

A man was thinking and he realized ...

it is a mistake to write off people.

People can change for the better.

It is where we end up that counts.

Fixer-Upper People

By

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To Those Who Do Not Give Up

Introduction

A friend of mine inherited an older house when her aged father passed away. Listening to her describe the house, which was in need of significant repairs, made me think. I have personally never seen the house, but the house was evidently almost unlivable without material renovation. Fortunately for her, since the house was in Southern California, before the real estate bust of 2008, the house was worth fixing up. It would take time, some money, and also some "sweat equity."

Fixing up a free house in Southern California will almost always be worth it. When the repairs are completed the house will be worth something. One can live in it, rent it out for an income stream, or sell it for a capital gain. My friend chose to fix it up and live in it. I will further elaborate, later in this book.

This book is not about fixer-upper real estate, however. It is about fixer-upper people.

Each of us has some good characteristics mixed with some bad ones, personality strengths and weaknesses, varying backgrounds, and other assorted flavorings that

make us uniquely who we are as a person. And each of us could use some fixing up in at least an area or two.

The main purpose of this book is to encourage you to take a good look at your life. Where are you at right now? And also to think about: Where do you want to go? Another purpose of this book is to provide you with a menu selection of ideas to help you along in the fixing up process. And also to encourage you to not sell yourself short and give up. It is not where we start out that matters. None of us can help that. It is where we end up that counts.

Human beings can change for the better and we should. This book offers encouragement and a camera angle on how to change for the better. The information from the pages that follow was gleaned from personal life experience and learning, the Bible, and from logical reasoning.

As a housekeeping point, the scriptural references, herein, are from the King James Version, KJV, unless denoted otherwise. Any emphasis, in the scriptural quotations, is mine throughout this book.

As an additional important note, I have chosen to write the pages that follow mainly in a conversational style. Having said that, let's get started. I offer for your serious consideration and hopeful edification what I have learned below.

Integrity, Passion, And Ability

What kind of people do you want in your life? Most people probably never stop and ask themselves that question. But they should. I think it is an important topic to think about.

When I thought about it I decided that I wanted people in my life that had integrity, passion, and ability. Of course there are many other aspects of character, which are important, but those three were very important. And since an author has to self-limit the scope of the information he chooses to share, I want to focus on those three aspects of character in particular. The other aspects of character, which are also important, are beyond the scope of this section of the book.

Integrity is an absolute must. If you are dealing with someone in your life and they do not have integrity, it is not possible to have a

real relationship with them. It just is not possible, because you cannot trust them. And if you cannot trust them, you cannot count on them. If someone lies to you, you know they are dishonest. If they are dishonest, they might also steal from you.

The lie or lies they have told you set in motion a negative chain of events. You cannot relax when they are around because you don't know what will happen next. Like the Sheriff, in an Old West town full of outlaws, you have to sort of "sleep with one eye open." You just cannot ever relax. So integrity is critical to relationships.

Honesty is extremely important to God and is the principle behind most of the Ten Commandments, e.g., do not steal; do not bear false witness; do not cheat on your spouse (commit adultery), etc. And honesty is the foundation of contract law. Without integrity, or honesty, a relationship is probably doomed – at least until the offending person chooses to change, which is possible. Without integrity, a society is also likely doomed.

In addition to integrity, passion is also very important. People with goals, who are actively

working to achieve them, are fun to interact with. It is great if someone has integrity. However, if they are just malingering in their life, they tend to be boring. If nothing excites them and they are couch potatoes, their talk tends to be small talk and, after a while, monotonous. In contrast, active people with passion have new things to share. People with some passion have just done something. They have just read a new book, or taken a new class, or have some new information to share. Perhaps they have just come back from a trip, or are working on a new project. Something is going on in their life that they can share with you. And you share with them in return. It adds a lot of richness and texture to life.

Passion is really important to God as well. Revelation 3:14-16 has a message to a church, which speaks directly to and for passion.

“And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.” Revelation 3:14-16, KJV

When God says, "thou art lukewarm," he is really saying they lack passion. And he wants them to have passion. God is in effect saying, "I wish you had some passion."

"Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." Revelation 3:17-21, KJV

There are a number of interesting elements, in the above, which fit into this section of the book. The first is that "white raiment" is a metaphor for integrity, or good character. The

second is that God has passion for these people. He loves them and cares for them enough to give them a passionate warning. And his warning is to be zealous and repent, i.e., to have some passion.

Another scriptural passage, that hits on the point of passion, is found in I Corinthians 9:24-27.

“Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? **So run, that ye may obtain.** And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.”
1 Corinthians 9:24-27, KJV

The Apostle Paul wrote the above and he says, “So run, that you may obtain [the prize].” Run hard. Have some passion.

The Olympics happen every four years. It is inconceivable that in an Olympics finals race,

when the starter's gun sounded, that four of the eight runners would just stand there looking around. Would that make any sense? After all his or her training, no Olympic athlete would have such a mentality, correct? Nobody would. If you want to win, you have to run. And you have to run with passion.

It is my belief that God places less importance on ability than he does on integrity and on passion. And there is a good reason for this, which I will make a case for below. Ability is important. I am not saying ability is not important. It is important. But ability can be added later, even miraculously added later by God.

In God's eyes, if someone has integrity and passion, that is great. But perhaps they have now grown very old - maybe even bedridden. And maybe they now have a hard time remembering things. At this stage in their life that good person, with integrity and passion, can no longer function to help get things accomplished. In other words, maybe their ability level has decreased with age. That human being, with integrity intact and with as much passion as someone their age can muster, continues to be a very valuable human being in

God's sight. Their current lack of ability is not a big problem for God because God can just add abilities as the below scriptures show.

Exodus 31:1-11 shows where God added ability instantaneously to Bezaleel, to Oholiab his assistant, and to the team of craftsmen working with them to create the Tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant, and all of the other items needed for the divine worship at that time.

“The LORD also said to Moses, “Look, I have chosen Bezalel [Bezaleel] son of Uri, grandson of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. I have filled him with the Spirit of God, giving him great wisdom, intelligence, and skill in all kinds of crafts. He is able to create beautiful objects from gold, silver, and bronze. He is skilled in cutting and setting gemstones and in carving wood. Yes, he is a master at every craft! “And I have appointed Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, to be his assistant. Moreover, I have given special skill to all the naturally talented craftsmen so they can make all the things I have instructed you to make: the Tabernacle itself; the Ark of the Covenant; the Ark’s cover--the place of atonement; all the furnishings of the Tabernacle; the table and all its utensils; the gold lampstand with all its accessories; the

incense altar; the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils; the washbasin and its pedestal; the beautifully stitched, holy garments for Aaron the priest, and the garments for his sons to wear as they minister as priests; the anointing oil; and the special incense for the Holy Place. They must follow exactly all the instructions I have given you.” Exodus 31:1-11, NLT

God wanted a Tabernacle built. He needed a master craftsman and a supporting team so the job could get done. The above scripture reads that God just downloaded the ability into Bezaleel and his team. You can read it as God enhancing ability that was already there, but the above scripture clearly states, “Moreover, **I have given special skill** to all the naturally talented craftsmen.” God downloaded the special skill into those men, i.e., God downloaded a particular ability into those men. And since God can just download ability, is a lack of ability a really big problem for God to solve? Obviously it is not.

To further make my point, that God can download ability, consider one of the most interesting publicly spoken messages found in the Bible - especially if you think about it from the downloading ability point of view.

"And the LORD opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times?" Numbers 22:28, KJV

God wanted to teach Balaam a lesson and so he downloaded the ability to talk into Balaam's ass. God is capable of downloading abilities. He can even make an ass talk.

Is a lack of ability a limiting factor for God? I really don't think it is. When we are resurrected to become spirit beings, with eternal life (I Corinthians 15), we will now have an eternity of time to gain abilities. We will no longer get physically tired and we will not be distracted by all the physical things this life forces us to deal with. Couple the above with a God that can download ability and there is an excellent chance we are going to be quite capable throughout eternity.

If we don't know how to play the guitar this year, we will have time to learn how to play it by next year. And then maybe you can also learn to play the piano, trumpet, trombone and every other instrument that was ever created as well. If you do not understand mathematics

now, you can learn and then you will have that ability as well. Once you have an eternity of time and a God who wants you to rise up and grow, is a temporary lack of ability going to be some big problem? I highly doubt it.

Each of us currently has some abilities and we would like to have more. And we do have a responsibility to use the talent and ability we have. I am not minimizing ability. I am just saying that the lack of a particular ability is not a big long-term problem. Integrity is a must. Passion is a must. The abilities we would like to have, but currently do not, can be gained later.

“For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord’s money. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had

received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he

shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Matthew 25:14-30, KJV

God is clearly saying, in the above, that he can and does give different levels of abilities to different people. Ability is important to God and how you use it is also. God does expect us to profitably use the talent and ability we have and he also expects us to do our part to grow. These things are important to him. And thankfully, the lack of ability is not a long-term problem to God.

A Fixer-Upper House

As previously mentioned, a friend of mine inherited a home, which was 50 plus years old, from her deceased father. And the home, as inherited, was very much in need of being fixed up. There was so much work to do she was actually a bit discouraged. Listening to her talk about it made me think. I got the feeling, from listening to her describe all the work that needed to be done, that she was almost not quite sure if doing the work would be worth it. But innately she knew that a home in Southern

California, once fixed up, would be worth something and would be a usable asset.

Let's personalize the above and pretend that you received a letter from your late uncle's attorney. The letter informs that you have inherited your deceased uncle's old house. When you get the letter you are very excited. You are inheriting a house! Wow, inheriting a house. Who would have thought? And, of course, you set out to go take a look at this new "asset" of yours. The old neighborhood is not so bad, but the answer to the question of, "Who owns the worst house on the block?" is, "You do." When you actually take a look at the house you are a bit shocked, because what you see brings home the fact that the house needs some major improvements. In fact, it can only be charitably described as a fixer-upper house.

When you drive up, the first thing you notice is it looks like the roof has some holes and patchwork fixes on it. Some shingles are missing. There are weeds in the front yard and the fence is leaning over onto the neighbor's property. About half the grass is dead and the house has not been painted in years. And all of the above is just on the outside.

When you walk inside you see that the carpet is worn and soiled. It definitely needs to be replaced. Some of the floor tiles are cracked and chipped and the grout in between the tiles is very brown. You hear the sound of the faucets dripping. The interior is poorly lit and the walls need painting. The furniture is dated and mostly worn out. The enormity of the work to be done starts to depress you. You are determined to make the best of it, however, and know that the house, once fixed up, will be an asset that can be lived in, rented out, or sold for a capital gain.

To make the house livable, or to increase its market value, what would you have to do? You have to fix it up, right? You need to put a new coat of paint on. You need to rip out the carpet and replace it with new carpet. You might need to hire a professional cleaner to get the grout clean again or maybe you have to replace the tiles altogether. You certainly need to replace the cracked and chipped ones. You would have to get the weeds out of the yard and maybe put some grass seed down and water so new grass grows back. Maybe you should plant some flowers and fix that fence so it is not leaning over into the neighbor's yard. A new roof is not cheap, but it is a necessity for this house. And

some of the plumbing fixtures have to be repaired and/or replaced. Changing some of the lighting out, to make the house more modern and having the house better lit, is going to make a big difference.

Once you did all of the above improvements, it would result in a significant increase in the market value of the house. It would be very fair to say that the end result would be that the house is a completely different and better house. It would take time, effort, and some money to get the fixed up results you are looking for. But once the fixing up process was completed you will have the option of living in the house, renting it out, or selling it. The house will have a major increase in value and it will be a real asset - not just a potential one. The sweat equity you put into fixing up the house will go a long way.

Probably most of the readers of this book do not live in what could be described as a fixer-upper house situation. So it would be easy to snicker if one of our friends inherited such a house. We might laugh out loud at our friend's "good fortune," knowing all the work that would be required to get a good end result.

This book, though, is not about fixer-upper houses. It is about how God views each of us. From God's camera angle we are all fixer-upper people. There is a point in time that God calls us to have a relationship with him. It is my opinion that, at that point in time, in God's eyes, he considers us to be fixer-upper people. And that is why this book is titled, *Fixer-Upper People*.

Christ As Redeemer And Builder

In Romans 3:23 it states that:

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;" Romans 3:23, KJV

This creates a big problem for each of us because in Romans 6:23 it clearly states:

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Romans 6:23, KJV

The above two verses specifically show that each human being is not just a fixer-upper house. We are a house that is going to be condemned, torn down, and burned up. We have a big problem! Fortunately God has

provided a solution to the problem, which is that Jesus Christ came to redeem us and to save us from the death penalty, which would otherwise fall on us.

“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”
Luke 2:11, KJV

The last half of Isaiah 60:16 declares:

“ ... and thou shalt know that I the LORD am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob.” Isaiah 60:16, KJV

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up [crucified]: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.” John 3:14-17, KJV

So there is a solution for our problem of being a sinner and being under the death penalty because of it. And that solution is that

Jesus Christ is both our Savior and Redeemer. But, we are not just in need of a Savior to pay the penalty for our sins - a Redeemer as it were. We also need a master builder to help fix us up because all of us need fixing up, to one degree or another, in varying areas of our lives. I intuitively believe, and think the scripture bears this out, that there is ongoing work to fix us up even after Christ's sacrifice is applied to us. There is ongoing work to fix us up. There just is.

What is very interesting to me is that when Christ was on the earth, he was a builder. I don't believe this was an accidental career choice. And this actually speaks to my analogy of fixing up a house.

"And he went out from thence, and came into his own country; and his disciples follow him. And when the sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands? Is not this the carpenter [the builder], the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his

sisters here with us? And they were offended at him." Mark 6:1-3, KJV

Jesus Christ was a homebuilder. I'll bet that if you had a fixer-upper house at the time Jesus Christ was on the earth, that you could contract with Christ and he would do a tremendous job of fixing up the house. Once Christ was done working on improving the house the fence would be straight and the roof wouldn't leak. The landscaping would look good. The front door wouldn't creak when it opened, etc. I believe that Jesus Christ was a tremendous homebuilder. He still is, only now he is fixing up people.

"For we are his workmanship [Christ's workmanship], created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." Ephesians 2:10, KJV

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 even calls each of us "the temple of God," i.e., a holy building. Again, I don't think it was an accident that Jesus Christ's choice of careers, while on the earth, was builder. His career choice was on purpose and for a reason. As Creator of the universe, he has always been a creator of value. He has always been the real builder. And he still is.

“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.” 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17, KJV

“Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.” Ephesians 2:19-22, KJV

We are being built up individually and also collectively into the temple of God. As such we are a building of God and Christ is going to be dwelling in us and working with us to fix us up personally and to also fix up the entire body of believers. Christ, the builder, is working on us. We are his workmanship. He is going to fix us up, but he needs our help, too.

Getting Fixed Up – A Strategy

How does the fixer-upper person actually become fixed up? That's an important question, because we are all fixer-upper people.

Pray like it all depends on God.

+

Work like it all depends on us.

What more could the Master Builder ask of us than this? If we do the above I really believe he will both help us with divine guidance and also through the blessing of our efforts. We do need divine help and guidance. And we need to have our thoughtful productive activity blessed in order to obtain the best results. God wants to bless our efforts. Combined with his divine grace and blessing, our sweat equity will gain

results as the Master Builder works on us - his workmanship.

One of the main jobs of being a Christian is to become like Christ. It is to let him fix us up to become like him and we have to cooperate with him in doing our part. Most of the remainder of this book is devoted to sharing some ideas and principles on how to become a better person. How do we, as it were, get that new carpet in and that new roof on and fix up the tile and have beautiful landscaping and make sure the roof does not leak, etc.? Plant some flowers in your life. Become a better person.

I have actually tried to follow some of the ideas and principles that follow for years and I should have tried to follow them even harder and more consistently. Any time I was not following the below principles, as I should have, I have learned that I was only penalizing myself.

What I am trying to do is to give your mind a direction to think in as to how to become a better person. The below ideas and principles are shared in order to help you to develop integrity and passion and ability in your own life.

We are all human and all of us will still have some work to do, even at the end of our lives – which is why we can be glad we have a Savior and Redeemer. Ultimately we will be completely fixed up (1 Corinthians 15) and then we will have incorruptible integrity, a lasting passion, and all the time we need to gain further abilities with which to enjoy eternal life.

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.” 1 John 3:1-3, KJV

We will become like Christ, incorruptible with eternal life. We will have time and we will grow in ability and we will enjoy life because we will know we can trust each other. All will have integrity. We will be interesting to be around because we have passion and because we have ability and we can create value and do things of interest to us. We can do things together and

share experiences. It is going to be a very exciting and rewarding time.

I think God spent a tremendous amount of time thinking about who he wanted to have around him for all eternity. It was one of the central issues that God had to determine before he decided to create us. And it is notable that he decided to make us out of the dust of the ground (out of dirt) (Genesis 2:7). He did so because if a human being was going to consciously and completely reject God, i.e., they were in total abject rebellion, God could just permanently extinguish them (Ezekiel 18:4,20). And then God could go on with those humans who cooperated with him, accepted and lived by his values, and accepted the Savior and his role in their lives.

The greater portion of the rest of this book contains ideas comprising what amounts to a fixer-upper "To Do List." And that list is broken down into seven different major categories. These categories are:

Spiritual
Mental
Physical
Family

Social
Vocational
Humility and thankfulness

Each of the above categories contains several ideas to give your mind a direction to think in. If it makes sense for you to incorporate one or more of the ideas, please do so. The list of ideas, taken as a whole, is too much for any one human being to do each and every day. Perhaps you can think of the fixer-upper list of ideas as a buffet line at a restaurant. When one goes down a buffet line one does not necessarily eat a portion of everything available at the same sitting. A human being cannot do everything every day. If you ate desert today, maybe you don't eat desert tomorrow. If you ate lamb today, maybe you eat fish tomorrow. You should always consider the context of your situation, and then use wisdom in making your choices.

Hopefully you can take something off of the buffet line every day that can help you grow over time. By growth I mean spiritually; mentally; physically; in terms of your family life; in terms of your social life; vocationally, etc. That's the idea. And the list is not intended to be a complete list. You can add to it as makes

sense for you. I am just sharing with you some of the things that I have thought of which have helped me.

One other housekeeping point is that you should always consider the context of your personal situation and then to also add some wisdom and some maturity to any of the ideas you read below.

If you are consistently working on an improvement program, aka a fixer-upper program for yourself, you will be doing two very important things. You will be redeeming the time and you will also be cooperating with God, the master builder.

“Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” Ephesians 5:16, KJV

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” James 4:7, KJV

If you are spending your days working on positive activities a lot of good things will start to happen. Number one, you will actually start to see improvement over time and it does take time. It is kind of like a tree growing. A tree

grows a little bit each day over time. Over time you will become a better person. You will experience personal growth.

As you become a better person another good thing will happen. You will grow in confidence. For single people this is important because your personal growth will improve your chances of finding a mate. To put it in business vernacular, you will increase your market value.

And while you are experiencing personal growth and growing in confidence something else very positive will happen. You will now be so productively busy that you will not have time to sit around feeling sorry for yourself. You won't have time to sit alone in your house and think, "Woe is me. Nobody knows I exist. Nobody loves me." You will be so busy working on becoming a better person that you will minimize those opportunities for Satan to take your brain in a negative direction. God, of course, knows you exist and loves you.

Spiritual

In terms of spiritual improvement, which is mainly the integrity aspect, some of the things we can and should do are pretty obvious. As we

go through the various suggestions for improvement, in this portion of the book, most of the suggestions are, in fact, pretty obvious. Knowing the obvious step for improvement and incorporating it into your life are two different things, however. You must actually take the action in order to gain the improvement.

For spiritual improvement some suggestions are:

Pray to God on a regular basis for a reasonable period of time. Ask for his guidance and help in your life. Ask to be forgiven for your sins and missteps and ask for his Holy Spirit to help you make better decisions and to execute on those decisions. Thank God for the good in your life and bless him for it. Pray for other things the Bible speaks of and pray about things that are important to you. Share your hopes and dreams and needs with your Creator.

Study the Bible, if possible, every day. While so doing, listen to God and try to understand what he is really saying and then think about how you can apply what you read in your life.

Meditate on God and his ways and what an honor it is to be made in his image. Think about

what to value. Think about the principles behind God's commandments and how you can apply those principles in the context of your situation.

Keep the Sabbath and try to find a place to meet with others of like mind so that you can encourage each other and worship God together.

Fast occasionally to draw closer to God, to overcome sins, and become humble.

Do some good for other people. Don't just think about yourself. We each have different gifts (Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12) that can be used to help others.

And there are many other things you can think of on your own. I end the improvement suggestions with the all encompassing, "many other things you can think of on your own." I am only one human being with limited perspective - limited by my own background and education and genetics and point of view (camera angle). So you can excel me with other ideas you can think of which would be beneficial for you. I am simply giving you some, not all, suggestions for improvement. As always, add your wisdom and maturity and always consider

the context of your situation. Then make good choices and implement them into your life.

Mental

Mental improvement can help with integrity, passion, and ability.

Read a book or a magazine article to improve your mind. Or, research something on the Internet. It could be doing research on virtually any useful topic, e.g., the vitamin content of various vegetables; how to waltz; or it could be how to cook lamb. As you keep learning your accumulated knowledge will improve your mind. You will gain confidence. You will have more ability and more talent and will have more things to share with other people. You can get more things done and you will be less afraid to try new things. It just stands to reason if you improve your mind you are going to be a more capable and fun person to be around. And that's the kind of people you want in your life. So you have a responsibility to become that way yourself.

Discuss a serious topic with others.

Study in your field of work.

Keep up with basic world news.

Many other things you can think of. Improve your mind a little bit every day. It adds up.

Physical Health

Physical health directly affects virtually every other area of your life. If you are not healthy, life can become very tough and it can negatively affect your ability and your passion.

Eat correctly. If you do not know how to eat correctly, then you should learn how. Toward that end, make a shopping list composed, as much as possible, with only foods and drinks that are good for you. Do not shop when you are hungry. Try to keep bad foods out of your house in the first place so you are not tempted to eat them.

Get enough sleep. This varies widely, between humans, but know yourself and then get to bed at a reasonable time. The world will still be there when you get up.

When my son was younger, my wife and I sent him to a one-week camp that taught young

people how to more effectively function in their lives and at school. It turned out to be a tremendous experience. What I really admired was the young people had to be in bed at 10:30 P.M. and they had to eat three square meals a day, all at the same time each day. The young people got enough sleep and ate consistently and correctly. This put them in a position to perform well.

Engage in a balanced physical exercise program. For most people this means a cardiovascular exercise engaged in 3-4 times each week, or more often if desirable for you. Each person is different and a 70 year old reading this book might decide to walk for 15-30 minutes several times per week. No matter the age, it could be more or less. A younger person might engage in any number of appropriate activities. The camp mentioned above had the young people do some physical exercise, outdoors, in the afternoon. So the young people got the benefit of physical exercise, along with some sunshine and fresh air. This, along with eating and sleeping correctly, put them in a position to perform well in the classroom. None of this is rocket science. It really isn't. But it can make a huge difference in your life.

If exercising strenuously three or four times a week is too intense, maybe you can go for a walk three or four times a week. In other words find a more benign form of exercise. And you can combine activities. For example, you can listen to something you downloaded onto your iPod while you are exercising. If available time is a problem then you can combine activities to gain some efficiency.

For many years, when I was in my personal best routine, I would get up at 6 o'clock in the morning and go to a local gym. Once there, I would ride the lifecycle (a stationary bicycle with a chair to lean back on) for about 20 minutes. While doing this I also usually would read a book I brought with me to the gym. Mostly I was exercising and so I concentrated on having enough pedal rotations per minute, but I also would usually get 10 – 20 pages of a book read. Over the course of a month, I would usually get at least one book read. That worked out to at least 12 books per year. It adds up over time. By getting up at 6 o'clock in the morning, before the rest of my family was up, I could get some physical and mental improvement done before any of the normal, or abnormal, daily problems started making their appearance.

Stretch your muscles, especially at night, a few times a week. Maybe you can take five minutes to stretch when you get home. Stretching brings you back to life, especially as you get older. As you get older it gets even more important to stretch so as to retain flexibility and balance.

Do not abuse certain foods or drinks or substances that are only good in moderation, especially drugs and alcohol, but also fatty foods and other notoriously bad foods.

Many other things you can think of.

Most of the above is pretty obvious, but you've got to do it, or you will limit yourself, or even hurt yourself. When you hurt yourself, you are helping Satan. When you help yourself, you are helping God and the others in your life who care about you.

Family

Here are some ideas for family improvement, the fourth category.

Spend quality time with your mate. You can walk and talk together, thus getting exercise

and spending time together. Eat dinner together. Have the television off during dinner. Learn to dance; and dance once in a while, even if at home. Find a way to spend some time together every day.

Spend some quality time with your children. They have to learn from someone. It should be you. Otherwise, their peer group, equal in ignorance to your own children, will provide the values and ideas that guide your child's life.

Honor your father and your mother. This is a big one that is really important. This one actually has promises from God associated with it. If each family member does this it helps to create an environment in the family where the family can work together as a team. It helps provide a nurturing environment for children because when the children are honoring their parents, now the parents want to help the children more, to help them grow and develop. And, of course, each parent should strive to be the kind of parent worthy of honor.

"Honour thy father and thy mother, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well

with thee, in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee." Deuteronomy 5:16, KJV

Keep in touch with relatives.

Invite a single person to dinner and share your family.

Keep your living quarters clean.

If you are single, but not by choice, you might find ways to meet singles with similar values to your own - singles who are trying to become better people and who are working to build a positive, productive, life.

Many other things you can think of.

Social

For social well-being call a friend on the phone, or send an email. Regarding emails, most of the emails we tend to receive are in shorthand fragments, or have some problem, or other issue needing to be dealt with. The same is probably true for other people. So if you send a friend an email that says, "I was thinking of you and missed you." And then you include a few coherent paragraphs sharing what is going

on in your life and ask your friend how they are, it is a different email altogether and will be appreciated.

Meet somebody for lunch during the week. It will break up the week for both of you and give both of you something to look forward to. Someone has to think of it and pick up the phone and extend the invitation. That someone can be you.

Treat strangers with honor and respect until they prove they don't deserve it. How do you meet someone and make a new friend? By being friendly and decent yourself.

Join one club, or community group with similar interests to your own, e.g., a skiing club, or a bridge club, or a singing group, etc. This will get you out of the house to a place where others have similar interests. You might make new friends and you can enjoy whatever activity it is that made you join the group in the first place. A scheduled group activity can give you something to look forward to. Get out and have some fun.

Laugh. Find a comedian, or someone who makes you laugh and then enjoy. Share jokes and stories.

Watch a sporting event with a friend. A great friend of mine and I went to the seventh game of the American baseball World Series together and we had a great time. It is an experience that we will always remember. We will never miss the exorbitant amount of money we paid for the tickets. And it was great. There we were at the seventh game of the World Series. Our team won and the home crowd went bonkers. The whole game was a gigantic party and after the game there was an award ceremony. It's something we will never forget. We did something fun together and now we have this shared memory.

In terms of social wellbeing, it is very important to speak well of others. My wife is really good about this. She virtually never says anything negative about anyone. It really helps build ties with other people if they feel safe around you.

Send flowers or write a card to a friend in need.

Do not sit at home and feel sorry for yourself, which is a big negative to avoid. Do not do that because it is a big mistake.

Many other things you can think of.

Vocational

Vocational improvement obviously speaks directly to ability, but it also encompasses having some passion for what you are doing. And it is important to have integrity, or people will not trust you, nor transact business with you.

Learn at least one trade, or develop at least one skill you can use to exchange (trade) with others. It's a necessity in this life. There are very few family farms these days so having a specialized trade, or knowledge you can trade with, is very important to your financial well being. Most of this book's readers were not born rich. You are going to have to develop a trade or some knowledge, with marketplace demand, so that you are able to exchange with others in order to obtain your needs.

Learn how to trade with others better. Become a better businessperson. Since you

have to be a trader, do yourself a favor and become better at it. One of the best practices I am aware of, in this regard, is to only do win-win deals with other people. Then others will appreciate you and will come back and do business again with you. Your “marketing costs” will be less over time. Also, you will have more fun along the way. This is because the people you are trading with will like you, because you helped them to also achieve their objective in the transaction. Life will be more rewarding.

Don't focus too much, or too little, on obtaining money and things. Find the right balance for your life. If you have too many things, then you also have a lot of maintenance costs. And then you can find yourself in the position of working very hard (exchanging your life) in order to pay for the maintenance costs of all those things. In other words many people, without thinking about it, are exchanging their precious life for physical things they rarely use and don't really need. On the other hand, if you have too little, then you might be in the position where you are not paying the maintenance costs on yourself, i.e., your own health and that is a prescription for an upcoming disaster. Find the right balance for you.

Read the most important current literature in your field. If there is a trade magazine for your field, you should subscribe to it and you should read it from cover to cover. You should also look at the advertisements in the magazine and you should really try to figure out what is going on in your industry. What are the major trends in your industry? What are the best firms doing right now to stay ahead of their competition? Doing all of this will help you to have more industry and company awareness and you will be more valuable to your employer, or to yourself in your own business.

If possible, go to your industry's major trade show each year. Obviously getting time off and finances come into play here. But try to go if you can. If you cannot go to your industry's major trade show, then make sure you get a copy of your industry's trade magazine covering that trade show. And then definitely read that trade magazine issue's coverage of the annual trade show carefully.

Little things can make a huge difference. For example, in the Olympics you sometimes see a hurdler just clipping a hurdle and now they start stumbling and bumbling and eventually they completely crash into a later hurdle. And then

their Olympic dream is lost, at least for that Olympics. That few centimeters can make a huge difference sometimes. The little extra you do, that the other person did not, can totally separate you from your competition. The cream is going to the top. The cream is not going to the bottom. And God wants us to be the cream.

Go to work five minutes early and stay at least five minutes late. I have managed hundreds of people over the years and rarely do you find a worker that starts work five minutes early, or who works five minutes late. Most workers find ways to take personal phone calls and talk on the phone when they are supposed to be working. In the modern era, inappropriate Internet use has proven to be a problem. Workers routinely come back from lunch late, but leave work on time. Many people just have a wrong perspective about work, about why they were hired into the workforce in the first place, and it's noticed. The workers with these very avoidable bad habits are the same workers who are targeted, by management, for the next layoff. A worker with this wrong attitude toward work and inappropriate on the job behavior makes them undesirable to retain on an on-going basis. If you want to be more valuable to your boss, give a little extra, and have a good

attitude at work. Come back from breaks and lunch on time.

Work hard.

Care. What a novel idea! Have some passion. Care about something. Try to make something good happen for other people and yourself. It makes a complete difference in the environment you are working in. Try to make something good happen today. Try to make something good happen tomorrow and the days after that. The boss will notice. Your customers will notice. Your co-workers will notice. It will add up. Try to keep your "goodwill piggybank" full to the top. You never know when some unforeseen event will cause you to have to make a withdrawal. It can save you from being fired some day.

Take classes in your field. You are not good enough just because you work proficiently today. It's an international world now. Somewhere on earth, somebody is getting up earlier than you are and staying up later than you are and thinking about how can they do it better than you. You can go to college – even on the Internet, or go to a Community College, or take classes at a trade school. Or, worst

case, you can buy college textbooks and read them yourself. Find a way to continue to learn in your field. Do not stand still. Otherwise, someone will eventually pass you by.

Honor your boss and your coworkers.

Do not engage in office gossip.

Many other things you can think of.

Humility And Gratitude

This seventh category of personal improvement is more important than is commonly recognized. It turns out to be important for human beings. When success comes, be appreciative and keep your feet on the ground. Seeing so many rich people self-destruct has constantly amazed me. Evidently, they seem to think that once they have become rich and successful, they are now somehow miraculously immune from the laws that govern the universe. It is almost as if they believe that because they are now successful, if they walk off of a cliff, gravity will not be applicable to them. But it is and down they go. I have seen a number of businesses crash and burn because the owner thought he could now safely ignore all

the principles he did correctly to achieve success in the first place. Now that he is rich, he is immune. A few years later, the business is gone. This can also apply to relationships.

If you invest the time and effort to improve yourself, then over time, you will become a fixed up fixer-upper person. You will see important and meaningful improvements in your life. You will experience some personal successes. Can I guarantee fame and fortune? Obviously I cannot. The cream does rise to the top, though, and I believe you will become a better person, over time, if you follow these principles. And when success does come we should not lose our perspective. The basic principles to remember are found in Deuteronomy 8. I will interject my take on some of the core principles in **boldface** and **[brackets]** below:

“Therefore thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to fear him. **[Respect God and develop and maintain your integrity.]** For the LORD thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and

honey; A land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any thing in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass.

When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee. [Be thankful to God for all the good in your life. Have some gratitude and bless God.] Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: [Do not forget God. Keep his laws. Guard and keep your integrity.] Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, [Do not become arrogant. Keep your feet on the ground.] which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint; Who fed thee in the wilderness with

manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end; **[It may take a while, but God wants us to succeed. He loves us.]** And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, **[Have humility and gratitude in remembering that all good things ultimately come from God.]** that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day. And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God." Deuteronomy 8:6-20, KJV

When you improve yourself you are going to attract more success into your life and you will attract some better quality people into your life. It is a real benefit to have some success in your life and to have people of integrity and ability and passion in your life. It really is a tremendous thing. And when it happens for

you, remember God. Be grateful. Be humble. Guard and keep your integrity. Remember that all good things come from God.

Summary And Who Is The Lever?

If we did inherit a fixer-upper house we would probably do just that, fix it up. We would want to capture all of the value we could out of our inheritance. And since fixing up the inherited house is what it would take to capture the value, then that is what most of us would do.

How much more, then, should we want to fix ourselves up? **Our life is an inheritance and we should value it.** After all, we are with ourselves wherever we go.

Sometimes I have run into someone, in the business world, who was just a terrible human being. In their present state they can only be regarded as a bad person. They can change, too, however, and hopefully they will. In their present state a person like this must be miserable because they are with themselves wherever they go. And right now, they are pretty disgusting. How good could their life be? At this moment in time, can they really be

happy? I highly doubt it. They have not yet learned that they need to change. I would personally rather have less money, but be happy with myself, than to be rich and also be a really bad person.

One of the main problems that young people experience is negative peer pressure. And the effects can last well past youth. From about twelve years of age on, young people tear each other down instead of building each other up. Younger people prey on each other's weaknesses and pull each other down. What young people do not know is that each of us is, in some form, a fixer-upper person. They also do not know that human development is a lifetime project where consistent ongoing determination and effort is needed. One of the things I particularly liked about the camp experience my son had was that young people were taught to work together to build each other up. And they did. And it made a big difference. They were taught to value each other AND THEMSELVES. We need friends who are trying to grow and develop. Try to find some and then be that friend to others yourself.

Each of us, not just young people, should think about how we can improve ourselves

every day. What can I incorporate into my life so that I grow some spiritually every day? The same goes for growing mentally; growing in terms of physical health; growing in terms of family health; growing in terms of social well being; growing in terms of vocational well being; and growing in appreciation and staying humble and remembering the principles you used to become successful in the first place. Always remember there is always more work to do to completely fix yourself up.

We are all human and sometimes we have a bad day. For example, let's say you are trying to lose weight, but there was a special event at work where food was served and you ate everything including too much desert. Instead of despairing, make a compensating correction, e.g., eat a salad for dinner, or exercise 20 extra minutes to get yourself back on track. Things like this are going to happen and when they do, make a compensating correction. Don't get discouraged. Keep going.

One of the central messages of this book is that we should strive to improve ourselves in various core areas of our life. And by consistently working to grow, you will, over time. The growth will not necessarily be linear.

Some setbacks will occur. But keep at it and over time the progress will come and you will be a better, more capable person.

Most of us have busy lives and then unanticipated events crowd in on top of our already busy lives. As to the improvement suggestions recorded earlier in this book, they are a menu selection. They are a direction for your mind to think in. No human being could do all of them every day. Consider the context of your life and add some wisdom and maturity to come up with a plan for you. It is sort of like trying to eat a balanced diet. It takes some thought and some discipline. Just do it. And once we become a better person we will almost certainly also have better people in our life.

It is an honor to be made in God's image and we owe it to him to work with him and to let him help fix us up. The human experience is tough and there is always a lot of work to do. I think God knows our frailties and is patient with us. God is asking for integrity; he is asking for passion; and he is asking us to use the talent and ability that we do have. And then a Savior makes up the difference. And then, in eternity, we will gain the abilities we lack now. And with

the abilities that we have and gain, along with our integrity and passion, we will be able to share a very rich and rewarding eternity with each other and with God the Father and with Jesus Christ and with the holy angels.

We should redeem the time and not get caught up in the negativity of this world. We cannot control the decisions that others make. We can only control the decisions that we make. We should redeem the time, because the days are evil (Ephesians 5:16).

Many times people pray to God asking God to mightily intervene into their life to fix a problem. And it is all right to do so. But, there is a lack of balance sometimes in that human beings would like to use God as an automated teller machine (ATM). We sometimes treat God like an ATM, i.e., we would like to bow down, pray, punch in the secret code, and get a miraculous result. I am guessing that God sometimes feels just like an ATM.

When a builder wants to move an object, if the object is too heavy to lift easily, the builder might engage in the use of a lever to move the object – hence the phrase, “gaining leverage.” By using a lever, an object that could not

otherwise be moved is moved and the desired result is achieved.

Human beings would like to use God as a lever to move things they cannot move on their own. It is easy to just ask God, the ATM lever, to do everything. From God's point of view, however, I sometimes wonder if he is not waiting for us to become ready, i.e., fixed up enough, **to be useful as a lever for him**. God would like to be able to use us as a lever, but we are not yet ready. Have you ever thought about being useful, as a lever, for God?

If you think about various Bible histories, God was many times able to use a single man as a lever to change the world. For example, Elijah took on the prophets of Baal and God blessed the effort. In that sense, God used Elijah as a lever and got the movement he was looking for. Of course, from a different point of view, Elijah used God as the lever because without God's answering of the brief prayer the day would have been lost instead of won. Ultimately, the most important point of view, however, is God's point of view. And I believe he viewed Elijah as a lever and used Elijah as such.

In Ephesians 5, amongst other things, it talks about Christ loving the church and working to fix it up to present it to himself holy and without blemish.

“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.”
Ephesians 5:25-27, KJV

Christ loved the church and gave himself for it, though we were sinners and far from perfect. We were like the fixer-upper house mentioned above. But then Christ works with us to sanctify and cleanse us and to fix us up to the point that we are holy and without blemish. And there is a role for us to play in the process as detailed in a comment made in Revelation 19:7, where it says:

“Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.”
Revelation 19:7, KJV

We, collectively the wife above, have a responsibility to work, with Christ, to make ourselves ready. And in so doing, we can be transformed from fixer-upper people to the levers that God himself uses to move the universe.