum. Don't stop after a failure; dust yourself off, learn the lesson, and start up again.

One of the great prizes of victory is the opportunity to do more. The trouble is that small doses of success have often inoculated us from catching the big victory.

Picture a large boulder at the top of a hill. This boulder represents our lives. If we rock the boulder back and forth and get it moving, its momentum will make it almost unstoppable. The same is true for us.

The Bible promises us God's divine unstoppable momentum. It always results in growth.

Five ways to keep divine momentum in your life are:

- Be fruitful (2 Cor. 9:10)
- Speak the truth (Eph. 4:15)
- Be spiritually mature (Heb. 6:1)
- Crave the Word of God (1 Peter 2:2)
- Grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus (2 Peter 3:18)

God’s definition of spiritual momentum is found in this verse:

> For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:5-8)

Here’s an easy way to remember this truth…let go of whatever makes you stop.

NUGGET #18

The Best Helping Hand You Will Ever Find Is at the End of Your Own Arm

One of the biggest lies we believe is that we are not responsible for our own actions. We blame our mothers, our employers, our neighbors, the government, or society. But the Bible clearly indicates who is responsible and accountable for our deeds: “So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (Rom. 14:12 KJV).

We may attempt to shift the blame to others, but there is no escaping the truth: every time we point a finger at someone else, three fingers point back at us.

Throughout my career as a consultant, I met many businessmen who were looking for answers. I was amazed to see how many were anxiously searching for help from other people when they had everything they needed to succeed. They were willing to give up control of their vision to others in exchange for money or simply because they didn’t want to be alone. It isn’t always easy for leaders to be by themselves. Their mistake was in looking to others instead of looking to God. The false sense of security they found in others led them to unbalanced relationships; relationships that eventually resulted in destruction of their dreams.

God sends people across our paths to bless and help us, but we should be directed by God and very cautious when entering into any partnership. We must be sure that the reason for the relationship is right, and sure that we aren’t merely

looking for a shortcut.

For every successful partnership, there are hundreds of disasters. Exercise great caution when you affiliate with someone else. In Exodus, God gave Moses some good advice that is applicable to Christians today. He said, “Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land where you are going, or they will be a snare among you” (Ex. 34:12).

I believe that God wants us to learn most things for ourselves because what we learn for ourselves stays with us deeper and longer than anything we learn from others. Mark Twain wrote, “A man who carries a cat by the tail learns something he can learn no other way.”

Faith is like a toothbrush: Everyone should have it and use it every day, but we shouldn’t use someone else’s. Decide for yourself. Learn for yourself. Answer for yourself.

NUGGET #19

When You Get Knocked Down, Get Back Up

How do you respond to failure? Failure doesn't mean nothing has been accomplished; there is always the opportunity to learn something. Always remember that God isn't surprised by your stumbles. His love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness are bigger than any mess you make.

We all experience failure and make mistakes. In fact, successful people always have more failure in their lives than average people do. Great people throughout history have all failed at some point in their lives.

Those who don't expect anything are the ones who are never disappointed. Those who never try, never fail. Anyone who is currently achieving anything in life is simultaneously risking failure.

It is always better to fail in doing something than to excel at doing nothing. A flawed diamond is more valuable than a perfect brick. People who have no failures also have few victories.

You will get knocked down; it is how fast you get up that makes all the difference. There is a positive correlation between spiritual maturity and how quickly a person responds to failures and mistakes. Individuals who are spiritually mature have a greater ability to get up and go on than people who are spiritually immature. The less mature the person, the longer they hold on to past failures.

God never sees any of us as failures; He only sees us as learners. We fail only when we don't learn from each experience. The decision is up to us—we can

choose to turn a failure into a hitching post or into a guidepost in our lives.

Here is the key to getting free from the stranglehold of past failures and mistakes: learn the lesson and forget the details. Gain from the experience, but do not roll the minute details of it over and over in your mind. Build on the experience, and move forward in your life.

Remember that the call is higher than the fall.

NUGGET #20

Those Who Don't Take Chances Don't Make Advances

People whose faith runs ahead of their minds make all the great discoveries. Significant achievements have been obtained by taking large risks on important issues, and not the other way around. Never waste time planning, analyzing, and risking on small ideas. It's smarter to spend more time on decisions that are irreversible and to spend less time on those that are reversible.

Learn to stretch and reach out to where God is. Aim high and take risks. The world's approach is to look to next year based on last year. We Christians need to reach for the potential, not base our success on the past. Those who make great strides are those who take chances and plan toward the challenges of life.

Don't become so caught up in the small matters that you cannot take advantage of important opportunities. Most people spend their entire lives letting down buckets into empty wells and then waste their days trying to pull them up again and again.

Choose to dream big, to strive to reach the full potential of your calling. Choose to major on the important issues of life, not on the unimportant. H. Stern said, "If you're hunting rabbits in tiger country, you must keep your eye peeled for tigers, but when you are hunting tigers, you can ignore the rabbits." There are plenty of tigers to go around, so don't be distracted by the rabbits of life. Set your sights on bigger game.

Security and opportunity are total strangers. If an undertaking doesn't include

faith, it isn’t worthy of being called God’s direction. Direction and faith go hand in hand.

A famous old saying goes like this: “Even a turtle doesn’t get ahead unless he sticks his neck out.” Dream big because you serve a big God.

NUGGET #21

The Faith to Move Mountains Always Carries a Pick.

—Anonymous

Rising above mediocrity never just happens; it's always a result of faith combined with works.

Faith without works is like gold within the earth. It is of no value until it is mined. A person who has faith but no actions is like a bird that has wings but no feet. The Bible says, "Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (James 2:17 NKJV).

Biblical principles multiplied by nothing equal nothing.

Let's be people who put our faith into action. One individual with faith and action constitutes a majority. Don't wait for your ship to come in; swim to it! Thomas Edison said it best: "Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work." True faith has hands and feet; it takes action. It isn't enough to *know* that *you know*. It's more important to *show* that you know.

The word "work" appears 564 times in the Bible. It isn't an obscure biblical concept. When faith and works operate together, the result is a masterpiece. We should choose to keep our faith working all the time. George Bernard Shaw said, "When I was young, I observed that nine out of every ten things I did were failures. So I did ten times more work."

When the founder of Holiday Inn, Kemmons Wilson, was asked how he became successful, he replied, “I really don’t know why I’m here. I never got a degree, and I’ve only worked half days my entire life. I guess my advice is to do the same, work half days every day. And it doesn’t matter which half. The first twelve hours or the second twelve hours.”

Tap into the power that is produced when faith is mixed with action, and then watch what God does in your life.

PART II:
Looking Outward

NUGGET #22

Serving Won't Make You Famous—Just Rich

Some time ago when I answered the phone, the voice on the other end said, "Bang! You're dead!" I paused. I didn't know what to think! Then I heard the familiar voice of James Campbell, a client of mine, saying, "John, just calling to remind you that we need to die to ourselves every day." Wow, what a wakeup call to start the day!

This is true: there is always room at the top for anyone who is willing to say, "I'll serve," and means it.

Several years ago I was listening to Zig Ziglar. In his presentation he said, "You'll always have everything in life that you want if you'll help enough other people get what they want." When I heard that statement, something went off on the inside of me. I made a conscious decision to incorporate that concept into my life every day. It has made a tremendous difference.

Selfishness always ends in self-destruction. John Ruskin said, "When a man is wrapped up in himself, he makes a pretty small package."

Serving others isn't always the most natural thing to do. We're all conditioned to think of ourselves first. That is why 97 percent of all people will write their own names when offered a new pen to try. Despite our tendency toward self-promotion, it is always true that more is accomplished when nobody cares who gets the credit.

True leadership always begins with servanthood. Be willing to serve without trying to reap the benefits. Before looking for a way to get, look for a way to

give.

No one is truly a success in life until he or she has learned how to serve. The old saying is true: “The way to the throne room is through the servants’ quarters.” One of the most powerful decisions you can make in your life is to do something for someone who does not have the power or resources to return the favor. Our Lord says, “He that is greatest among you shall be your servant” (Matt. 23:11 NKJV). And again He declares: “Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant” (Matt. 20:26-27 KJV).

When you give of yourself to help others, you cannot help but be abundantly rewarded. The rewards and blessings of service always extend far beyond the scope of this life’s rewards. That’s true wealth!

NUGGET #23

Your Best Friends Are Those Who Bring Out the Best in You

A number of years ago I found myself at a stagnation point in my life. I was unproductive and unable to see God's direction clearly. One day I noticed that almost all of my friends were in the same situation. When we got together, our problems were all we talked about. As I prayed about this matter, God showed me that I needed "foundational-level" people in my life. Such people bring out the best in us and influence us to become better people. They cause us to have greater faith and confidence and to see things from God's perspective. After being with them, our spirits and our sights are raised.

We need to be careful of the kind of insulation we use in our lives. We need to insulate ourselves from negative people and ideas, but we should never insulate ourselves from godly counsel and wisdom.

Misery wants your company. In Proverbs we read, "A mirror reflects a man's face, but what he is really like is shown by the kind of friends he chooses" (27:19 TLB). Proverbs also tells us, "He who walks with wise men will be wise; but the companion of fools will be destroyed" (13:20 NKJV). We become like those with whom we associate.

I've found that it is better to be alone than in the wrong company. A single conversation with the right person can be more valuable than years of study.

The Lord showed me that I needed to change my closest associations and meet with some other people on a regular basis. These were men and women of

great faith, people who made me a better person when I was around them. They were the ones who saw the gifts in me and could correct me in a constructive, loving way. My choice to change my closest associations was a turning point in my life.

When you surround yourself with the right kind of people, you enter into the God-ordained power of agreement:

> Two can accomplish more than twice as much as one, for the results can be much better. If one falls, the other pulls him up; but if a man falls when he is alone, he's in trouble. And one standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer; three is even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken. (Eccl. 4:9-10,12 TLB)

Stay far away from negative-thinking "experts." Remember: in the eyes of average people, average is always considered outstanding. Look carefully at the closest associations in your life; they indicate the direction you're heading.

NUGGET #24

Stand Out; Don't Blend In

The majority, many times, is a group of highly motivated snails. If a thousand people say something foolish, it is still foolish. Truth is never dependent upon consensus of opinion.

The Bible says of us Christians, "You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9 NKJV). "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but be a new and different person with a fresh newness in all you do and think. Then you will learn from your *own* experience how His ways will really satisfy you" (Rom. 12:2 TLB, italics mine).

One of the greatest compliments anyone can say to you is, "You're different." Christians live in this world, but we are aliens. We're destined for another place; this earth is not our final destination. We should talk differently, act differently, and perform differently. We should stand out.

There should be something different about you. If you do not stand out in a group, if there is not something unique or different in your life, you should re-evaluate yourself. Take a close look at your thoughts, conversations, and actions.

One way to stand head-and-shoulders above the crowd is to choose to do regular, ordinary things in an extraordinary and supernatural way—with great enthusiasm. God does some of His very best work through people right when the circumstances appear to be stacked against them. In fact, God sided with the underdog in every battle described in the Bible—the minority.

Majority rule isn’t always right. It is usually those without dreams or visions of their own who want to take a vote on everything. People in groups tend to agree on courses of action that they as individuals know aren’t right.

Don’t be persuaded or dissuaded by group opinion. It doesn’t make any difference what anyone else believes; *you* must believe.

Never take direction for your personal life from a crowd. Never choose to quit just because somebody disagrees with you. In fact, the two worst things you can say to yourself when you get an idea are: “That’s never been tried before, so I can’t do it” and “That’s been tried before, so I can’t do it either!” Someone else’s failure in a certain area does not guarantee *your* failure.

Be a pioneer and stand out! Don’t be afraid to get hit with a few arrows! Be who you are and do what *you* know you should do.

NUGGET #25

Decide Today to Go Through What You've Been Going Through

Stop constantly talking about the situation you're going through. Decide to get through it! Do not accept your current temporary situation as your permanent condition. Make up your mind to get on with your life and to fulfill your divine purpose despite your current circumstances.

God wants each of us to come all the way through whatever situations we face. We are not to be moved by what we see, but by what we do not see. This is what the apostle Paul meant when he wrote that we walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). Today is the day to begin to walk by faith—right out of your present circumstances.

If you've been saying, "I'm going through this situation" for years, you need to change your story. Begin to declare, "I've had enough! Now is the time I'm going to get through this mess!"

The Bible contains many promises that can deliver you today. If you will believe and appropriate these promises, you will see your circumstances line up with the Word and will of God—eventually, if not immediately.

The devil tells us that we will never be victorious, that we will never get through what we are going through. But the Bible tells us:

> No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can

> bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. (1 Cor. 10:13)

You should take hold of this verse and use it as scriptural grounds to stand on. God is faithful. He will provide a way out for you. You can take your stand of faith and boldly proclaim, “I’m going to get through what I’ve been going through!” Natural circumstances may still remain unchanged, but between God’s efforts and yours, you can know that you are going through that situation!

Some people stay in the same hopeless place their whole lives, never making a firm decision to seek God and His power in order to get through the circumstances they face. Just because a fruit of the Spirit is longsuffering doesn’t mean we are required to stay in a miserable situation one second longer than is absolutely necessary.

Here’s how we position ourselves to break through: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may *prove* what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2 NKJV, italics mine).

Be transformed by renewing your mind with the Word of God. Then you will know what is the good and perfect will of the Lord, and you will be able to get through—once and for all—what you’ve been going through for so long.

NUGGET #26

Say No to Many Good Ideas

One of the devil's tricks is getting us to say *yes* to too many good things. We end up being spread so thin that we are mediocre in everything and excellent in nothing. The old saying is very true, "There is one guaranteed formula for failure, and that is to try to please everyone."

Something that's *good* and something that's *right* aren't always the same thing. The challenge is to discern the difference. It may be good to be a missionary in Iraq, but it may not be right for you. Our responsibility as Christians is always to do the right thing. That must come first. With excellence, we should do the things we're called to do—the things that are right—before we consider anything else.

There comes a time in every one of our lives when we must learn to say *no* to many good ideas. In fact, the more we grow, the more opportunities we will have to say *no*. One key to results is becoming focused. Nothing brings focus like the word *no!* Perhaps no other key to growth and success is as overlooked as this one. The temptation is always to do a little bit of everything.

Remember, saying *no* to a good idea doesn't mean saying *never*. *No* may mean *not right now*.

The word *no* has power. *No* is an anointed word that can break the yoke of overcommitment and weakness. *No* can be used to turn a situation from bad to good, from wrong to right. Saying *no* can free you from burdens you don't really need to carry right now. *No* can also allow you to devote the correct amount of attention and effort to God's priorities in your life.

When you read the title of this nugget, past experiences and present situations probably came to mind. You probably recalled many situations in which *no* or *not right now* would have been the right answer. Don’t put yourself through that kind of stress in the future. Learn the power of *no*.

Yes and *no* are the two most important words you will ever say. These two words determine your destiny. How and when you say them will affect your entire future.

Saying *no* to lesser things means saying *yes* to priorities in your life.

NUGGET #27

There Is Always Free Food on a Fishhook

Do you know that the best shortcut you can ever take is to do what God says in His timing? Shortcuts outside the will of God invite compromise, and create strife and confusion.

We need to understand that we're long-distance runners, not sprinters. As marathoners, we don't need to look for shortcuts that open the door to compromise.

This old saying is absolutely true: "If you keep your attention on learning the tricks of the trade, you will never learn the trade." Watch out for fads—even spiritual ones—because the letters in "fad" stand for "for a day."

There is a story about a beautiful bird that was known for its great singing. It would sit at the top of a tree and make lovely melodies. One day, a man walking through the woods passed by the tree and heard the beautiful bird. The bird noticed the man and that he was holding a box.

"What do you have in the box?" the bird asked the man.

The man replied that he had large, juicy earthworms in the box. "I will sell you a worm for one of your beautiful feathers," he offered.

The bird pulled out a feather and exchanged it for a worm. He reflected to himself, "Why should I work hard to get worms when it is so easy to get them this way?"

The bird and the man repeated this process over the course of many days, and

soon the bird no longer had any beautiful feathers to pay for worms. Furthermore, he could no longer fly, nor was he pretty. He didn't feel like singing beautiful songs, and he was very unhappy.

Like this foolish bird, we are sometimes tempted to look for shortcuts, ways outside of God's will to get ahead and obtain the results we desire. But as the foolish bird learned, there is a price for taking shortcuts.

Eventually we learn that there is no shortcut to success. One of the hidden truths of life is that the path to the prize is always more valuable than the prize itself. Shortcuts rob us of valuable lessons we need to learn along the way.

When you're presented with a shortcut—a way that is not of God—say no. Be persistent and stick to the path where the Lord has placed you.

NUGGET #28

When You Refuse to Change, You End Up in Chains

You are custom built for change.

An inanimate object like an article of clothing doesn't have the ability to truly change; it grows out of style and becomes unusable. But any one of us is able to change at any point in time, at any age. Changing doesn't always mean doing the opposite. In fact, most of the time, it means adding to or slightly adjusting what already exists.

When the Lord calls us to change, perhaps we may continue to reach toward the same goal, but in a slightly different way. When we refuse to cooperate with the change God requires of us, we make chains of delay that constrain and restrict us.

Here are three things we know about the future: First, it isn't going to be like the past. Second, it isn't going to be exactly the way we think it's going to be. Third, the rate of change will take place faster than we anticipate. The Bible indicates that in the end times—in which we are now living, I believe—changes will occur more quickly than ever before in history.

In 1803 the British created a civil service position that required a man to stand on the Cliffs of Dover with a spyglass. His duty was to be a lookout against invasion. He was to ring a bell if he saw Napoleon Bonaparte's armies approaching. This job was appropriate at the time, but it wasn't eliminated until 1945! How many "spyglasses on the Cliffs of Dover" are we still holding onto in our lives? We shouldn't let the way we are accustomed to doing things interfere

with the opportunities God is providing for us today.

Nothing remains as constant as change. Even the most precious of all gems needs to be chiseled and faceted to achieve its best luster. Don't end up like concrete—all mixed together and permanently set.

In Isaiah the Lord declares: "Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them" (42:9 NKJV). The Bible is a book that tells us how to respond to change ahead of time. You see, I believe we can decide in advance how we will respond to most situations.

When I was coaching basketball many years ago, I told my players that they could prepare for many situations ahead of time. We used to practice as many game situations as we could so they would already know how to respond when they found themselves in the actual situations. This one idea really helped our team to be very successful.

One of the main reasons the Bible was written was to prepare us ahead of time; to teach us how to respond in advance to many of the situations we would encounter in life.

Choose to flow with God's plan. Be sensitive to the new things He is doing. Stay flexible to the Holy Spirit and know that our God directs, adjusts, moves, and corrects us. He is always working to bring us into perfection.

NUGGET #29

Everything Big Starts with Something Little

Every successful person I know is very good at doing the small things well. When Jesus told the parable of the talents, He referred to a servant who had multiplied his master's money. The master responded to the servant, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord" (Matt. 25:23 NKJV). On another occasion, God asked the prophet, "For who has despised the day of small things?" (Zech. 4:10 NKJV). There is power in taking small steps.

Many people aren't moving with God today simply because they were not willing to take the small steps He placed before them. You should leap at the opportunity—no matter how small—to move in the direction the Lord calls you. If you're called to be a youth pastor and are merely sitting at home waiting for an invitation from a large church, it will never come. You need to find the first young person you can, put your arm around him or her, and begin to minister.

Don't be afraid to take small steps. The Bible promises us that if we are faithful in small matters, one day we will be rulers over many larger things.

Many times the impossible is simply the un-acted upon small opportunity

I remember a time in my life when I was frozen with fear over what God had called me to do. It seemed so huge a task that I was unable to bring myself to face it. A friend came to me and spoke two words that broke that paralysis in my life. He said, "Do something!" and walked out of my house. That day I "did something." My first small step started momentum in my life and I began to run

toward the vision God had for me. Those two words were a turning point in my life.

If you're at a point of paralysis in your life because of what God wants you to do, my word for you today is, "Do something!" Don't worry about the goal; just take the steps that take you past the starting point. Soon you'll get to a point of no return. As you climb higher, you'll be able to see much farther.

We should all learn to grow wherever we're planted.

As you begin, don't be afraid. Eric Hoffer said, "Fear of becoming a has-been keeps some people from becoming anything." Every great idea is impossible from where you are starting today. But little steps add up, and they add up rapidly. Most people don't succeed because they are too afraid to even try. They don't begin due to the fear of failure.

Many times the final goal seems so unreachable that we don't even make an effort. But once you've made your decision and boldly taken a step forward, you're more than halfway there. God will begin with you today—no matter what your circumstances.

NUGGET #30

A Chip on the Shoulder Weighs a Ton

When faced with the need to forgive and forget, never make the excuse, “But no one knows what that person did to me!” That may be true, but do you know what unforgiveness will do to you?

What really matters is what happens *in* us, not *to* us. Forgiveness is essential for good human relationships. We can’t give a hug with our arms folded.

Our forgiveness of others assures us of God’s forgiveness of us. Jesus said, “If you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins” (Matt. 6:14-15). The weight of unforgiveness greatly drags us down. It’s a tremendous load to carry in the race we’re called to run.

Unforgiveness leads to bitterness, which is a deadly misuse of energy. Pondering a negative situation and plotting how to get even divert a great amount of brain power away from productive thinking. If we keep burning bridges we’ll become isolated and alone, and we’ll deal with strangers and enemies the rest of our lives. Let’s build bridges, not burn them.

Vengeance is a poor traveling companion. Every Christian is called to a life of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18). Trying to get even wastes time and results in unhappiness.

Working with churches throughout America, I have found unforgiveness in every stagnating situation. And conversely, I have found that growing churches talk about future progress, not past problems.

Never underestimate the power of forgiveness to free you to fulfill your calling. Forgiveness is the one power you have over a person who slanders or criticizes you. The farther you walk in forgiveness, the greater the distance you put between yourself and the negative situation.

Forgiveness gives you a spring in your spiritual walk and a second wind in the race of life.

NUGGET #31

Never Surrender Your Dream to Noisy Negatives

Nobody can ever make you feel average without your permission. Ingratitude and criticism are going to come as part of the price you'll pay for leaping past mediocrity.

After healing the ten lepers, even Jesus Himself was thanked by only one of them, and He was perfect! Don't be surprised by ingratitude.

If you move with God, you will be criticized. The only way to avoid criticism is to do nothing and be nothing. Those who get things done inevitably stir up criticism.

The Bible offers this great promise concerning criticism: The truth always outlives a lie. This fact is backed by Proverbs. "The truthful lip shall be established forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment" (12:19 NKJV). We may boldly say, "The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Heb. 13:6 KJV)!

Never judge people by what their enemies say about them. Kenneth Tynan provides the best description of a critic I've ever heard: "A critic is a man who knows the way but can't drive the car." We are not called to respond to criticism; we are called to respond to God. Often criticism will present the best platform from which to proclaim the truth.

Most of the time, critical people are either jealous or uninformed and say things that have no impact whatsoever upon truth. A famous anonymous saying describes this situation perfectly: "It is useless for the sheep to pass resolutions

in favor of vegetarianism while the wolf remains of a different opinion.”

If what you say and do is of God, it doesn’t make any difference if every other person on the face of the earth criticizes you. Likewise, if what you are doing is not of God, nothing other people say will make it right.

Pay no attention to negative criticism. “Trust in the Lord, and do good” (Ps. 37:3 NKJV), knowing that in the end what you do in the Lord will be rewarded.

NUGGET #32

Your Problem Is Your Promotion

Every obstacle introduces a person to himself.

A great example of an obstacle in the Bible is the giant Goliath. He brazenly confronted and intimidated the armies of Israel, including the brothers of a young shepherd named David. We know from history David's brothers chose not to do anything about the obstacle before them, but David did. Why? The brothers looked at the obstacle and figured it was too big to hit, but David looked at the obstacle and figured it was too big to miss.

No obstacle leaves you the way it finds you; it changes you for better or worse. It's the way you look at it that makes all the difference. Let each new obstacle take you to the next level in God.

Every obstacle has a limited life span. We worried about things last year that we can't even remember today. Don't believe the devil when he tells you that things will not change, that they will not pass. Every problem has a soft spot.

Obstacles subdue mediocre people, but great leaders rise above them. You and I need to be like the great man who, when asked what helped him overcome the obstacles of life, responded, "The other obstacles." We should be like a kite that rises against the wind.

Many people think most of their obstacles are money-related, but the correct perspective is to know that a problem that can be solved with a checkbook is not really an obstacle; it's an expense.

Someone said that obstacles are what we see when we take our eyes off the goal. Keep your eyes on the goal and remember that you are not alone in your struggle, for “we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

In times of adversity, you don’t have an obstacle; you have a choice. In the midst of unbelievable circumstances, believe.

NUGGET #33

If in Doubt, Don't

One day a hunter came across a bear in the woods. The bear said to the hunter, "I want a full stomach."

The hunter responded, "I want a fur coat."

"Let's compromise," suggested the bear, and then he ate the man. As a result, they both got what they wanted. The bear went away with a full stomach, and the man went away wrapped in fur.

That hunter learned the lesson of compromise. When deciding the lesser of two evils, choose neither.

In Deuteronomy 30:19 the Lord said to His people, "This day I call the heavens and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live." You and I have a choice. Every day we must choose between life and death. We should never settle for anything; we should always seek the best. It is rarely the strong man who urges compromise. A compromise is often more expensive than either of the alternatives.

The call of God is a call to excellence, not to mediocrity. If anything is worth doing, it is worth doing well. If you can't do it with excellence, don't bother. Someone asked, "If you don't have time to do it right, when will you have time to do it over?"

When people allow compromise in one area, it always leaks and begins to affect other areas. It also allows lies, deceit, and error to creep in and take over. I know people who have turned from the Lord completely. Their troubles started

with compromises. They began to give in to little things, which soon became bigger things. It wasn't long before compromise began to infiltrate their personal lives. Eventually it overtook and overwhelmed them.

In Proverbs 4 the writer warns us: "Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established. Do not turn to the right or to the left; remove your foot from evil" (vv. 26-27 NKJV).

Don't allow compromise to creep in and destroy. You can't say, "Well, I'll compromise in this one area, and everything else will be okay." Once it has a foothold, compromise grows and spreads. What you compromise, you lose.

Be a person of integrity. Guard your reputation and the reputation of Jesus Christ and His Church. If the only way others can tell that you're a Christian is from the fish symbol on your business card, do us all a favor and leave it off. Take a stand today against compromise.

NUGGET #34

An Army of Sheep Led by a Lion Would Defeat an Army of Lions Led by a Sheep.

—Old Arab Proverb

What are the actions and attributes of leaders? What is it that makes them different from others?

1. Leaders are always full of praise.

2. Leaders learn to say “thank you” and “please” on the way to the top.

3. Leaders are always growing.

4. Leaders are possessed with dreams.

5. Leaders launch forth before success is certain.

6. Leaders are unafraid of confrontation.

7. Leaders talk about their own mistakes before they talk about someone else’s.

8. Leaders are people of honesty and integrity.

9. Leaders have good reputations.

10. Leaders make others better.

11. Leaders are quick to praise and encourage the smallest amount of improvement.

12. Leaders are genuinely interested in others.

13. Leaders look for and praise someone doing something right.
14. Leaders take others up with them.
15. Leaders respond to their own failures before others have to reveal them.
16. Leaders never allow murmuring from themselves or others.
17. Leaders are specific about what is expected.
18. Leaders hold others accountable.
19. Leaders do what is right rather than what is popular.
20. Leaders are servants.

A leader is a lion, not a sheep.

NUGGET #35

Making Others Better Is a Boomerang

A famous old poem goes like this:

> When days are hot and flies are thick, use horse sense—cooperate.
>
> This is a truth all horses know; they learned it many centuries ago.
>
> One tail on duty at the rear can reach that fly behind the ear.
>
> But two tails when arranged with proper craft can do the job both fore and aft.

We should look for opportunities to help each other.

William Danforth said, “Our most valuable possessions are those which can be shared without lessening; those which when shared multiply. Our least valuable possessions are those which when divided are diminished.”

Somebody saw something in you and reached out to help you. That act of kindness determined where you are today. The person may have been your pastor, a parent, a friend, a teacher, a coach, a neighbor, or just someone who gave you extra money, prayers, good advice, or the right equipment and supplies. That individual had the foresight and the resources to invest in you and to take a risk on your future.

I have a challenge for you. Take a few minutes this week and send a note to people who have greatly affected your life. Also, take a few minutes to help someone else get ahead. You will find this to be one of the most satisfying experiences you’ve had in a long time.

A verse in Proverbs is one of my favorite verses. It says, “Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in the power of your hand to do so” (3:27 NKJV). You have something in your possession that can bless someone. Maybe it’s a timely word, a much-needed piece of advice, a monetary gift to meet a need, or a simple thank you for a job well done.

Choosing God’s will in our own lives makes those around us better. Invest in somebody today. Believe in that person. Offer support and encouragement. Help that person rise to another level.

Try it; you’ll like it! You’ll also benefit from it! And that good thing you’ve given to others might just come flying back to you too.

NUGGET #36

People Are Born Originals but Most Die Copies

The call on your life is not a copy. It is unique to you and you alone.

In this day of peer pressure, trends, and fads, we need to realize that every person has been custom made by God the Creator. Each of us has a distinctive call. It's to be ourselves.

Because I do a lot of work with churches and businesses, I come into contact with many different types of people. One time I talked over the phone with a pastor whom I had never met and who did not know me personally. We agreed that I would visit his church as a consultant. As we were closing our conversation and were setting a time to meet at the local airport, he asked me, "How will I know you when you get off the plane?"

"Oh, don't worry, Pastor, I'll know you," I responded jokingly. "All you pastors look alike."

The point of this humorous story is that you must be the person God has made *you* to be.

Our standard is God's unique plan and design for our lives. How the Lord chooses to deal with others has nothing to do with His call for each of us individually. Average people compare themselves with others, but we should always compare ourselves with what God has called us to be and what His Word says.

You and I can always find someone richer than we are, poorer than we are, or more or less able than we are. But how other people are, what they have, and

what happens in their lives have no effect upon our call. In Galatians we are admonished, “Let everyone be sure that he is doing his very best, for then he will have the personal satisfaction of work well done, and won’t need to compare himself with someone else” (6:4 TLB).

God made you a certain way. You are unique. You are one of a kind. To copy others is to cheat yourself out of the fullness of what God has called you to be and to do.

So choose to accept and become the person God has made you to be. Tap into the originality and creative genius of God in your life.

NUGGET #37

Ten Truisms That Aren't True

1. *The way to guarantee success is to work smarter, not harder*.

This is a losing idea. You will find that effective leaders do both. They work smarter, and they work harder.

2. *Activity equals accomplishment*.

Activity is not accomplishment. Hard work is not results. We should not ask ourselves whether or not we're busy, but what we're busy about. We serve a God who is interested in results.

3. *Take care of things, and they will take care of you*.

We should not take care; we should take control. If you don't take control of your own life, somebody else will.

4. *Never say never*.

It's better to say, "Seldom say never and only when you really mean it."

5. *Don't waste (kill) time*.

Although this truism expresses a good thought, it isn't completely accurate. When you waste your time, you waste your life.

6. *If it's not broke, don't fix it*.

Even when things are working, they still can be improved.

7. *What you see is what you get*.

We Christians are commanded to be moved, not by what we see, but by the

Word of God. We are to see the unseen in every situation.

8. *He is a self-made man*.

There is no such thing. A person can succeed only with the help of God and others.

9. *Talk is cheap*.

Talk is very expensive. What people say is ultimately what they get and what they pay for.

10. *Practice makes perfect*.

No, perfect practice makes perfect. Wrong practice leads to wrong habits. Perfect practice leads to perfect action. Make sure that whatever you do on a regular basis is right.

PART III:
Looking Upward

NUGGET #38

Stop Every Day and Look at the Size of God

Who is God? What is His personality? What are His character traits?

According to the Bible, He is everlasting, just, caring, holy, divine, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, and sovereign. He is light, perfection, abundance, salvation, wisdom, and love. He is our creator, savior, deliverer, redeemer, provider, healer, advocate, and friend. Never forget who lives inside you: “The Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods” (Ps. 95:3).

I often travel by air and one of the benefits is the glimpse I get of God’s perspective. I like looking at my challenges from 37,000 feet above the earth. I can see that no problem is too large for God’s intervention, and marvel that no person is too small for God’s attention.

God is always able. If you don’t need miracles, you don’t need God. Dave Bordon, a friend of mine, said it best: “I don’t understand the situation, but I understand God.”

God likens our life in Him to seedtime and harvest. Do you realize how miraculous that is? Let me give you a conservative example: Suppose one kernel of corn produces one stalk with two ears, each ear having two hundred kernels. From those four hundred kernels come four hundred stalks with 160,000 kernels. This huge harvest is a result of one kernel planted only one season earlier.

The miraculous realm of God involves multiplication, not addition.

Our confession to the Lord should be Jeremiah 32:17: “Ah, Sovereign Lord,

you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.”

God is bigger than _____. (Fill in the blank for your own life.)

NUGGET #39

Ideas Go Away, but Direction Stays

How do you know the difference between ideas that come to your mind and direction from God?

There is a persistency to direction. The Bible says, “Many are the plans in a person’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails” (Prov. 19:21). In Psalm 32 the Lord promises, “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye” (v. 8 NKJV).

Direction is a stream with banks. It keeps us from wandering aimlessly and spilling into areas we don’t need to be involved in. When we know what God wants us to do, then we can have total confidence that what we are attempting is right and that God is on our side.

Direction is a matter of fact; ideas are a matter of opinion. Direction from God is impossible to follow without His involvement.

Direction is the mother of divine discomfort. Divine discomfort is a sense that God wants to direct us, a stirring so that we are never totally satisfied with where we are in God or what we’re doing for Him. If you think you’ve “arrived” with God, beware. There is always room for growth.

We should be known as a people with a mission, not as a people just fishin’. Evangelist R.W. Schambach put it this way: “Be called and sent, not up and went.” We are a people with a purpose, not a problem.

In Colossians the apostle Paul wrote, “Giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has

delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love" (1:12-13 NKJV).

Be aware of areas *out* of which God is calling you and *into* which He is calling you. There is a difference between God's will *in* our lives and God's will *for* our lives. God's will for our lives includes those things that He intends for every person—salvation, strength, health, peace, joy, etc. But God's will in our lives is unique to each individual. One person may be called to live in one place for life while another is called to move six times within ten years.

Never be afraid of the light of God's direction. Maurice Freehill asked, "Who is more foolish, a child afraid of the dark or the man afraid of the light?" Wherever God guides, He provides. And whom God calls, He appoints and anoints to do the work.

Lay hold of those persistent directions in your life and tap into the power of God's will for you.

NUGGET #40

Retreat to Advance

Sometimes the most important thing we can do is get away to a peaceful, God-filled spot.

This is one of the most powerful concepts I have incorporated into my life. Right now I'm writing this book in a cabin on a hill overlooking a beautiful lake, miles away from the nearest city.

Where is that spot for you? It may be a certain room in your home, a spot on a lake nearby, or maybe at the back of the sanctuary of your church. It's somewhere you don't normally spend much time.

When we draw away for a time, we can see and hear much more clearly about how to go ahead. Jesus did this many times during His earthly life, especially just before and after major decisions. The Bible says, "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength" (Isa. 30:15 NKJV). There's something invigorating and renewing about retreating to a quiet place of rest and peace.

Silence is an environment in which great ideas are birthed.

There are times when we should not see people; times when we should direct our whole attention toward God. I believe that we should have a place of refuge, a place out of the normal scope of living, a place where we can retreat to advance and focus on the Lord.

It's important to intently associate with your loftiest dreams as often as you can. Find a place where you can do that in privacy and comfort. In Isaiah we read, "But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall

walk and not faint” (40:31 NKJV). Learn to wait upon the Lord.

Make a regular appointment with yourself; it will be one of the most important appointments you keep during the course of a week or a month. Choose to retreat to advance. See how much farther you move forward with God as a result.

NUGGET #41

It's as Important to Know What God Can't Do as It Is to Know What He Can Do

1. God cannot lie.
2. God cannot change.
3. God cannot recall our sins after we've asked for forgiveness.
4. God cannot be the author of confusion.
5. God cannot leave us or forsake us.
6. God cannot go back on His promises.
7. God cannot revoke His gifts.
8. God cannot be pleased without faith.
9. God cannot be defeated.
10. God cannot be too big for our problems.
11. God cannot be too little for our problems.
12. God cannot prefer one person over another.
13. God cannot break His covenant.
14. God cannot revoke His calling.

15. God cannot be unjust.
16. God cannot do anything contrary to Scripture.
17. God cannot bless a lie.
18. God cannot love sin.
19. God cannot give anything to a double-minded man.
20. God cannot be forced into an impossible situation.
21. God cannot ignore the praises of His people.
22. God cannot be our problem.
23. God cannot be overcome by the world.
24. God cannot be late.
25. God cannot be neutral.
26. God cannot be weak.
27. God cannot bless doubt.
28. God cannot withhold wisdom from those who ask in faith.

NUGGET #42

Have a Ready Will and Walk, Not Idle Time and Talk

Acting on God's will is like riding a bicycle; if you don't go on, you go off!

Once we know God's will and timing, we should instantly obey, taking action without delay. When God is telling us to do something now, delay is sin. I have found this to be true: the longer we take to act on whatever God wants us to do, the more unclear His directives become. We need to make sure we're on God's interstate highway and not in a cul-de-sac.

Ours is a God of velocity. Velocity is all about timing and direction. Since these two always go together, it's never wise to act upon only one without the other. Jumping at the first opportunity seldom leads to a happy landing. In this proverb, Solomon tells us, "Do not go out in a hurry to argue. Or what will you do in the end, when your neighbor puts you to shame?" (Prov. 25:8 NLV). Even the right direction taken at the wrong time is a bad decision.

A famous saying holds that people can be divided into three groups: 1) those who make things happen, 2) those who watch things happen, and 3) those who wonder what's happening. Most people miss out on God's best in their lives because they aren't prepared. The Bible advises us to be prepared continually. The apostle Paul exhorts us to "be ready in season and out of season" (2 Tim. 4:2 NKJV).

So, say yes to God, now. Seek his timing…and direction. When you find both and act accordingly, you'll find yourself right where you want to be.

Be ready! He wants to direct your path at the right time in the best direction.

NUGGET #43

The Bible Is a Book of Directions, Not Suggestions

The Bible does not offer suggestions. Instead, it tells us:

1. To be in right relationship with our friends (Matt. 5:24)
2. To follow the rule of peace (Col. 3:15)
3. Not to get even (1 Thess. 5:15)
4. To be an example to others (1 Tim. 4:12)
5. To be abounding, steadfast, and immovable (1 Cor. 15:58)
6. To renew our minds (Rom. 12:2)
7. To separate ourselves from unclean things (2 Cor. 6:17)
8. To be content with what we have (Heb. 13:5)
9. To be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18)
10. To have no fear of what man can do to us (Luke 12:4)
11. Not to be like the world (Rom. 12:2)
12. To avoid greed and envy (Heb. 13:5)
13. To be patient with all people (1 Thess. 5:14)
14. Not to quit (2 Thess. 3:13)
15. To be people of quality (Heb. 6:12)

16. To beware of false prophets (Matt. 7:15)
17. To avoid wrong conversation (1 Tim. 6:20)
18. Not to quench the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19)
19. To abstain from all lust of the flesh (1 Pet. 2:11)
20. To teach our children about the Lord (Eph. 6:4)
21. To cast all our cares upon the Lord (1 Pet. 5:7)
22. To avoid murmuring and disputing (Phil. 2:14)
23. To give thanks in everything (1 Thess. 5:18)
24. To give no place to the devil (Eph. 4:27)
25. Not to grieve the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30)
26. To honor our parents (Eph. 6:2, Matt. 19:19)
27. To submit ourselves to God (James 4:7)
28. To let men see our good works (Matt. 5:16)
29. To resist the devil (James 4:7)
30. To put on the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:11)
31. To humble ourselves (James 4:10)
32. To walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:25)
33. To cast down vain imaginations (2 Cor. 10:5)
34. To come boldly to God (Heb. 4:16)
35. To seek God’s kingdom and righteousness (Matt. 6:33)
36. Not to forsake the assembling of ourselves (Heb. 10:25)
37. To look to Jesus (Heb. 12:2)
38. To be in agreement (Matt. 18:19)
39. Not to cause others to stumble (Rom. 14:13)
40. To bless those who persecute us (Matt. 5:44)
41. To redeem the time (Eph. 5:16)

42. Not to be ashamed of the gospel of Jesus (Rom. 1:16)

43. To have confidence in God (Heb. 10:35)

44. To worship decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40)

45. To do all to God’s glory (1 Cor. 10:31)

NUGGET #44

God's Call Is Heard, Not Seen

Every good opportunity that presents itself isn't necessarily God's will for us. Many times circumstances line up, and everything looks good; yet, it doesn't seem right. In such cases, we need to hear from God. That's why I say that divine direction is really heard and not seen. We should be more interested in the unseen than in the seen.

The only safe way to decide which direction to go is to distinguish between the voices we hear: God's, our own, and the devil's.

Learn to distinguish between these three to eliminate foggy areas in life that blind you. This skill is a key to being able to see and think clearly. Like natural fog, spiritual fog is very dangerous to drive through. Stay in the clear by knowing what God's Word says. It perfectly reflects His voice and helps you discern whether words from other sources are true.

We should build on what we hear on the inside, not on what we see on the outside. There's a big difference between having an ability to do something and being called and anointed to do it. You may have seen someone in church who has an ability to sing, but that talent isn't necessarily evidence that the person has been called by God to the life of a singer. A gift is not a call.

I am not suggesting that God isn't directing us to use our abilities. But ability shouldn't be the only criterion for deciding whether or not we make a particular choice. Not only does the Lord give us a road map, but He also provides direction signals, information signs, a vehicle, fuel, and divine direction.

We need to be sensitive to what lies in the unseen. Not realizing what lay just beneath their feet, many people have walked right over rich pools of oil or veins of gold. Their vision was too limited. They saw only the ground, not the treasure hidden in it.

Look beyond what you see with your natural eyes. Listen with your spiritual ears. Keep your antenna up for God’s perfect direction in your life.

NUGGET #45

It Is More Valuable to Seek God's Presence than to Seek His Presents

Yes, God wants to bless you, but He also wants you to experience His presence. Something wonderful happens every time you experience the presence of God. Here are three of the benefits the Bible gives from seeking His presence.

The first benefit is joy. In Psalm 16:11 David said of the Lord, "You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." We can't help but experience great joy in our lives when we're in the presence of the Lord.

A second benefit of seeking God's presence is the great light it provides. In Psalm 89:15, we read, "Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, Lord." Wherever God is, there is great illumination. If there is a dark area in your life, an area in which you are having difficulty seeing clearly, invite the presence of the Lord into that area. If you're having problems with your work, invite God to your job. If you're having difficulty at home, invite God into your home. The mere presence of God will bring illumination and cause all darkness to leave. It will shed great light on your path.

A third benefit of seeking His presence is God's divine protection. "You shall hide them in the secret place of Your presence from the plots of man; You shall keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues" (Ps. 31:20 NKJV). Thank God for His divine protection and shelter in our lives! Everyone needs a

hiding place, a place of safety and refuge. The presence of God provides a shelter to keep us from evil plans and words. When you're troubled by the actions and words of others, invite God's presence into those circumstances. He will be a shelter, a hiding place, for you.

Jesus said, "My peace I give to you" (John 14:27 NKJV). You'll find great peace and rest in the presence of God. Trouble, nervousness, anxiety, unrest—all these flee in the presence of the Lord.

Invite God's presence everywhere you are. James 4:8 promises, "Come near to God and he will come near to you." He will encamp around you every minute and be with you in every situation of life. In His presence you will find great joy and light, divine protection, peace, and rest.

NUGGET #46

When Wisdom Reigns, It Pours

Expect wisdom from God.

The Bible says, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5 NKJV).

When you’ve heard God’s voice, you’ve heard His wisdom. Thank God for His powerful wisdom; it forces a passage through the strongest barriers.

Wisdom is seeing everything from God’s perspective. It is knowing when and how to use the knowledge that comes from the Lord. An old adage says, “He who knows nothing, doubts nothing.” I say, he who knows the truth has a solid basis for his belief.

We have available to us the wisdom of the Creator of the universe. So few drink at the fountain of His wisdom; most just rinse out their mouths. Many try to live without the wisdom of the Bread of Life, but they will die in their efforts.

The world doesn’t spend billions of dollars for wisdom; it spends billions in search of wisdom. Yet, wisdom is readily available to everyone who seeks its divine source.

Here are ten ways to gain godly wisdom:

1. Fear God (Ps. 111:10).

2. Please God (Eccl. 2:26).

3. Hear God (Prov. 2:6).

4. Look to God (Prov. 3:13).

5. Choose God’s way (Prov. 8:10-11).

6. Be humble before God (Prov. 11:2).

7. Take God’s advice (Prov. 13:10).

8. Receive God’s correction (Prov. 3:12).

9. Pray to God (Eph. 1:16-17).

10. Know the Son of God (1 Cor. 1:30).

NUGGET #47

Stand Tall by Falling to Your Knees

The strongest action you can take in any situation is to go to your knees and ask God for help. Whatever is worth worrying about is certainly worth praying about. Prayer unlocks God's treasure chest of great ideas.

One of my favorite prayers is only one word: *Help!*

"Help, help, help!"

When we pray, we must simultaneously be willing to take the action that God directs in answer to our prayer.

Four kinds of prayer are:

Petition: "Father, I need."

Intercession: "God, help."

Praise and thanksgiving: "Thanks, Lord!"

Conversation: "Good morning, Father."

In Philippians 4:6-7 the apostle Paul counsels us, "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." And in Colossians 4:2 he says, "Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful."

Here are twelve benefits of prayer:

1. Prayer defeats the devil (Matt. 18:18).
2. Prayer saves the unbeliever (Acts 2:21).
3. Prayer edifies the believer (Jude v. 20).
4. Prayer sends laborers into the harvest (Matt. 9:38).
5. Prayer heals the sick (James 5:13-15).
6. Prayer overcomes the impossible (Matt. 21:22).
7. Prayer changes the natural (James 5:17-18).
8. Prayer brings the right things to pass (Matt. 7:7-11).
9. Prayer imparts wisdom (James 1:5).
10. Prayer brings peace (Phil. 4:5-7).
11. Prayer guards against temptation (Matt. 26:41).
12. Prayer reveals God’s answers (Luke 11:9-10).

NUGGET #48

Hearing Tells You the Music Is Playing; Listening Tells You What the Song Is Saying

Hearing something is of little value; we must listen in order to understand. Unfortunately, one of our least developed skills is listening. There are really two different kinds of listening. There is human listening which is interaction with other people, and there is spiritual listening which is interaction with God.

It has been said, “Men are born with two ears but only one tongue, which indicates that they were meant to listen twice as much as they talk.” In human communication, leaders should always monopolize the listening. What we learn about another person will always result in a greater reward than what we tell him or her about ourselves.

We need to learn to listen and observe aggressively. We must try harder to truly listen and to not just hear.

In regard to spiritual listening, Proverbs 8:34-35 quotes wisdom, who says, “Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway. For whoever finds me finds life and receives favor from the Lord.”

Valuable wisdom and supernatural favor are to be gained by listening.

Proverbs 15:31 says, “He who listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise.” Listening allows us to maintain a teachable spirit. Listening increases our “teach-ability.” Those who give us life-giving rebukes can be great

blessings to us.

The Bible teaches that we are to be quick to listen and slow to speak (James 1:19). We must never listen passively, especially to God. If we resist hearing, a hardening can take place in our lives. Callousness can develop. In Luke 16:31 Jesus said of a certain group of people, “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.” The more we resist listening to the voice of God, the less fine-tuned our hearing becomes.

Look at the results of spiritual hearing, as we see in Luke 8:15. This passage relates to the parable of the sower: “The seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.” Harvest is associated not only with persevering and good seed in good soil, but also with those people who hear the Word of God and retain it.

Fine-tune your natural and spiritual ears to listen and learn.

NUGGET #49

God Is Not Your Problem; He's Your Answer

Some time ago I was eating at a Mexican fast-food restaurant. As I stood in line for service, I noticed in front of me a very poor elderly lady who looked like a street person. I concluded this because she was carrying a grocery bag filled to the top with what looked like all of her possessions in the world. When it was her turn to order, she asked for a drink of water and one taco.

I couldn't help but observe her and be moved with compassion for her. Shortly after I began my meal, I walked over to her and asked if I could buy her some more food to eat. She looked at me and angrily said, "Who are you!"

"Just a guy who wants to help," I responded.

She ignored me, so I sat back down in my booth. We both finished our meals and got up to leave at about the same time. As she began to walk out of the restaurant, I followed her because I felt led to give her some money. In the parking lot, I approached her and offered her some cash.

Her only response was, "Stop bothering me!" Then she stormed off.

Immediately the Lord spoke this to my heart: "That's the way my people respond to me."

God up in heaven wants to pour out a blessing and we respond by saying, "Who are You? What do You want from me?" The Lord, being the gracious God that He is, continues to try to bless us. Yet, we react by saying, "Stop bothering me! I'll do this myself." Missing out on the rich blessings of the Lord, we walk away, just as this lady did.

It isn’t the absence of problems that gives us peace; it’s God who is with us in the problems.

In Romans 8:38-39 the apostle Paul wrote, “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” In verse 31 he declared, “What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?” A paraphrase might be, “If God is for us, who cares who is against us?”

Thank God that we can, without hesitation and with full confidence, lean on His eternal faithfulness.

NUGGET #50

Learn the Alphabet for Success

A Action

B Belief

C Commitment

D Direction

E Enthusiasm

F Faith

G Goals

H Happiness

I Inspiration

J Judgment

K Knowledge

L Love

M Motivation

N Nonconformity

O Obedience

P Persistence

Q Quality

R Righteousness

S Steadfastness

T Thankfulness

U Uniqueness

V Vision

W Wisdom

X (E)xcellence

Y Yieldedness

Z Zeal

NUGGET #51

The Measure of a Man Is Not in What He Does on Sunday, but in Who He Is Monday through Saturday

God wants you to walk every day in the same closeness, strength, joy, and direction you experience with Him on Sunday. You don't have to leave that atmosphere. God is with you…period. Every day. The devil wants to ambush you by bringing to your mind thoughts of fear, doubt, unbelief, and destruction.

Let's guard our minds and hearts. As spiritual creatures, we walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). We are commanded to live in the Spirit, not in selfish human desires.

People whose eyes, ears, and minds are directed toward the world find it difficult to hear God speaking to them. The Lord wants to talk to you at work, at lunch, at play—everywhere you go. Some of my greatest revelations from God have come, not in my prayer closet, but in the midst of my everyday life, while doing normal, everyday things.

Our inner man is always willing, but our humanity resists. That's what Jesus meant when He said to His disciples, "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:41 NKJV).

The advantage of walking in the Spirit is that it keeps us on the right path. In Galatians 5:16-17 the apostle Paul wrote, "So I say, live by the Spirit, and you

will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”

Thank God that our relationship with Him is not a sometimes affair; it’s an all-the-time union! With the words of the old hymn, I say, “He leadeth me! O blessed thought!” God is with you!

NUGGET #52

God Will Use You Right Where You Are Today

You don’t need to do anything else for God to begin to use you now. You don’t have to read another book, listen to another teaching, memorize another Scripture, plant another seed gift, or repeat another creed or confession. You don’t even need to attend another church service before God can begin to make use of you.

God uses willing vessels, not brimming vessels. Throughout the Bible, in order to fulfill His plans for the earth, God used many people from all walks of life:

1. Matthew, a government employee who became an apostle
2. Gideon, a common laborer who became a valiant leader of men
3. Jacob, a deceiver whose name became Israel
4. Deborah, a housewife who became a judge
5. Moses, a stutterer who became a deliverer
6. Jeremiah, a child who fearlessly spoke the Word of the Lord
7. Aaron, a servant who became God’s spokesman
8. Nicodemus, a Pharisee who became a defender of the faith
9. David, a shepherd boy who became a king
10. Hosea, a marital failure who prophesied to save Israel

11. Joseph, a prisoner who became prime minister

12. Esther, an orphan who became a queen

13. Elijah, a homely man who became a mighty prophet

14. Joshua, an assistant who became a conqueror

15. James and John, fishermen who became close disciples of Christ and were known as “sons of thunder”

16. Abraham, a nomad who became the father of many nations

17. Peter, a businessman who became a great evangelist

18. Jacob, a refugee who became the father of the twelve tribes of Israel

19. John the Baptist, a vagabond who became the forerunner of Jesus

20. Mary, an unknown virgin who gave birth to the Son of God

21. Nehemiah, a cupbearer who built the wall of Jerusalem

22. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, Hebrew exiles who became great leaders of the nation of Babylon

23. Hezekiah, an idolatrous father’s son, who became a king renowned for doing right in the sight of the Lord

24. Isaiah, a man of unclean lips who prophesied the birth of God’s Messiah

25. Paul, a persecutor who became the greatest missionary in history and the author of two-thirds of the New Testament

All God needs in order to use you is all of you!

A Final Word

Be the whole person God called you to be. Don’t settle for anything less. Don’t look back. Look forward and decide today to take steps toward His plan for your life.

And remember 1 Thessalonians 5:24: “The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.”

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John Mason is a national best-selling author, minister, executive author coach, and noted speaker. He's the founder and president of Insight International and Insight Publishing Group, organizations dedicated to helping people reach their dreams and fulfill their God-given destinies.

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