

**Never believe a few caring people can't change
the world . . . that's all who ever have.**

—MARGARET MEAD #worldchangerbook

WHY A FIELD GUIDE?



Can I do it and stay sane?

Can I do it without my other priorities slipping?

Can I do it without neglecting the people I love?

—from page 62

Sometimes I wonder if life's greatest challenge is not *finding* your purpose in life, but *surviving* it.

That is why I've created what we're calling *a field guide for staying sane*. It's a map of collected wisdom for navigating the gnawing questions that threaten to sink the world's most passionate people:

How will I manage to keep up this pace long enough to make a difference? And if I do, what will I have sacrificed to get there?

To get any benefit from the content to come, then, it's important to first come to grips with this unfortunate truth. When you are intensely committed to a cause, when you invest your life in your beliefs and convictions for any sustained period of time, you will eventually—to some degree, at some point—encounter hardship. The causes you champion, no matter how pure or how noble, will not be immune to setback.

Even though nearly every human being on the planet is aware of the world's deficits—poverty, violence, oppression, apathy, anxiety, excess—society will not always welcome your ideas for improvement. The world will not always celebrate

the rise of even the most brilliant, compassionate, or selfless people who seek to change it.

Moments of spiritual frustration too big to fathom will come when all of us will wring our hands and wonder at the mystery of a God who does not always intervene to clear the way on our behalf.

We will marvel at the endless lines of people in need, tremble at systemic issues so huge they seem un-dentable, and shed blood, sweat, and tears at the two-steps-forward, one-step-back progress that can leave us wounded and panting for breath from what seems like an always uphill battle.

In the meantime, our task is to learn to live well in the learning curve—to settle in and find a home in the tension between the way things are and the way we hope they will one day be.

We must recognize that being always busy, always tired, always emptied and dried-up creates an emotional poverty God never intended to birth or to hold our most cherished dreams.

Rather than abandon this drive or seek to subdue it, this book suggests wisdom improves every facet of life, every kind of personality, and every type of dream. It suggests that if we can acquire relevant principles and apply them to our circumstances, we can live smarter, love deeper, walk taller, stride more confidently, and enjoy more peace.

In making this claim, please know I don't present these ideas to you with any suggestion that I am a uniquely wise person. No one should give me a seat on the top of a mountain any time soon. In many, many cases, in fact, I prove quite the opposite. I have only stumbled onto wisdom after first

failing miserably or making a variety of foolish or impulsive mistakes.

My hope, then, is you will enjoy and exercise more wisdom than I have and that the coming pages will save you a few bumps and bruises along the way so that you, like me, will wake up to fight another day. If you do and you want to tell me about the part of the world you aim to change, feel free to connect on Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/sarahcunninghampage>) or Twitter (@sarahcunning). I'll even be inviting select readers to share great advice or wisdom they've acquired by guest-posting at my blog (<http://www.sarahcunningham.org>).

And as you're reading, if a quote jumps out to you that you think is worth sharing, whether it's a provided quote or one you draw out of a chapter yourself, we'd love it if you'd help us create a collection of online wisdom by posting it to your social networks using the hashtag #worldchangerbook.

Blessings on your journey, my fellow world changers.



Section 1

WORTH & SUCCESS

**The world has not seen what God will do
through one man who is totally yielded to God.**

—D. L. MOODY #worldchangerbook

THE BEST WAY TO BE PERCEIVED AS LEGITIMATE IS TO BE LEGITIMATE

THOSE WHO BRAG ABOUT THEIR IQ



*The elevator to success is out of order.
You'll have to use the stairs.*

—JOE GIRARD #worldchangerbook

Is your soul swelling with a big, game-changing vision just begging to be adopted by the masses? Is the biggest want, or even need, of your cause or organization that you need exposure? That you need to be heard? be platformed? go viral?

Good for you for having something of substance worth sharing—for bringing something to the world, instead of just sucking the life out of it.

Now please take a number and hop in line.

Sound harsh?

It is.

But, sadly, so is the world.

If I had my choice, I'd give you a microphone. I'd set you up with national press conferences. Pay your way into the Super Bowl ad space. Get your stuff endorsed by A-list celebrities. Start a door-knocking campaign that made sure every

resident in your area knew about the noble sort of things you're sinking your life into.

But I'm not the one in charge of doling out attention or platform in this world.

Here's the thing. As much as the average person might benefit from knowing about the causes we're fighting for, the movers and shakers in our field aren't going to line up around the block to listen to us. Random millionaires aren't going to take the initiative to show up at our door to bankroll us. Zuckerberg isn't going to personally champion our work to help us take the Internet by storm.

Instead, we're going to grapple. We're going to struggle to be heard. We'll have days when we feel like our voice is drowned out by a million others.

And when that happens—when you don't feel legitimized, when your work isn't validated, when people don't listen or seek to really understand what it is you're saying—you have two options.

The first is to wallow in the lack of resources available to you, to grieve the spotlight dancing just out of your reach, and to complain.

But here's another option worth considering.

Want to be seen as a leader in your field? Then get out there and *lead*.

Want to be perceived as being legitimate? Then, the best thing you can do is go out and *be legitimate*.

Not just for a day or a few months or for even a few years. But throw in, invest, show people you're in it for the long haul, that you're going to show up tomorrow, and next week and next month and the month after that. Be present, work hard,

and prove you can be taken seriously as a long-term partner.

Asserting your own validity, especially when you're new on the scene, can make you seem like that socially inept intellectual you run into at a party. The one who tells you the exact results of their IQ test within 60 seconds of meeting them.

But be honest! You don't really want them to tell you they have an IQ of 180, do you? *You want to discover it.*

The same is true for ideas and causes.

It's like King Solomon said—In all toil there is profit, but mere talk tends only to poverty!¹

Is what you're doing as an entrepreneur, a writer, a speaker, a leader in an organization, worth hearing about? Then don't tell people it's worth hearing. Don't whine that people aren't listening. Don't go around telling people how you deserve a bigger platform. Prove you have some good ideas. Write them down. Talk about them with small groups. Serve someone already in leadership. Respect those who've gone before you.

The best way to be heard is to say something worth hearing.

The best way to go viral is to produce something worth sharing.

The best way to get attention is to do something worth noticing.

There is no blank check beyond that.

YOU'RE NOT GIVEN OPPORTUNITY, YOU EARN IT

SETH GODIN'S RED CARPET



*Some critics will write
"Maya Angelou is a natural writer,"
which is right after being a natural heart surgeon.*

—MAYA ANGELOU #worldchangerbook

In my years as a high school teacher, I routinely came across students who weren't happy with the grade they received from me or another teacher.

"It's so stupid!" they would declare. "I can't believe she gave me a D."

And this is when I would give them the standard response that any teacher who hopes to survive must refer back to hundreds of times in any given year.

"Teachers don't *give* you grades, good or bad. You earn them."

Most of us can get a good smirk out of this one. Either we have an entitled child of our own or we can remember how entitled we were as children. But it's amazing, then, how quickly we sometimes forget this perspective as adults.

We see someone, Seth Godin, for example, who becomes a sought-after, nationally platformed speaker, whose expertise is quoted in thousands of newspapers, books, and blogs,

whose books shoot to the top of the bestseller list. And we think, *Wow! The planet just hauled off and gave Seth Godin a world stage.*

And I know why we often get misled this way.

Some journalist, who by the way wasn't around all those late nights Seth Godin worked grueling hours trying to make something of his life, writes a snapshot story of the author's success.

Look what he did! He started giving away his book for free and then everyone wanted it. It catapulted him to dozens of bestsellers.

How simple success was for Seth Godin.

How nice of the world to just hand respect and notoriety over to him like that.

And we fall for it. We think, yes, yes one day—after barely working at all—Seth Godin was just leisurely sitting around on his porch sipping lemonade and an idea came to him. *I'll give my book away for free.* So the next day he did and he was suddenly on the cover of every magazine and his voice mail was full of messages from news producers.

How absolutely ridiculous of us! But how true, right?

The owner and editors of every major media outlet of his time didn't just show up on Seth Godin's doorstep and say, *We'd like to give you fame!*

He earned it.

Now true, our simple success stories have more lure. They're more fun to read. Easier to remember. Why? Because they suggest that maybe the same thing will happen for us. Maybe we will barely have to work at all and then one day

the world will come knocking on our door to invite us to unbridled fame and success!

A fun story, but we can't learn as much from it, can we?

If we really read all of Godin's blog posts, if we really read everything he's said in his speeches and TV appearances and magazine interviews, we'd get a completely different picture. We'd get a picture of a man who investigated the whole world, who ate, drank, and slept ideas, who read every book and article he could get his hands on, who learned from every person who crossed his path, who tried and tried and tried many times without world-recognized success.

Now, that is sort of disappointing, isn't it? So you do have to work hard for success.

But it's also freeing!

No one gave Seth Godin accomplishment. He earned it.

With that realization, you know exactly what to do. Stop hoping the next Seth Godin red carpet is going to roll down your driveway to your door. Get up and go earn your own grade in this world.

THEY DON'T HAVE THE AUTHORITY TO AFFIRM OR NOT AFFIRM US

THE DANGER OF LIVING
OFF PEOPLE'S COMPLIMENTS



*I don't know the key to success,
but the key to failure is trying to please everybody.*

—BILL COSBY #worldchangerbook

*What good are fans?
You can't eat applause for breakfast.*

—BOB DYLAN #worldchangerbook

The cheapest way to stir up good feelings for ourselves is to collect affirmation. Store up compliments. Let “nice sweater” or “great haircut” make us walk a little taller.

Remember nice things said about us, in person or online. Let “he’s a brilliant thinker” or “she’s a talented communicator” make us smile with satisfaction. Glean worth from applause, from awards, from promotions or recognition . . . from all those times someone notices how smart or efficient we are; what we’ve managed to pull off.

These kind of surfacey, impulse-driven good feelings are easy to come by. Post on Twitter or Facebook about having a bad day and three dozen people you knew in high school may come to your emotional rescue.

But things often come cheap because they *are* cheap.

Good feelings derived from affirmation too often unravel at the first sign of disapproval, say when someone mocks our new hairstyle or tells us our prized hipster glasses remind them of a celebrity we can't stand. They become sinkholes in our guts when we learn people thought we rambled on too long or went on too many tangents. They feed an ache to win people over in moments when no one claps, when the room falls silent, when others attack, interrupt, or dismiss us. They subtract from our emotional state on all the days when people don't notice what we're doing or how hard we're working; when people don't like or retweet us or read our blog posts in masses.

Affirmation, it turns out, is a short-lived and shaky refuge.

Depending on it allows the masses to influence our well-being, assigning commentators validity they probably have not earned and do not deserve. It unfairly lures our pool of acquaintances or online followers into a loop where they can skim off the top of us. Meanwhile, we wait for their reactions, reacting (and sometimes overreacting) to how they'll respond, egging them on to inappropriately appoint themselves judges who get to rate and score some one-dimensional expression of who we are.

The irony is they can clap or boo as loud as they want for the three-minute presentation you just gave, without ever really knowing the truly applause-worthy or disapproval-worthy parts of you. "Good talk" or "terrible blog post" is often a sadly detached critique from someone who doesn't really know the first thing about us.

I have come to believe Jesus would pull the carpet out

from under this equation, overturning our tendency to draw worth from this kind of empty critique. When the religious leaders of his time pulled this sort of thing, he wouldn't have it!

"How can you believe," he demanded, "since you accept glory from one another but do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?"²

Is it any different for us? How then can we, we who try to embody the way of Jesus in the modern world, claim to hold God so high and yet still put so much worth on the words of humans?

Addiction to approval can mess with us. It can actually prevent us from knowing and being known, allowing us to get our approval fix too easily and excusing others from bothering to understand us as filled-out, living, breathing human beings. As the people who dig deep for their kids, who persevere to grow through pain, who don't quit even when life gives them reason, who put in time reflecting and growing and becoming time and time again.

To present your fullest self in friendship and draw steadiness and strength from those around you, you often have to be willing to do something pretty tough: let go of the approval of the masses.

WHEN GOD IS INVOLVED, THE BACKUP PLAN CAN BECOME THE ORIGINAL

WHEN GOD WALKED THROUGH
A COVENANT IN TWO FORMS



*Success consists of going from failure
to failure without loss of enthusiasm.*

—WINSTON CHURCHILL #worldchangerbook

I don't doubt God could lead a person to a specific place or a specific task.

I also don't doubt that if and when he prods us forward, we might—in our distractedness—miss his promptings altogether.

But here's what I do doubt: That we're supposed to be anxious about this, worrying about how we might've missed some destiny he pointed us to three years ago and now we're cursed to some lesser path.

I don't buy that God ascribes to that kind of do-or-die mentality.

Even if we miss some sort of cue along the way, I firmly believe God maintains an uninterrupted desire to bless us just as much as he would've had we been more attentive or responsive.

In our human economy, if we don't execute the ideal, the backup plan is usually lesser. It's the best and least taxing secondhand way to get something accomplished, given that we already missed the absolute best path.

It's more work, less rewarding, and may not produce an equally good outcome. But it's the best we've got.

Not God though.

God can insert the backup plan right over the original and weld them together. He can make this draft of the plan—forged from your successes and failures—so productive, so enriching, that it's as if the first plan never existed. Somehow your left turn takes you exactly to where a right turn would've taken you.

My Old Testament professor, Dr. Bailey, bolstered my confidence in this when he described the covenant Abraham entered into with God in Genesis 15.

Here's the CliffsNotes: In Jewish tradition, when two beings entered into an oath, they would split a sacrificial animal into two pieces and walk together between the two halves of the animal.

This was to signify the importance of their vow to each other. It was like saying, *If we don't fulfill our part of the bargain, then the blood of this animal is on our hands. If we fail to follow through, we shed its life for no reason. So break your promise and that abuse is on you.*

But when God made his covenant with Abraham, check out what happened in verse 17.

God appeared in two forms: smoke and fire. And those two forms passed through the two pieces of animals, while Abraham lay in deep sleep.

The Bible doesn't comment on why.

But given what we know about the tradition, it creates a powerful picture of redemptive backup plans.

God didn't have Abraham walk through the pieces alongside him. He didn't make Abraham vow to perfectly keep his covenant to God. Instead, he walked through in two forms, as if perhaps to illustrate that in his grace, and despite our failings, he would keep both parts of the covenant.

God would not only hold up his part of the covenant. But if and when Abraham missed the mark, God wasn't going to abandon his promises. He wouldn't throw down his oath and say, well, Abe, it's on you. You took a left when you promised to take a right.

No, he would still hold up his own part of the covenant.

And he'd guarantee Abraham's part of the covenant too.

He'd forge Abraham's backup plan right back into the original.

PROGRESS IS SOMETIMES TWO STEPS FORWARD

THE THINGS PETER NEVER GOT



*A goal is not always meant to be reached,
it often serves simply as something to aim at.*

—BRUCE LEE #worldchangerbook

You're realizing it now, aren't you?

You've taken on something absolutely huge. And despite your best efforts, the results are a long way from what you had hoped.

You wanted to teach people new skills that reverse a lifetime of conditioning. You wanted to activate society around a cause that hadn't been on previous generations' radars. You wanted to inspire people to press into deeply knowing God and fully embodying his ideals.

But you've done all you can, put in all your energy, and you can't check a single completed task off the list.

Reality has not lined itself up with your specific, stated goals. People are still waltzing about making bad decisions, not always implementing the skills you've taught them. Society is still charging forward, only occasionally pledging some extra pennies to your cause. People are still clocking in and out of Sunday morning services, as if this single hour of programming and community is the end all, beat all of

what spirituality has to offer them.

This is where the head bashing begins, right?

How could this be? we cry!

How could we lay everything on the line and show up day after day and still, so little is changed?

I have a feeling Jesus could relate.

Take Peter, for example.

He was the first guy in, the first guy called off the seashore. He spent all that time by Jesus' side, taking in teaching, handing out bread and fish, really absorbing Leadership 101.

But did he instantly take on the health and focus of Jesus?

Not even close.

It was like his mind was a sieve. He let some things in, but a lot of things just seemed to flow right through him. In one ear and out the other.

He was always shooing the wrong person away, falling into the water, cutting off a soldier's ear. He was telling Jesus not to go to the cross, denying he even knew Jesus, hiding in a house—afraid and not knowing what to expect—even though Jesus had said he'd rise from the dead three days after he was crucified.

Peter, Peter, Peter! Jesus could've bashed his head against the nearest fishing boat. Weren't you standing there all that time? Didn't you hear what I said? Didn't you see what I did? What has all this been for?

But this, even in Peter's case, is not how progress works.

It does not arrive all at once.

It comes in bit by bit.

The urban high schoolers you work with may not graduate from high school and then college, they may not wait until

they have jobs and own a home before they procreate, they may not become model citizens who don't even break the speed limit and may not become pastors or missionaries or small group leaders.

But here is what we must ask ourselves.

Are they better off than the day I met them? Do they know something more than they knew back then?

Did they pick up some wisdom about how to weigh two decisions and make the best one?

Did they begin to claim values—and stand for them—in their own ways?

Did any fruits of the Spirit surface?

We ask the same questions across the board, regardless of our context.

Do the people in our communities know more about a world issue we brought to them than they knew when we started? Are they more aware? Have they contributed to a cause in some way? Have they learned enough about it that they've started mentioning it to others? That they're talking about it online?

What about your church or faith community? Do they know more about Jesus than they did before? Do they now own a Bible? Have they read more of it than they had coming into it? Do they try to pray? Do they pray more? Do they exhibit more kindness, more self-control, purpose?

Are they two steps ahead of where they were?

Well yes, we say. Yes, but we wanted things to be so much different by now. We had bigger plans in mind than this!

That is fantastic you have spoken such big hopes over the

situation. That you've dreamed such full dreams over people's lives.

Perhaps in the short amount of time you've known them, with the resources you had, given the life circumstances they found themselves in, you have been exactly what they needed to get on that outlined path toward greatness. Or, perhaps, if they had already started on their way, you've given exactly the kind of support to keep them moving in the right direction.

You gave.

You contributed.

You encouraged.

It meant something.

Why would we be disappointed we didn't fully save them? That we didn't transform the entire situation altogether, in every way, shape, and form?

Why would we ever have expected that?

Why would we have ever thought that was our job in the first place?

We aren't the Savior in this narrative!

We aren't responsible for the outcome of other people's lives. We aren't responsible for the fate of the entire planet. We're just responsible for what we do with our stretch of time.

We don't have to get them across the finish line, we're just prompting things two steps closer to it.

Perhaps we need to look for the day Peter got the beginnings of what he needed to know to make his journey. For the moment he looked Jesus in the eye and got it right, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

We have to look for those two steps forward and trust that even better things lie ahead in Peter's future.

GOOD MAY JUST BE YOUR NEMESIS

WE DON'T FIGHT GOOD



*Show me a thoroughly satisfied man
and I will show you a failure.*

—THOMAS EDISON #worldchangerbook

We've all got our definitions of good.

Whether it is what our parents would consider good—or what our culture might thrust upon us.

We've all got our benchmarks. What we'd consider “doing all right” by 25 or 30, 40 or 50. Maybe we determine we're doing okay by what kind of house we live in or what kind of luxuries we can afford, what kind of position we hold at work or what life accomplishments we've achieved, what kind of family or friend dynamics we have, how often we travel, how much time we have for entertainment or recreation.

Well, I'm unconventional, we cry.

I've never wanted what those people want.

I'm not some run-of-the-mill office dweller, you know.

I've got dreams.

Visions.

Causes.

But it doesn't matter.

We've got our ideas of good too. What's acceptable for

someone at our age, in our generation, in our region with our skill sets. Maybe it's working for a certain kind of company. Maybe it's being on the right rung in our climb up to lead pastor. Maybe it's doing some freelance work we love on top of our regular work.

So maybe we settle in when we get there.

Whew. We're not embarrassed by the makeup of our life. We're bringing in enough money to scrape by. We've got a job in the general industry we want to work in. Or we have a role using a skill set we are good at. Or we get to interact with people and we're people persons.

Home is okay. We don't spend quite as much quality time with a spouse as we wish we did. Or we don't always get the kids to sit down to dinner. We end up working many nights, but everyone has enough to eat and everyone knows they are loved.

Win-win, right?

But be so so careful.

Do you hear the benchmark you're using to assess your life?

Good? Fine? Satisfactory?

Really?

That sounds terrible!

Okay sounds like a terrible thing to measure life by. When you were little, did you grow up dreaming of having an average life? When people ask your children about their childhood, are you hoping they will say it was so-so? When your coworkers talk about you in retirement, would it please you if they stood on a stage and described you as average?

May no teacher ever force her class to watch a boring documentary of your life!

Is good really all that good? Are you constantly drawn to more? Do you have to have regular pep talks with yourself, building a case for why this stage is okay?

It's good. Really it is. Seriously, it's fine.

Maybe that's a sign that good isn't the exact right fit for you.

Maybe good is even your antagonist. It is your arch-enemy. Your biggest foil. Your nemesis.

My nemesis? we protest. *How can good be our nemesis?*
It's just good.

Because it may be tricking you, that's why.

Standing there, disguised, blocking the path between you and your dreams.

And you just accept it. After all, everything is fine. What is there to argue or feel bad about?

See how good might steal your dreams without you even noticing? That's a talented nemesis indeed! To run off with your hopes and visions without you even realizing anything has been taken!

Now evil! You know to run from evil. If things were bad or harmful, you would get busy changing them. But when things are good, you're not afraid. When things are good, you're comfortable. When things are good, you can coast a little, reflect a little less, put dreams on hold until . . . never.

Maybe good is pulling the wool over your eyes. Enticing you to live the life you asked for instead of God's exceedingly more than you ever imagined.³

Maybe good is the very worst thing that ever happened to you!

GETTING ATTENTION IS NOT THE SAME THING AS BEING ADMIRABLE

EVEN CAR WRECKS TURN HEADS



There is no logical reason why the camel of great art should pass through the needle of mob intelligence.

—REBECCA WEST #worldchangerbook

Anyone can grab a pot and a wooden spoon and stand out on the street clamoring for attention.

Go ahead. Set up a soapbox. Buy a spotlight. Sell tickets. Put on a show.

But just know, make sure you know down deep in the places where you hold all things important, that begging for attention is no virtue. Not on its own.

Your nonprofit got noticed. So what?

You're a regionally influential church now? Who cares?

You've become a sought-after speaker with a national tour? Big deal.

You're the "go-to" in your community, the one with all the programs, with the great music, with the people wearing jeans who welcome you as you are.

All of this is well and good, but by itself? Not all that impressive.

But we've got people on the edge of their seats, you pro-

test. The world's eyes are locked on us. We're turning the heads of thousands . . .

We're the up-and-coming new guys. We're taking the stage in force, we're filling the speaker slots, grabbing the re-tweets. We've got fresh faces. Fresh ideas. Fresh movements. We've got a new model, an innovative start-up, a crisp conference idea right out of the oven. Our arsenal is packed with hot concerts, powerful CDs, popular books, flash-in-the-pan festivals. We're sweeping the hipsters en masse.

We're coming into our own. We're the talk of the spiritual town!

Applause. Autographs. Introductions. Fans and Followers . . . and *bam*. Celebrities are born! Brands are forged! Masses are gathered!

The world is standing at attention.

Yes, yes. And all of this can and very well may be used for great good. And you sincerely deserve some admiration for working so hard to get there.

But turning heads?

Please don't tell me that's how you measure success.

You're turning heads? So is the accident on the side of the road.

All kinds of things turn heads. A heap of mangled metal, blood-splattered windshields, engines caught on fire, overturned semis.

People slow down. They gawk. They tweet about it and even take photos.

Crowds gather at a corner to watch an apartment building burn. They'll huddle on their porches as a neighbor is visited by the police.

Do the people being observed—the offending drivers, the owners of the burning house, the resident being interrogated—think their observers are looking on in admiration? Do they suspect the crowds gathering up are their new fan clubs coming together?

Do the people in the accidents deserve medals? Should we give them some sort of prize? Is this something to be celebrated?

Of course not.

Getting someone's attention is not the same thing as creating a disciple. Turning heads isn't the same thing as gaining the allegiance of a long-term donor or board member. Screaming in the street isn't the same thing as being a loyal mentor or friend for the long run.

Fame! Notice! Recognition! Bah, humbug. What does the crowd know? The crowd gets fixated on anything shiny, turning their heads like a bird flocking to a piece of tinfoil.

The crowd looked at Jesus, the man who accepted the marginalized and spoke hope over the world, and picked Barabbas.

FAME IS NOT ALWAYS THE GREATEST EXPRESSION OF OUR GIFTS

MAYBE BILLY GRAHAM
WISHES HE WERE YOU



*Envy is the art of counting the other fellow's blessings
instead of your own.*

—HAROLD COFFIN #worldchangerbook

Do you hope to be huge? To be Rick Warren or Rob Bell or Billy Graham? To be Oprah, Angelina Jolie, or Blake Mycoskie (the guy behind TOMS shoes)?

Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, or Mark Zuckerberg? John Grisham, J. R. R. Tolkien, or C. S. Lewis?

Sheesh, I hope not.

What influential people. What example of human beings fixed on a goal. What examples of people whose work landed in front of millions!

But the world would be a pretty overstimulated place if there were thousands, even millions, of Billy Grahams. All competing over the stadium stages. Doing evangelistic crusades left and right—one for every day of the year, for every venue in the city, in every city in the world. It would take something away from it, wouldn't it?

Likewise for Steve Jobs. The world would be a very distracted place if there were thousands, even millions of him. All designing sleek, efficient gadgetry with great branding. Releasing a new product every time you blinked—one for every second of the day, for every day, for every year. It would take something away from it, wouldn't it?

So while there's no doubt that every Billy Graham and Steve Jobs of the world are good examples of some things—hard work or devotion, for instance—I'm not sure that necessarily means they're the best examples for you and me.

Who's to say they have reached the pinnacle of human experience? What it means to be Christian leaders or advocates or entrepreneurs? That they got the most privileged or blessed route of anyone in their era?

Maybe.

They certainly experienced favor.

But maybe, just maybe, being Billy Graham isn't the dream life. Maybe traveling from city to city, living out of a suitcase, seeing an ocean of new faces every night, each place blending in with the next, with no permanent community to invest in wouldn't be as luring as we think it would. Maybe there's something equally significant, even preferable, about being the man or woman who lives in regular community with people, side by side, alongside them, celebrating births, dedicating babies, baptizing, marrying, burying the dead—really knowing and investing in people over the course of life.

Maybe there are some gifts people at the local level get that Billy Graham can't touch. Like maybe Billy Graham would've loved to know where all the people who converted to the Christian faith at his events ended up. Maybe he'd

have given his right arm to see them grow in their faith over months or years, to be able to support them to make sure they didn't feel isolated or unresourced, to watch them grow up or grow older and take on visions of their own firsthand.

Maybe (and there's a wealth of crash-and-burn A-listers to support this) it's not amazing to be famous, to be recognized. To not have people lobbying you to say things this way or that way. To think you have the answers to every political squabble or war. To have your privacy infringed on, to have everything you say be taken as representative of the entire Christian faith, to have every gadget you produce immediately met with knockoffs by your fierce competitors. Talk about pressure!

Maybe the freedom of being able to live out your faith and dreams and visions, in the good moments and in the bad moments, in some sort of privacy, at a more manageable scale, among people who know you is something cherishable.

Maybe the *Time* magazine People of the Year are the rich guys writing checks and you are the widow giving your two mites. Maybe in today's Jesus parables, you'd be the one who *really* got it right.

Maybe Billy Graham and Steve Jobs and Angelina Jolie wish they were you.

MAYBE YOU WON'T BE PRESIDENT

THE LITTLE LADY WHO MADE
4,000 STAND UP AND APPLAUD



Real success is not onstage, but offstage as a human being, and how you get along with your fellow man.

—SAMMY DAVIS JR. #worldchangerbook

Maybe you will not be the president of the United States who signs all kinds of important legislation into being. Maybe you will not even be a senator or congressional representative. Maybe you will never champion adoption reform, campaign for families, or create policy that builds up local communities.

Maybe you will not be the president's advisor or the CEO turned lobbyist who has breakfast with him. Maybe you will not even be some run-of-the-mill professor or lawyer who reads the story about the president via their subscription to the *New York Times*.

Maybe you will not even be the person who knows the person who is cousins with the guy who walks the president's dog.

Maybe you're not even on the nation's radar.

Maybe you will be the poorest of the poor, an impoverished soul who lives on the cheapest of diets with the sparsest of resources, who pours yourself out to others, who works

with the least of the least, day after day for next to nothing.

Maybe it will look like your life is void of achievement, empty of applause.

Maybe you will just be that invisible set of hands and face, who is occasionally called upon to represent the religious or humanitarian communities. To go to the hospital when people are hurting. To comfort those who are grieving. To give little talks or prayers during annual ceremonies and conventions.

But you just never know.

None of us do.

Maybe, during one of those talks, you will pour out what you have seen in your work. Maybe you will plead with those present to stop aborting children, and instead, maybe you will find yourself volunteering boldly to take any unwanted child who is brought to you. Maybe you will vow to find every single one of them a place to be loved. To belong.

And maybe as you finish your little spiel and reassemble the pieces of your heart you've lain out on the stage, you will look out on the room and see, to the surprise of your younger self, that every person in attendance has risen to their feet to applaud you.

And that there standing among the applauders are 4,000 national leaders from both political parties, one of whom is the president of the United States.

Maybe it will be in this wise moment that you know that the only criteria that could've possibly gained you this platform and earned you the favor of these usually divided people, is the fact that while everyone else was getting applause, earning votes, and creating media buzz, you got yourself something more powerful than all of that.

Credibility.

Maybe you think this is a ridiculous claim and a fantastical story. That sure, in the Bible, and theoretically, it's the Samaritan who makes the right choice, not the religious official.⁴ It's the person who got their hands dirty in prison or gave the needy water who did right by Jesus.⁵ But the good guy doesn't win; that is not real life. That is not modern-day reality, a voice inside us may protest.

I think that too sometimes.

But maybe before either of us land firmly in that conclusion, we should take a good long look at what happened on February 5th, 1994, at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington D.C.⁶

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