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7 STEPS TO  
LIVING AT  
YOUR FULL  
POTENTIAL



JOEL OSTEEN

YOUR  
*Best  
Life*  
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FULL POTENTIAL**

20TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

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New York • Nashville

*YOUR BEST LIFE NOW*  
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You've probably heard me say that God wants to take us places that we've never dreamed. When you keep Him in first place, are your best each day, and take steps of faith you will see His goodness in new ways.

Sometimes the next step God asks us to take is a small one, but at other times the step to the next level becomes a leap of faith. This is what happened when I trusted God and decided to write *Your Best Life Now*, and it's now twenty years later with over ten million copies in print.

Only seven years before I wrote this book, I was working in TV production for our church. I was not even thinking about being a pastor, much less an author. In fact, when I was first approached about writing a book, I declined the offer simply because I didn't think of myself as a writer. But I know that God has placed more promise and potential in each of us than we know. So, about a year after I declined the first offer to write a book, the opportunity presented itself again. This time, I decided to trust God, step out in faith, and expect good things to happen.

As I look back on this—the twentieth anniversary of the release of *Your Best Life Now*—I believe now more than ever that when we trust God, He will take us where we need to be. I can't help but be grateful that God in His goodness has used this book to help millions

of people around the world. I never dreamed that the book would open so many doors for our ministry in 2004 and put us at a different level of exposure. It proved to me, once again, that God's dream for our lives is much bigger than our own, and when you believe, you will rise higher, accomplish more, and live your best life now.

—Joel Osteen, June 2024

## INTRODUCTION

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The future is yours for the taking!” is an often quoted expression of hope passed on to graduating seniors, new employees, and wide-eyed couples on their wedding days. Yet we all know that while some people grab life with enthusiasm and take control of their futures, such a grandiose promise doesn’t always pan out for everybody. Why is that? What makes the difference?

Happy, successful, fulfilled individuals have learned how to live their best lives *now*. They make the most of the present moment and thereby enhance their future. You can, too. No matter where you are or what challenges you are facing, you can enjoy your life right now!

Many people go through life with low self-esteem, focusing on the negative, feeling inferior or inadequate, always dwelling on some reason why they can’t be happy. Others put off their happiness till some future date:

- *Someday, things will be better in my life.*
- *Someday, I will be caught up with my work long enough to enjoy making memories with my family.*
- *Someday, I’ll earn more money, and I won’t have to worry about how I will pay the bills.*
- *Someday, I’m going to get in better physical condition.*
- *Someday, I’ll have a better relationship with God and enjoy more of His goodness.*

Unfortunately, “someday” never comes. Today is the only day we have. We can’t do anything about the past, and we don’t know what the future holds. But we can live at our full potential right now!

In this book, you will discover just how to do that! Within these pages, you will find seven simple, yet profound, steps to improve your life, regardless of your current level of success or lack of it. I know these steps work, because they have worked in the lives of my family members, friends, and associates, as well as in my own life. I’m confident that if you will take these steps along with me, you ultimately will be happier than ever before, living with joy, peace, and enthusiasm—not just for a day, or a week, but for the rest of your life!

In *Your Best Life Now*, we’ll explore how to:

- *Enlarge your vision;*
- *Develop a healthy self-image;*
- *Discover the power of your thoughts and words;*
- *Let go of the past;*
- *Find strength through adversity;*
- *Live to give; and*
- *Choose to be happy.*

In each of these areas, you will find practical suggestions and simple choices that will help you to stay positive in your lifestyle and believe for a brighter future.

You may have experienced adversity or trials in your past. Perhaps you’ve had more than your share of setbacks and heartaches. But today is a new day! By following the principles I’m going to share with you in *Your Best Life Now*, you can be happy and fulfilled, starting *today*.

I will challenge you in this book to break out of a “barely-get-by” mentality, to become the best you can be, not merely average or ordinary. To do that, you may have to rid yourself of some negative

mind-sets that are holding you back, and start enlarging your vision, seeing yourself as doing more, enjoying more, being more. That, my friend, is what it means to live your best life now.

Are you ready to develop your full potential? Let's get started! It's time to begin living your best life now!

PART I

*Enlarge Your Vision*

## *Enlarging Your Vision*

I heard a story about a man on vacation in Hawaii with his wife. He was a good man who had achieved a modest measure of success, but he was coasting along, thinking that he'd already reached his limits in life. One day, a friend was driving the couple around the island, showing them the sights. They stopped to admire a gorgeous house set high on a hill. The property was replete with beautiful palm trees and lush green gardens in a picturesque, peaceful setting with a panoramic view overlooking the ocean.

As the man gazed at the magnificent home, he commented to his wife and friend, "I can't even imagine living in a place like that."

Right there, something inside him said, *Don't worry. You won't. You will never live in a great place like that.*

Startled at his own thoughts, he asked himself, *What do you mean?*

*As long as you can't imagine it, as long as you can't see it, then it is not going to happen for you.* The man correctly realized that his own thoughts and attitudes were condemning him to mediocrity. He determined then and there to start believing better of himself, and believing better of God.

It's the same way with us. We have to conceive it on the inside before we're ever going to receive it on the outside. If you don't think you can have something good, then you never will. The barrier is in your mind. It's not God's lack of resources or your lack of

*Your own wrong  
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from God's best.*

talent that prevents you from prospering. Your own wrong thinking can keep you from God's best.

You, too, may have assumed that you've already peaked, that you've reached your limits in life, that you will never be more successful. *I'll never achieve significance, do something meaningful, or enjoy the good things in life that I've seen others enjoy.*

Sad to say, you are exactly right . . . *unless* you are willing to change your thinking. That's why the first step to living at your full potential is to *enlarge your vision*. To live your best life now, you must start looking at life through eyes of faith, seeing yourself rising to new levels. See your business taking off. See your marriage restored. See your family prospering. See your dreams coming to pass. You must conceive it and believe it is possible if you ever hope to experience it.

To conceive it, you must have an image on the inside of the life you want to live on the outside. This image has to become a part of you, in your thoughts, your conversation, deep down in your subconscious mind, in your actions, in every part of your being.

## Envision Your Success

Shawn Johnson East was the 2007 individual all-around World Artistic Gymnastics Champion at the age of fifteen. She followed that up at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, winning the individual gold medal in the balance beam and three silver medals, and helping her American team take second in the world. Having practiced gymnastics since the age of three, she had long dreamed of competing in the Olympics. As was true of the other gymnasts she competed against, she had trained her body for thousands of hours to rise to that level of success.

But Shawn has said that while many people have the body for winning, her practice of mental training and visualization was just as important as the physical training, especially for withstanding the pressure of performing before hundreds of millions of viewers

worldwide. Her coach taught her to visualize herself enclosed in an invisible glass box that no noise or pressure could enter. As long as she stayed in the box, she couldn't hear the crowd or what the other competitors and coaches were saying. She wouldn't be distracted by the thousands of people in the arena or the scoreboard or the other competitors on the floor around her simultaneously doing their events. She said that when she stepped into the Olympic arena, it was still and peaceful and all she could hear were her coach and parents.

Shawn also told how her coach approved her having a shorter workout routine in the gym than the other girls. He gave her time to go home, lie in bed, and envision her various routines over and over. Every time she made a mental mistake in a routine, she would start over, sometimes over and over again. The most difficult part of reaching her gold medal was training her mind to envision every move being made perfectly, because the mind is so naturally wired to the negative.

Have you ever seen yourself accomplishing your dreams? Do you keep that vision of victory in front of you? You will never be a winner until you first see yourself as a winner. You have to reprogram your mind, to rid yourself as much as possible of the reasons why you can't do it. You have to replace that vision in your mind of yourself as not making it with a mind-set of faith and success. You have to develop a can-do attitude and see yourself stepping onto the winner's platform.

What you keep before your eyes will affect you. You will produce what you're continually seeing in your mind. If you foster an image of defeat and failure, then you're going to live that kind of life. But if you develop an image of victory, success, health, abundance, joy, peace, and happiness, nothing on earth will be able to hold those things from you.

Too many times we get stuck in a rut, thinking we've reached our limits. We don't really stretch our faith; we don't believe for anything bigger. But God wants us to constantly be increasing, to be rising to new heights. He wants to increase you in His wisdom and help you to make better decisions. God wants to increase you financially, by giving you promotions, fresh ideas, and creativity.

The Scripture says that God wants to pour out “His far and beyond favor.”<sup>1</sup> God wants this to be the best time of your life. But if you are going to receive this favor, you must enlarge your vision. You can’t go around thinking negative, defeated, limiting thoughts. *Well, I’ve gone as far as my education will allow. Or, I’ve had this sickness for years. I guess it’s my lot in life.*

To experience this immeasurable favor, you must rid yourself of that small-minded thinking and start expecting God’s blessings, start anticipating promotion and supernatural increase. You must conceive it in your heart and mind before you can receive it. In other words, you must make room for increase in your own thinking, then God will bring those things to pass. Until you learn how to enlarge your vision, seeing the future through your eyes of faith, your own wrong thinking will prevent good things from happening in your life. God will not pour fresh, creative ideas and blessings into old attitudes.

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## Get Rid of Those Old Wineskins

Centuries ago, wine was stored in leather wineskins rather than bottles. Animal skins were dried and cured until the leather could be shaped into containers to hold the wine. When the wineskins were new, they were soft and pliable, but as they aged, they often lost their elasticity; they wouldn’t give anymore. They would become hardened and set, and they couldn’t expand. If a person poured new wine in an old wineskin, the container would burst and the wine would be lost.

Interestingly, when Jesus wanted to encourage His followers to enlarge their visions, He reminded them, “You can’t put new wine into old wineskins.”<sup>2</sup> Jesus was saying that you cannot have a larger life with restricted attitudes. That lesson is still relevant today. We are

set in our ways, bound by our perspectives, and stuck in our thinking. God is trying to do something new, but unless we're willing to change, unless we're willing to expand and enlarge our vision, we'll miss His opportunities for us.

The fact that you are reading this book, however, says that you are ready to go to a higher level; you want to reach your full potential. The good news is, God wants to show you His incredible favor. He wants to fill your life with "new wine," but are you willing to get rid of your old wineskins? Will you start thinking bigger? Will you enlarge your vision and get rid of those old negative mind-sets that hold you back?

One fellow whose marriage was on the verge of dissolution told me, "Joel, I've been this way for a long time. Nothing good ever happens to me. I don't see how my marriage could be restored. We've always had these problems."

"That kind of thinking will keep you from receiving the good things God wants to pour out in your life," I told him. "Those wrong attitudes will block the flow. You must stop dwelling on negative, destructive thoughts that keep you in a rut. Your life is not going to change until you first change your thinking."

Early in our marriage, Victoria and I were out walking through our neighborhood one day when we came upon a beautiful new home in the final stages of construction. The doors were open, so we stepped inside and looked around. It was a fabulous home, much prettier than any of the other homes in that community. Most of the other homes around us were one-story, ranch-style homes that were forty to fifty years old, but this house was a large two-story home, with high ceilings and oversized windows providing an appealing view of the backyard. It was a lovely, inspiring place.

When we came out of the house, Victoria was excited. She turned around, looked back at the home, and said, "Joel, one day we're going to live in a beautiful home just like that!" At the time, we were living in an extremely old house that had experienced some foundation problems, preventing all of our doors on the inside from closing

properly. We had stretched our faith and spent everything we had just to buy that home and get into that neighborhood. Thinking of our bank account, and my income at the time, it seemed impossible to me that we'd ever work our way up to a home like the one we had toured.

Being the "great man of faith" that I am, I said, "Victoria, that home is so far beyond our reach, I don't see how we could ever afford something like that."

But Victoria had much more faith than I did, and she would not give up. We stood out in front of that house for thirty minutes and debated. She told me all the reasons why it could happen. I told her all the reasons why I doubted.

She said, "No, Joel; I feel it deep inside. It is going to happen."

She was so filled with joy, I didn't want to burst her bubble, so I let the matter drop. But Victoria didn't! Over the next several months, she kept speaking words of faith and victory, and she finally talked me into it. She convinced me that we could live in an elegant home like the one we saw. I got rid of my limited thinking and I started agreeing with her. I started believing that somehow, some way, God could bring it to pass. We kept on believing it, seeing it, and speaking it.

Several years later, we sold our property, and through another real estate deal, we were able to build a house just like the one we had viewed. We saw it come to pass. But I don't believe it ever would have happened had we not first conceived it on the inside. I don't believe it would have happened if Victoria had not talked me into enlarging my vision.

God has so much more in store for you, too. Start making room for it in your thinking. Conceive it on the inside. Start seeing yourself rising to a new level, doing something of significance, living in that home of your dreams. If you want to see God's "far and beyond" favor, then you must replace those old wineskins.

"I've gone as far as my parents were able to go," Steve said to me. "I've gone as far as anybody else in my family. That's good enough, isn't it?"

“No,” I told him. “You don’t have to be bound by the barriers of the past. God wants you to go further than your parents. I’m sure your parents were fine, hardworking people, but don’t fall into that trap of just sitting back and accepting the status quo. You need to make a decision that you are not going to live an average, mediocre life. When you get up in the morning you need to have the attitude of: *I’m going to do something great. I’m going to excel in my career. I’m going to enthusiastically serve other people. I’m going to break out of this mold and rise to new heights.*”

When our children were young, I told them all the time, “You’re going to go much further than Daddy. You have so much potential. You’re going to accomplish great things!”

I was not simply trying to instill pride in our children; I wanted them to have a big vision. I wanted them to conceive great possibilities at an early age. I wanted them to grow up expecting God’s favor, expecting to be leaders, expecting to excel in whatever they do. And I knew they must have it on the inside before God can ever bring it to pass on the outside.

One day, I was driving through Houston with my eight-year-old son, Jonathan. As we drove down the freeway we came upon the Compaq Center, the sixteen-thousand-seat arena that was the former home of the Houston Rockets professional basketball team, and soon to be the home of Lakewood Church. I slowed down and pointed. “Jonathan, look over there. One day, that’s where you’re going to be preaching.”

He said, “Oh, no, Daddy. When I get old enough, I’m going to preach in Reliant Stadium!” (Reliant Stadium, now known as NRG Stadium, is Houston’s seventy-thousand-seat home of the Houston Texans football team.)

I thought, *I like the fact that he’s got a big dream.* When I first told that story at Lakewood several years ago, after the service a lady came up and handed Jonathan a check for one hundred dollars toward that new stadium. He was so excited. He said, “Daddy, I wish you’d talk about me more often in your sermons!”

Even if you come from an extremely successful family, God still wants you to go further. My own father accomplished great things in his lifetime. He inspired people all over the world. But I'm not going to be satisfied to do merely what Daddy did. I don't want to simply hold my ground and maintain. No, I want to press on toward new heights.

If you look carefully, you will see that God has been trying to encourage you. He's allowed people to cross your path who are far more successful than you are, who have much stronger marriages, who are enjoying His favor in marvelous ways. When you see or hear about other people succeeding or doing what you want to do, be encouraged rather than jealous. Don't say, "That could never happen to me. I'm not that talented. I'll never get those kind of breaks. I'll never have that much money."

Get rid of those old wineskins. Change your thinking. Get beyond the barriers of the past and start expecting God to do great things in your life.

### "Do You Not Perceive It?"

Understand, God is constantly trying to plant new seeds in your heart. He's constantly trying to get you to conceive, to give up antiquated ideas and spawn new bursts of creativity within. The key is to believe, to let the seed take root so it can grow.

What if Victoria had acquiesced concerning that new house, and said, "Yes, Joel; you're right. We're just young people. We'll never afford this. That house is way out of reach."

We'd probably still be living in our original crooked house. Thankfully, she enlarged her vision and conceived what God was saying to her. Perhaps God has been speaking to you, as well, trying to move you to a new level. He's put people in your life as examples to inspire you. When you see their accomplishments, their joys, their victories, something inside you should say, "Yes, God! I know You can

bless me in a similar way. I know I can have a great marriage. I know I can be that happy. I know I can go to those new heights.”

There is a seed within you trying to take root. That’s God trying to get you to conceive. He’s trying to fill you with so much hope and expectancy that the seed will grow and bring forth a tremendous harvest. It’s your time. You may have been sick for a long time, but this is your time to get well. You may be bound by all kinds of addictions, all kinds of bad habits, but this is the time to be set free. You may be struggling financially, in all kinds of debt, but this is the time for promotion. This is your time for increase. Friend, if you will get in agreement with God, this can be the greatest time of your life. This can be the time that God pours out His immeasurable, far and beyond favor.

God says, “Behold, I am doing a new thing. Do you not perceive it?”<sup>3</sup> Notice, God is always ready to do new things in our lives. He’s trying to promote us, to increase us, to give us more. Yet, it’s interesting that God asked the question “Do you not perceive it?” In other words, are you making room for it in your own thinking? Are you believing for increase? Are you believing to excel at your job? Are you believing to be a more effective leader, or a better parent?

It’s time to enlarge your vision.

Maybe God wants to improve your marriage, restore your family, or promote you at work. But that seed of opportunity can’t take root because of your doubts.

“How could my business ever take off and begin to flourish? I’ve got so many obstacles. It’s just impossible.”

God is saying to you something similar to what He told the Virgin Mary and others throughout Scripture. It’s not going to be by your might. It’s not going to be by your power. God said it’s going to be by His Spirit. The power of the Most High God shall come upon you and cause it to happen. With God on your side, you cannot possibly lose. He can make a way when it looks as though there is no way. He can open doors that no man can shut. He can cause you to be at the right place, at the right time. He can supernaturally turn your life around. Jesus said, “If you believe, then all things are possible.”<sup>4</sup>

My question to you is: Will you believe? Will you allow that seed to take root? The angel told Mary that she would conceive without knowing a man. In other words, God was saying it could happen through supernatural means. It can happen without the bank loaning you the money. It can happen without having the right education. It can happen in spite of your past. It can happen despite what the critics are telling you. With God, all things are possible.

When we got the news that the Compaq Center might be coming available, some of my initial thoughts were similar to Mary's. *How could this be? How could we ever get that facility? It's going to be too expensive. The city will never let a church use that. It's much too prominent.* But this time, I expanded my vision. I let the seed take root. I conceived it on the inside. I began to "see" our congregation worshipping God in the Compaq Center in the heart of Houston.

Over the next few months, plenty of people told members of our congregation, staff, and me, "It's never going to happen. You don't have a chance. You're wasting your time."

That didn't matter. The seed was growing on the inside. When it looked impossible, and we faced all kinds of challenges, I just said, "Father, I thank You that You are fighting our battles for us. I thank You that You're going to show us some of that immeasurable, far and beyond favor." The seed kept growing, getting stronger and stronger. Sure enough, three and a half years later, against strong adversity, God turned the situation around, and He brought us out with the victory.

God wants to do big things in your life, as well. Don't settle for a small view of God. We serve the God that created the universe. We've got to eliminate this barely-get-by mentality. "God, if You'll just give me a fifty-cent raise, I think I'll make it this year." "God, if You'll just help me endure this marriage..." "God, all I want is a little happiness."

Get rid of those old wineskins. Get rid of that small-minded thinking and start thinking as God thinks. Think big. Think increase. Think abundance. Think more than enough.

Years ago, a famous golfer was invited by the king of Saudi Arabia to play in a golf tournament. He accepted the invitation, and the king flew his private jet over to the United States to pick up the pro. They played golf for several days, and enjoyed a good time. As the golfer was getting on the plane to return to the United States, the king stopped him and said, "I want to give you a gift for coming all this way and making this time so special. Anything you want. What could I get you?"

Ever the gentleman, the golfer replied, "Oh, please; don't get me anything. You've been a gracious host. I've had a wonderful time. I couldn't ask for anything more."

The king was adamant. He said, "No, I insist on giving you something so you will always remember your journey to our country."

When the golfer realized that the king was resolute, he said, "Okay, fine. I collect golf clubs. Why don't you give me a golf club?"

He boarded the plane, and on his flight back home, he couldn't help wondering what kind of golf club the king might give him. He imagined that it might be a solid gold putter with his name engraved on it. Or maybe it would be a sand wedge studded with diamonds and jewels. After all, this would be a gift from the oil-rich king of Saudi Arabia.

When the golfer got home, he watched the mail and the delivery services every day, to see if his golf club had come yet. Finally, several weeks later, he received a certified letter from the king of Saudi Arabia. The U.S. professional thought that rather strange. *Where's my golf club?* he wondered. He opened the envelope, and to his surprise, inside he discovered a deed to a five-hundred-acre golf course in America.

Sometimes kings think differently than you and I think. And friend, we serve the King of kings. We serve the Most High God, and His dream for your life is so much bigger and better than you can even imagine. It's time to enlarge your vision!

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