

START LIFE ↻ OVER

Stop reacting to life and start living with intention

DONALD MILLER



CREATING YOUR LIFE PLAN

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Introduction

Years ago I was really overweight, pretty sad, isolated and alone, and not very productive. Basically, I had come to believe a lie about life and it was this: Life is something that happens to you, not something you can steer and change.

It's a crazy lie to believe, but I find different people believe it in different percentages. But those who believe it the least are the most likely to succeed.

At Storyline, we've helped more than 25-thousand people live completely differently. We've helped them sit down with God and dream up a new life together. When we do things "with" God rather than "for" God we bond with Him. And I think that's what God wants most. Intimacy. He's a connector. And He's a healthy dad.

This PDF was created as a series of blogs for Storylineblog.com. We are a community of people who live intentionally, who don't believe God wants us to simply react to life. Certainly we can't control everything, but we can take more ownership of our lives than we've ever believed. And we can do beautiful things with them.

Each of the principles I'll share in this PDF helped free me from the big lie that life was just something that happens to me. Each of these 5 principles was like a brick coming out of my backpack.

My life looks very different now. I'm healthy, run a little company with people I love, am happily married and more productive than ever. Certainly there are highs and lows in life, but it "happens to me" a lot less. I started learning how to impact my life rather than have life impact me.

I know setting goals and not hitting them can be really frustrating. So what if this year was different? What if we encountered some major paradigm shifts that helped us start over rather than just continue down a path that isn't working? What if we recalibrate how we saw life?

As you start thinking about the new year, will you join us on this journey of taking ownership of our lives rather than being victims to it? Will you become one of the people who do beautiful, amazing things with your life? The bigger our community gets, the more we live into these ideas ourselves. We need you.

Here are 5 principles I've picked up along the way that have allowed me to change, to start over, and to own my life.

Have a great 2015! Here's to impacting life rather than having life impact us.

Sincerely,

Donald Miller

The first principle is this: You were designed to change.

Last year, I wrote a blog about how I'm glad I'm not the same person I was when I wrote *Blue Like Jazz*.

For those of you who don't know my writing, *Blue* was my first breakthrough book. I wrote it in my late twenties and it spent many weeks on various bestseller lists. That said, when I wrote the book I was 150 pounds heavier, lonely, codependent and emotionally isolated.

I only say that because over the years my writing has changed. Hopefully I'm still vulnerable, but I'm not as messed up as I used to be.

And you know what's strange?

People miss the old, messed up me. They say "I miss the old Don." Well, I have to tell you, I don't. Things that stay the same aren't healthy.

These days life isn't perfect, but it's a heck of a lot better. I'm down 150 pounds, I've built an amazing community, and my business has quadrupled. I even got married. I've changed. And I'm glad.

For years, though, it was hard for me to change. And one of the main reasons (there are 5) I couldn't improve my life was because I didn't realize I actually *could* change. I thought people were just people and we were stuck as we were.

But that was a lie.

Here's a principle that has everything to do with becoming somebody different: Every healthy thing God created changes.

If something doesn't change, it's dead. God designed the world so that it is in constant motion, never sitting still, always dying and being reborn. Everything is changing, all the time. Even you.

Physically, you will regenerate several times before you die. The skin you have now will not be the same skin you have in 7 years. What this means for us is we get to let go of the mistakes we've made in the past. We also get to let go of the identity other people want to trap us in. We get to change.

We get to become somebody different.

One of the ways God encourages us to change is by constantly starting things over.

He created you to sleep, so every night you lie down and go into an odd kind of coma for about 8 hours and then you wake up and start another day. Think of it like a do-over. And it's not only you. The whole earth is starting over every morning.

And it's not only days that start over, it's the seasons, too. Soon it will be spring, again, for the millionth time. But it will be all new to us. And then summer and then fall, always changing, always starting over, always inviting us to do the same.

I meet people occasionally who think of themselves the way I used to think of myself when I was so unhealthy.

They think of themselves as fixed beings.

That is, beings who cannot change. But this is a lie. We can change and were designed to change. Still, though, even if I can convince them they were designed to change (as is obvious) then they believe change is hard.

Really? Why should something so natural, so ingrained in our design be hard?

One of the most freeing realizations I've ever had is that I was designed to change. Once I realized that, I was able to let go of the old me so the new me could get created. I didn't have to be scared, lazy, or controlled by fear anymore. That me could die away and a new me could start growing out of the ashes. I could be somebody different.

Of course nobody changes over night.

But nobody changes at all if they don't believe they're supposed to.

So here's the question: Do you believe you were designed to change? And if so, what's stopping you? I mean that literally. What's stopping you from changing?

In the next entry, I'll talk about the second thing I believe stops us from changing and what we can do about it.

For now, let's start the year by meditating on the idea we are all designed to change. At the end of 2015, none of us have to be the same person we are now.

That's not what we were designed to do. I've changed, and I'm glad. God thinks it's okay for you to change, too.

The second principle is this: You are in a relationship with yourself. Make it a healthy one.

This one is a little complicated, but I promise it will make sense by the end of this blog. And it's the most powerful idea I've ever come to understand.

First, though, I have to confess something.

I'm very driven by other people's approval of me. I mean if somebody doesn't like me or think I did a good job, it hurts. I feel like a loser. Mostly I sense this passively, like I just get angry or hurt or something. I'm not often willing to admit they're affecting me, but on an honest day I'll tell you the truth: Other people's opinions mean a lot to me. In fact, they have the power to name me, to tell me who I am.

As I've grown older and read more and more about psychology, I've realized that, in part, this is by design. We really do shape our opinions about ourselves, in large part, through the opinions of others. It's as though we wear certain clothes and act a certain way and try to succeed at things so other people will tell us we are good or valuable. And when they do, we feel a little better about ourselves and when they don't, we start thinking we are losers.

But one day I had a dramatic realization.

I spent a few hours with a friend I have a great deal of respect for. He's the kind of guy I'd really like to be. He's kind, productive, generous and humble and super disciplined and respectable. He almost always wears a nice suit but is never snooty (not that that matters, but it's kind of cool, right?)

Well, later that night I caught myself disrespecting myself a little bit. Just being overly critical. And then it hit me.

I'm in a relationship with myself.

I know that sounds a little odd, but if you think about it, we really do operate like two people. We are a person who lives and breathes and does things; then we are another person who judges ourselves. It's as though we have a critic in our brain.

Now some people's critics are too harsh and judgmental, for sure. And that's a whole other issue, perhaps one that needs counseling. (That's not a knock. I've spent hours in counseling.)

Then I had another major epiphany.

And it was this: The reason I respect my friend so much is because he does respectful things. I mean he's disciplined and considerate and generous and kind and, well, he doesn't look like a slob.

So I began to wonder, if I do more respectful things, perform more generous actions and, well, dress a little better, will I actually have a little more self respect? In other words, because I'm in a relationship with myself, maybe I should act in such a way that my "self" could respect my "self" a little more.

And it worked. I would find myself wanting to eat a half gallon of ice cream while watching television and I asked myself "if you skipped this, would you have a little more respect for yourself?" and the truth is I would. So I skipped it. And I had much more self respect.

I liked myself more.

This sort of thing translated into a whole host of other areas of my life. I started holding my tongue a little more and found I respected myself more when I was more thoughtful in conversation. I found myself less willing to people please because, well, people who people please aren't as respectable, right?

Here's another thing I realized: Human beings aren't really motivated by goals; they're motivated by character transformation.

Every story that we love is about a character that doubts themselves in the beginning and believes in themselves at the end. The most powerful stories are about people

who learn something about themselves that changes their identity for the better.

The reason I bring this up is because when you dangle the carrot of “I will respect you more if you make a better decision here” in front of your nose, it’s incredibly motivating.

We all want to be loved.

We all want to feel approval. So why not get into a healthy relationship with yourself where you do respectable things to earn your own respect?

I’ve noticed the people I admire the most are the people who respect themselves, who have standards that seem to have little to do with the opinions of others and much to do with their opinion of themselves.

When we rely on the opinions of others to shape us, we’re getting into dangerous territory. The reality is it’s a competitive and fallen world. People mean well and are often very nice, but we’re all competing for some kind of social validation that we wrongly believe is scarce.

So the idea that another person’s view of you will be objective is unlikely. People will view you through the filter that benefits them the best. That’s why it’s so important to have a great relationship with yourself.

It’s important to be objective.

As it is to be fair and to do the things that help you respect yourself and create your own sense of self worth.

I’d confuse people if I didn’t mention that God is the one who ultimately names us and gives us our worth. Certainly this is true. It’s true at our core, soul level. But we are much more relational than that. Ultimately our relationships with ourselves and with others has dramatic sway.

Perhaps this is because of the fall of man, I’m not sure. But I do know that nobody I know is not affected by the opinions they have of themselves or the opinions they receive of others. It’s powerful, powerful stuff and for that reason, I’d rather us filter those opinions so they’re based on fact and are fair and objective. And you’re the

best person to do that in your own life.

So, in summary:

- People are deeply motivated by the potential transformation of how they see themselves.
- The opinions of others can be nice, but it's hardly objective.
- You are in a relationship with yourself, and your opinion of yourself can help transform you.
- You'll respect yourself a lot more if you do respectful things.

This one was heavy, but it's powerful stuff.

If you really want to change who you are on the deepest level, start listening to that voice inside you and start earning its respect by doing respectful things. You'd be surprised at how fair and balanced you actually are when you change your decisions so that your "self" can start to respect your "self."

Next, we'll talk about the incredible power of quitting!

The third principle is this: Sometimes it's okay to quit.

If you don't have today off, you're likely bored at work. Certainly not all of you, but studies show more than 50% of Americans are not inspired by their jobs. This really stinks. All that college tuition, all those hours searching and hoping for a job that fulfills us have come to this. Boredom.

I've been there.

I used to work at a company where I'd take an extra lap around the parking lot even though there were plenty of empty spaces, just because I didn't want to go inside. And once inside, I'd waste time. But the horrible part wasn't the wasting time, it was the guilt I felt because I was wasting time.

So what can be done? What do we do if we don't like our jobs? Or for that matter, what do we do if we don't like our lives?

My friend Bob Goff tries to quit something every Thursday. Most of the time it's small stuff, like biting his nails and stuff. But sometimes it's big stuff. He's actually resigned from Boards because it was a Thursday.

The idea is twofold:

1. Get rid of anything that doesn't need to be in your life.
2. Realize you don't have to be stuck in a rut.

You can quit things.

If you're in a dating relationship that's been killing you, quit. If you aren't happy with that small group you've been meeting with, quit. It's not like you're quitting your spouse or God; you're just living out the God-given reality you've got choices and are completely allowed to make them.

And if you're really bold, you can even quit your job. I know it sounds crazy and there are all sorts of reasons we should stay. We have to feed our children. We have to make

our mortgage payments. But wouldn't you just love to quit? Wouldn't you love to wake up, perhaps a month from now, and love your work instead of being so bored?

Warren Buffett says the secret to successful people is they have learned to say no to almost everything. They aren't people who go around seeking security. They seek the big life.

And because they seek it, they get it.

I had a friend years ago who hated his job. He complained all the time about his associates and his boss. That didn't bother me too much, but one day when he was talking about his son, who also hated his job, he said "you know what my boy needs to learn? He needs to learn that everybody hates their job. They're supposed to hate their job. Working isn't supposed to be fun, that's in the Bible."

I stood there taken aback. I completely disagreed with him. I loved my job. And the Bible said work would be hard, not that it was supposed to be miserable.

Here's something I've learned over the years. People who are willing to wait for what they want have a much higher percentage chance of enjoying life in the long run. And those who choose security over passion have a much higher chance of not enjoying life.

Now I've likely offended most of the people reading this. And I apologize for that. God knows I'm not asking all of you to quit your jobs. That's a big step.

But do we really have to settle?

I mean were you really created to be born, be bored, then be buried? Is that what God had in mind?

Ask yourself this, how many decisions are you making because you want security? And how's that going for you? What's one thing you can do to make your life more passionate and enjoyable? If you did that thing, what would be the next thing that would make life more passionate and enjoyable? And then what's the thing after that?

What if, by the end of 2015, you were doing something in your life you didn't hate? Something that didn't make you bored? What if?

The fourth principle is this: You will become like the people you hang out with.

If you've ever attended Storyline Conference or if you're already purchased *Creating Your Life Plan*, you know this is one of my core beliefs.

And it's not just a belief.

It's a fact. You are more than what you eat, how much you exercise or how much sleep you get. You are a conglomerate of the people you hang out with.

I have a friend who runs a small business and is just now experiencing a great deal of success. His team is great, but there's one guy I've noticed my friend has trouble with. When I asked him about it, he said dealing with the guy was like dealing with a 7-year old.

"Why do you keep him around?" I asked.

He told me he needed him, that he was sure his ideas were valuable. I told him what I'd tell anybody: Let him go. He's going to corrupt your entire culture. Pretty soon you'll have other team members taking on his characteristics.

My friend listened.

But he ultimately didn't take my advice. Or at least he didn't for six more months. He finally let him go when he just couldn't take it anymore. The guy was causing too many divisions and spreading a negative culture.

These days, my friend's company sings right along and he hardly even misses the guy. Isn't it funny how much we think we need certain people when the reality is we really don't? Often, we'd be better off without them.

One bad egg will make your life miserable. And worse, eventually you'll become like them. If you hang out with bitter people, you'll get bitter yourself. And the sure way to become a cynic is to hang out with cynical people. Want a Darwinian, cut-throat view of life? Just hang out with sharks.

Every once in a while I get some pushback on this idea.

Shouldn't we be gracious and forgiving?

And my answer is yes. But what does being gracious and forgiving have to do with selling your soul? And if you're people pleasing your way into relationships that are negatively affecting you, you're definitely compromising your soul.

The idea isn't that we're viewing ourselves as better than others; the idea is that we're protecting ourselves from becoming somebody we don't want to become.

When Jesus talks with the rich young ruler, He explains the rules, grieves the ruler's decision not to become like Him, and walks away. He doesn't misappropriate grace by joining the ruler and forfeiting His mission in life.

Who do you want to be?

Do you want to be kind, smart, authentic, vulnerable, wise and disciplined? If so, find people like that and spend a lot of time with them because that's exactly what you will become.

Some of us pay more attention to what we eat than we do to who we're eating with. The reality is, the latter has a more dramatic affect on the quality of our lives.

Now this gets complicated in a couple ways. The first is, well, there are certain people you can't get away from. Perhaps your coworkers (though you really could quit if you had to) or maybe your spouse. These situations really stink.

In this case, putting up some boundaries would be great.

And while hard, it's really doable.

Just refuse to become whoever it is they are. In time, you might even have a positive effect on them. After all, they're also becoming a lot like you.

The second way this gets complicated is that it's contextual. What I mean is, certain people have more strength than others.

If I'm around a really selfish person, I'll become like them too easily. I have to keep my distance. I have friends, though, who are way less impressionable. They can stay in those relationships longer and not be affected. So our levels of tolerance vary from person to person.

The idea remains the same, though.

We can be way more proactive in choosing who we spend time with and this will make all the difference. Are there relationships you need to let go of? Are there new people you need to intentionally get time with? Let's make some changes in who we hang out with and watch how powerfully we begin to change ourselves.

The fifth and final principle is this: I can only do three big things in a year. That's it. Just three.

Most people I know who aren't having much of an impact in the world suffer from one of two problems. Either they don't know what they want to do or they are trying to do too much.

I've never really had trouble knowing what I've wanted to do, but I've had tons of trouble trying to do too much. And this is a problem.

I used to think that's just how life is. It gets busy. Responsibilities get piled on. And the more I believed that, the worse my life got. Something had to change.

Warren Buffett said, "The difference between successful people and unsuccessful people is that really successful people say no to almost everything."

The key here is learning to let go of great opportunities to take advantage of even better opportunities. Once life starts flowing and you start succeeding, the opportunities pile on. And people want something from you. But here's the deal, you can either get a little bit done on a lot of projects or you can finish a few of them and change the world.

I've turned down the opportunity to endorse books, write forwards, do television interviews, serve on boards of directors, speak overseas and on and on, and I rejected them all gladly because if I did those things I'd have lost the ability to do something else.

These days, I give myself 3 big projects each year, and I intend to finish them. This year I'll write another book, come out with an online course teaching people how to

[brand their companies using story](#) and I'll release a series helping people live a better story. That's it. I can't do anything more than that.

This all sounds arrogant and harsh and I suppose it is. I get my feathers up about it because people can be quite demanding. Tim, the guy who runs my company, just sent me an e-mail from the head of a non-profit who guilted and shamed us for not endorsing a book her non-profit is releasing. She explained why we owed them something. The e-mail made me angry, to be honest. I know she's doing great work, but she also knows the value of focus. She was focused and determined, but she didn't care whether or not we got off focus.

Picking three major things to do this year, whether it's as fun as having the best family vacation ever or as big as starting a new business, will change your year. It may also ruffle some feathers. But we can't do big things if we're distracted. And you don't really owe anybody anything. If you break focus for a second to help someone, that's an awesome gift to them but make sure to know it came at a cost.

This last post will likely get the most negative feedback. It sounds like I'm saying that you should only focus on yourself. But that's not what I mean at all. My hope is those three things you're going to create will be beautiful and will help tons of people. They're important. In fact, it might even be selfish of you not to focus on them.

Each day I fill out a one-page planner I created that has massively boosted my productivity. On that planner I've got a to-do list that is full of stuff I need to get done, but the big part of the page asks me to write down the 3 projects I'll allow myself to work on that day. My mind can really only focus on 3. After that, I'm toast.

I know you can do this. I've not met anybody yet who didn't have incredible potential in them. It will require focus and you'll have to say no to enormous and fun opportunities. But your work is important. The change you'll bring to the world may benefit thousands.

This has been a fun series to write. I hadn't realized how much these ideas have changed my life until I wrote them all down. Good stuff. I'm hoping Storyline can help thousands of people do thousands of big, life-changing things this year. Can't wait to hear the stories.

Friends,

I know how it is to wake up in a fog and not know exactly where my life is going. It's a terrible and confusing feeling. I used to think that's just how life was but then I realized I could take ownership of my life. I could actually make plans and execute them and my life could look completely different.

You know the rest. Life is much better now. I've filtered out all the junk, gotten focused and get up every day ready to execute my plan. It doesn't always go perfectly, but it ALWAYS goes better than it would if I'd have reacted to life rather than lived it with intention.

I want to take you through the process that changed everything for me. *Creating Your Life Plan* includes all I've learned about making and executing plans, about why people get stuck and have a fear of taking responsibility for their lives. The online course is the sum of years of work. In the course, I walk my friend Shauna Niequist through the creation of her life plan and you're going to love her tenderness and insight.

I've paid as much as \$3,500 in the past to sit with a life plan facilitator and create my life plan. I'm glad I did because the experience was awesome. But my course is going to cost you about 1% of that. At Storyline we're selling the course for \$39.95. And we are taking the course down at midnight on Tuesday, January 13th. After that it won't be available again.

Please be in the last batch of friends who go through it. It's already changed thousands of lives.

And if you don't like it, you can have your money back.

Will you join those of us who've decided to stop reacting to life and start living it? We'd love to have you with us.

Have a terrific 2015.

Sincerely,

Donald Miller

To get the deal on *Creating Your Life Plan*, click [here](#).

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