



TAKE  
YOUR  
LIFE  
BACK

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DAY BY DAY

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*Inspiration to Live Free  
One Day at a Time*

STEPHEN ARTERBURN, M.Ed.  
DAVID STOOP, Ph.D.

Authors of the #1-bestselling Life Recovery resources

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*Take Your Life Back Day by Day: Inspiration to Live Free One Day at a Time*

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Printed in the United States of America

22 21 20 19 18 17 16  
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

## INTRODUCTION

By opening this devotional, you have revealed some positive things about yourself. First, you realize that your life could be better and you know that something needs to change in order for that to happen. You also understand that taking your life back is a day-by-day process, and it helps to get some encouragement and reinforcement along the way. We're happy to join you on this journey and offer some hope and some practical ideas along the way. Thank you for allowing us an opportunity to help you.

God created you for freedom, joy, and peace. For meaningful relationships and productive work. But somewhere in your past you got off track. Because of your own sin, or sins committed against you—abuse, neglect, bad choices, misunderstandings—you lost the sense of freedom and peace that God intends for you. You may have developed unhealthy habits and coping mechanisms that cause more problems than they solve. Instead of responding appropriately to what life sends your way, you may react blindly. You worry about what others think. You carry a heavy weight of guilt, shame, or anger.

You know all too well what the apostle Paul meant when he said, “I don’t really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don’t do it. Instead, I do what I hate. . . . I want to do what is good, but I don’t. I don’t want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway.”\* Sometimes it feels as if your life isn’t your own anymore.

But that can change. With God’s help, you can take your life back. You can experience healing for your pain and recovery from an unhealthy reactive

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\* Romans 7:15, 19

lifestyle. But it won't happen all at once. It's a daily journey, not a one-time experience. We created this devotional to be a companion on the road to recovery. It combines nuggets of encouragement with wisdom from God's Word, some questions to stimulate thought, and a suggested prayer to pull you closer to the Source of all true healing.

If you haven't already, we suggest that you also read our book *Take Your Life Back*, which explains many of the concepts and strategies we refer to in this devotional. We have also created a *Take Your Life Back Workbook*, which will guide you through a five-week study and can be used for personal reflection or as the basis for a group discussion. The purpose for the *Take Your Life Back* series is to help you find healing, purpose, and meaning in life, and to inspire you to do precisely what the title suggests.

This 365-day devotional is designed to give you daily encouragement, wisdom, and insight as you progress toward wholeness. Our hope is that you will come to realize that real and lasting change is not only worth *pursuing*, but it is also *achievable*. We all must learn how to stop *reacting* to life and begin to *respond* appropriately instead. If you're ready to take your life back, this devotional will be your daily companion and encourager along the way.

May God greatly bless you, and may you experience his presence as you read the daily devotions and begin to experience the life you were born to live.

## Looking Ahead

*Go in peace . . . for the LORD is watching over your journey.*

JUDGES 18:6

As you embark on this day-by-day journey toward taking your life back, it might help to take a quick look at your desired destination. Though you will never achieve perfection in this world, you can reach a place where you are happier, healthier, and more attuned to God than you ever thought possible.

What will your life look like when you have taken it back? You will feel relatively safe and confident, not tossed to and fro by the whims of other people or by the extremes of your own emotions. Instead of blindly reacting to every little thing that might threaten your comfort or safety, you'll respond appropriately and effectively.

As you discover your real self and begin to live comfortably without pretense or façades, you will develop standards that you intend to keep and expect others to honor. You'll have a good sense of where you end and others begin, and you'll be capable of healthy attachments. You'll give other people grace for their imperfections, but not allow those imperfections to hurt or dominate you. You'll be free to be yourself, free to choose, free to heal, and free to be a healthy, loving adult.

### ASK YOURSELF

- » What are your feelings as you read through this description of the destination? Does it seem possible? Desirable? Why or why not?
  
- » How far along are you on this journey? What choice can you make today to take you further?

### ASK GOD

Heavenly Father, thank you for your gifts of wholeness and healing. I ask for your guidance, your protection, your provision, and most of all your presence as I travel toward becoming the person you created me to be.



## A Tool for the Journey

*So we can say with confidence, “The LORD is my helper, so I will have no fear. What can mere people do to me?” Remember your leaders who taught you the word of God. Think of all the good that has come from their lives, and follow the example of their faith.*

HEBREWS 13:6-7

When we’re wounded—as we all inevitably are—we tend to *react* to what happens to us instead of responding in a healthy way.

Our reactivity can take a variety of forms. Some people *act out* in rebellion and anger. Others *act in* by becoming envious, judgmental, or depressed. Either way, when we’re living reactively, our lives become contingent on what others do and say. But God longs to set us free from our bondage to such dependency. He wants us to take our lives back—to recover from these unhealthy patterns.

The writer of Hebrews offers a valuable tool for our recovery in the form of a question: “What can mere people do to me?” In other words: “What others say and do can no longer affect me in any significant way. In fact, I’m fearless now because instead of reacting to other people, I trust in God to shape my responses.”

When you feel yourself pulled into old patterns, try speaking this verse aloud. It can help you turn reactive living on its head.

### ASK YOURSELF

- » What (if any) reactive patterns do you recognize in yourself?
- » How does turning to God as your Helper change that?

### ASK GOD

Lord, with confidence I say that because you are my Helper, I do not fear. Thank you for the ways you are helping me break free from old patterns and find new life in you.

## Would You Like to Get Well?

*One of the men lying there had been sick for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him and knew he had been ill for a long time, he asked him, "Would you like to get well?"*

JOHN 5:5-6

It sounded like a no-brainer. Of course the sick man wanted to get well.

Or did he?

Jesus knew that being healed would change the man's life forever. Begging at the pool was all he knew. All his friends were there. If he was healed, he'd have to leave them and find a new way to support himself. He'd have to learn to care for himself instead of relying on others. In light of all these potential changes, no wonder Jesus asked the man if he really wanted to be healed.

Jesus asks us a similar question: *Do we really want to take our lives back?* Our relationships will shift, and some people in our lives will resist us. We'll have to develop new habits and find a better balance between caring for others and caring for ourselves. A lot will change, and change is almost always difficult, even when the outcome is good.

It's not an idle question: *Do you want to get well?* Be careful how you answer.

### ASK YOURSELF

- » Are you willing to do the work that will be required of you as you take your life back? What part do you think will be the hardest?
- » Who in your life do you think will be the most resistant to your changing? How will you handle that person?

### ASK GOD

Jesus, I do want to get well, but I know that changing isn't easy. Please give me the strength to meet resistance with grace and to persevere. Thank you.

## Grow with Confidence

*This is my command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.*

JOSHUA 1:9

After the death of Moses, Joshua was in charge. His task was huge. The Hebrew people he was leading were about to enter the Promised Land, and they would have to take the land from the current inhabitants. To lead them, Joshua needed all the courage—and encouragement—God could give him. But God told him clearly what to do. He was to obey all the instructions Moses had given him and not deviate from them. Only if he did that, God said, would he “prosper and succeed” (Joshua 1:8). In other words, God said to do the next right thing—and then to keep on doing the next right thing until he achieved success.

The same is true for those of us who are in the process of taking our lives back. We know what to do—heal our inner wounds, repair or replace our broken attachments, and confront our trauma. To do this, we need to be strong and courageous. But God’s promise to us is the same as his promise to Joshua. He will be with us wherever we go in our quest for wholeness.

### ASK YOURSELF

- » Where in your recovery process does your fear tend to rise up and threaten to stop you?
  
- » How can you live more fully in the promise that God will be with you wherever you go?

### ASK GOD

Father God, I need to be strong and courageous, but I get stymied by my fear. Help me to face my fear and overcome the barriers to my recovery.

## Surefooted Faith

*Give your burdens to the LORD, and he will take care of you.*

*He will not permit the godly to slip and fall.*

PSALM 55:22

Most of the psalms written by David were expressions of his troubles and affirmations of his faith. And David had enough troubles (and enough faith) to last many lifetimes.

Life was turbulent for David as a young man. He spent more than twenty years running for his life from King Saul and other enemies. He lived in caves and never knew whom he could trust. Later, as king, he endured multiple disappointments, including the rebellion and death of a beloved son. When David advises us to give our burdens to the Lord, he knows what he's talking about.

But David also got into some serious sin during his lifetime. He even had an adulterous affair and arranged for his lover's husband to be killed. How could he say that God doesn't let the godly slip and fall?

David slipped when he *stopped* giving his burdens to the Lord and tried to manage life on his own. But when he confessed his sin and returned to relying on God—to being “godly”—he found his footing again.

### ASK YOURSELF

- » Are you anxious about situations you can't control? How can you give that burden to the Lord?
- » Have you ever slipped and fallen and felt that getting up was impossible? How did you finally find your footing?

### ASK GOD

Dear God, I want to be strong and surefooted as I walk through this life. Remind me that this will never happen unless I give you my burdens and trust in your care. Help my understanding of you to grow each day so that I can experience you fully.

## The Grown-Up Alternative

*When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child.*

*But when I grew up, I put away childish things.*

1 CORINTHIANS 13:11

Counselors often ask their clients how old they feel on the inside, especially when in the presence of a parent, a boss, or some other authority figure. Most people answer that they feel somewhere between four and sixteen years old. And that can be a problem.

If I feel like I'm only eight or ten when I'm in the presence of a parent, part of me is still living as a wounded child, probably because I experienced some kind of emotional injury that left me stuck. So even though I am chronologically an adult, I am still speaking, thinking, and reasoning childishly. To take my life back, I need to address those childhood wounds and grow up mentally and emotionally.

One childish thing many of us do is to try to get another person to validate us and make us feel worthwhile. We give away part of ourselves every time we do that. The grown-up alternative is to remember that we are loved and validated by the Creator, the one who made us in the first place.

### ASK YOURSELF

- » What is it you are seeking when you react as a child? What childhood wounds in you need healing?
- » What does it mean to you to be loved by the Creator of the universe—the one who made you?

### ASK GOD

Loving Father, help me as I go through this day to feel that you love all of me, especially those parts of me that are still childish. Give me patience as I learn more about myself and work to “grow up” the child within me.

## I'm Experiencing a New Life

*Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person.*

*The old life is gone; a new life has begun!*

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

When we acknowledge Jesus as our higher power, we start a new life—one characterized by being loved and accepted instead of being shamed or condemned. But the fullness of this life doesn't come to us automatically.

Notice that Paul says, "A new life has *begun*." It's as if God has erased the slate, giving us a fresh start. But now we must learn new behaviors and attitudes that allow us to take back the life God intended us to experience.

Part of the new life we've begun is learning to care about ourselves as well as others. For too long we have believed that we can care for others only at our own expense. But that makes us feel like we are trying to fill someone else's glass with an empty pitcher. We need God's help to learn how to balance our caring. That's an important way to take our lives back.

### ASK YOURSELF

- » Think of a situation in which you cared for someone else at the cost of your physical, mental, or emotional health. What was your motivation in doing so?
- » What makes it hard for you to practice self-care, to make certain you have something to give?

### ASK GOD

Heavenly Father, you gave so much for me by sending Jesus to die on my behalf. Help me to see how much you value me as a person. Help me to see that you love me no matter what.