

# FULLY ALIVE

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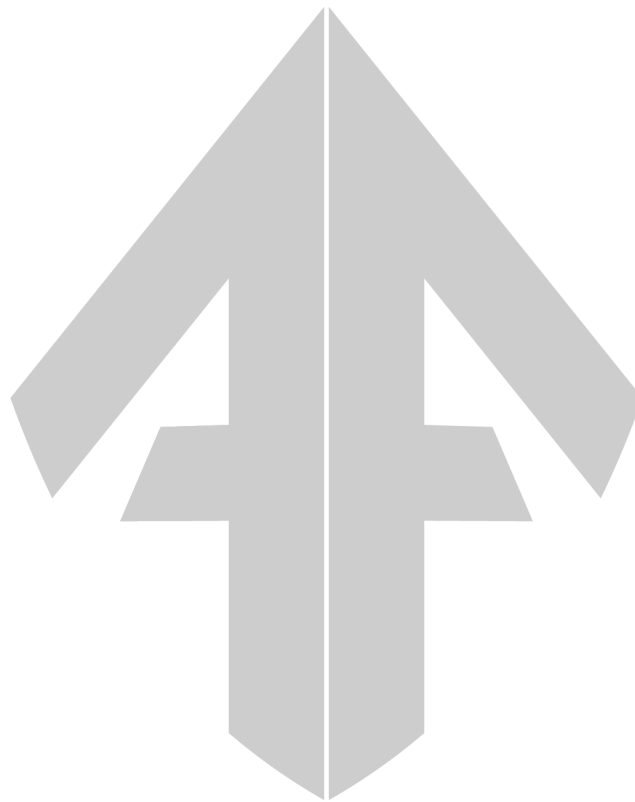
Living Out God's  
Design for Our Health



DERYL W. DUER

# FULLY ALIVE

Living Out God's Design for Our Health



## PRAISE FOR *FULLY ALIVE*

“Deryl Duer has written a personal, inspirational, and challenging book showing the relationship between exercise, eating right, and biblical teaching. I knew Deryl when he was at his heaviest and unhealthiest, and it has been encouraging for me to watch his transformation, as well as his growing ministry in this pivotal area. I encourage you to ingest, digest, and act on his wisdom.”

—Kendell Easley, University Professor of Biblical Studies, Union University (Tennessee)

“I am the Sarah that you’ll read about in this book. I have loved the Lord for many years, with all of my heart and mind but had never been taught about loving Him with all of my body. God began stirring in my heart this need to find out what His Word said about how to eat and care for my body. He led me to Deryl. What Deryl did for me over several months he has now done for you through this amazing book. I no longer see how I can sincerely love the Lord and willingly ignore the fact that He absolutely has a “best” for me in this area and that I was bought and paid for and that it is my responsibility, no, my privilege, to willingly bring this part of who I am under submission to Him. Why? Because it is His good pleasure that I live fully alive. Open your heart, read this with a willingness to learn, and the victory will be yours. I journey with you. It is indeed, war.”

—Sarah Musick, Christ-follower, wife, mother of 7, and worship leader

“For nearly a decade, I have enjoyed building a friendship with Deryl and Tracy that now can be described more as family. Being given the honor to mentor with Deryl as he worked this year to complete this God inspired mission, has more than blessed me personally. I have grown in my understanding of how every aspect of our lives is so important to God. I have learned to respect and love how He made me so that I can serve His purpose for my life reading through the chapters of this book. I encourage you to be prepared for your heart to receive the message God has for you as you take the journey to read *Fully Alive*. You will discover God’s heart and design for your health!”

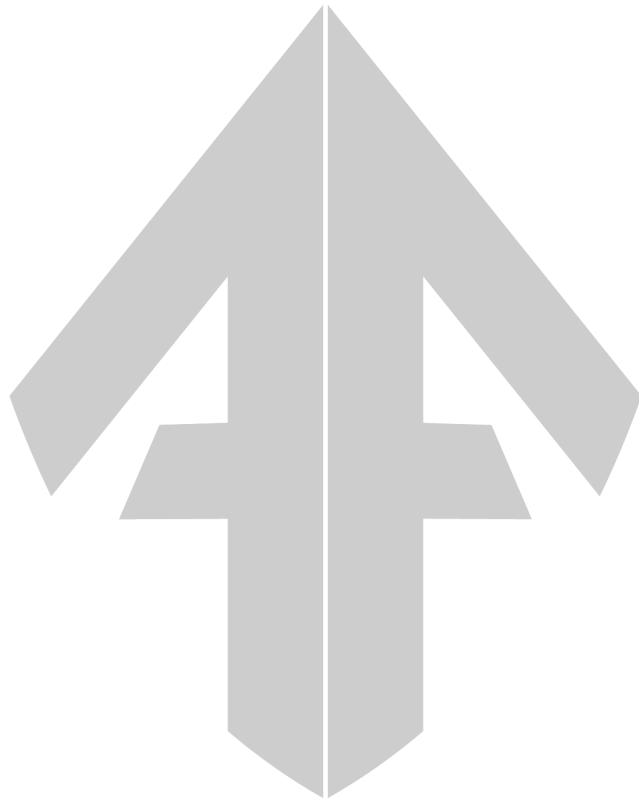
—Denise Needham, CSO (Chief Strategy Officer), SurveyMe, Newport Beach, California

“Through his irrefutable testimony, Deryl exhorts us to commit to life fully. To be “All In.” His honest, direct challenges are not formed in a bubble with a Bible, but with a life that contains tragedy and triumph. The Bible informs his experiences, giving meaning to his life, and in turn, to our lives. Our culture has grown weary of soft-spoken half-truths that make us feel better about our choices. Deryl’s bold statements, backed with science and spirituality, lead us to authentic evaluation of our life now and how it could be in the future. Whether you consider yourself a health nut or a couch potato, this book will take you deeper in your understanding of complete health. Just as in the exhilarating conclusion of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Deryl calls to us, “Come further up! Come further in!” Read this and gain a renewed desire to be *Fully Alive*!”

—Jocelynn Bailey, Social Media and Communications Consultant

“Deryl has a passion to glorify the Lord in every aspect—and especially by being a steward of the temple that God has given him. In his book, he tells the story of his own dramatic 100-pound weight loss and transformation, encouraging others to be able to make the changes, too—and not out of vanity or as an idol, but as a tool to glorify the Maker of the heavens and the earth. He uses God’s Word and his own personal experiences to remind you of the truth of the gift of obedience in all things to Christ. I encourage anyone to pick up this book to edify your spirit, encourage your mind, and motivate your body into submission to Christ. Every word of God proves true, he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. (Proverbs 30:5) May you be encouraged through the passion that God has given Deryl to proclaim this message!”

—Keri Horning, CIHC, Founder, Energetic Wellness Coaching



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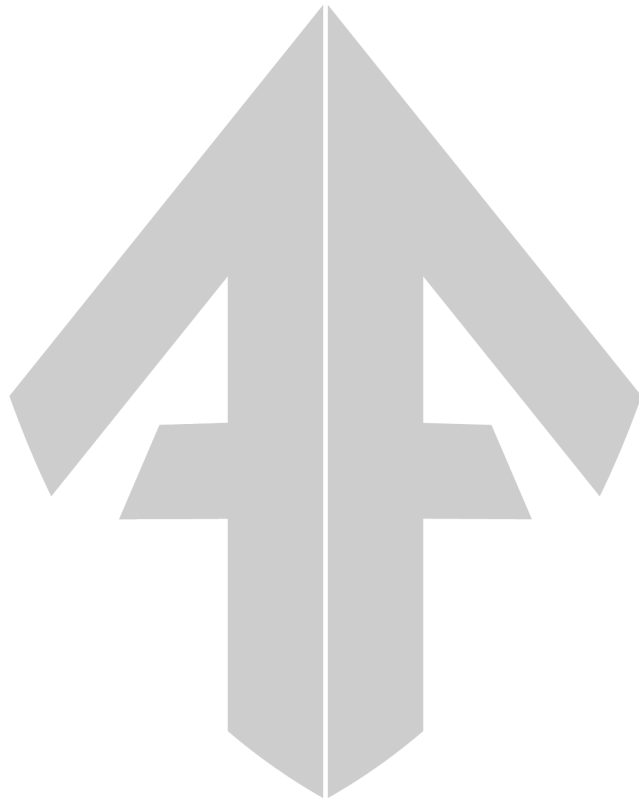
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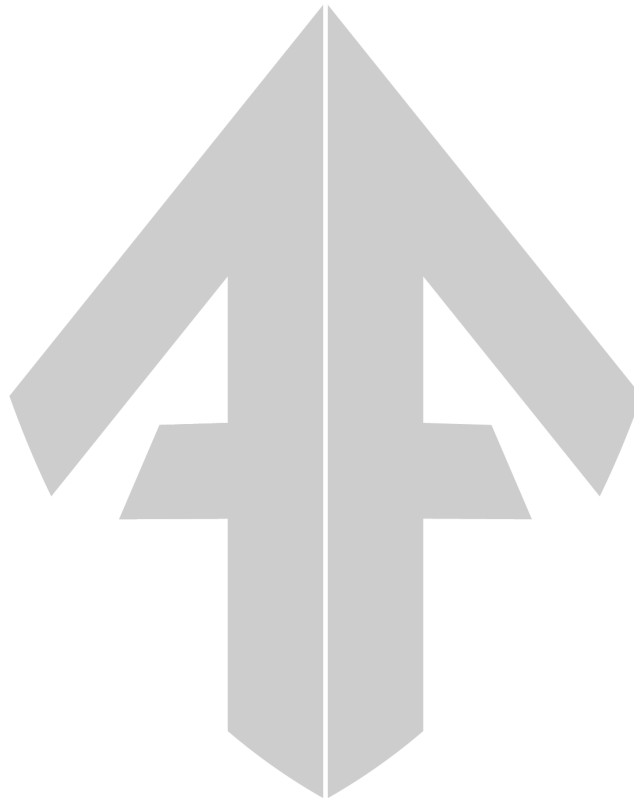








*To my wife, Tracy—it is a blessing to share my life, love and purpose with you. This book would not be possible without your encouragement and support. And to our children, Reese, Sam, Gabe and Grace—thank you for your understanding and belief in your daddy’s mission. Your growth in wisdom and stature and faith are a source of continual pride and joy.*



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*It has been said that writing a book is somewhat like birthing a child. Having watched my wife give birth to our four children, I'm not sure it's quite the same, but I understand the analogy. It has certainly been a labor of love more than a decade in the making, and this material has been as much lived as written. There are so many people I wish to thank who have inspired and encouraged me throughout this journey.*

*To Dana for being the first person to encourage me in this calling God has on my life and for giving me the first platform to teach. Words cannot express my gratitude. I look forward to seeing you again at the Master's table.*

*To Denise, for your guidance throughout the writing of this material, I could not have done this without you. Thank you for believing in this ministry and in me.*

*To our life group, friends and pastors at Compass Bible Church Hill Country, thank you for supporting this vision and being my editors, proof-readers, and examples of what it looks like to walk with God.*

*To my family, whose love and support have never wavered through all of the ups and downs of life.*

*To Dad, for giving me kick in the pants I needed to take control of my health. Thank you. I am so grateful that God brought you back into my life.*

*To Mom, thank you for being a "nutrition nut" long before it was cool. I finally learned. Thank you for telling me I could do anything I set my mind to.*

*To my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for the mighty power that You have displayed throughout my life. Thank You for Your grace and mercy, without which I would be lost. Thank you for creating and choosing me for such a time as this.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The glory of God is man fully alive.

—IRENÆUS OF LYONS

“You missed my heart...”

Tears welled up in my eyes as I heard those words echo in my head. The nudging of the Spirit was almost audible. Almost. Still, the impression it left upon my heart was deep. It was a perfect autumn morning, and I was basking in the glory of God’s creation as I sat on the back porch of our house in New Braunfels, Texas. This is where I spend my time alone with God—when weather permits. That’s when God interrupted the tranquility of my morning. Like a bolt of lightning, a quote from Irenaeus leapt off the page at me—“The glory of God is man fully alive.” Immediately it hit me, “Fully Alive! That’s it! That’s the point.”

For nine years, I had been writing and teaching God’s principles for health and fitness found throughout Scripture. I had led weekly Bible studies, delivered sermons, blogged, and even led a weekend conference on the subject. God had given me a passion for discovering and teaching what He has to say about stewarding, or taking care of our bodies, that began with my 100-pound weight loss and health transformation in 2006.

You see, I was at the unhealthiest point in my life three years into seminary. The years of intense study to finish my undergrad and start seminary, along with the “sympathy weight” I gained when my wife, Tracy, was pregnant with our first two children, had taken its toll. At the time, I just didn’t know better. I didn’t know all I was missing. Perhaps worst of all, I didn’t realize those were just excuses.

My transformation had shown me how much better life is when I am healthy versus unhealthy.

That’s when God started taking me back to His Word and showing me that it indeed contains God’s wisdom for every area of life. I was sharing my passion and what I was writing with my pastor at the time, Dana Key. Dana had been one of my heroes since I was a teenager. He was a pioneer of Christian rock music and half of Degarmo & Key, one of the most prominent Christian bands of the ’80s and early ’90s. Dana was the first person to suggest that this is a message the Church needs to hear and that God was setting me apart to help deliver it. He was also the first to warn me “from one pioneer to another” that the message God was prompting me to share would not always be popular. He told me not to get discouraged when I encountered resistance—even from within the Church.

I started teaching these principles at our church in Memphis. From the beginning, I struggled with what to call it. Originally it was *Body by God*, and then *Your Body Is a Temple*, then *Fit4Glory*. None of those ever felt right. I never had a peace about them. Something was missing.

That is until God interrupted my quiet time with the quote from the spiritual grandson of the Apostle John. Not only did I now know what I needed to call my wellness ministry, but more importantly, I understood *why* it mattered. What I heard in my spirit that morning was this: “Fully Alive! That’s the point!” I finally understood. That’s why God cares how we treat our body. Everything I had written and taught the previous nine years was correct. Our body does belong to God. We are to glorify Him in it. He does care about what we eat and drink. He does care whether or not we are active. God does care about our health. All of those things are important, but I had missed His heart.

That's when the tears welled up. Deep in my heart, I believe it was the prompting of the Holy Spirit because I knew it was true. How had I missed that? I had read numerous books on health, many of them written by Christians, but somehow missed this vital truth.

If I'm being completely honest, I had become a bit of a legalist—focused more on the letter of the law than the Spirit behind it. Being legalistic about your health may get you results, but it tends to create idols. It will also rob you of your joy. There is no joy in legalism. Legalism and idolatry are a rotten and deadly quagmire. That's not God's design for us.

God offers us *life*. Jesus says in John 10:10, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." Not some "pie-in-the-sky" dream, not just life in eternity, but a full and fulfilling life right here, right now. This is not about "health and wealth," although it may include one or both. It's certainly not "name it and claim it." Like every good thing in life, it's going to require you to do your part. It is found by delighting in Him and gladly obeying His Word. The abundant life is filled with the peace and joy of God. It is glorifying God in everything you do—*everything*. That necessarily includes how we care for our bodies.

I should probably take a moment here to very briefly address the body-positivity movement that has taken hold in our culture since the first edition of this book was written in 2017. While I would agree that fat-shaming is bad and that your body shape and size has absolutely nothing to do with your value or worth as a human being, there are problems with the movement. Perhaps most importantly, your size can have a significant impact on your health. It also may be an indication that you have idols in your life like food or drink. And if someone is putting themselves in harm's way, the most loving thing you can do is lovingly warn them. No one is perfect just as they are. And nothing is static—we're constantly either improving or devolving in itty-bitty increments. Then there's the fact that the movement itself is rooted in Marxism, critical theory, and intersectionality. But I digress.

The question you have to ask yourself is, do you feel *fully* alive? When I was overweight and had high blood pressure, pre-diabetes, and high cholesterol, I certainly didn't. But, like most people, I was living a life I was comfortable with simply because I didn't know any different.

Most of us rightly understand that Jesus came to give us eternal life, but it's not always as clear that eternal life begins *now*. The word *eternal* means "perpetual or everlasting," not "future."

It's not just a hope for the future but a present reality. Luke 18:30 says that when we give our lives to Christ, we will be rewarded many times over "*at this time and in the age to come, eternal life*" (*emphasis mine*).

When Luke speaks of God's gift of eternal life, he means that it is ours forever. In other words, we can never lose it. As Oswald Chambers said, "I am not being saved—I am saved. Salvation is as eternal as God's throne, but I must put to work or use what God has placed within me."<sup>1</sup> The offer of life starts now, and it's our responsibility to take care of everything God has entrusted to us.

But what does this have to do with our health and fitness? There seems to be this sort of unspoken belief in the church that to concern ourselves with our bodies and fitness is, at best, a vain pursuit. Which is odd. As followers of Christ, we believe the gospel touches every area of life. It changes how we do married life, how we parent, how we date, how we work, how we relate to others, how we live in community, how we handle our finances, our time, *everything*. Why then do we ignore how the gospel affects how we take care of our bodies, especially considering Paul's command, "glorify God in your body." (1 Corinthians 6:20)?

Case in point, about a week after my conversation with God about this book, a very dear friend named Sarah reached out to us. She said she felt God prompted her to talk with my wife, Tracy, and me about her desire to be healthier. Sarah said that she had always felt that worrying about what she ate and pursuing physical fitness were forms of idolatry—which they definitely can be. But then she admitted, "I don't have any energy. I'm always exhausted. This can't be how we're meant to feel. I want to be *fully alive*."

I love Sarah's heart for God. She is unreservedly in love with her Savior and God. And, she truly wants to understand for herself whether or not God actually cares about her body and the effort required to keep it healthy and fit. Over the course of a couple of hours, we had a wonderful conversation exploring God's Word together, talking about the real-world consequences of ignoring our health and the myriad of benefits

that result from seeking to glorify God in our bodies. God began to reveal His heart to Sarah through His Word, and we all came away from that conversation encouraged.

Now, I invite you into that conversation.

The primary purpose of this book is to help you obtain and maintain the biblical imperative to steward your body. In other words, to help you discover and live out God's heart and design for your health and come away with an appreciation of the powerful connection between faith and fitness. As John Piper observed, "Given the way God made us, the condition of our bodies affects our spiritual experience and usefulness. Eating, exercising, and sleeping are more spiritually relevant in the ministry than we may think."<sup>ii</sup>

It is essential to the Christian life that we care for our bodies to the best of our ability, not to glory in them but to glorify Christ in them. Your physical health matters because it is foundational to every other area of life. Your physical health impacts your mental health, emotional health, relational health, vocational health, spiritual health, and even your financial health. Not to mention the fact that you don't have the energy to engage in the other areas when you're not physically healthy.

Ask God to open the eyes of your heart to see His heart. I know that our bodies are a gift from God. I believe it is His will for most of us to be healthy, vibrant, and active so we can better serve Him. I say most of us, because we live in a fallen world where some diseases and illnesses are beyond our control. The Apostle Paul had his own "thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7-9) that may have been some sort of physical affliction. Regardless, there is no doubt that His desire is for you to bring every aspect of your being under His authority so that you can be *fully alive* in Him—whatever that looks like for you. That was Paul's prayer for us: "Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:23 ESV).

Your spirit, soul, and body are linked. If one suffers, the others also suffer. "All for one and one for all," as the saying goes. Being fully alive—living the life that God intended for us—requires being complete in Him. It means being as fit and healthy as we can be.

You don't have to be an athlete or model, but you do owe God your best—your very best. The imperative is to "glorify Him in your body."

Are you ready to be fully alive?

SOLI DEO GLORIA (Glory to God Alone)

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<sup>i</sup> Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost For His Highest: An Updated Edition in Today's Language*, (Nashville, TN: Discovery House Publishers, 1992), December 5.

<sup>ii</sup> John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals: A Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry*, Updated & Expanded, (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 183.

## CHAPTER 1

# WE ARE AT WAR

Life is war. That's not all it is. But it is always that.<sup>1</sup>

—JOHN PIPER

Open war is upon you, whether you would risk it or not.<sup>2</sup>

—ARAGORN (THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE TWO TOWERS)

I love *The Lord of the Rings*! Written by J.R.R. Tolkien, it is one of the greatest epic stories ever put to paper. The trials and triumphs the characters experience throughout the trilogy convey so many profound truths about the nature of life and the struggles we all face. If you have no idea what I am talking about, I recommend you read the series—or at least watch Peter Jackson's film adaptations.

In the second movie, *The Two Towers*, a dialogue takes place that many in the Church have quoted, especially as it relates to spiritual warfare. Théoden, king of the horse warriors of Rohan, is reluctant to go to battle. He is afraid, and rightfully so. An overwhelming army of exceptionally vicious and powerful creatures called Uruk-hai is marching toward them, destroying everything in their path.

Aragorn, a leading protagonist in the story and leader of the Fellowship of the Ring, tells Théoden, “It is an army bred for a single purpose: to destroy the world of men.” Yet Théoden will not commit to battle. He is hesitant to accept the risk of what he knows it will cost.

“I will not risk open war,” he balks.

Into Théoden's reluctance, Aragorn speaks truth: “Open war is upon you whether you would risk it or not.”<sup>3</sup>

Aragorn's warning hits the nail squarely on the head. Certainly, we can choose which battles we will fight, but the underlying fact is we were born into a world at war. Whether we like it or not, there it is. We are at war—and we are losing too many of the battles. And we are losing badly. We lose them because, like Théoden, we hesitate to enter the battle, to fight for truth and the life Jesus promised us.

Freedom is never free. We must fight for it.

Yes, Jesus promised us life, but He first warned us about a very real enemy who is waging war against us. He told us that our enemy is a thief whose sole intent is to steal and kill and destroy every aspect of our being. He has set himself and his armies against the life that Christ offers. The last thing our enemy wants is for us to be fully alive. He fears it. He knows what you are capable of in Christ, and it terrifies him.

That is why Peter warned us, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8 ESV).

Are you catching what Peter is saying here? You have an enemy who is on the hunt. He is on the offensive, and he is determined to do you harm. He doesn't want to just wound you. He wants to *devour* you, to tear you limb from limb. His attacks are savage and cruel, and he will take out any child of God who's not paying attention.



There is no “if” here. Peter considered it a given. The enemy *will* attack us. And while those attacks may be subtle or unseen, they are absolutely intended to inflict the maximum damage possible. So Peter sounded the alarm and encouraged us to “Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world” (v. 9 ESV). Likewise, James, the brother of Jesus, encouraged us, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7 ESV).

If we are going to have any hope of resisting this enemy, we will need strength greater than our own. Thanks be to God that we do! “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the might of His strength. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil” (Ephesians 6:10–11 LSB).

We are soldiers in His army. We fight in His strength, by His authority, and are protected by supernatural armor. Unfortunately, our lack of understanding of this very truth has led to a lack of passion and perseverance in the spiritual disciplines, especially Bible study and prayer. We need to be in constant communication with our Commander-in-Chief. The Apostle Paul reminds us to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Alas, prayer is too often neglected in our hectic lives because we don’t understand how vital it is. In the words of John Piper, “We cannot know what prayer is for until we know that life is war.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, there is more to life than war, but as the Navy Seals say, we are never out of the fight! That may sound pessimistic, but you know in your heart of hearts that it’s true. We would do well to remember that Scripture repeatedly reminds us “that prayer is a walkie-talkie for warfare, not a domestic intercom for increasing our conveniences.”<sup>5</sup> To neglect prayer is to attempt to fight life’s battles in our own strength and with our own resources, or worse, to withdraw from the battle entirely.

The enemy attacks us on every front, in every area of our lives. Our faith, relationships, careers, finances, and health (spiritual, physical, and mental) are all under attack. Our physical health matters because it is literally our life. When we live in a state of *dis-ease*, we tend to lack the strength and energy to deal with the other areas of life. We must be proactive. We must know in the deepest places of our hearts the tremendously high stakes of this battle. Losing is not an option—we must win this war!

I think we all sort of “know” these things on a surface level—like we know that the Allies stormed the beaches of Normandy on June 6, 1944. But that seems distant and far away. We have seen the pictures and heard the stories, but it’s not real to us. Unless you were there, unless you experienced it firsthand, you can’t really *know*.

We have grown far too comfortable. We aren’t fully convinced there is a spiritual war raging all around us. So we close our eyes, which is the same as being blind. I know this because I was once blind too.

## MY STORY

I was nineteen years old in the summer of 1989. I had made it through my freshman year at Florida State University and was living with my godfather (we called him “Uncle Joe”) in Valdosta, Georgia. I hadn’t exactly applied myself in school the previous year and was struggling to find my way. Uncle Joe had helped me find a job working in pool construction. He thought that maybe some good, hard manual labor would help me get back on track. On a hot Saturday that August, Uncle Joe called me into the living room and told me to sit down. “I found your father,” he said.

Huh? Come again? *You found my dad?*

“Yes. I made a couple of calls. He’s living in Nashville. He should be at work now. I wrote the number down on a pad by the phone in the kitchen. Do what you want with it.”

My mind started reeling. I could hardly breathe. It had been more than 11 years since I had seen, spoken with, or heard from my father. I wasn’t even sure if he was still alive. Yet, almost every time I was in a crowd, I looked around, wondering if my dad was there somewhere. There was a hole in my heart and my life left there by my father’s absence.

Uncle Joe believed I needed my dad in my life, and so he found him.

Now what. What do I say?

I picked up the phone and dialed the number. A voice on the other end answered, "This is Deryl Duer."

Pause. *Hi, Dad*

An even longer pause. His voice breaking, my dad, hoping against hope, questioned, "Deryl?"

Yes.

I don't recall the details of the call after that. I know there were lots of questions and lots of tears. My dad asked where I was and if he could come to see me. He dropped everything he was doing, hopped in his Honda Accord, and drove the 475 miles from Nashville to Valdosta as fast as he could. I'm pretty sure the posted speed limit signs were mere suggestions to him that day because six hours later, he knocked on the door of Uncle Joe's house. I opened the door, and for the first time in what seemed like forever, I was face to face with my father.

My dad wrapped his arms around me and held me in a bear hug, the kind only a father can give. Then, he just held me as we both wept. Eventually, we made it inside the house and sat down to talk, joined by Uncle Joe and his family.

Nothing can replace the years I lost with my father. I have to tell you though, that this felt good. It was the beginning of our reconciliation and restoration as father and son. Thankfully, we got a second chance.

Now, I told you that story to tell you this one:

Seventeen years later, in August 2006, I was visiting my dad in Nashville along with Tracy, and our two oldest children, Reese, who was 2, and Sam, who was 2 months. I was in the process of transferring to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and we had driven up from Memphis to Louisville, Kentucky, to visit the campus. On our way home, we decided to stop and spend some time with my dad. He pulled me aside at one point and, with a concerned look on his face, said, "Deryl, I'm worried about your health. You've gained a lot of weight over the past couple of years."

You have to understand that I looked much different back then, much more like the Pillsbury Doughboy than Mr. Clean. I knew in my heart he was correct, but to be completely honest, I was more than a little offended. Maybe it was embarrassment. Perhaps it was shame. Whatever it was, I didn't have time to fully process because his next question pierced my heart even deeper and broke through all my defenses. He asked, "Who's going to raise your boys when you're gone?"

Are you catching the irony of the moment? Do you understand how deeply that question rocked me to the core of my being? My father, the one who had abandoned me and left that gaping hole in my life, was warning me about the dangers of abandoning my own family—not temporarily, but for good. Fortunately, he loved me enough to confront me and tell me the truth.

When I got home to Memphis on Monday, I made an appointment with my doctor to have a physical. He confirmed that my dad was right to be concerned. I was morbidly obese, had high blood pressure, high LDL cholesterol, and was borderline diabetic.

Because of what I had endured as a child, I promised myself I would be the best dad in the world and that I would never leave my kids. I was determined to always be there for them. I decided that I would never be too tired to play with my kids. I envisioned running with them and wrestling with them, and playing sports with them. But I wasn't keeping my promises.

Those days, I barely had the energy to walk up a flight of stairs. Ha! Who am I kidding? I got winded if I had to bend over and tie my shoes. My whole body was inflamed. You could see it in my skin, especially my face. And I felt it. I felt the pressure: the aches and the joints that hurt. My skin that just felt "tight." The inability to catch my breath at times. I wrestled with the fear that I was having a heart attack every time I got heartburn.

Do you know what I'm talking about?

I pray you don't. But I'm guessing you do—or that you love someone who does.

Here I was running the risk of losing my family every day. My choices were robbing me. I couldn't fully enjoy the days I did have with them. Ironically, it took my dad's warning that my future with them was in jeopardy to wake me up.

I put the emphasis on “my choices” because it’s true. Motivational speaker Zig Ziglar used to say, “I have never accidentally eaten anything.” That was me. I chose what I ate, when I ate, and how much I ate. I chose to be sedentary instead of investing time to exercise. As a result, I was slowly killing myself and willfully sabotaging my quality of life.

God gives us one body and one life to live, and I was abusing both of His gifts. So, I decided to do something about my health. I knew it was time to take action. But I wasn't going to “try.” I wasn't going to “see if it worked for me.” No, I was going to *do it!* Yoda was right, we fail because we only try. “Do, or do not, there is no try.”

The first and most important aspect of creating any kind of lasting improvement in your life is to trust not in ourselves, but in the One who empowers us. So, I took God at His Word that He would work in me, both to will and to work for His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13).

That first day at the doctor's office, he wanted to put me on prescription medications immediately to control my symptoms. However, I knew in my gut that pharmaceuticals were not the answer. I didn't want to mask the symptoms. Instead, I needed to treat the underlying cause. Weeds must be pulled out by the roots. Merely cutting them doesn't work.

I also knew that if I started down that road, it was a slippery slope to a life I did not want. So I begged him for a chance to change my lifestyle. He gave me six weeks.

I started with an at-home six-week DVD workout program that Tracy had ordered from an infomercial two years earlier. That's actually a funny story. A couple of weeks after Reese was born, Tracy was in the rocking chair, nursing him and watching TV. I was headed out the door to go to church, where I was an intern in the college ministry. She had been watching the infomercial and said she wanted to order it. She was looking for a way to reclaim her body after pregnancy, and the infomercial inspired her. I laughed and said something along the lines of nobody getting those results that fast, much less from an at-home workout. Maybe it was possible if you spent hours a day at a gym... But who was I to tell her no?

Tracy was working as a registered nurse, and I was working as an intern at our church. When the program came in, she did it for a couple of days, but then she went back to work and got busy. And I wasn't all that supportive as her husband—perhaps because I was nowhere close to where I needed to be with my own fitness. But, misery loves company, or so they say. So, on the shelf it went to be forgotten... until two years later.

I don't believe it's a coincidence that my doctor gave me six weeks to show improvements. We had a six-week program sitting at home on a shelf that guaranteed results. Even if I wasn't necessarily convinced, I had nothing to lose and resolved that nothing was going to stand in my way. Although I have to confess I didn't tell Tracy what I was doing. We were on opposite schedules so I could do the workouts while she was at work in the mornings, and I had Reese and Sam down for naps. But I didn't just work out; I went all in, including making significant changes to my diet in order to break my addiction to sugar and processed foods. I lost 27 pounds in those six weeks and lowered my blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar all to within normal ranges. When I went back for my six-week check-up, my doctor was utterly flabbergasted! I was the first patient he had who had ever made such a dramatic change. In fact, he looked at the nurse and, with a break in his voice, said, “Whatever he paid today, give it back. I didn't do this, he did. I can't charge him for that.”

A few weeks later, we were back at my dad's for Thanksgiving. I was down nearly 50 pounds from our visit three months earlier. When my brother, Zach, asked me what I was doing to lose weight so fast, I told him about my dietary changes and the at-home workouts. That was the first time I admitted to anyone I was using the program I had made fun of previously. Tracy overheard our conversation and laughed. “You told me you were running,” she said. That was true; I had run—some. I just neglected to mention the part about using her DVDs. I had been through the program twice at that point and was looking for something new. That's when I found another at-home workout program called P90X®. It was time to take my fitness to the next level, so that was my Christmas gift to myself. I started my first round on January 1, 2007. I was excited and nervous at the same time—excited for what I dared to believe was possible and nervous because

I knew it was going to be hard—really hard. I put the first DVD in for Chest & Back and heard Tony Horton say, “Don’t say ‘I can’t,’ say ‘I presently struggle with.’” I did.

In all, I lost just over 100 pounds in less than a year and was in the best shape of my life at 37 years old. But what I gained was even more powerful than all the weight I had lost. I gained a whole new life that I didn’t even realize was possible. I didn’t just get healthy. I created a new life for my family and me. It was only then that I began to understand how our health and fitness impacts every area of our life—for better or worse.

I am absolutely *committed* to being the best husband and father I can be. But, even more important, I’m determined to glorify God with everything I am and every aspect of my being, including my body. When I went back for my physical a year later, my doctor told me that if I had not changed my lifestyle, there was an excellent chance that I would have been dead by 50—and that my first warning sign may have been the heart attack that killed me. Instead, he said, I probably added decades to my life! And I didn’t just add more years to my life; I was adding more life to my years.

That means I got a second chance with my family! I have more time to spend with Tracy and now four amazing children. I got a second chance to be the person God made me to be and to *do* what he put me on earth to do. Fun side note—I was also a featured story in the P90X infomercial in 2008.

This brings up another interesting thing that happened through that process--our friends and family began to notice the changes in me and started asking me what I was doing. They began to ask for help. Of course, I wanted to help, so I shared with them what was working for me. I encouraged them to start working out and helped them pick out a program based on their needs and likes. I also offered to help them with their meal plans and shared tips I had learned along the way to save time and money and still eat healthily. And as I ran across verses that talk about glorifying God in our bodies (like 1 Corinthians 6:19-20), I began to realize that God has a *lot* to say about health.

Despite being raised in the church and attending a Christian college and seminary, I couldn’t recall a single time I had heard anyone talk about these things. So, I began to research and write and share with others what God was revealing to me through His Word. At this point, I didn’t really consider it a calling. I just did it because I was passionate about it and genuinely wanted to help people.

The funny thing is, this is not a path I would ever have chosen for myself. In fact, if you had told me a year earlier that this would become a passion and pursuit, I would have said you were crazy. But God often calls you into the unexpected. We plan our way, but it is God who directs our steps (Proverbs 16:9). Remember, God called Abraham out of his home country, away from his family and friends, and into a land He would show him. To be sure, God will often use the passions He’s given you to guide you into your purpose, but you are always called to prosper where you’re planted.

Your job or vocation is not your purpose in life. It’s not who you are; it’s just what you do. God has providentially placed you where you are to shine His light and make His name great. So whether you’re a nurse, a law enforcement officer, a farmer, a business owner, a pastor, a teacher, a janitor, a construction worker, an office worker, or whatever you are, the attitude of your heart should be, “How can I most glorify God in my work?”, not “How can I find my life’s purpose in this work?” Your life’s purpose is to glorify God in all that you do (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Not long after this, I had the conversation with Dana Key when he encouraged me to embrace this ministry God had given me. Having a man of God I had admired for so many years confirm what God was doing through me was a turning point in my life. I began to read books about health and nutrition and exercise. I became a Certified Personal Trainer and Certified Instructor in Turbo Kick®, Insanity®, P90X®, and Core de Force®. I became a certified Integrative Nutrition Health Coach. For the rest of my life, I will continue learning about health, nutrition, and fitness and continue helping others with their health because there is a need for it. “Find a need, fill a need,” as they say.

By God’s grace, we will not lose heart. This road is not always easy. I have faced opposition and failure, and so will you. But that’s okay because the rewards far outweigh the trials. God does love you. He proved that at the cross. He does have a plan for your life (Jeremiah 29:11-13, Ephesians 2:10). Ultimately, His plans

are for your sanctification and His glory. That's your best life, the one where you experience God's joy and peace and abundance—that's being fully alive.

## FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

I believe that God brings us through trials so we can help others. As Paul said, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Corinthians 1:3–4 ESV).

God has used my story to inspire others to make positive changes and adopt a healthier, God-honoring lifestyle. This endeavor is all about understanding that our physical bodies matter to God, that they are a precious gift, and that we will one day answer to Him for what we did with them. Put another way, it's about the choices we make.

Life is full of choices. Each and every decision you make has a consequence, either good or bad. Moreover, while we are free to choose our actions, we are not free to choose the consequences of those actions. Consequences are pre-determined by laws and principles ordained by God. Paul warns us in Galatians: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

This is an absolute and universal truth. There are no exceptions. It applies to every area of life. It will either work for you or against you. Paul goes on to say: "Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful nature will harvest decay and death from that sinful nature. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit." (Galatians 6:8 NLT)

It seems like an obvious choice, right? I mean, who would choose decay and death over eternal life? The Bible says that we are new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), yet we still struggle with our old sinful nature. We believe the Devil's lie when he says we can break God's laws and get away with it. We rationalize; we creatively justify our rebellious behavior; we convince ourselves that we won't face any real consequences. We have this strange idea that doing whatever we feel like is freedom. But it never seems to work out that way.

What we find is that the more we pursue our idea of freedom, the more we discover it is a trap. Freedom does not mean the absence of moral constraints or absolutes. Remember that part about not being free to choose the consequences of our actions? Let's take the law of gravity as an example.

Suppose you go skydiving, and at 10,000 feet, you announce to the rest of the skydivers, "I'm not using a parachute this time. I want be free!" The fact is you're under the restraint of something greater than your idea of freedom—the law of gravity. If you choose the "constraint" of the parachute, you save your life and enjoy the true freedom and exhilaration of the experience. If you choose to jump without a chute, you'll experience what happens to the human body when it hits the ground at 240 mph. Even if you survive, you'll probably wish you hadn't. You will have destroyed your life.

God's laws act the same way: they restrain us, but they are absolutely essential to enjoy the exhilaration of true freedom. Likewise, our bodies are subject to specific "laws" when it comes to nutrition, exercise, and so forth. Obey those laws, and you experience the positive results of feeling better, living longer, and enjoying a more abundant life. Disregard them, and you have nobody but yourself to blame for the repercussions of disease, discomfort, and premature death.

We are each responsible for our lives because we are accountable for our choices. Your challenge is to own up to your responsibility for your current state of health. As Darren Hardy said in his book, *The Compound Effect*:

From this day forward, choose to be 100 percent responsible for your life. Eliminate all of your excuses. Embrace the fact that you are freed by your choices, as long as you assume personal responsibility for them. It's time to make the choice to take control.<sup>6</sup>

That day at my dad's house was my wake-up call to the health issues in my own life. It was the day I decided to own my responsibility for my health and take control. I thank God that my dad loved me enough to confront me with the truth, that he was “courageously forthright,” as one of my mentors likes to say. I knew I had to make drastic changes. I was fortunate enough that I woke up when I did, or my wake-up call may have been the heart attack that killed me.

God has plans for me. I believe He has plans for you too. But we can no longer afford to ignore what is going on all around us. We are at war, and it is time to engage our enemies.

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<sup>1</sup> John Piper, *Let The Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 65.

<sup>2</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, directed by Peter Jackson, 2002. USA: New Line Cinema, 2003 DVD.

<sup>3</sup> Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*.

<sup>4</sup> Piper, *Let The Nations Be Glad!*, 65. Italics original.

<sup>5</sup> Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, 1986, 1996, 2003), 178.

<sup>6</sup> Darren Hardy, *The Compound Effect*, (New York: Vanguard Press, 2011), Kindle Edition, 33.