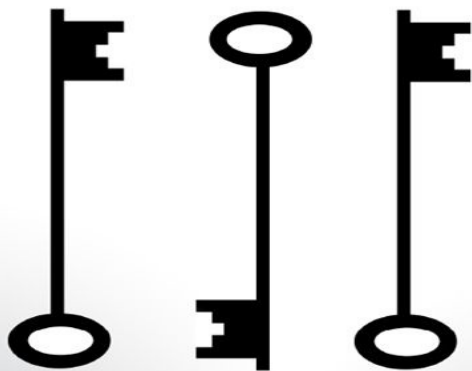


UNLOCK YOUR POTENTIAL

Becoming Your Best You



Dr. Myles Munroe

UNLOCK
YOUR
POTENTIAL

Becoming Your Best You

DR. MYLES MUNROE

Copyright © 2013—Myles Munroe *All rights reserved. This book is protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America. This book may not be copied or reprinted for commercial gain or profit. The use of short quotations or occasional page copying for personal or group study is permitted and encouraged. Permission will be granted upon request.* Unless otherwise identified, Scripture quotations are from THE HOLY BIBLE, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. All rights reserved. Quotations marked (LB) are taken from The Living Bible, and (NKJV) from the New King James Version. Take note that the name satan and related names are not capitalized. We choose not to acknowledge him, even to the point of violating grammatical rules.

Destiny Image Publishers, Inc.

PO Box 310, Shippensburg, PA 17257-0310

“Promoting Inspired Lives.”

ISBN 13: 978-0-7684-0442-5

For Worldwide Distribution Printed in the U.S.A.

Bahamas Faith Ministry
P.O. Box N9583
Nassau, Bahamas

Previously Published ISBN: 978-0-7684-9438-9

This book and all other Destiny Image, Revival Press, MercyPlace, Fresh Bread, Destiny Image Fiction and Treasure House books are available at Christian bookstores and distributors worldwide.

For a U.S. bookstore nearest you, call 1-800-722-6774.
Or reach us on the Internet: www.destinyimage.com.

Parts of this book were previously published as *Maximizing Your Potential Expanded Edition: The Keys to Dying Empty*, ISBN 978-0-7684-9438-9, copyright © 2013.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

How to Become Your Potential

CHAPTER 2

The Enemies of Potential

CHAPTER 3

Guard and Protect Your Potential

CHAPTER 4

Cultivate and Feed Your Potential

CHAPTER 1

How to Become Your Potential

What you have done is only a mere fraction of who you are.

Slowly the young man worked his way through the brush and the young trees that had grown up through the cracked foundation of the dilapidated house. Cobwebs filled openings where windows had once been and hornets' nests clung to the scorched beams of the floor above. A partially burned-out staircase hovered in the corner and a broken oil lamp lay dashed on the first step. Years of dirt and debris littered the floor, with an occasional wildflower providing a discordant note of charm and warmth.

At the base of the staircase, the young man halted. Dared he try to climb the stairs to the main floor above? He doubted the rotted wood would hold him, yet the desire to go higher impelled him cautiously on. For years he had wanted to explore this shell of a house, but his mother had strictly forbade it, reminding him that the forlorn gate to the fence that surrounded the property contained a faded "No Trespassing" sign and warning him that it was not safe. How long the house had stood this way, he didn't know, for within his memory it had always been so. Today no one could stop him, however,

for only a few hours before he had bought the land on which the house stood.

Moving carefully from one step to another, testing each before putting his full weight upon it, the young man gingerly mounted the stairs. Here and there he skipped a step that threatened to give way beneath him. At the top, he paused to survey the charred remains that surrounded him.

He stood at the end of a long room that appeared to have once been a kitchen. Broken pottery and twisted metal littered the floor. A warped candlestick lay on the edge of what must have been the family table. Here and there scraps of material waved in the breeze that blew through the paneless windows. Nearly one whole wall of the room was missing, gaping into a room beyond. Though he wondered what that room might reveal, a step in that direction quickly changed the explorer's mind, for his foot went through the floor. Light streaming from the room beyond suggested that little remained of that part of the house.

Turning to his left, the young man discovered a long hallway with an opening on either side. Here the floor creaked beneath his step, but it did not give way. The opening to the left revealed a room dominated by a massive stone fireplace. Parts of the chimney had tumbled onto the rusted, sooty grate, and the filth on the hearth warned that many birds had built their nests within the chimney's shelter. The only furniture in the room was the crumbling remains of a small table.

The opening to the right, farther down the hall, revealed a small sitting room with the hulks of rotting furniture leaning

against two walls. Strips of blackened wallpaper hung from the ceiling, but the walls contained no gaping holes as had the other two rooms. Backing quickly from the room when a rat scurried across the floor through the carpet of leaves that had blown through the broken windows, the young man turned to retreat. Suddenly a faint streak of light at the end of the hall caught his attention.

Moving cautiously around the broken boards on the floor, the explorer moved toward the hint of light. As he neared the blackened wall, he realized that a closed door lay at the end of the hallway. The doorknob turned, but the rusted hinges prevented him from opening the door. Though he pushed with all his strength, the door would not yield. Disappointed, the young man retraced his steps through the kitchen, down the rickety stairs, and through the cluttered basement. As he started to climb into his car, the thought came to him: *That hint of light must mean an open window or a hole in the wall. Perhaps I could see into the room from the back of the house.*

After much effort, the explorer stood at the back of the house, having worked his way under the low branches of old trees and through the overgrown bushes and waist-high weeds that hampered his progress. A single window adorned the back wall. Although direct access to the window was denied by high bushes, a large tree spread its limbs within inches of the cracked, but nearly whole, panes. Inching his way up the tree and out the limb, the explorer gasped with astonishment as he peered through the dirty glass.

This room appeared to have been largely untouched by the fire that had ravaged the rest of the house. Candlesticks stood

on the mantle over the small fireplace, the wax from the candles having run down the stone onto the hearth below. Books lay open on the desk to the right and curtains hung at a high window to the left. Although the walls were yellowed with age and spotted with water, they were not black like those of the rooms he had entered. Who would have thought such a room could exist in the otherwise ruined house?

Excitement coursed through the young man's veins. Why, this room might reveal what the rest of the house must have looked like before the fire. It might also provide the clues he needed to determine who had lived here and why the house had been left to rot instead of being rebuilt. Perhaps other treasures awaited him in the parts of the room he could not see, untapped resources that would help him to solve the mystery that had always surrounded the house in his young mind. Wildly his imagination soared as he looked into the unexpected chamber that lay before him.

In time the young man withdrew from his vantage point in the tree. His mind was filled with wonder, for the room held possibilities beyond his greatest hopes. Perhaps it would afford him the opportunity to fulfill his boyhood dream of restoring the house to its former grandeur. Already he was busy calculating how he would force open the door at the end of the dark hallway. Then he would know more certainly the wealth of his find.

Potential. The unexposed, untapped, hidden, dormant revelations that lay beneath the accumulated dust and grime of many years. *Potential.* Strength and beauty that lay unmarred by the ravages of fire, wind, and water. *Potential.* The

possibilities for rebuilding after years of destruction, decay, and neglect.

Our lives are very much like this decaying house. The strength and beauty God gave to men and women when He created them in His image and likeness too often are not evident in us. Our minds are cluttered with impure thoughts and mixed motives, our bodies are weakened by the effects of bad habits and poor decisions, and our hearts are warped by misplaced trust and the absence of love. In many ways, we are empty people working our way through the problems and detours of life with little hope that things will ever change. This discouragement and dissatisfaction with life is the result of our separation from God, a separation that came when Adam and Eve sinned by choosing to put their own thoughts and desires above God's commandments and promises. (See Genesis 3.) Every person shares this tendency to establish his wants and will over God's. Therein lies the source of our discouragement and dissatisfaction.

Our discouragement and dissatisfaction with life are the results
of our separation from God.

God's intent for men and women has not changed, nor has He taken from us the strength and beauty He gave us at birth. These gifts are buried within us, covered over by the attitudes and assumptions that prevent us from living the abundant life God planned for us. In effect, *many have placed a "No Trespassing" sign over their power, strength, abilities, talents, and capabilities.* Because we have obeyed that sign, many of the possibilities with which we were born still exist within us—hidden and dormant, unused and untried.

TREASURE IN CLAY POTS

The great writer Paul refers to this hidden wealth within as “treasure in jars of clay” (2 Corinthians 4:7). The jar may not look like much, but the treasure inside it is valuable and priceless. In other words, *what people see when they look at you is not who you truly are. You can become much more than you now are.*

Who would have thought that Saul of Tarsus, a fervent Jew who vigorously opposed the followers of Jesus, would become Paul the apostle, the greatest missionary the Church has ever known? Certainly not the Christians he persecuted—they did not expect anything good from him (see Acts 9:20–21)—nor Saul himself. Not in his wildest imaginings would he have seen himself as a servant of the One he despised. Yet, like the old house, Saul contained a dormant wealth that was not evident under the outer trappings of his misguided religious fervor.

That same wealth is present in you. You are capable of more than others expect of you—even beyond your own most extravagant dreams. Unexposed, dormant potential rests beneath the surface of your daily existence, waiting to be discovered and released. Although access to this great treasure has been clogged by sin, the strength and beauty of your potential can be reclaimed. The destruction, decay, and neglect of years need not continue to hold captive the reality of who God created you to be.

You are capable of more than others expect of you—even

beyond your own most extravagant dreams.

This untold wealth within you is uniquely yours because God creates no two people for the same purpose. Your personality, abilities, and resources are God's gifts, bestowed on you before He gave you the breath of life, and they contain the possibility for bringing meaning and fulfillment into your life. They are available, however, only to those who put forth the effort to recover them and to use them according to their God-given specifications. *Learning to tap the hidden wealth of your potential is the greatest task and the most pressing need of your life* because if you do not discover how to expose and use this treasure, you will die with it. This wealth, which is the all-surpassing power of God within you, is never given to be buried. God wants you to release all He gave you for the benefit of others and the blessing of your own life. Let us use the stories of the ruined house and the life of the apostle Paul to establish some keys you can use to tap into your potential.

KEYS TO RELEASING YOUR POTENTIAL

The explorer in the story of the old house was undoubtedly excited as he backed away from his perch outside the unexpected room at the back of the house. He had received a glimpse of the house's former grandeur, a prelude to understanding the original owner's dreams and plans when he built the house. That glimpse suggested the possibility of

establishing the necessary link to the house's past—before fire, wind, and water had caused major destruction—that would enable him to rebuild the house according to its original design.

Know Your Source

No one knows a product like the manufacturer. If you are going to move from who you now are to whom God created you to be, you too must seek to understand the nature of God's original design for you, before sin ravaged your life. That understanding is not available to you unless you become reconnected with God, your Creator. Apart from Him, you cannot and will not release your full potential because He gave you this potential and He designed you to fulfill it. *You must know God, your Source, if you want to experience a satisfying, abundant life.*

Saul of Tarsus met his Source on the road to Damascus when Jesus Christ spoke to him from a bright light that left him blind. For three days he remained blind and did not eat or drink. He simply waited before God, wondering what would happen next. Then God sent a man named Ananias to place his hands on Saul to restore his sight and to bring the Holy Spirit into his life. Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes and he could see again. It was during this period that the purpose for Paul's life was revealed to him by his Creator/Source. After that, Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus, preaching that Jesus is the Son of God and proving that Jesus is the Messiah.

What a change! Few of us will experience a change as

dramatic as that which occurred in the man Saul who became Paul, but a change just as radical—from being self-centered to God-centered—must occur in all who would discover and use their full potential. This is true because *the foundation key for releasing potential is always a relationship with the source or maker of a product*. You *must* have a life-changing encounter with the One who made you if you want to become who you were created to be.

Like the young man who could not restore the house to its former grandeur without understanding the builder's original design and intent, you cannot expose the gifts, talents, and natural abilities that God put into you if you do not become reconnected with Him. All you do and are apart from God will always fall short of the true value and capacity of your potential. Therefore, fulfillment and value are impossible without Him. Only by returning to your Source/ Manufacturer/ Creator can you hope to unlock His power within you. *You must know your Source to become your potential. This is the foundation key.*

Understand Your Function

The mode of operation for maximum performance of any product is determined and established by the manufacturer/creator, and must be obeyed for maximum benefit. Thus, the second key to releasing your potential is knowing how God created you to function and applying that knowledge to your life. No builder can successfully restore a house unless he first knows the specifications determined by the builder and the features provided by the original blueprints. A shower, for example, may fulfill part of the designer's intent for the

bathroom, but it cannot match all the functions of a tub. Thus, installing a shower in place of a tub would change not only the room's appearance but also its ability to provide the intended functions that were built into the original design.

Man was designed to live by faith. *God's original design for men and women calls for them to live from the perspective of faith with eternity in their hearts.* The Book of Hebrews defines faith as "being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1). This is God's mode of operation. He is not influenced by outward appearances; neither is His power diminished by seemingly impossible obstacles.

God is not influenced by outward appearances; neither is His power diminished by seemingly impossible obstacles.

The apostle Paul learned the importance of looking beyond what is immediately visible and evident. Although he encountered many situations that seemed to stand in the way of his mission to share the good news of Jesus with those outside the Jewish world, he persevered by focusing on His God-given task and by relying on the Holy Spirit to guarantee the completion of God's plans. Thus, Paul testified, "[I] live by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7).

Your ability to unleash your potential is tied to your willingness to consistently live from God's perspective, which saw Paul the apostle in Saul the murderer. He created you to share His viewpoint. If you allow the obstacles that clutter your path and the expectations of others to discourage you and to send you on time and energy-consuming detours, your

God-given talents and abilities will be wasted. *Learning to function by looking beyond what you now see to what is yet possible is an important key to releasing your potential. You must resolve to live by faith.*

Understand Your Purpose

To fully release your potential, you must discover your corporate and specific reason for existence and the accompanying assignment. One of the first tasks of a builder who wants to restore an old house is to determine the purpose for each room. Although this purpose may not be immediately evident, the rebuilding cannot accurately and effectively duplicate the original building if the purpose for each room is not established.

In a similar manner, you cannot effectively release your potential if you do not discover God's purpose for giving you life. Your potential and your purpose are perfectly related because God never requires you to do or be something that is not part of His purpose. Likewise, He never requires something of you that He did not provide for when He created you. Your potential enables you to fulfill your purpose, and your purpose reveals the potential hidden within you.

Your potential enables you to fulfill your purpose, and your purpose reveals the potential hidden within you.

From his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus to the end of his life, the apostle Paul knew that he had been called and saved by God for a specific purpose: "...God, who set me apart from birth and called me by His grace, was pleased

to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles..." (Galatians 1:15-16). Similarly, the apostle Peter discovered his purpose when Jesus told him three times, "Take care of My sheep" (John 21:16; see also John 21:15-18). Both remained faithful to God's purpose, dedicating their lives to its accomplishment and conforming their actions to its fulfillment.

You are like these apostles. You too have a purpose set forth by God and the skills, talents, abilities, and characteristics that enable you to fulfill His plan. Your responsibility is to discover *what* God designed you to do and *how* He planned that you would accomplish it. Until you discover God's blueprint, you will not have the motivation to uncover the potential that will empower you to accomplish it, nor will you be happy and fulfilled. *Discovery of purpose is discovery of potential.*

Success without an understanding of purpose is meaningless. Knowing and cooperating with your God-given purpose is the third key to releasing your potential. He alone knows why He created you with the specific combination of personality, abilities, and dreams that make you the unique individual you are. *You share the purpose of humanity to glorify God by fulfilling your individual purpose and by releasing the power, beauty, and possibilities hidden within you.*

Success without an understanding of purpose is meaningless.

Know Your Resources

Provisions are given for the fulfillment of vision. Every

builder, before he starts a project, both estimates what materials he will need to complete the job and determines what resources are available to him. God functions in a similar manner. As He forms and fashions each person for a specific purpose, He also provides the necessary resources to accomplish His plans.

The apostle Paul knew that God had given him certain resources to help him fulfill his purpose and release his potential. Varied in nature and use, these resources included his tent-making skills, his Roman citizenship, his Jewish education and upbringing, and, most importantly, his faith in Jesus Christ and his confidence that God, through the Spirit, had given him a message for the world. (See Romans 15:15-19.)

Paul was careful, however, to view these resources only as tools given by God to accomplish His plans. Therefore, he always treated his resources as being less important than the One who gave them. His education and upbringing as a Jew, for example, had to be refined and redirected before Paul could use, not abuse, them. Thus, he came to see the law, which had been all-important to him as a Pharisee, as God's gift for showing men their sin and their need of a Savior. (See Romans 3:20.) Resources cannot and should not be substituted for the Source.

You too possess God-given resources. The proper use of these resources will release your potential, but their misuse will destroy you. Hence, you cannot fulfill your limitless potential unless you learn what resources you have, how God intended them to function, and why He gave them to you. *The effective use of your resources is the fourth key to releasing your potential.*

Maintain the Right Environment

All potential demands conditions conducive to the maximum fulfillment of purpose. Consequently, all life forms have ideal conditions in which they grow and flourish. The apostle Paul clearly understood that the conditions in which we live affect the nature of our living. Light that is continually surrounded by darkness is in danger of losing its brilliance. Righteousness that repeatedly associates with wickedness may, in time, be tarnished. Thus, Paul writes:

“I [the Lord] will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be My people. Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God (2 Corinthians 6:16b–7:1).

Paul’s observations are as applicable today as they were when he wrote them. “For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14b) You cannot consistently spend time with ungodly people, or be surrounded by unrighteous behavior, and maintain your fellowship with God. That’s serious business, since *fellowship with God and obedience to His laws and commandments are essential ingredients of your ideal environment*. Life outside that environment will destroy your potential because a wrong

environment always means death.

Life outside your ideal environment will destroy your potential because a wrong environment always means death.

All manufacturers establish the ideal conditions required for the maximum performance of their products. In the same manner, you were created to function under specific conditions established by your Creator. Any violation of the Manufacturer's specific conditions minimizes His intended effect. The laws of God are given not to restrict us but to protect us by maintaining the ideal environment for maximum performance. Obedience protects performance. Disobedience diminishes potential.

As fish cannot live in polluted waters and plants die in parched ground, so you cannot live in conditions that do not acknowledge God as the central, all-important factor of daily life. Creating and sustaining a God-centered environment is as important for your growth and satisfaction as designing houses that fit their climates and settings is for the reputation and the success of an architect. Maintaining your ideal environment is the fifth key to releasing your potential.

Work: The Master Key

Dreams without work accomplish nothing. The young man peering into the unexpected room could dream forever about restoring the house, but his dream would become reality only if he channeled his excitement and vision into drawing blueprints and doing the work of rebuilding. In a similar manner, the apostle Paul could not have reached the non-Jewish world with

the gospel of Jesus Christ if he had only rejoiced in his new relationship with God, learned to live by faith, surveyed his resources, and sought a healthy environment in which to live. Paul had to work to release his potential and to achieve his purpose.

Dreams without work accomplish nothing.

The New Testament is filled with stories of Paul's efforts to share God's gift of salvation with those who had not heard the gospel. (See particularly Acts 13–20.) When one door closed, he looked for another. When his traveling companions interfered with his plans, he parted company with them and looked for others who could share his vision. Not even riots, beatings, and imprisonments prevented him from continually seeking ways to share the good news of Jesus. Again and again, Paul worked hard—fighting discouragement, misunderstandings, and distrust—to fulfill his commission from God.

You also need to work. *The love of work is the secret to personal progress, productivity, and fulfillment because work encourages the release of potential, and potential is the abundance of talents, abilities, and capabilities given to every person.* When you refuse to work, you deny yourself the opportunity to fulfill your potential and your purpose, and you forfeit the productivity that could have blessed yourself and others. Therefore, you steal from the world. The greatest safeguard against this theft is both to understand the purpose and the nature of work, and to live from that knowledge.

The Purpose of Work

Most of us are not interested in discovering what we can accomplish when we go to our jobs. We go to work only because we want a paycheck. This view of work is contrary to God's purpose for giving work. He is more concerned with our use or abuse of the skills and talents He gave us than He is with our financial wealth or poverty. He wants us to be good workers, not good job keepers. This change in attitude requires that we begin to see work as a blessing, not a punishment.

Work as God planned it was given to man before he sinned. *It is His tool to make us productive and fruitful.* Because God's assignments and activities always involve work, He designed men and women to share in His creativity by giving them the opportunity to work. Even as God worked through His spoken word to make the unobservable visible, so too we must work to reveal the invisible possibilities that exist in us. Although the *conditions* of work changed after sin—becoming painful and requiring great effort—the purpose of work did not. *Work is not a result of sin.*

In essence, work is God's gift to help people discover their potential. Until you start working to discover what you yet can be, you will miss the blessings inherent in work. This is true because work profits the worker by...

- providing for physical needs,
- building self-esteem,
- teaching that the discovery and use of talents, skills, and abilities is far more important than the acquisition of money,

- developing an attitude that sees a challenge as a cause for rejoicing because it holds the possibility for success,
- offering the opportunity to transform dreams into reality,
- multiplying resources, and,
- revealing the potential that is yet to be exposed, tapped, released, and employed,
- Work also blesses others as we give generously of what we have and who we are.

Work is God's gift to help you discover your potential.

The Nature of Work

God's work in creation was to deliver the stuff hidden inside Him. He labored to birth the world. This concept of laboring to deliver is the central factor in God's perception of work.

Work releases potential and empowers success. It uses innate abilities and natural talents to share experience and proficiency. It also energizes the world's productive ability and activates man's creative power. In essence, *work brings forth from a man or a woman the possibilities that will die with that individual unless they are activated, performed, produced, and fulfilled.* In the absence of work, strength and energy waste away, dreams and visions wither and die, God-given skills and talents degenerate, and productivity wanes. In

essence, laziness, which is the absence of work, aborts potential and sacrifices possibilities.

Work releases potential and empowers success. Laziness, which is the absence of work, aborts potential and sacrifices possibilities.

Therefore, God's purpose for giving you work is to bless you by calling forth from you all that He sees in you. He designed you to meet your needs and the needs of others through your ability to work. When you see work from this perspective, and you accept your opportunities to work as the gifts of a loving God who wants to draw from you the wealth of your hidden potential, you will find that work becomes an anticipated pleasure to be embraced as an opportunity to find happiness and fulfillment. Work is the master key to releasing your potential.

These six keys are essential for the release of your potential. If you disregard even one of these principles, you will limit your potential because the violation of a law always incurs a penalty, and history has proven that these laws are true. Commit yourself today to practicing these keys so your potential will not die with you. God wants all He put in you for the good of the world to be released and maximized. Only then can you truly become your potential.

God works the vision in; man works the vision out.

PRINCIPLES

THAT

GOVERN POTENTIAL

1. What God speaks to is the source for what He creates.

God spoke to Himself when He created you, so you came from God.

2. All things have the same components and essence as the sources from which they came.

Because you came from God, who is Spirit, you also are spirit.

3. All things must be maintained by the sources from which they came.

You must be maintained by God, your Source. Apart from Him you will die.

4. The potential of all things is related to the source from which it came.

Your potential is related to God's potential.

5. Everything in life has the ability to fulfill its potential.

God built into you the ability to fulfill your potential.

6. Potential is determined and revealed by the demands placed on it by its creator.

God reveals what He created you to do by placing demands on you. You are capable of doing everything God asks of you.

KEYS TO RELEASING YOUR POTENTIAL

1. You must know your source.

God is your Source.

2. You must understand how you were designed to function.

God designed you to operate by faith.

3. You must know your purpose.

God created you to express His image, to enjoy fellowship with Him, to dominate the earth, to bear fruit, and to reproduce yourself.

4. You must understand your resources.

God has given you resources of spirit, body, soul, time, and material things.

5. You must have the right environment.

God created you to live with Him in a relationship of fellowship and obedience that is established and maintained by His presence, assurance, guidance, and direction.

6. You must work out your potential.

Work is God's blessing to challenge and expose your potential.

CHAPTER 2

The Enemies of Potential

Your ability is your responsibility.

The cyclists arose early the first day of the journey. By noon they were well on their way to completing the first leg of their cross-continent trip. As they fell into bed that night, exhaustion and exhilaration vied for attention. The day had given them an exciting taste of the joy that lay ahead. It had also warned them that much hard work lay between them and their intended destination.

The next morning they awoke to blisters, sore muscles, and a spectacular sunrise. Amid groans, teasing, and words of encouragement, they prepared to break camp and to begin riding. To their chagrin, however, two of the ten bicycles had flat tires. Repairing the flats delayed their starting by an hour or more so that the heat of the day was upon them when they hit the road.

That evening as they set up camp, anxiety and discouragement overshadowed the exhilaration of the night before. First, the bikers had been soaked by a late afternoon downpour. Then, the campfire was difficult to start because wood was scarce and what they found was wet. Finally, one

cyclist discovered that a strap on his pack was nearly worn through, and another realized that his canteen was missing from his gear. As they huddled in their sleeping bags on the damp ground, each hoped the next day would be better.

Dawn was just beginning to light the sky when an angry shout broke the silence. An early riser had awakened to find the contents of his pack strewn all over the ground. Something—or someone—had gotten into it during the night. The others quickly checked their packs, only to find that some of their food was missing too. Although no one voiced the thought, more than one cyclist wondered if someone was trying to stop them from finishing their journey. It was a silent, troubled group that mounted their bikes that third morning.

Our lives are not unlike this cross-continent bicycle trip. When we come back to God and begin to glimpse and act on His plans and purposes for our lives, we become excited and we anticipate the joys and the surprises that lay ahead. As we meet obstacles and discover the perseverance and hard work that will be required for us to fulfill our God-given potential, our enthusiasm often wanes and boredom or disillusionment sets in.

Then, like the cyclists, we must simply stay with the journey in spite of the hardships and the discouraging situations and events that plague us. Even as a pregnancy is no guarantee of the birth of a healthy child, so beginning a journey does not ensure that it will be finished. *Vision can be aborted.*

The world is proficient at aborting potential. Not only will

it do nothing to help you reveal and use the hidden you, it most likely will discourage you by measuring your efforts against its standards for success—standards it made because the world doesn't know what true success is. Beware of these standards and the disparaging words of those who live by them because, if you let them, they will undermine your journey. Then tragedy strikes as success dies in failure, hope dies in despair, and visions die in the absence of confidence. This abortion of potential breaks the heart of God.

Tragedy strikes when success dies in failure, hope dies in despair, and visions die in the absence of confidence.

You are responsible to release your potential. No one else can or will do it for you. Releasing some potential, however, does not mean that you will release all your potential. Redeeming all your potential requires that you protect your potential, cultivate your potential, share your potential, and discover and obey the laws of limitation regarding your potential. These are the keys to maximizing potential.

You can work hard to achieve a dream, but if you do not protect it, cultivate it, share it, and act within God's standards and directives, you will lose it. This loss occurs because knowing God's requirements and fulfilling them are two very different experiences. One is information, the other action. Many times what should have been doesn't happen because somewhere between the dream and its completion our great aspirations are trampled and destroyed. This is the work of the destroyer.

THE ENEMY OF YOUR POTENTIAL

When God placed man in the garden, He commanded him to work the garden and take care of it. The King James Version of the Bible says that man was to *till* and *keep* the garden, while Today's English Version assigns to man the responsibility to *cultivate* and *guard* the garden. This requirement of God is given to man before he breaks fellowship with God through disobedience. Man is in his ideal environment, being filled with God's power and anointing, living in perfect holiness and purity, and enjoying God's fellowship and presence. Thus, this commandment implies that something or someone was waiting to take or attack what man had been given to keep. The Scriptures warn us of this thief.

I [Jesus] am the gate; whoever enters through Me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full (John 10:9-10).

Satan is our enemy. He wants to destroy the power of God within us so that God's glory is not revealed in us. He who was thrown out of Heaven to the earth, where he "leads the whole world astray" (Revelation 12:9), is out to remove us from the One who is our life and our salvation. He's out to destroy all we could be because he knows that those who become rerooted in God have the ability to act like God, showing His

nature and likeness. Consequently, satan comes as a thief to steal our potential because he cannot boldly challenge God's power within us. Our outward container, which is our body, reveals nothing of the treasure inside us. This all-surpassing treasure is God's power and wisdom.

The Lord is exalted, for He dwells on high; He will fill Zion with justice and righteousness. He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is the key to this treasure (Isaiah 33:5-6).

In other words, the key to releasing God's power within you is reverencing Him, which is living with Him in a relationship of obedience and submission. *You are filled with heavenly wisdom, but you have to follow God's program to benefit from it.*

Jesus spoke of this need to live in relationship with God when He said:

Remain in Me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in Me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you (John 15:4-7).

No wonder satan tries to steal our potential. He fears God's power within us because it is greater than he is. Therefore, our dreams, plans, and ideas are targets of his evil forces. The minute we have a good idea, the deceiver will send someone to criticize our dream because he cannot permit us to accomplish our vision. As long as we are only dreaming, he is safe and he'll let us alone. When we begin to act on our dream, he'll hit us full force.

Our dreams, plans, and ideas are targets of satan's evil forces.

You are responsible to guard your dream and bring it to reality by safeguarding and protecting it from injury and loss. To do so you must understand how satan seeks to rob you of your destiny.

ENEMIES OF POTENTIAL

Satan's methods for stealing dreams are many and varied, according to the vision and the personality of the dreamer. Let us identify some of these enemies of potential so you will recognize them for what they are, the deceiver's activity in your life.

1. Disobedience

The Bible repeatedly states that disobedience withholds God's blessings and rains His curses upon us. This is true because disobedience brings into our lives the natural (God-ordained) consequences of our actions. Teenagers who

experiment with sex destroy the beauty of the first intimacy that is to be enjoyed between a husband and a wife, open themselves to AIDS and other diseases, and risk losing the joys of youth due to the birth of a child. They also forfeit their dreams to problems in marriage in later years, to serious illnesses and possible death, and to the responsibilities of raising a child before they have matured into the task.

Jonah learned the consequences of disobedience when he boarded a ship going in the opposite direction from the city to which God was sending him. He nearly lost his life by drowning. In a similar situation, Lot's wife, in spite of God's commandment not to look back, sacrificed her life for one last look at the city she was fleeing from. *Disobedience always wastes potential and retards the attainment of goals. You cannot persist in disobedience and maximize your potential.* To maximize your life you must submit to God's will in everything.

2. Sin

Although the effects of disobedience and sin are similar, sin is a more basic ill because it is total rebellion against the known will of God—or to say it another way, a declaration of independence from your Source. The resulting alienation from God destroys potential because we cannot know God if we do not have His Spirit, and His Spirit is the password to unlocking our potential. Sin, in essence, says, "I know better than you do, God, how to run my life."

King David experienced the desolation and death that result from a rebellious spirit when he violated another man's

wife and tried to cover up his action by having the woman's husband killed in battle and taking her for his wife. The son born to David from this affair died, and David endured the agony of separation from the God he loved. What the child could have done in his lifetime was sacrificed, as were David's energy and vitality during the months before he confessed his sin. It is no wonder David prayed:

Hide Your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from Your presence or take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me (Psalm 51:9-12).

Destroying your relationship with God through sin is always suicide. *You cannot become who God created you to be if you persist in rebelling against Him.* Without God's Spirit living and working in you, you will die with your potential. Sin caps the well of your potential. To maximize your life you must avoid compromise with ungodliness.

3. Fear

Fear is having faith in the impossible. It's dwelling on all that could go wrong instead of what will go right. Although, for example, accidents do happen and cars must be carefully maintained and driven, fear that prevents us from driving or riding in a car immobilizes our potential because it severely limits where we can go.

Fear is dwelling on all that *could go wrong* instead of what *will*

go right.

When as a lad, David met the giant Goliath with a slingshot and three stones, he most likely was afraid. Yet because he mastered his fear by trusting in God instead of thinking about all that could go wrong, he freed the Israelites from the oppression of their enemies and honored the name of God. (See First Samuel chapter 17.) His faith in God moved him beyond timidity to power. Fear is seeing Goliath too big to hit. Faith is seeing Goliath too big to miss. Paul wrote to Timothy about this ability to move beyond fear:

...fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline (2 Timothy 1:6-7).

A spirit of self-discipline submits the information we receive through our bodies and our minds to the knowledge we receive from God's Spirit. It refuses to allow our minds to run wild imagining everything that *could* happen and chooses instead to apply God's promises to the situation and to depend on God's love and power for the outcome. Faith, our God-given mode of operation, combats fear and encourages the maximizing of potential. He who fears to try will never know what he could have done. He who fears God has nothing else to fear. To maximize your life you must neutralize fear with faith.

He who fears to try will never know what he could have done.

4. Discouragement

Most things worth having require patience and

perseverance. No pianist plays perfectly the first time she touches the keys, nor does an athlete win a race the first time he runs. Many discouraging moments exist between an initial experience and the perfecting of a skill.

Unfortunately, *much potential is sacrificed on the altar of discouragement*. Perhaps you've experienced this enemy as too many sour notes hindered your ambition to practice or the failure to win a prize took you from the race. Replaying the music until it's right and running every day are the only ways to fulfill your potential. Concert pianists and Olympic athletes aren't born. They move beyond their discouraging moments to perfect their innate skills.

The same attitude is required of you to maximize your potential. *God will not give you a dream unless He knows you have the talents, abilities, and personality to complete it. His commands reveal the potential He gave you before you were born.*

God commanded Joshua to be courageous (see Deuteronomy 31:7; Joshua 1:7-8). Even though Joshua didn't feel courageous, God knew courage was in him and commanded him to show what was there.

Those who are under command—military command, for example—just do what they are told. No matter how they feel about the command, they just obey it.

You must respond the same way to God's commands. Even if you are feeling discouraged about completing the task, you must start it. Do what needs to be done no matter how difficult

or impossible God's commands feel. Then discouragement will have no opportunity to destroy your potential. To maximize your life you must neutralize discouragement with hope.

5. Procrastination

How many times have you delayed so long in making a decision that it was made for you, or in completing a project that it was too late for your intended purpose? Most of us do this more often than we'd like to admit.

Procrastination, the delaying of action until a later time, kills potential. The Israelites discovered this when they found many reasons why they couldn't obey God and enter the land He was giving them. When they saw that the land was good, with an abundance of food, and finally decided to take the land as God had commanded them, they discovered that the opportunity to obey God was past. Disregarding God's warning that He would not go with them, they marched into battle and were soundly defeated. God left them alone to fight for themselves.

If you wait for perfect conditions, you will never get anything done (Ecclesiastes 11:4 LB).

Procrastination often grows out of discouragement. When we become discouraged, we stop finding reasons for doing what we know we can do. Then God allows us to go our own way and suffer the consequences. Sooner or later, we will discover that we've lost much because we refused to act when God required it. Very often He will find someone else to do the job. Procrastination is a serious enemy of potential. It eats

away at the very core of our time and motivation. To maximize your life you must destroy procrastination by eliminating all excuses and reasons for not taking action. Just do it!

Procrastination eats away at the very core of our time and motivation.

6. Past Failures

Too often we are unwilling to take risks in the present because we have failed in the past. Perhaps the first story you sent to a magazine wasn't published, so you never wrote another story. Perhaps your first garden didn't produce many vegetables, so you never planted another garden. Perhaps your first business proposal didn't win the bank's approval, so you never started your own business, and you're still working for someone else.

Failure is never a reason to stop trying. Indeed, failure provides another opportunity to enjoy success. The apostle Paul discovered the truth of this when he met Jesus and turned from persecuting Christ to preaching the good news of God's salvation in Him.

...I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things.... Only let us live up to what we have already attained

(Philippians 3:12-16).

Paul was not unaware of his failures, but he refused to allow them to keep him from doing what he knew he could do. He believed that the God who had called him to serve Him would accomplish within and through him all that He had purposed. He trusted in a power higher than himself.

...I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith (Philippians 3:8-9).

Paul had messed up, but in Christ he found the reason and the strength to pick himself up and move on. You must do the same or you will never see your full potential. Refuse to be a loser no matter how many times you lose. *It is better to try and fail than never to try at all.* Remember, you cannot make progress by looking in the rearview mirror. To maximize your life you must let the past be past and leave it there.

7. The Opinions of Others

Most of us have had the experience of sharing a great idea with friends only to have them tell us 50 reasons why it won't work. Too often such criticism prompts us to abandon our ideas because we wanted those with whom we shared our dreams to approve of our plans.

Forsaking dreams because others belittle them or say we are crazy for trying them wastes potential. So does changing our plans to suit the ideas and expectations of our family, friends, and business associates. Satan uses those closest to us, whose opinions we value, to get to our potential. He kills our vision by shaking our faith in God and our confidence in ourselves.

Satan uses those closest to us, whose opinions we value, to get to our potential.

Because the destroyer uses those you trust most to keep you from translating your vision into reality, you must accept that no one is for you except God. No human being can be trusted to defend *your* potential. You alone are responsible. By refusing to allow the disparaging comments of others to discourage you, by removing yourself from their influence when your vision becomes threatened, and by clinging to God's commandments and directions, you can unleash the totality of God's power within you.

Jesus demonstrated the importance of disregarding the opinions of others when He went to Jerusalem one Passover and the crowds believed in Him because of the miracles He performed.

But Jesus would not entrust Himself to them, for He knew all men. He did not need man's testimony about man, for He knew what was in a man (John 2:24-25).

He had a good reason to be cautious about accepting the affirmation of the crowd: He knew the fickle nature of people.

He didn't trust their cheers and their pats on the back. Accolades should be appreciated but never required.

The events of the week preceding His death confirm the wisdom of His decision. One day the people in Jerusalem received Him with great joy and hailed Him as the Messiah. Several days later they clamored for His death. Had He relied on their praise and good will, He very well may have lost the opportunity to fulfill His God-given purpose to be the Savior of the world.

You too must beware of allowing the opinions of others to influence your decisions. Do not trust others to work for your good. Too often folks you thought were for you will turn against you and destroy what you have been working to accomplish. Remember, you are required to perform for an audience of one, the Lord Jesus Christ. When He applauds, then you are successful.

Get your encouragement and promotion from God. Tap into the heavenly realm and receive the confirmation of your plans from Him because His opinion is the only one that counts. The opinions of others can destroy your potential if you permit them to touch your dreams and visions. To maximize your life you must declare independence from the opinions of others.

8. Distractions

This is one of the principal enemies of maximizing potential. All of us have had the experience of walking into another room and saying, "Now, why did I come here?" We had a purpose

when we decided to go into the other room, but something between our decision to go and the moment we arrived sidetracked us from our original intention. Or we may allow side interests to distract us from our main goal.

Say, for example, that you set the goal of walking three miles every day to improve your health. The first day you walk three miles in a little over an hour. The second day your walk takes an hour, but you walk only half a mile because you keep stopping to pick wildflowers. Picking flowers isn't bad. It's the result of picking flowers—the distraction from your goal—that is bad.

Satan uses distractions to stop our progress toward a goal, or at least to change the speed of that progress. If he cannot convince us that our dream is wrong, he'll throw other things into our path to slow the development of our vision or he'll push us and induce us to move ahead of God's timetable. One of Satan's most successful devices is to preoccupy us with "good" things to distract us from the "right" things.

Perhaps God has planted the seed of a dream that He wants you to accomplish 20 years from now. Between then and now He has many other plans for your life. Let that seed incubate, and proceed cautiously. As you stay open to God's leading in that area, He will reveal when the timing is right. Never sacrifice the right thing for a good thing.

Likewise, if God says, "Now is the time," be careful to examine your thoughts and actions closely to see if they help or hinder the completion of your goal. If a plan or activity distracts you from accomplishing your vision according to

God's schedule, it is bad for you at that moment. The apostle Paul understood this truth.

"Everything is permissible for me"—but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible for me"—but I will not be mastered by anything (1 Corinthians 6:12).

Everything that doesn't help our progress hinders it. This is true because obeying God too soon or too late is disobedience. Therefore, we must be careful not to get drawn into good activities that distract us from our overall purpose. God requires our prompt response to Him throughout the journey. Obedience part of the way is really disobedience. We must be true, then, to our whole vision over the long haul because true obedience to God is doing what He says, when He says, the way He says, as long as He says, until He says "stop."

Because distractions take us off course, we cannot maximize our potential if we allow ourselves to be distracted from faithfully obeying Him every step of the way. Even if God, in His love and mercy, permits us to get back on course, we cannot recover the time and effort we wasted being distracted.

God is the only One who knows where you are going and what is the best way to get there. He will not send you by roundabout routes with many delays; neither will He lure you into detours and dead ends. The fulfillment of your potential is His hope and joy. To maximize your life you must stay focused on your purpose and avoid distractions through discipline.

9. Success

Success is another enemy of potential. When we complete a task and quit because we think we've arrived, we never become all we are. If, for example, you graduate from college and teach first grade for the rest of your life when God wanted you to be a high school principal, you forfeit much of your potential because you stopped at a preliminary success. *Leave your success and go create another. That's the only way you will release all your potential.*

Leave your success and go create another.

Remember, satan is afraid of our potential. He knows that God created us to do something great. Therefore, he will allow us a small success and try to convince us that we have arrived. Then, we will not want to move on to greater successes. We must beware that a small success does not keep us from accomplishing our larger goal or purpose.

In a similar manner, we must be careful to judge our successes by God's standards, not the world's. Success in the world's eyes is not really success because the world does not know what true success is. True success is being right with God and completing His assignment and purpose for our lives. It's knowing God and obeying Him. Thus, *we cannot succeed without discovering and doing what God asks of us.* Without God, everything we do is nothing.

Therefore, do not be intimidated by your lack of achievement in the world's eyes. The power of God within you is greater than any other power. When you're hooked up to

God and you're obeying *His* directives, you will achieve success by His standards. Refuse to allow the world's measurements of success to encourage or discourage you because God's standards are the only criteria that matter. Follow Him as He leads you from success to success. To maximize your life you must never allow temporary achievement to cancel eternal fulfillment.

10. Tradition

Traditions are powerful enemies of potential because they are full of security. We don't have to think when we do something the way we've always done it. Neither do we receive the incentive to grow and be creative because our new ideas may interfere with the conventional way of doing things.

Say, for example, that you are hired to be a receptionist in a manufacturing company. Invoices, orders, replacement parts, personal mail, trade journals—everything comes through your desk before being distributed. Because the company is a large one, you spend much of your day sending out mail or deciding who should receive incoming mail. This prevents you from presenting the company to the public as effectively as you would like and often delays the routing of important contracts and specifications.

Thus, you propose that all outside vendors and salesmen should be notified that their business will receive prompter attention if it is addressed directly to the department to which it pertains. Invoices should be sent to accounts payable, payments to accounts receivable, shipping instructions to the expediting office, parts to the supply room, *etc.* Your proposal

is not implemented, however, because the receptionist has *always* opened all the mail. Indeed, you are criticized for being lazy and inefficient because you cannot handle both the mail and your other duties as the company's gatekeeper. Most likely, it will be a long time before you make another suggestion to improve this company.

The tragedy is that the tradition, which probably served its purpose well when it was started, prevents the accomplishment of the purpose for which it was established. When the manufacturing company was small, it made sense to have the receptionist open all the mail and stamp it received because she also served as the secretary for the various departments. Now that the company has grown and each department has secretaries and clerks within it, the continuation of that tradition is self-defeating. Disorganization, rather than efficiency, is the result.

Remember, no matter how good the present system is, there's always a better way. Don't be imprisoned by the comfort of the known. Be an explorer, not just a passenger. Don't allow yourself to become trapped by tradition or you will do and become nothing. Your present level of success will be your highest level of success, and God, who is not trapped within tradition, will find someone else to do what you could have done. *Use your imagination. Dream big and find new ways to respond to present situations and responsibilities.* Then you will uncover never-ending possibilities that inspire you to reach for continually higher achievements. We are sons of the "Creator," who created us to be creative. Nowhere in Scripture did God repeat an identical act.

Refrain from accepting or believing, “We’ve never done it that way before.” Now is the time to try something different. The release of your full potential demands that you move beyond the present traditions of your home, family, job, and church—in essence, throughout your life. To maximize your life you must be willing to release ineffective traditions for new methods.

11. A Wrong Environment

Nutritious vegetables cannot grow in poor soil and healthy fish cannot thrive in polluted waters. Neither can we maximize our potential in a wrong environment. The apostle Paul speaks to this principle when he says, “Bad company corrupts good character” (1 Corinthians 15:33b). That means, no matter how good our intentions may be, if we get in with bad company, we will eventually think and act as they do. We will not change them, they will change us.

Many dreams die because they are shared with the wrong people. Joseph learned that lesson the hard way. Indeed, he landed in a pit and was sold into slavery because his brothers were jealous of their father’s favoritism toward him and they were offended by his dreams that placed him in authority over them. This is really not so surprising because older brothers rarely enjoy being dominated by younger ones. Had Joseph kept his dreams to himself, his brothers’ resentment may not have developed into a plan to murder him.

Many dreams die because they are shared with the wrong people.

Remember, others do not see what you see. They cannot completely understand the vision God has given you. Protect your potential by choosing carefully those with whom you share your dreams and aspirations, and by maintaining an environment in which your potential can be fulfilled. To maximize your life you must manage your environment and the quality of the people and resources that influence you. Your greatest responsibility is to yourself, not others.

12. Comparison

Many parents struggle with the temptation to compare their children's strengths and weaknesses with the skills and temperaments of other children. This tendency to compare can be lethal to potential because it may produce either discouragement or false pride. Both prevent us from becoming all we can be. Discouragement keeps us from trying new things because we lack the confidence that we can succeed. False pride short-circuits our potential by giving us the illusion that we have arrived.

If, for example, you compare yourself to an artist who paints beautiful landscapes and bemoan your lack of artistic ability, you may never discover that you have a knack for arranging flowers into pleasing bouquets. The fact that you cannot draw a flower need not prevent you from making attractive flower arrangements. Likewise, you may sacrifice an Olympic record because you are satisfied to run the 100-yard dash faster than your brother.

Whenever you compare your skills and abilities with others—either favorably or unfavorably—you forfeit the opportunity

to become your potential because you try to make equal but different people the same. God created you with your specific blend of personality, skills, and abilities to fulfill *your* purpose. To maximize your life you must understand that you are unique, original, and irreplaceable. There is no comparison.

13. Opposition

Satan has a way of snuffing out our great dreams by causing us to compromise. Most often this occurs because we give in to opposition. If he can't stop us, he'll push us to make a deal that is not God's deal. Then we have no hope of attaining our goal because we are trying to accomplish our God-given vision with human values and specifications. Opposition is natural to life and necessary for flight. If everyone agrees with your dream, it's probably a nightmare.

Let's say God gives you a vision to establish an adoption agency to place orphans of war. Because you don't raise the funding as quickly as you had hoped, you become impatient and look for additional sources of revenue. When a local businessman offers his support, you eagerly accept his gifts.

At first this arrangement works very well, but when the businessman demands a position on the agency's board and begins to dictate who can be sponsored for adoption and who can be adoptive parents, you begin to wonder if your decision to accept large sums of money from him was a wise one. Yet, to safeguard the financial support you receive from him, you agree to his conditions. In so doing, you compromise your vision. To fulfill your vision in life you will usually have to swim upstream against the tide of popular opinion. Opposition

is proof that you're swimming, not floating.

Compromised vision always kills potential because a vision that is attempted outside God's guidelines cannot reveal His power. Take your dream and be willing to die for it. This is a requirement for maximizing potential. To maximize your life you must accept and understand the nature and value of opposition.

14. Society's Pressure

Finally, pressure from society's standards and expectations is a threat to potential. The word *society* comes from the same Latin root as the word *social*, meaning "a companion," and ends with the suffix *ity*, which means "the state or condition of something." Thus, *society* means "the condition of being companions" and refers to the people we frequently associate with.

The people we associate with, if they make judgments based on age, race, financial status, ancestry, and education, may pressure us to relinquish a dream because they do not believe we can accomplish it: "Your daddy was nothing, so I don't expect that you'll amount to anything either." "You're going to start a business at your age? That's for young people to do." "Only white folks live in fancy houses." "They don't let Germans, Vietnamese, Japanese, Italians, Puerto Ricans... live in that neighborhood!" "You can't manage a restaurant. You never finished high school!" "No woman's ever going to be the president of your country!"

God doesn't think that way. He walked up to Sarah when

she was almost 100 years old and told her that she would have a son. Imagine telling your neighbors that you're going to have your first baby at that age. They'd laugh at you and ridicule your dream of being a mother.

Many dreams are killed by laughter and ridicule, but your dream doesn't have to die. Dare to be different. Accomplish something. Trust God's word rather than society's expectations. *Never is as old as the first time it changes.* It only lasts as long as the person who refuses to allow society's dictates to squash his or her dream.

Those who say "I can" no matter how many people say "you can't" transform dreams into realities. They have learned the priority of remaining true to their vision and they have developed the inner strength to trust God when society pushes them to abandon their goal. They are those who maximize their potential.

A TREASURE WORTH MAXIMIZING

When the apostle Paul described our potential as treasure in clay pots (see 2 Corinthians 4:7), he recognized that discovering and exposing that treasure is not always an easy task.

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not

abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed (2 Corinthians 4:8-9).

He faced the discouragement, failure, opposition, negative opinions, and age-old traditions that could have enticed him to forfeit his potential and forsake God's purpose for his life.

Yet, because he affirmed that this treasure is the "all-surpassing power...from God and not from us" (2 Corinthians 4:7), Paul persevered to the end. He relied on God's power in his life to achieve what God had purposed. Like John, he stood firm in his faith that "the one who is in [me] is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4b) and his conviction that his Shepherd would take care of him:

My sheep listen to My voice; I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of My Father's hand (John 10:27-29).

You too must trust God and cooperate with Him to fulfill all the dreams He gives you and to reach all the goals He sets before you. Yes, satan will use the enemies of your potential to destroy God's power within you, but you are not captive to his ways. You can choose to protect yourself from his attack; to cultivate the possibilities you yet can accomplish; to use your talents, skills, and abilities for the good of others; and to live within the laws of limitation that govern who you can become. These keys to maximizing potential, together with the keys to releasing potential, acknowledge both your dependence on

God and your responsibility to trust Him and cooperate with Him as He works in and through you.

As we expect a plant or tree to grow from a seed because we know it exists in it, so God calls forth from us the wealth of our potential. He wills that we should bear fruit that shows His potency. Practicing the keys that maximize potential and recognizing the enemies of potential are essential steps in our journey of becoming who we are.

KEYS TO MAXIMIZING YOUR POTENTIAL

1. You must guard and protect your potential.
2. You must cultivate and feed your potential.
3. You must understand and obey the laws of limitation that govern your potential.
4. You must share your potential.

PRINCIPLES

1. Vision can be aborted.
2. Satan is your enemy. Your dreams, plans, and ideas are

targets of his evil forces.

3. Beware of the enemies of your potential:

- Disobedience
- Sin
- Fear
- Discouragement
- Procrastination
- Past Failures
- The Opinions of Others
- Distractions
- Success
- Tradition
- A Wrong Environment
- Comparison
- Opposition
- Society's Pressure

4. God's power is stronger than all the enemies of your potential.

CHAPTER 3

Guard and Protect Your Potential

You were created to perform for an audience of one, the Lord Jesus Christ!

The boy sighed with satisfaction as the last of the four towers stood firm and tall. Now all he had to do to finish the sand castle was to draw the design on the top of the walls. As he worked, he watched the approaching waves. Before long they would be up to the castle. The surf had been far down on the sand when he started building four hours before, but he had known that the time would come when the waves would approach where he worked. Hence, he had built a large moat with an opening toward the sea to help the water stay in the moat instead of coming up over the entire castle. He hoped the moat would protect his castle for a few minutes before the waves completely destroyed it.

As he finished the last of the walls, the boy also kept an eye on his younger sister. Twice she had come to “help him.” The first time she had smashed an entire section of the wall with her shovel before he could stop her. The last time he had been on guard and had seen her coming. Thus, he had protected the castle from major destruction by catching her

hand. Now he was especially guarding against her attack because he knew that the time he had been looking forward to the whole time he had built the castle would soon be here. Water would soon fill the moat. Because he planned to play with his boats in the moat of the castle, the boy hoped the moat was wide and deep enough to prevent the first waves from destroying his morning's work.

THE TWO STAGES OF DEFENSE

The boy building the sand castle was wise. He recognized the approaching waves and the misguided help of his sister as enemies of his goal to build a castle and to play with his boats in its moat, and he defended against them.

The defense of something occurs in two stages. The boy's first step was to *guard* his castle by building a wide, deep moat that would keep the first waves from sweeping over it and by keeping a watchful eye on both the waves and his sister so he would see them coming and, thus, have the opportunity to defend against their attack.

Guarding is preventive in nature. It occurs while the *possibility* of an attack is present but before the threat is active and near. Recognizing the existence of an enemy who wants to steal or destroy the treasure, the one who guards watches over the treasure to safeguard it from injury or loss. He does so by

taking precautions against an attack and by keeping watch so the enemy cannot slip up on him and catch him unaware. Guarding leads into the second step of defense, which is the action necessary when an enemy steps over the established boundary and threatens the treasure.

Guarding occurs while the possibility of an attack is present but before the threat is active and near.

This second step of defense is *protecting*. *Protection* is active defense in the midst of an assault. It implements the pre-established plan to preserve the treasure from danger or harm. The boy protected his castle when he caught his sister's hand to keep her from ruining it.

Protecting is active defense in the midst of an assault.

WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR DEFENDING OUR TREASURE

Protecting and guarding work together. One without the other presents a weakened resistance to the thief who is trying to steal the treasure. The responsibility for this resistance lies with the recipient of the treasure. God didn't tell Heaven or the angels to protect the garden. He told Adam to protect it. In a similar manner, the apostle Paul admonished Timothy, not his mother or his grandmother, to defend the treasure he had received:

Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith (1 Timothy

1:18-19).

This defense begins with an understanding of the treasure we have received from God and is worked out in our fight to keep what we have received. This treasure is both God's wisdom and power within us (our potential) and the gift of His Spirit.

WHAT ARE WE TO DEFEND?

As we have seen, God deposits a treasure in each person He creates. This treasure is a) God's wisdom and knowledge concerning who He is, who we are, and how we are to live in relationship with Him; b) God's power that worked in creation through the spoken word and even today brings forth beauty from chaos; and c) God's Spirit who lives within our hearts. Thus, God reveals Himself to us and crowns us with His potency—His power, authority, and strength to effectively accomplish what He wills.

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us (2 Corinthians 4:7).

This potency of God within us—our potential—is the treasure we must defend. The treasure is the God-invested vision and purpose for our lives, designed both to show His glory and to bring Him glory.

The Treasure of God's Wisdom and Knowledge

The prophet Isaiah recognized God's wisdom as a treasure, as did the psalmists and King Solomon. They also agreed that

the fear of the Lord is the key to this treasure:

He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is the key to this treasure (Isaiah 33:6).

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow His precepts have good understanding... (Psalm 111:10; see also Proverbs 1:7).

My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom, and from His mouth come knowledge and understanding (Proverbs 2:1-6).

What does it mean to fear God? The psalmists liken those who fear God with those who “hope...in His unfailing love” (Psalm 33:18), who “understand [His] statutes” (Psalm 119:79), and who “walk in His ways” (Psalm 128:1). They also compare fearing God with trusting Him (see Psalm 40:3; 115:11) and advise those who would learn what it means to fear the Lord to “turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it” (see Psalm 34:11,14). Solomon equates fearing the Lord with shunning evil (see Proverbs 3:7; 8:13) and hating knowledge with *failing* to fear the Lord (see Proverbs 1:29). *Thus, to fear the Lord is to trust and obey Him. In so doing we defend the deposit of His wisdom and knowledge within us.*

The apostle Paul speaks of God's wisdom within us as a "secret wisdom" (1 Corinthians 2:7) because sinful man can neither know nor understand the thoughts and the heart of God toward His children. Only as we come to God through faith in Jesus Christ, "and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2), and through the presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts (see 1 Corinthians 2:9-16) are we privileged to understand God's thoughts toward us.

Isaiah acknowledged this difference between God's thoughts and ours:

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater; so is My word that goes out from My mouth: It will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:8-11).

This wisdom of God is a treasure to be cherished and defended. His thoughts toward us are good and His knowledge of us is perfect. He sees beyond our vessels of clay to His wisdom within us and calls forth from us what He sees. As we learn to see as God sees and to live from His perspective, we begin to understand this treasure of His wisdom and the importance of safeguarding it from the snares of the evil one. Paul wrote of this to Timothy:

Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith... (1 Timothy 6:20-21).

God sees beyond our vessels of clay to His wisdom within us and calls forth what He sees.

God's wisdom will never match the ways of the world:

For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? (1 Corinthians 1:19-20)

We must be careful to safeguard His knowledge within us so we can see the perfection and beauty of His plans and purposes for our lives.

Sadly, satan influences many people to close their eyes and walk away from their visions because they don't believe what they see. He knows the potential they contain—what they can become, the many goals they can meet, and the ideas they can accomplish—but they don't. This is why the apostle Paul instructs us to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5).

When we bring our thoughts to Jesus and make them subject to Him, we combat satan's strategy and unmask his

deception. Jesus, who knows both satan's works and the potential God builds into every human being, cleanses our sight and enables us to see rightly through the eyes of faith and hope. This is the beginning of wisdom.

The Treasure of God's Power

God has also deposited His power within us. The apostle Paul spoke of this power as the means by which God works salvation in us—"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes..." (Romans 1:16)—and he carefully portrayed this salvation as "a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that [our] faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power" (1 Corinthians 2:4-5).

In a similar manner, Peter and John understood God's power to be the secret behind their power:

... "Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? ... By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong" (Acts 3:12,16a).

God doesn't want us just to *know* who we are in Him; He wants us to *become* it. This occurs as we take hold of His power and make it our own. We must always be careful "...to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2 Corinthians 4:7). Even when we do not understand how God is working in our lives or what He is trying to accomplish, we can do great things when we cooperate with His power.

This is true because potential is vision in a dormant state that can be activated by our faith in God's power. If we are children of God, our greatest goal in life should be to resemble our Father.

God doesn't want us just to *know* who we are in Him; He wants us to *become* it.

Whenever we see ourselves being something, doing something, or going somewhere, and we believe that God's power in us will bring this glimpse of our potential to pass, we tap into God's power to accomplish His will. This power of God is at work in us to save us and to call us to a holy life in Christ Jesus (see 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 and 2 Timothy 1:8-10).

Satan knows that God "is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us" (Ephesians 3:20) and he is threatened by potential that is transformed by this power. Therefore, we must diligently defend God's power within us so that our vision can be changed into mission and God's potency may be revealed in us. God's power in us is a second treasure to be defended from the schemes of the evil one.

The Treasure of the Holy Spirit

Paul also identifies the Holy Spirit Himself as the deposit or treasure within us that we must guard.

Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set His seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come... (2 Corinthians 1:21-22).

Now it is God who has made us...and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come (2 Corinthians 5:5).

The Holy Spirit both reveals God's wisdom and power in us and guarantees that we will receive all God has planned for those who seek His wisdom and live by His power. His presence in our lives is an important deposit because He is the key to tapping into God's storehouse of wisdom and power. We cannot understand and apply God's wisdom without the Holy Spirit; neither can we live by His power. He is the Counselor to teach us all things (see John 14:26), the Searcher of our hearts to reveal to us the deep things of God (see 1 Corinthians 2:9-11), and the One who testifies that we are God's children (see Romans 8:16). Through Him we know God's thoughts and understand what God has given to us:

We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. ... The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:12,14).

THE TREASURE OF POTENTIAL

In essence, God's wisdom, power, and Spirit are the treasure we must safeguard. They are a deposit of Himself in us so that we can act and function like Him, sharing in His work. Together they are our potential, the source of our dreams and visions. We must remember, however, that having this deposit of God does not mean that we will keep it.

All the great things God has put inside us—our visions, dreams, plans, and talents—are satan's targets. He is afraid of men and women who have faith in God's wisdom and power, because they take their visions and translate them into action. They not only set goals, they make them happen.

All the great things God has put inside us—our visions, dreams, plans and talents—are satan's targets.

The deceiver fears the treasure we possess. His destructive tactics and deceptive influences come into our lives to nullify and entrap all God has given to us. He isn't going to let us fulfill our potential without encountering resistance from him. Indeed, his attack is so severe that Paul advised Timothy to seek the help of the Holy Spirit to meet and overcome it:

Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us (2 Timothy 1:14).

Have no fear! God has given us everything we need to safeguard our hidden wealth from the schemes and deceit of the evil one. We must be careful, however, not to rely on weapons of human strength and wisdom. We cannot whip the enemy by ourselves, "for the foolishness of God is wiser than

man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength" (1 Corinthians 1:25). Only as we are "strong in the Lord and in His mighty power" (Ephesians 6:10) can we withstand satan's onslaught against us. The Holy Spirit, sent by Jesus when we receive Him as Savior, is our Helper.

GOD'S PLAN OF DEFENSE

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert... (Ephesians 6:12-18).

This description of the armor of God details a plan to guard and protect your life against satan's invasion. You must understand the provisions of this plan and put them into practice if you want to defend your potential.

Recognize your enemies as the spiritual forces of evil.

First, *recognize your enemy as the spiritual forces of evil*, “for our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against... the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil...” What looks to be a conflict in personalities or a difference in values may well be a struggle on a more basic level. Discouragement, opposition, criticism, and the other enemies of potential are the work of evil forces through those who are close to you. Learn to recognize and combat these obstacles for what they are.

Learn to recognize and combat the enemies of potential.

The Scriptures are filled with examples of satan’s work. Moses’ mother and sister relied on God’s power to save him from death when Moses’ life was threatened by the Pharaoh of Egypt’s decree that all Hebrew boys should be killed at birth. After his mother had hidden him for three months and she could hide him no longer, she put him in a basket and placed it among the reeds in the Nile River. His sister then watched from a distance to see what would happen to him. When Pharaoh’s daughter found him and took pity on him, Moses’ sister brought her mother to care for him. (See Exodus 2:1-10.) Thus, Moses was saved from Pharaoh’s murderous plan.

Joseph was but a youth when his brothers plotted to kill him. After they had sold him into slavery instead of killing him, Joseph endured many hardships that could have prevented his potential from being unveiled and exercised. First, he was falsely accused of seducing his master’s wife and was, therefore, thrown into prison; then he was forgotten by those he helped. Still Joseph remained faithful to God and continued to trust Him. He didn’t allow the enemies of discouragement,

opposition, and the negative opinions of others to destroy the dreams God had given him.

After many years, Joseph was placed in a position of great prominence because he interpreted Pharaoh's dream. Thus, his potential to interpret dreams and to manage wisely were effectively used, and his purpose to preserve his father Jacob's family in the midst of a severe famine was fulfilled. (See Genesis 37-47.)

King Saul tried to kill David many times. After Saul disobeyed God and God chose David to replace Saul as king, "...the Spirit of the Lord...departed from Saul, and an evil spirit...tormented him" (1 Samuel 16:14). As a young man, David came into Saul's house to soothe him with the playing of the harp. Because he found favor with Saul, David became one of Saul's armor-bearers.

Before long, David ran into trouble. As he became a great warrior and grew in popularity, Saul came to be jealous. One day Saul hurled a spear at David. Another time he sent his men to David's house to kill him. Although David escaped, he spent many years as a fugitive, trying to avoid death by Saul's hand. Discouragement, fear, loneliness, distractions, negative opinions, and pressure from others were all part of those years. Yet, David trusted God to fulfill the promise he had received when Samuel had anointed him to be king. In time, David fulfilled his potential and became the greatest king in Israel's history.

Although death is a favorite way for Satan to destroy potential, he will most likely try to ensnare you with one of the

enemies of potential. Be alert to recognize these enemies for what they are—satan's attacks on your potential.

Expect Satan's Attack.

Paul knew that the attack of satan is inevitable. Thus, he told the Ephesians to put on the full armor of God so they could withstand when the evil day came. He wanted them to expect trouble so they would be prepared to meet it when it came.

No matter what you do, you will always have critics. This is true because some people cannot bear to see others succeed. When you aren't doing anything, you're not a problem for them; but when you start fulfilling your dreams and visions, you'll attract attention. People don't care about you until you start doing something big.

No matter what you do, you will always have critics.

This opposition often occurs because your critics aren't doing anything. Those who are working out their own dreams don't need to be threatened by your accomplishments. They are too busy to be jealous and too confident to worry how your success might affect them. Thus, you must be careful of those who are doing nothing with their potential. They will be your greatest critics.

Learn to expect their opposition and to rise above it. Refuse to get drawn into their petty quarrels or to allow their words and actions to influence your self-esteem or your behavior. *Every dream you share has the potential to cause jealousy, so be careful with whom you share your dreams.* Sometimes you

must keep your dream to yourself because no other person can understand it. Indeed, your dreams may sound funny or pretentious to others.

Just stick with what you're supposed to do until you achieve what you're after, and let those who are going nowhere go there without you. Others who are pursuing their purpose and maximizing their potential will understand your behavior, even if they can't see your particular vision. Find them and enjoy their company, for those who are going somewhere are more likely to support you in your journey. This is an essential factor in guarding your potential.

Prepare to overcome satan's attack.

One way you can prepare to defend your potential is to make wise choices. Consider carefully with whom you associate and where you spend your time. Examine your reading material and how you fill your day. Be cautious with whom you share your dreams—if you share them at all.

A second priority in preparing to meet satan's attack is to be sure that your vision is from God. Don't conjure up your own ideas. If they contradict God's Word, you know your ideas are not from Him. God will not deny His Word. False dreams and fake prophecies are sure ways to lose your potential. Satan will distract you any way he can.

Prepare for his attack by staying in close fellowship with God and by seeking His knowledge and wisdom.

A third method for fortifying yourself against the assault of evil is to seek God's discipline and direction in your life. Be

truthful in your dealings. Act with justice and virtue. Live at peace with others in so far as it is within your power, being careful, however, not to compromise your loyalty and obedience to God and His Word. Seek His chastening when you have failed and “rejoice in [your] sufferings, because... suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us...” (Romans 5:3b-5). God will honor your efforts to obey Him and, in so doing, you will guard your potential.

Stand firm in the midst of attack.

Sooner or later, satan is going to step over the boundaries of your defense and you are going to be under attack. Then it is time to move from guarding your potential to protecting it. Paul admonished the Ephesians to stand their ground and, after doing everything else, still to stand. Perseverance is the key. You may not win the war in one battle, but you can stand firm in the midst of each assault.

Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, Paul—all persevered through numerous battles to emerge victorious. At times they faltered and failed, but they always returned to the battle. You too must persevere when the forces of evil threaten to overwhelm you to destroy your potential. The story of Nehemiah offers some hints on how to do this.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF FROM ATTACK

Nehemiah, a common man, had a job as the cupbearer of the Persian king in whose land he was an exile. When he heard of the plight of his former countrymen who had not been

carried into exile and the sorry state of the city of Jerusalem, he mourned for them and asked God to help him return to Jerusalem so he could rebuild the city. God heard his prayer and granted him favor in the king's sight so that the king gave Nehemiah both his permission to return to Jerusalem and the resources to begin rebuilding the city.

Not everyone, however, was happy that Nehemiah was taking an interest in the well-being of the city and its inhabitants.

When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this, they were very much disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites (Nehemiah 2:10).

Even though Nehemiah was trying to do something beneficial, these fellows were angered by his plans. So they started to make trouble for him.

"What is this you are doing?" they asked. "Are you rebelling against the king?" (Nehemiah 2:19b)

But Nehemiah was not to be deterred. He gathered workers together and began to rebuild the gates and the walls of Jerusalem. This incensed Sanballat further so that he began to ridicule the Jews:

What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble—burned as they are? (Nehemiah 4:2b)

Tobiah joined in his mocking:

What they are building—if even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones! (Nehemiah 4:3b)

Nehemiah did not reply to their ridicule. Instead, he turned to the Lord in prayer (see Nehemiah 4:4-5) and kept on with the work. This illustrates the first guideline for protecting your potential. *Don't answer your critics.*

There are several levels of anger. At first your critic may be annoyed by you, but if you persist in your work, he becomes incensed. Sanballat, Tobiah, and their associates became incensed by the continued work on the walls of Jerusalem and committed themselves to destroying the potential of Nehemiah and the other workers who were rebuilding the city.

They all [Sanballat and his cohorts] plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it. But we [Nehemiah and the other workers] prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat (Nehemiah 4:8-9).

Nehemiah responded to this new threat the same way he had answered the last one. He prayed to God instead of answering his critics. He also added a second line to his defense. He posted a guard. This is the second guideline for protecting your potential. *Post a guard to lessen the likelihood of attack.*

When our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to

the wall, each to his own work (Nehemiah 4:15).

This reveals a third means of protecting your potential from attack. Allow God to fight for you. The workers stood guard, but God frustrated the plans of the attackers. The Israelites relied on Him to fight for them:

Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us! (Nehemiah 4:20)

For a while, Nehemiah and his helpers worked in peace. Yet, they did not let down their guard.

From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other; and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked (Nehemiah 4:16-18a).

Thus, they employed a fourth means for protecting their potential from attack. Don't allow a lull in the battle to convince you that the war is over. Don't confuse quiet with peace.

Finally, when Nehemiah's enemies received word that the wall had been completely rebuilt, they sent a message to request a meeting:

Come, let us meet together in one of the villages... (Nehemiah 6:2b).

Nehemiah wisely countered this as well, recognizing it for a different kind of attack:

But they were scheming to harm me; so I sent messengers to them with this reply: "I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?"
(Nehemiah 6:2c-3)

This reply reveals a fifth and a sixth means of protecting your potential from attack. First, Nehemiah sent a messenger instead of going himself when his enemies summoned him. *Stay away from the opposition.* Second, he refused to stop his work to talk. Don't waste time talking.

Even when Sanballat sent letters four and five times requesting Nehemiah to come to a village to talk, and tried to intimidate Nehemiah by suggesting that he would soon be in trouble with the king in Persia, Nehemiah remained firm in his stance. He again sent a letter instead of going himself, and he accused his opposers of making things up in their heads to create trouble. You too must *remain firm in your decisions and refuse to be intimidated by your oppressors.* These are the seventh and eighth factors in protecting your potential when you are under assault.

Nehemiah used many methods to fight for his vision. You must employ the same methods to preserve your potential from attack.

FIGHT FOR YOUR VISION

There will always be people who are committed to destroying you. They will criticize you, ridicule you, and become angry with you. Let them. You are not responsible for their actions, only your own.

Fight for your vision. Share your dream only when you must, and choose carefully with whom you share it. Do the background work and stay on course when the going gets rough. Expect opposition and be careful not to allow the threats and accusations of your enemies to intimidate you. Stick with your decisions and remain committed to your goal. Don't let quietness fool you so that you are caught unprepared by a later attack. Talk to God about your needs and allow Him to respond to your oppressors. Never answer them yourself.

Finally, keep yourself busy. *Don't allow the battle to interfere with your work.* You may not be popular, but you will be successful because God works with those who put forth the effort to stay with the vision He has given them. Thus, *your opposers will learn that they are not as important as what you are doing*, and you will remain focused on your vision with renewed wisdom and strength to accomplish it. Your potential is worth the effort of overcoming its enemies.

GET MOVING

God helps those who help themselves. This familiar saying expresses an important truth. Paul told Timothy to seek the help of the Holy Spirit (see 2 Timothy 1:14), not to expect Him to run the whole show. The Holy Spirit will not take over our

lives, but He will assist us in running them. That's the meaning of His name (*paracletus*). He is our helper or assistant. He doesn't guard our potential. He helps us to do so by guiding our decisions and by empowering us to withstand and triumph in the midst of trials.

Guidance, by definition, requires movement. Merriam Webster's 10th Collegiate Dictionary says that *to guide* is to "direct in a course or to show the way to be followed. [It] implies knowledge of the way and of all its difficulties and dangers." As a ship that is resting in the harbor cannot be steered, so the Holy Spirit cannot guide us if we are not going anywhere. When we say, "Guide me, Lord," the Holy Spirit replies, "Where are you going?" He needs us to move so He can turn us in the right direction.

If you want God to guard your potential, you have to start using it. If you want Him to protect it, you have to start protecting it. Let's say, for example, that you have a dream to go back to school and become a teacher, but you're struggling with your dream because you have poor reading skills. God will help you protect your dream of becoming a teacher if you sign up for an adult reading class and work hard to learn to read.

Or again, you may have the ambition to be a nurse or a cabinet maker or a store manager. Research the nursing programs in your area and get all the facts before you present the idea to your parents or your spouse. Find a skilled carpenter to serve under as an apprentice before you set up your own shop. Start going to school in the evenings to get your master's degree in business administration before you apply for a supervisory position. That first step you take may

not be the right one, but God can't help you until you do something. He can't close a door you haven't opened or affirm a decision you haven't made. *If you aren't doing anything to accomplish your goal, He isn't doing anything either. The Holy Spirit can't work for you unless you are working.*

The same principle is true for protecting your potential. Perhaps you have the ambition to graduate from school with honors, but too much of your study time is being spent working a part-time job or hanging out with friends. Quit your job or rearrange your hours to give you more study time. Limit your social activities and make your free hours productive and relaxing. When you do something to remove the attack against your vision, God will aid your efforts. Nevertheless, *the initiative must come from you.*

Or perhaps you'd like to lose weight because your appearance is affecting both your self-esteem and the confidence others have in your ability to accomplish a given task. You know you can do the job, but you never get the chance to try because neither you nor your boss is willing to risk giving you the extra responsibility. When you make a sincere effort to watch what you eat and to get the proper exercise, God will reaffirm His estimation of your value and motivate others to see you as a capable, valuable person. His action to protect your potential depends on your actions.

God won't take a bad habit or an inappropriate lifestyle from you because He didn't give it to you. He *will* affirm your decisions and strengthen your efforts when you start taking positive steps to *rid yourself* of the negative influences, the wrong attitudes, or the poor choices that are threatening your

potential. Destroy the cigarettes or drugs. Move out from living with your boyfriend or girlfriend. Stay home instead of spending every night at the local bar. Leave the room when you are about to hit your child in anger. Take responsibility for your own actions when your boss asks you why a project isn't completed or your spouse is disappointed that you forgot her birthday or your wedding anniversary.

A boat that is still cannot be turned no matter how long or how far you turn the wheel. Move a small distance and the boat will respond to a gentle touch on the wheel. The guarding and protecting of your potential is the same. If you stay stuck in your present rut with no attempts to get out of it, your dreams will wither and die. *Start moving and the gentle touch of God will begin changing you and helping you to achieve seemingly impossible dreams. God is your partner.* You must work together to protect your potential. When you start contributing to your own protection, the Holy Spirit starts to protect you as well. He empowers what you begin and redirects your efforts when they don't match His expectations. Then you can begin to discover your potential and to protect what you see.

Guarding potential is a daily task that requires more wisdom and power than we possess. God is in the business of maximizing potential. He'll empower our efforts if we cooperate with Him, but He will not do the work for us. Begin today to follow the guidelines for guarding and protecting your potential. The future of your dreams and visions is at stake.

PRINCIPLES

1. You are responsible to guard and protect your potential.
2. The treasure you must defend is God's wisdom, God's power, and the presence of God's Spirit in your life. This potency of God within you is your potential.
3. Guidelines for safeguarding your potential:
 - Recognize your enemies as the forces of evil.
 - Expect satan's attack.
 - Prepare to overcome his attack.
 - Stand firm in the midst of attack.
4. Guidelines for protecting yourself from attack:
 - Don't answer your critics.
 - Post a guard to deter attack and to warn of impending danger.
 - Allow God to fight for you.
 - Don't allow a lull in the battle to convince you that the war is over.
 - Stay away from your opposition.

- Don't waste time talking.
- Refuse to be intimidated by your critics' threats and accusations.

CHAPTER 4

Cultivate and Feed Your Potential

Whatever you eat eventually eats you.

The old woman smiled as she entered the small, hot room. A blaze of color met her eyes. African violets of many shades of pink, purple, white, red, and blue, and variegated mixtures of these colors, filled the room. The room had not always looked like this. When she and her husband had first built this house many years before, this had been their children's playroom. Then, toys had filled the shelves.

After the last of their children had left home, the woman had become very depressed, missing the children and having very little to do. That's when a friend had given her clippings from her African violets and had persuaded her to turn the playroom into a greenhouse. The idea had been a good one, giving her renewed interest in life.

Over the years, she had spent many hours here. At first only one of the many shelves had contained plants. Now the original shelves were completely filled and others had been added. She still remembered her joy when her violets bloomed for the first time. Many hours had preceded that triumph, for she had never been known for having a green thumb. In fact,

some of her friends had tried to discourage her new adventure because in the past plants had been more likely to wither than flourish while in her care. Still she had forged ahead. In time she had come to understand that her plants had failed because she had not given them sufficient care. Indeed, they had died from neglect.

When the first plants not only lived but flourished under her touch, she gained the confidence to add other colors by getting more clippings from her friend. She also began reading books and magazine articles about the care of African violets and talking with others who loved plants. One day while reading a horticulture magazine, she discovered an article on creating hybrids. That was the day she became hooked.

Since then, she had spent part of every day in this room, watering her plants, checking for insect pests, rooting new cuttings, fertilizing the plants that were about to bloom, picking off old blossoms, and rotating the plants so each one received sufficient light. Even the day her husband had died, she had wandered in here to find solace among her friends—as she had come to think of her plants.

In the evening, she often read gardening and horticulture magazines here, having moved her favorite chair from the living room when her husband was no longer there to spend the long hours with her. After nearly 40 years of hard work and extensive reading, the riotous color that surrounded her revealed the success of her efforts.

Now, her skill in cultivating and breeding African violets was known throughout the community, and over the years she

had found great joy in teaching others the art of cultivating plants. Every year her conservatory was considered to be the highlight of the garden tour. Plant collections throughout the town—in gardens and rooms—were testimony to her skill.

The successful fulfillment of your potential is similar to the task of growing prizewinning flowers. Both require careful attention and diligent effort to produce winning results.

POTENTIAL DOESN'T GUARANTEE PERFORMANCE

God made everything with the ability to produce fruit or to reproduce itself. Yet, the potential to produce does not guarantee performance, nor does the quantity of fruit guarantee its quality. You may have a good idea that produces mediocrity-laden results. Or you may have big dreams that amount to very little. This is true because pregnancy is no guarantee of fruitfulness, and performance is not ensured by plans and dreams. Pregnancy and performance match when the potential to produce is properly cared for and developed.

Pregnancy is no guarantee of fruitfulness, and performance is not ensured by plans and dreams.

You may have the potential to be a world-class architect, but your ability does not guarantee that you will reach this level of success. You may never progress beyond drawing doll house plans for your daughter or designing a model train layout for your son. An important key to producing what you are capable of is spending the necessary time and effort to promote the development of your talent. *You must cultivate and feed your potential.*

A GARDEN TO CARE FOR

When God made man, shrubs had not yet appeared on the earth and plants had not yet sprung from the ground. Only after man's creation did God plant a garden and give it a river to water it. Why? Until then "there was no man to work the ground" (Genesis 2:5). The earth was pregnant but nothing was coming out because there was no one to care for the soil's babies.

Thus, we see that God created all life to depend on cultivation to maximize its existence because potential cannot be released without work. In essence, God said, "I can't allow these trees and plants to grow yet because they need cultivation when they start growing and there is no one to care for them." The fruit and seeds of many plants and trees were present in the ground, but the soil did not produce them until Adam cultivated the garden.

The New International Version of the Bible says that God gave Adam the responsibility of *working* the garden. The Revised Standard Version and the King James Version describe man's task as that of *tilling* the garden, and the Good News Bible speaks of *cultivating*. All point to man's assignment to help the garden produce to its fullest capacity. Thus, man was created to have a cultivating ministry by making the earth grow richer as he gives to it, feeds it, and adds to it.

WINNING THE PRIZE REQUIRES RUNNING THE RACE

Potential is like soil. It must be worked and fed to produce fruit. King Solomon referred to this process of releasing the fruitfulness of man when he said, “The purposes of a man’s heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out” (Proverbs 20:5). Notice, the drawing out of man’s potential requires effort. Like the fisherman who brings forth the treasures of the sea by hard work and the farmer who harvests the fruit of the ground by the sweat of his brow, so man must labor to tap even a portion of God’s potential within him.

Potential is like soil. It must be worked and fed to produce fruit.

The apostle Paul understood this need to put forth the effort to release his fruitfulness.

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).

Understanding and wisdom are the keys to the success of man’s mission. His race to maximize everything God has given him begins with knowing what God requires of him and how He expects him to reach the finish line. The primary principle in cultivating one’s life for maximum living is to destroy ignorance by the pursuit of knowledge, wisdom, and understanding.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING PROMOTE GROWTH

Suppose I wanted to create a beautiful vase to place in my living room, but I knew nothing about making pottery. My first step would need to be a visit to a master potter, or at least to the local library, to learn all I could about working clay into beautiful pieces. I would have to learn about the selection and preparation of the clay, the throwing and shaping of the vase on the potter's wheel, the length of time and the conditions for seasoning the raw pot, the proper temperature and duration for firing the pot in the kiln, *etc.* Much work, including many hours of practice on much lesser pots than the vase I hoped to create, would precede my reaching the goal of making a vase to place in my living room.

This procedure is not unlike the process we must undertake to maximize our potential. Knowledge and effort must co-exist, but knowledge is the foundation for success. As we saw in the last chapter, God's wisdom and knowledge become available to us when we are connected to Him through the presence of His Spirit. An understanding of His ways and the discovery of His purposes are part of the treasure He has given us.

For the Lord gives wisdom, and from His mouth come knowledge and understanding. He holds victory in store for the upright, He is a shield to those whose

walk is blameless, for He guards the course of the just and protects the way of His faithful ones. Then you will understand what is right and just and fair—every good path. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul (Proverbs 2:6-10).

The search for knowledge requires effort. You must seek it like a treasure that is precious to you. You cannot touch God's knowledge, however, without diligence and exertion.

Apply your heart to instruction and your ears to words of knowledge (Proverbs 23:12).

My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God (Proverbs 2:1-5).

By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures. A wise man has great power, and a man of knowledge increases strength; for waging war you need guidance, and for victory many advisers (Proverbs 24:3-6).

Building a house and waging war require great effort. They do not just happen. The same is true for storing up things. If

you've ever canned or frozen fruits and vegetables in the summer to provide for your family in the winter, you know that many long, hot hours precede the final act of putting the finished jars on the shelf.

In a similar manner, removing treasures from the earth is also arduous and time-consuming. Wells must be drilled before oil can be pumped from the depths of the earth, and great shafts or tunnels must be dug before the mining of diamonds, silver, and other precious metals can be achieved. These are the images Solomon used to illustrate the strength and the dedication you will need to exercise if you hope to gain the knowledge that will advance the unleashing of your potential.

Knowledge must always precede action or much time and effort will be wasted through misguided efforts and dead-end directions. God, who planned your life and granted you the potential to fulfill His plans, works for and with you when you seek to know Him and to understand and follow His ways.

Knowledge must always precede action or much time and effort will be wasted through misguided efforts and dead-end directions.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF NEGLECTING KNOWLEDGE

Sadly, we often forfeit our potential because we neglect the wisdom, knowledge, and understanding that come from God alone. Solomon spoke of the consequences of this neglect, as did the prophet Hosea:

Wise men store up knowledge, but the mouth of a fool invites ruin (Proverbs 10:14).

The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death. Good understanding wins favor, but the way of the unfaithful is hard. Every prudent man acts out of knowledge, but a fool exposes his folly (Proverbs 13:14-16).

My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. "Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as My priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your children" (Hosea 4:6).

A lack of knowledge is not the same as the unavailability of knowledge. Hosea says that God's people perish because they have *rejected* knowledge. Knowledge may surround us, but unless we apply it to our situation or use it to inform our decisions, it is useless to us. We cannot really excuse ourselves before the Lord saying, "I didn't know," because opportunities to gain knowledge abound in our world. We live in an age of an information explosion with libraries, tape ministries, teaching videos, television, and radio bombarding us on every side with opportunities to stretch our horizons and increase our knowledge. What we can confess to God is, "I rejected the opportunity to learn."

The saying, “What you don’t know can’t kill you,” is simply not true. Too often we suffer loss because we did not take the opportunity to learn the facts about a particular subject. We perish because of what we don’t know. *No matter how great your dream is, if you don’t have the information relative to your plan, forget it.*

THE PENALTIES OF IGNORANCE

The devil doesn’t destroy God’s people...the government doesn’t destroy God’s people...the economy doesn’t destroy God’s people... cocaine and marijuana don’t destroy God’s people. *Ignorance* destroys God’s people. This one thing is behind every destructive influence in our lives.

God rejects those who reject His knowledge. In other words He says, “We can’t do business. You haven’t used the tools I gave you, so I can’t help you. You can’t even talk intelligently with Me.” Ignorance affects how God answers our prayers because we ask for things we don’t need or shouldn’t want. To ask rightly we must understand how we operate, how the devil operates, how the world operates, and how God operates. Asking God to do something for us before we understand these aspects of our situation is wasting our time and God’s. He must reject everything we request because our prayers and His ways, will, and desires for us do not line up.

Ignorance affects how God answers our prayers because we ask for things we don't need or shouldn't want.

Research your dream before you start working to achieve it. Learn everything you can about the business you want to start or the people you want to reach. You need good information to make right decisions.

God also ignores the children of those who ignore His knowledge. This is true because your children learn what you know. If you don't know anything, they aren't going to learn anything, and they will thus make the same mistakes and have the same values and attitudes you have.

Ignorance messes up the next generation. It destroys not only your fruitfulness but your children's as well. Thus, you and your children reap what you sow, and *your* lack of information harms *them*. Our world is experiencing a multitude of human disasters that give evidence to this fact. Abortion, AIDS, environmental issues, drugs—all reveal the consequences of the rejection of knowledge by this generation and those that preceded us. In essence, ignorance is generational and transferable. The decision to pursue knowledge, improve understanding, and gain wisdom is a personal decision but not a private issue. Every book you read affects your grandchildren, so read and cultivate yourself for posterity.

TWISTED VALUES

Our ignorance of God's will and His ways has twisted our world. We devalue what God values and elevate what is insignificant to Him. He sees the tremendous ability we have and we look at the earth houses that contain that treasure (see 2 Corinthians 4:7). He created us to show forth His power, but we are more interested in success by the world's standards. He affirms our ability to tap into His wisdom, but we make decisions based on the information we receive from our physical senses and our education.

Our poverty of knowledge is revealed by our inability to fulfill God's potential on our own. We live aimlessly without purpose, flitting from one thing to another and never accomplishing anything. Such life is a waste of time. Without a sense of purpose we are like stillborn babies.

Your potential will be wasted if you do not allow God to cleanse your sight and redirect your values. Then you can escape this purposeless existence. This occurs as you become aware of the world's standards and compare them carefully with God's. You may be surprised by what you find.

POTENTIAL UNDER ATTACK

The Bible says, "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7c). It's time you and I reevaluate the standards of the world. Our cars are faster but

weaker. Our clothes are sharper, but they come apart at the seams. Our vinyl shoes shine nicely, but they lack the durability of leather. What appears to be better may indeed be a compromise on value and worth. These upside-down values are attacking your potential.

Our world has become very concerned about pollution issues. Environmental groups are angered by oil spills and they warn us about the need to protect endangered animals, rain forests, and waterways. As consumers we are constantly reminded to dispose of waste properly as part of the effort to protect our planet's air and water supplies, and we are encouraged to recycle to promote the wise use of the earth's resources.

Sadly, we are more concerned about the destruction of the earth's atmosphere than we are about the poisoning of our children by the airwaves they breathe in our homes. We are interested in the purity of the water we drink, but we do not monitor the pollutants that fill our minds. Our world is sick because we value the wrong things.

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus rebuked the Pharisees because their values were mixed up. As Jesus and His disciples were walking through a grain field, they were picking and eating grain because they were hungry. Since it was the Sabbath, the Pharisees complained that they were breaking the law.

He answered [them], "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? ...he entered the house of God and ate the

consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.” Then He said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

Another time [Jesus] went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Some of [the Pharisees] were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched Him closely to see if He would heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, “Stand up in front of everyone.” Then Jesus asked them, “Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” But they remained silent. He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored (Mark 2:25–3:5).

Matthew records Jesus’ words on this occasion slightly differently:

[Jesus] said to them, “If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:11-12).

The values and standards of our world are not so different from those of the Pharisees. We save whales and try to protect endangered species, but we allow babies to be aborted. We cannot shoot flamingos, but we can take a scalpel and kill

human fetuses.

We are sick. We are no different than those Jesus admonished. Therefore, we need to rethink our values and redefine the definition of pollution. *The most damaging pollutants that are poisoning our communities are not coming from cars, factories, and toxic waste dumps. They come from bookshelves, televisions, movie houses, and rental videos.* They come from our schools and colleges where teachers who do not believe in God teach our children that God is a crutch or a figment of their imaginations. Don't tell me not to shoot flamingos when teachers are shooting my children by teaching them corruption, error, evolution, and Godless philosophies!

The only way to combat this pollution is to examine what we are feeding our children and to cultivate with care the environments in which they grow. Then we can activate and stimulate their potential, and ours, with the proper nutrients and fertilizers. God determined this need to care for our potential when He placed Adam in the garden and commanded him to work, till, and cultivate it.

A TWOFOLD PROCESS: CULTIVATING AND FEEDING YOUR POTENTIAL

Potential must be cultivated and fed to produce fruit. But how do we do this? How do we cultivate and feed the talents, skills, and abilities we possess?

The definitions of *cultivate* include: a) to prepare and work to promote growth; b) to improve growth by labor and attention; c) to develop and refine by education and training;

and d) to seek or promote, such as a friendship. To *feed* something means that we a) supply with nourishment; b) provide as food; c) furnish for consumption; and d) satisfy, minister, and gratify. All these definitions imply that the process is to be beneficial, not harmful. If the provisions do not supply nourishment that is essential for growth, they are not truly feeding us. Likewise, if the activity and attention do not help us to develop, refine, improve, and promote our abilities, skills, and talents, they cannot truly be called cultivation.

Even as seeds do not become plants overnight, so the wealth of our potential cannot be exposed and fulfilled in an instant. We must exert effort to cultivate what God has given us, and we must exercise care to fertilize and water it properly. As specific plants require certain nutrients and conditions to grow, so we must provide the right nourishment and environment to encourage the maximizing of our potential. These specifications have been set by God, who created us. To ignore them is to invite death.

Cultivating and Feeding the Three Dimensions of Potential

We are like a fallow field. We contain much fruit, but our fertility will not become evident until and unless we cultivate and feed our bodies, souls, and spirits. These are the three dimensions of potential. Cultivating and feeding work together to promote maximum growth and fulfillment. If we activate and stimulate our potential through challenging work and experiences, but we neglect to provide the appropriate fertilizers that will sustain and maintain it within those situations, before long growth will become stunted and eventually stop. Likewise, if we feed our bodies, souls, and

spirits according to our Manufacturer's specifications, but we fail to foster and develop occasions when we can try new things and reach for new goals, we will still diminish the effective release of our potential. Both cultivating and feeding are necessary for wholesome growth.

Each dimension of our potential—body, soul, and spirit—has definite specifications and materials for cultivation and explicit requirements in fertilizers. These specifications or requirements prescribed by our Manufacturer ensure that each part of our being operates at peak performance and achieves maximum fruitfulness. They are essential ingredients for unveiling who we can be and what we can do.

You are what you eat. This is true for all three dimensions of potential. If you eat excessive fatty foods, you will gain weight and your face will be covered with pimples. If you feed your mind with trash, your thoughts will be in the gutter. If you feed your spirit the information received through the senses of your body and the education of your soul, neglecting God's wisdom and knowledge, you will operate from worldly standards and values.

You are what you eat.

Cultivate and Feed Your Body

Your body is a precise machine that requires proper food, exercise, and rest. Healthy food, regular exercise, and scheduled periods of rest are essential for it to operate at its maximum potential. Physical health deteriorates when sweets, fats, or other harmful foods are stuffed into the body, and the

body's strength and endurance are lessened if exercise (work) is missing from your daily routine. Likewise, the absence of rest depletes the body's resources until exhaustion and even collapse eventually occur. Cultivate and feed your body by living within a healthy routine that includes nutritious food, moderate but systematic exercise, and regular sleep and relaxation.

Secondly, the cultivation and feeding of your body requires that you use it with discretion, setting it apart for its intended uses. God did not give you a physical body so you can fill it with empty calories or treat it as a beast of burden. If you have a choice of a salad or french fries for lunch, choose the salad. The fries may taste good, but they do little or nothing to nourish you. In a similar manner, consider the proper use of your body when you are working or exercising. For example, safeguard your back by bending your knees to lift a heavy load.

This requirement to use your body with discretion also means that you should treat it with respect and exercise caution not to abuse it. Take care not to allow cigarettes, alcohol, and other harmful substances to enter it. As the apostle Paul warns us:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Each person will have to give an account for what he did with his body.

Third, you must cultivate your physical body by preserving it and protecting it from pollutants. If you are going to do something for the world, if you are really going to contribute to the effectiveness and the productivity of your nation, you cannot be sick because you cannot be effective if you are sick. As the apostle Paul says:

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? ...Therefore honor God with your body (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

In his letter to the church at Rome, Paul adds:

...offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship (Romans 12:1).

For something to be a sacrifice, it must be valuable and worth giving. You cannot effectively honor God if your body is too heavy or your heart is weak because you have filled your body with cholesterol-producing foods. Preserve your body by understanding and obeying the Manufacturer's directions. You are responsible to protect your physical temple. Cultivate your body.

Cultivate Your Soul

Your soul consists of your mind, your will, and your emotions. *What goes into your mind always influences what comes out.* If your children watch disrespectful, smart-mouthed kids on TV, they will learn to talk and act the same way. In fact, they won't even know that they are being disrespectful

because their values and wisdom will have been skewed by the things they saw and read.

Be careful, then, to *convert your mind* by filling it with godly, uplifting materials. Feed it God's Word instead of junk novels. If you spend much time reading ivory-towered romantic fiction, you will come to have unrealistic expectations of your spouse and you will either degrade or destroy the marriage relationship through unfaithful thoughts, words, and actions. Turn on a teaching tape instead of the afternoon soaps. Take part in a small group Bible study. Use your moments of leisure to uplift rather than tear down.

Likewise, *cultivate your mind*. Spend some time each week in serious Bible study or research a useful topic you know little about at your local library. Attend concerts and lectures, or take evening classes at a community college. The whole purpose of encyclopedias, formal education, and other sources of knowledge is not to make you smart, but to give you the opportunity to make yourself smart. Use the resources available to your mind to inspire you to activate your dreams and reach for new goals. Your mind is a powerful tool created by God for the good of mankind.

It's a pity to die with water when people are dying of thirst. Yet it happens every day as people who have the answers to the world's problems refuse to feed and cultivate their minds so they can reach into the deep wells of their possibilities and pull out what the world needs. Look to the careful cultivation and feeding of your mind. Remember, the person who doesn't read is no better off than the person who *can't*.

It's a pity to die with water when people are dying of thirst.

The cultivation of your soul also includes the discipline of your will. Discipline is training or teaching someone or something to obey a particular command or to live by a certain standard. The discipline of your will is particularly important because the will is the decision maker. If you refuse to discipline your will, you won't be successful in fulfilling your potential *because your will determines your decisions, which govern your potential.*

I imagine Jesus in the garden before His arrest. His will was saying, "Let's find another way to do this," but God said, "There is only one way." Because Jesus' will was disciplined, He said, "Okay, Your will not Mine be done." (See Mark 14:32-36.) If you do not train your will to be subjected to God's wisdom and purposes, you will forfeit the purpose for which you were born, and your potential will be wasted. Self-discipline is the highest expression of self-management, which is manifested in a disciplined will.

The cultivating of your soul also requires that you control your emotions. Too often we allow our emotions to control us instead of our controlling them. Tantrums and fits of rage are symptoms of this malady. Emotions are controlled by understanding. Ecclesiastes 7:12 says:

Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter; but the advantage of knowledge is this: that wisdom preserves the life of its possessor.

What we know to be true from seeking information and

examining the facts must be the basis on which we make decisions and relate to other people. Emotions often color what we see. They also prompt us to say hasty words and to make unwise choices. Emotions governed by information provides an environment in which the potential of our souls can be maximized.

Better a patient man than a warrior; a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city
(Proverbs 16:32).

Jesus said that the soul is the most important dimension of our make-up because the soul is both our receiving center and our distribution center. It receives information through our physical senses and discernment through our spirits and it sends directions back to both our bodies and our spirits. Thus, our souls processes information from both the physical and the spiritual worlds. Jesus said in Matthew 5:5, “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.” The word *meek* does not mean “weak,” but rather “controlled power” or “disciplined energy.” Self-discipline will cause God to trust us to manage more of the earth’s resources.

Too often the soul is neglected and permitted to pick up information that is not good for the spirit. Maximize your potential by cultivating and feeding your soul so that your spirit may fellowship with God, who is the source of all potential.

Cultivate and Feed Your Spirit

Maximizing your potential begins with your decision to

accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior because the measure of your true potential is your spirit. Until you become reconnected with God through faith in Jesus Christ and the presence of His Spirit in your heart, you are spiritually dead, and the potential of your spirit is unavailable to you. Then your mind can only be controlled by what you receive through your senses and your mind.

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace (Romans 8:5-6).

The secret wisdom of God concerning your potential (see 1 Corinthians 2:7-11) cannot influence your life if His Spirit is not present in your heart because only God's Spirit knows and understands God's plans and purposes for you. These were written long before your birth. They contain the information you need to live to the fullest and to achieve everything you were sent to do. Attaining your maximum potential is impossible if you do not cultivate and feed your spirit by hooking yourself up to God and abiding in Him. (See John 15:1-8.)

Cultivating and feeding your potential is a second key to maximizing your potential. As you pay attention to the fertilizer you give your body, soul, and spirit, and the work you do to keep them healthy by the Manufacturer's specifications, you will be surprised and delighted by the many things you can accomplish and the satisfaction and joy in life you will

experience. You must cultivate and feed your potential according to God's specifications and with His materials.

Show me your friends, and I will show you your future.

PRINCIPLES

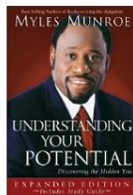
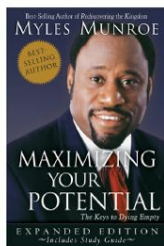
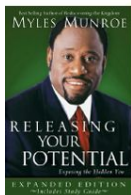
1. The potential to produce fruit does not guarantee either fruitfulness or the quality of the fruit.
2. Potential must be worked (cultivated) and fed to produce fruit.
3. Ignorance messes up the next generation because God rejects both those who reject knowledge, and their children.
4. God designed the potential of your body, your soul, and your spirit to be maximized by specific fertilizers and environments that promote positive growth and development.
5. Cultivate and feed your body by getting the proper food, exercise, and rest, by using it with discretion, and by preserving and protecting it from pollutants.
6. Cultivate and feed your soul by feeding your mind positive, Godly information, by disciplining your will to discover and live by God's wisdom and purposes, and by governing your emotions with God's truth.

7. Cultivate and feed your spirit by living from God's secret wisdom dispensed through His Holy Spirit.

enjoy

UNLOCK YOUR ? POTENTIAL

Becoming Your Best You



Try these other books by
DR. MYLES MUNROE

Learn More About Your
Potential Today!



DESTINY IMAGE PUBLISHERS, INC.

"Promoting Inspired Lives."

VISIT OUR NEW SITE HOME AT
WWW.DESTINYIMAGE.COM

FREE SUBSCRIPTION TO DI NEWSLETTER

Receive free unpublished articles by top DI authors, exclusive discounts, and free downloads from our best and newest books.

Visit www.destinyimage.com to subscribe.

Write to: Destiny Image
 P.O. Box 310
 Shippensburg, PA 17257-0310

Call: 1-800-722-6774

Email: orders@destinyimage.com

For a complete list of our titles or to place an order online, visit www.destinyimage.com.

FIND US ON FACEBOOK OR FOLLOW US ON TWITTER.

www.facebook.com/destinyimage
www.twitter.com/destinyimage

facebook

twitter