

Chapter 12

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# Tempus Fugit



*To be what we are, and to become what we are  
capable of becoming, is the only end.*

- Robert Louis Stevenson

*Our life's journey* is the accumulation of the choices we make while we are alive.

And our emotional well-being is dependent upon how effectively we make use of the time on our journey as we make those choices.

You see, after you eliminate all the obstacles you create to avoid the choices necessary for a life of well-being and empowerment, you are left with but one choice.

We all can choose between following the familiar path, which creates expedient short-term relief but perpetuates long-term pain, or confront our fears associated with the never-before-traveled path of the unknown.

My life in Chicago has provided me with many experiences that have taught me the wisdom of this very simple axiom over and over again. If you have ever been to Chicago, you probably know that it's unique for a big city. I love it because the culture here is so diverse from neighborhood to neighborhood. And because of that diversity, I have had experiences here that I would never have had in most cities.

One such memorable experience occurred on a busy Saturday afternoon. I had gone for a walk and came upon a man preaching in the streets. He stood next to a big chalkboard setup on an easel right in the middle of State Street. He looked pretty strange dressed in an old black coat that came down to his heels, a torn top hat, and a T-shirt and jeans underneath the coat. I had some time to kill, so I walked over and listened to him preach for a while. At first, all I thought was that it took guts to stand in the street and talk.

But then I heard his story.

"It's about two friends, Thomas and Jonathon," he

said. "Jonathan had gone on for years talking bad all the time. He complained bitterly about how badly the world treated him and how he felt beaten by what he called the *system*. He said he never got the credit for anything he did. Jonathan felt like no one cared about him. In the end, he said, no one would miss him if he went off somewhere and just died. It was awful."

As the street preacher told his story about these two friends, he paced up and down in front of the chalkboard like Groucho Marx as he talked.

"So one time," the street preacher said, "when Thomas had visited his friend Jonathan, Thomas asked Jonathan if he would like to know how to change his world in only five minutes. Jonathan doubted him, but he was miserable and would have tried anything, so he agreed to listen as Thomas explained his plan.

"Imagine someone gave you \$1440.00 in cash every day for the rest of your life. You can use it for whatever you want. You could buy gifts or services or eat well, you would just have to spend the money. I wouldn't tell you how to spend the money.

"But!" Thomas said as he raised his finger, "there is a catch."

"Oh, I thought there would be a catch."

"But it's a strange catch," Thomas said. "If you don't spend it all, the money you don't use would be taken away and you would lose it forever. That's the catch.

"The next day you would have \$1440.00 more to spend. The opportunity would never stop. You could spend it as you please. But if you don't spend it that day, you lose it forever."

"Jonathan liked the idea. He talked about all of the

things he would do with the money. He talked about the progress he could make with his life.”

Jonathan said, “The small things I could get right away. And, once I finish buying all of the material things, I can help others more poor and helpless than I am. I can teach people to read and write once I learn to read and write for myself. I can show everyone how to stop feeling sorry for themselves.”

“That’s great,” Thomas said. “I can see you understand how big the opportunity is. I’ll even help you write down all the things you want, so we can keep a list.”

“When they were finished with the list, Jonathan sat patiently and listened as Thomas explained the details of his plan for Jonathan to uplift his life.”

“The \$1440.00 is the 1440 minutes that are in each day. Every day we have 1440 opportunities to try and try and try. Our choice is whether or not we want to waste the precious gift or spend it wisely.

“The truth for you Jonathan is you have an opportunity to do all of those things we have on the list. You can work to buy the material things, or you can spend your time learning to read and write. If you want, you can even spend your time showing other people how to enjoy this gift themselves. But remember, once a day is gone, you can never have those 1440 minutes back again. They’ll be gone forever.”

By now I was watching this street preacher closely. He was on a roll, and he had us all mesmerized by his story. He asked the crowd, “Do you all want to know the end of that story?”

We all wanted to know.

The preacher said, “Truth is, I am the Jonathan in the

story.” As the preacher spoke those words, he wrote his name, JONATHAN, on the chalkboard.

“Jonathan is my name and today I can write it for you. And if anybody needs more explaining, I want you all to see that I am spending my time doing what I told my friend Thomas I would do years ago.”

The preacher concluded by telling us, “You now have all the knowledge I have. And somewhere in the good book it says, ‘with knowledge comes responsibility.’ So everybody make your own list, spend your 1440 minutes wisely and get off your asses and do something.”

His last line made the whole crowd laugh. Some people even applauded.

I walked away deeply touched by the story of Thomas and Jonathan. I learned from Jonathan that our life’s journey is a verb. The quality of our journey is about the action we take.

And the quality of the action we take is related to the personal empowerment we create in our lives. Personal empowerment is the specific manner in which we live our lives. Empowerment is the action we take to enable each of us to grow and create a life rich with purpose. Empowerment is the action we take to transform ourselves from second-class citizenship into our fully actualized selves.

But let’s not kid ourselves. Personal empowerment is a lot of hard work. Creating a life’s journey congruent with whom we genuinely are is one of the most difficult things imaginable. It is difficult because we must confront the core of who we are and the fears that permeate the job of living our lives in a manner that honors the essence of who we are.

I can't count the number of times I've sat in a group therapy room or across the room from somebody and thought, "There's a lot of work happening here!"

And I am only watching the action.

I once had a client look up at me from his chair and say, "I didn't know when I started this that I would have to not only pay for therapy but do all this work as well. It seems kinda lopsided. Can't you just give me the answers or something and let me go home and study for a quiz?"

I laughed at his joke and agreed with him. And then I told him I was merely a guide for his life's journey. My task is to point out the potential of the different paths that lay before him. He must do the work of choosing which path to take, as well as clearing the obstacles from whichever path he chose to follow.

I explained that it was more important he discover his own truths about how to live his life rather than to try to get me to tell him what choices were best for him. If all he did was create his life based upon what I thought was best for him, he would merely be an actor playing a part, rather than a director scripting his own life.

If the efforts at creating a life's journey that honors who you are feels easy and is without the pain of discouragement, you aren't doing something right. This stuff requires effort, your own blood, sweat, and tears.

But, for a variety of reasons, many of us have been fed a message of impotence and hopelessness. We live in a world that reinforces the message of our limitations rather than our possibilities. But for you today, your world can become very different.

For me personally, there was nothing more liberating than the day I discovered who set my limits and who

held me down. In my case, the person holding me down was myself.

If you find yourself saying, "Steve, you don't understand, I'm in a relationship where someone is setting my limits." Or, "Steve, I'm in a job where someone is holding me down."

Then listen carefully to what I have to say. Any relationship, any job, any circumstance can be improved if you are willing to work at it by respecting and honoring yourself.

If you are in any situation that is currently overwhelming you, you might be saying to yourself "I can't even imagine what it takes to do that!"

Personal empowerment is a tough thing to embrace all at once. For today, simply realize that it can be done.

For just like the preacher on the street learned, personal empowerment is the accumulation of a series of choices to take small risks that lead you from the path of safety in your familiar ways to the path of fear and discomfort that awaits you on your new life's journey.

All you need to know is you only need to fight the battle fought within the period of 1440 minutes. And anyone can do that.

If you think you need the support of a therapy setting or a support group, trust yourself. You deserve to change the course of your life with whatever means you can find at your disposal.

Even if you don't think you'll need a lot of help, give yourself the opportunity to discover the tools you'll need to activate the unused potential that lives within you.

The results of changing the path of your life's journey are almost unbelievable. It is great to awaken in the

morning and feel unchained and free. There is room in your soul to enjoy life once you lift the burdens of self-alienation and self-doubt from your soul.

A woman I know discovered for herself how euphoric life can be. She told me, "All the energy I put into creating the messages of self-denigration and shame are gone. I wake up feeling so light, so fresh, so alive because my head doesn't have to work half as hard on that useless junk."

For you, the journey may be just starting, and it may seem new right now. But realize that this is a simple thing to do. However, you won't grow all at once. But you will grow.

Sit down right now and visualize your life and how you can grow into who you truly are. Plan time in each of the next five days to meditate on this simple visualization. And dedicate yourself to the task of growing.

I wish you all the well-being I have found through the various principles I have shared with you in this book. Before we end, let me tell you how proud I am of you. You have read through this book and you have a plan for yourself now. If you can, write and let me know the results. I really want to hear how things are going for you!!!

What the street preacher said is unquestionably true. In reality, there is a responsibility that comes with knowing the answers of life. And in your case, the responsibility is to learn to be true to yourself, honoring who you are on the inside.