

A Way of Intention

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Learn what you are
A guide for getting Serious.

Reject the reasonable life
A guide against small living.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!
A guide for reaching the Promised Land.

Make friends with stress and anxiety
A guide against calmness.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.
A guide for creating Moments of Genius.



By Anthony Garone
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*This book contains five works
to help you navigate and define an intentional life of
exceptional mastery*



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Author's note

A Way of Intention is a collection of contrarian and paradoxical works. They outline an approach to mastery I have observed in others and adopted for myself. I do not pretend to possess any special authority on what it takes to craft a meaningful life; I am simply a witness to the same truth that Richard Feynman spoke of: “I could say how society looks to a scientific man, but it is only how it looks to me.”

This book comes after many years of working with (and for) world-class talent. I've had the privilege of collaborating with Grammy-winners, Emmy-winners, Olympic athletes, TED speakers, Fortune 500 executives, NASA astronauts, inventors, mathematicians, theoretical physicists, and world-renowned experts. I have seen *up close* how they work, think, and approach problems. Their methods are not random — they are ordered. And I have sequenced my observations and personal practice in this book.

I write sharply on purpose, not to condemn, but to interrupt the trance of comfort, safety, and ease. The intent is to help you (and me) build a life of disciplined stewardship. This book aims to serve as a blueprint for already-capable people who seek to increase clarity, mastery, and fruitfulness. It is *not* for beginners, nor for those who need truth to arrive gently.

My writing serves as the basis of my coaching practice. I help successful people — executives, creatives, post-exit founders — to see, confront, and move past their blind spots. They come to me for clarity, next-steps, and direct honesty. As I like to tell them, “You're not stuck. You're blind.”

Quoting Feynman further, “The ideas I wish to describe are old ideas. There is practically nothing I am going to say tonight that could not easily have been said by philosophers of the seventeenth century. Why repeat all this? Because there are new generations born every day. Because there are great ideas developed in the history of man, and these ideas do not last unless they are passed purposely and clearly from generation to generation.”

A Way of Intention is my attempt to do exactly that — deliver the same timeless insights in a form that demands a commitment to discipline, to practice, and to stewardship. It is not a quick fix; it is a call to ordered life.

Note: Some of these essays first appeared in earlier collections, titled “The Protocol of the Serious” and “A Catalog of Tensions.” They have been revised and reordered here under a broader and more mature package.



There are many ways to live a life of intention. This book highlights one of them.

A Way of Intention contains five provocative essays.

Though each essay takes about an hour to read,
they are not meant to be read quickly,
nor are they meant to be read passively.

The first essay, *Learn what you are*,
tears down the comforting illusion of endless options
and forces you to face your finite nature,
your calling, and the price of postponement.
It demands a single, non-negotiable commitment
to a purpose that cannot be delayed.

The second essay, *Reject the reasonable life*,
names the habits and assumptions
that keep capable people small —
safety mistaken for wisdom,
optionality mistaken for freedom,
and comfort mistaken for peace.
It is a direct attack on the life that makes sense on paper
but slowly deadens the soul.

The third essay, *Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!*
is the campaign for mastery,
turning disciplined practice into performance,
speed into power,
and humility into a weapon.
It trains you to conquer the world
by making your work the only reality you respond to.

The fourth essay, *Make friends with stress and anxiety*,
reframes stress and anxiety as natural signals
rather than enemies,
teaching you how to interpret Pressure,
carry a heavy Load without complaint,
and return to a state of readiness
instead of living in chronic activation.

The fifth essay, *Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius*
is the final revolution, demanding you surrender ego,
cultivate selfless joy,
and become a vessel for moments of genius.
It teaches that true brilliance emerges
only when mastery meets humility and purpose.

Taken together, these essays outline a path
from self-knowledge to sacrifice,
from discipline to service,
and from mastery to joy.

They are not meant to flatter the reader,
but to confront drift
and call forth a way of intention.

Learn what you are



A guide for getting Serious

Written December 13 – 17, 2025

Learn what you are

Learn what you are

Contents



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*Each chapter of this guide starts with philosophy
and ends with exercises to get you started.*

*For some, the exercises are the value.
For others, the philosophy.
For a few, both.*

Learn what you are

PREAMBLE

**This book is a declaration of war
against a world governed by fantasy.**

A world that treats time as unlimited
and life as something that can be postponed
until conditions improve.

Where “someday” is treated like a real date
to which its citizens are somehow entitled.

It is a world of dabbling, pretending, and waiting
full of plans that *feel* productive
yet demand no risk.

Safety passes for wisdom.
Comfort masquerades as virtue.
Reward is expected without cost.

No. We are here to sever ourselves
from this life of fantasy and excuses
and reclaim who we actually are.



Learn what you are

This is what it means to get Serious.

The moment you decide your life is non-negotiable — not to be delayed, managed, or optimized later — is the first moment of Seriousness.

The second moment is when you realize how little time there is to fulfill your Calling.

The third moment is when you realize what delay has cost you.

But once you are Serious you will never make peace with delay again.

Learn what you are

Achievement and success can solve many problems, but they do not lead to an ordered life.

It is possible to be intelligent, capable, and wealthy without being Serious.

Outcomes arrive for many reasons.
Order does not.

Many people reach the point where resources are no longer the constraint.

What remains is a problem that cannot be outsourced, optimized, or delegated.

How lucky are those who do not require material things to lead a Serious life.

Learn what you are

Do not mistake the Unserious as lazy.

The Unserious are often exhausted —
busy and stressed,
constantly playing catch-up
while planning for the future.

They may be excellent and lovely people,
but they are not Serious.

The Unserious mistake motion for action,
preparation for commitment,
and passion for guidance.

They treat life like a rehearsal.
The real work is always later.

**Unserious people believe they deserve
what they do not have.**

Serious people accept the cost
before the outcome.

Learn what you are

There are costs to getting Serious about your life.

No plausible deniability.

“I didn’t know” and “I wasn’t ready”
taste like ash in your mouth.

No fantasies of unlimited time.

You stop talking about doing
and start living out the consequences of your decisions.

No complaining.

Victimhood is embarrassing
when you know what you chose not to do.

It’s no longer about *you*.

Your life becomes about stewardship,
not possession.

We do not strip away fantasy to become empty
or to live in isolation and self-denial.

We do it to become fruitful.



Learn what you are

To be Serious is to have a Destination
for life is *not* about the journey.

Seriousness provides orientation
and keeps your perspective ordered.

Seriousness dictates intensity
because reaching the Destination
is a matter of distance over time.

Seriousness defines context
and differentiates the blessed from the forbidden.

Let the world fantasize about the journey.
Have a Destination.

A journey without a Destination
is just movement.

But a Master leads and others follow.

Learn what you are

The Destination appears
when we submit to the *reality*
that we are created
with a Calling
and meant to bear fruit.

We do *not* find a Destination by wandering.

And we are not meant to wander.



Learn what you are

Why do we enjoy *anything*?

When I was thirteen,
I heard a Steve Vai song on the radio.
And I became Serious.
I knew immediately
that I would play guitar.

Over the next ten years,
I spent six to twelve hours every day
practicing.

Something already present in the song
Activated my DNA
and seized me for life.

It was a Calling.

Not “passion” or “talent” or “motivation.”
Those words explain merely the effect,
not the cause.

A Calling is not chosen.

Learn what you are

Serious people:

- **Operate on a different timeline.** There is no “someday.”
- **Subtract relentlessly.** Keep only what serves the Calling.
- **Live as stewards, not owners.** Talent is entrusted, not possessed.
- **Persist without burnout.** Their work is rooted in Joy.
- **Continuously purify.** There’s no place for waste or excuses.
- **Filter complexity.** Freedom comes from *less*, not more.
- **Treat failure as information.** No mistake ends the Calling.
- **Are not geniuses.** Genius works *through* them, not *from* them.
- **Do what others avoid.** Obedience makes difficulty inevitable.
- **Are called to adventure.** No risk, no reward.
- **Know the real enemy.** Compromise is never neutral.
- **Commit fully.** Lukewarm effort produces nothing.
- **Bear much fruit.** They cannot avoid success.

Unserious people cannot become Masters.

Seriousness is non-negotiable.

Learn what you are

Even into their teenage years,
my children loudly proclaimed,
“But it’s not fair!”

I did not chastise them.
I did not even disagree.
Instead, I celebrated it with them.

“You are right.
It isn’t fair.
And thank goodness for that.”

Fairness is regression to the mean.

Seriousness does not despise fairness.
It refuses to depend on it.

Do not pray for fairness.
Fairness is for the victim.
Asymmetry is for the Serious.

Learn what you are

Fairness, results without effort, and certainty before action are just some of the fantasies of the Unserious.

But fantasies are symptoms.

The deeper issue is this:

Unserious people desire effects without accepting the cause.

Seriousness is simply the refusal to live in that contradiction.

Difficulty cannot be skipped, optimized, or outsourced.

You will pay a price for getting Serious.
Seriousness changes *which* price you pay.

Learn what you are



Anyone can live a happy, fulfilling life.

A Serious person knows happiness is not the measure.

Anyone can find work they enjoy.

A Serious person accepts work they are responsible for.

Anyone can feel inspired.

A Serious person acts without waiting.

Anyone can be busy.

A Serious person is directed.

Anyone can improve their situation.

A Serious person submits to a Calling.

Anyone can seek balance.

A Serious person accepts imbalance where it is required.

Anyone can want meaning.

A Serious person accepts obligation.

Anyone can talk about who they are becoming.

A Serious person lives with today's consequences.



Learn what you are

You don't need to get Serious.

Your life will still move forward.

Time will continue to pass.

And choices will accumulate.

The difference is:

will it all happen without your consent?

Do you want a life shaped by delay, convenience,
and other people's priorities?

Seriousness offers clarity.

It offers direction.

Wandering feels harmless
until you realize years are gone.

Learn what you are

In these pages, I will show you
what Seriousness is and how to embody it.

You are free to ignore it all
and toss this book aside.

I do not know you,
but I know this:

Your life did not begin by accident.
And it will not end without meaning.

You *cannot* afford to misunderstand this.

I would not be here without it.
And neither would you.

Learn what you are

WHAT YOU ARE

**Let us begin with the first lie
that started our war with fantasy.**

It is the lie about *what you are*.

Fantasy insists that you are unlimited potential.
You are not.

You are a finite and embodied creation
born with specific capacities and limits
constrained by time, ability, temperament, and circumstance.

You did not choose these things.
You received them.

Seriousness begins when you stop resenting those limits
and start using them as weapons.

Learn what you are

Limits are beautiful.

∫ They create specificity
and make your purpose legible.

Accepting and adoring your limits
is the beginning of responsibility.

Nothing will give you more clarity than a limit.

You know you will die,
so there is a limit to your time.

Your intelligence is limited,
so you only need to understand a few things.

Your interests are limited,
so you don't need to worry about what to care about.

Without limits,
you'd never choose anything
and nothing would become real.

Learn what you are

Limits can drive world-class Performance.

Dr. Seuss wrote *Green Eggs and Ham*
by limiting himself to 50 distinct words.
It became his best-selling book.

In 1975, Jazz pianist Keith Jarrett
was set to perform in Köln, Germany.
The venue provided a broken, out-of-tune piano.
Jarrett almost refused to play,
but instead recorded a night of improvised music
using the limits of the piano.
It became the best selling solo jazz album of all time.

In 2009, programmer Jan Koum was unemployed
and living on savings in San Francisco.
He built a messaging app that replaced SMS texting —
which was expensive for him at the time —
with data, which was cheap.
He built WhatsApp and is now worth \$15B.

There are countless stories like these.
Seek out your limitations
and play within them.

Learn what you are

Just as Seriousness begins
by accepting external limits,
it continues when you
set limits on your interior life.

The Unserious are ruled
by thoughts and feelings.

But you are not your thoughts,
which arise and pass.

And you are not your feelings,
which change and fluctuate.

Your thoughts and feelings are experiences,
not instructions.

A life ruled by thoughts and feelings
is undisciplined and irresponsible.

A Serious person obeys reality —
externally and internally.

Learn what you are

Like a well-pruned tree,
a Serious person prepares
a life that bears fruit.

When branches are cut back,
growth is directed
and energy is not wasted
on what will never produce anything.

Pruning looks like loss at first,
but it is actually focus.

A tree that grows unchecked produces shade,
not fruit.



Learn what you are

A tree does not eat its own fruit.
Nor does a Serious person produce fruit
for their own gratification.

It is for the joy and hunger of others.

A tree embraces its finitude.
It does not fantasize or wish itself
to become an orchid.

And life is better for that.

You are not an abstract self
waiting to be defined.

You are a particular life
with a particular design
that requires stewardship.

Learn what you are

A good steward takes Seriously
their responsibility for what is entrusted to them.

They do what is required,
not what feels meaningful.

They accept what they have been given
and are careful not to waste it.

A good steward is attentive
and does not wish for something “better.”

Gratitude is consent to reality.



“You are an unrepeatable instance of God’s unfailing love.”

– Fr. Larry Hennessey

Learn what you are

There is no sense in pretending
you are Serious.

(Though many do.)

Activities and labor can provide the *feeling* of Seriousness.
Your half-written book *feels* Serious.

But Seriousness is not about “finishing books.”
It is about achieving the aim
that made writing it unavoidable.

Vanity produces projects.
Necessity produces work.

If your “book” did not exist,
would the world be incomplete?

Or would only your ego be unsatisfied?

Learn what you are

The ego wants to know *who* you are.
But that is uninteresting
because anyone can invent an answer.



Knowing *what* you are
is harder
and far more important.

It orients you toward
what is good, beautiful, and true —
not as ideas,
but as obligations.

Learn what you are

Do not forget what you are,
for it happens slowly.

You are told that meaning is self-assigned.
That nothing is required until you feel ready.

These ideas feel freeing.
They remove pressure.
They also remove responsibility.

Forgetting also happens through discouragement.

You try. You fail.
And decide it must not matter that much.

This is not humility.
It is resignation.

When you forget what you are,
your life does not stop.

It simply drifts.

Learn what you are

You are a mist. A vapor. Smoke in a wind tunnel.
You appear for a little while. And then you vanish.

This terrifies the coward
and paralyzes the dabbler.
But it Activates the Serious.

Unserious people live as if they have infinite time.
They “kill” time.
They “spend” time.

To be Serious is to look at the clock,
realize it is ticking down,
and decide — right now —
to stop apologizing for your ambition.

You were given a specific set of talents.
You did not ask for them.
But you will be asked what you did with them.

What is your life?

Learn what you are

Exercises to know what you are

The point of these exercises is not to tell you *what* to do, but to show what you *might* do to know what you are. They are not prescriptive.

1. **The Vapor Calculation** — Calculate the exact number of weeks you have left if you live to 80. Write the number on a sticky note and put it on your bathroom mirror. The abstract must become specific. You cannot steward what you do not count.
2. **The “Not Me” Audit** — List three “projects” or “identities” you are maintaining solely for the approval of others (e.g., the “nice guy,” the “intellectual,” the “socialite”). Why are you doing these things? What would happen if you stopped today?
3. **The Sideways Glance** — Write down the names of three people you compare yourself to most. Next to each, write what they appear to have that you want. Then answer one question only: “What hard thing about my own life do I not want to look at right now?”

Learn what you are

WHAT YOU HAVE

**Our war on fantasy rejects a second lie:
you need more.**

This lie says you are under-equipped,
waiting on permission, resources, credentials, or timing,
and you cannot begin.

But a Calling is not something to *acquire*.

It is something you recognize
in what has already been entrusted to you.

It does not require more inputs,
but more *attention*.

You don't need "more."

You need to commit
to what you have been given.

Learn what you are

There is more inside you
than you think.

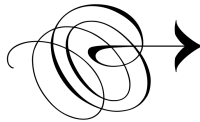
You have a pattern of attention
that helps you to notice
problems that bother you
and talents that excite you
long after others have moved on.

You have capacities that activate under pressure,
where you become clear, focused, and alive
without needing to be asked.

What is this?

It is not a blank slate,
but a shape.

And it is already pointing somewhere.



Learn what you are



Your Calling

The work reality keeps asking you to do
is your Calling.

It is at the intersection of:

what you have been given,
what refuses to leave you alone,
and what the world needs addressed.

A Calling is recognized, not invented.

It does not arrive fully explained.
It becomes clearer only through response.

Your Calling does not feel like inspiration,
but obligation.

And ignoring it
is never a neutral act.

Learn what you are

To believe you've missed your Calling
is like believing you've missed your exit on the freeway.

The road continues.
The destination remains.

But every missed exit adds distance
and turning around takes time.

The mercy that allows another exit
does not erase the cost of delay.

Learn what you are

Jane Goodall started her career in science
as a quiet 26-year-old secretary.
She had no degree or credentials.
Anthropologist Louis Leakey hired her
specifically because she was untrained.

As a child, Goodall spent hours in henhouses
just to learn how hens lay eggs.
She did not know that sitting for hours in waiting
would become a “skill” that revealed her Calling.

Because she could sit quietly in the presence of animals
for long stretches of time
the animals accepted her presence
and she could study them in a way
no scientist had done before.

Vivian Maier worked as a nanny for 40 years
who, in her spare time, took over 150,000 photos
of people in the street.

She did not know she had a Calling as a photographer.
Her work was only discovered
when a storage locker was auctioned off
due to missed payments shortly before she died.

When the world finally saw her photos,
she was discovered as one of the greatest street photographers
of the 20th century.

Her Calling had been fulfilled in total silence
after she had died.

Learn what you are

I was lucky.

I heard a Steve Vai song
that Activated the guitarist inside me.

But what about people who haven't heard a Calling?

Perhaps a better question:
are they listening?

A Calling does not announce itself
to a distracted life.
Nor does it compete with noise.

It waits for attention.



So was I lucky?
Or was I attentive?

Learn what you are

You might believe that if you had more time, money, and freedom, you would finally get Serious.

It does not work this way.

Abundance hides the truth.

When you have everything, there's no reason to do anything.



A Serious person understands limits.

Lack of budget.

A demanding job.

Shortness of the hour.

These are not “problems.”

They are parameters that create a game.

If you cannot create under constraint, how will you create when you have more?

Do not wait for surplus.

Constraint is the fuel.

Learn what you are

There is a trail of evidence across your entire life
that you have already been given what you need.

Look at the problems you solve for others
that feel trivial to you
and miraculous to them.

Look at what you did as a child
before the world told you to be practical.

Look at the books you read
late at night when no one is paying you.

You do not need a personality test.
You need to look at the data.

What you have has appeared for decades.
You dismissed it as a “hobby” or a “quirk.”

This is the curse of familiarity.

Dismiss the evidence,
dismiss your Calling.

Learn what you are

You are told to suppress your anger.

To be pleasant.

To tolerate disorder.

But your frustration might be data.

The Unserious complain about the world

but the Serious recognize

that their frustrations point

to what they are meant to address.

What consistently bothers you is not accidental.

A Serious person interrogates their pain.

Learn what you are

What is not used decays.

What is buried atrophies.

This is the law of atrophy.

Skills dull.

Attention weakens.

The same is true of a Calling.

The longer it is buried,
the harder it is to retrieve
and you become less capable
of responding at all.

Keep capacity alive
or watch it wither.

Learn what you are

A new hobby.
That Netflix series.
Silent retreats.
Mind-altering substances.
Another online course.
Your friend's latest book.

So much to do. So little time.

But this is not the problem.
It is the outcome of avoidance.

Delays.
Procrastination.
Weight.
Burden.

It is a distraction
to believe something *else* is required
before you begin.

Learn what you are

Several successful entrepreneurs have told me:
“If I’d known the risks and costs beforehand,
I never would have started a business.”

So why did they do it?
What did they have?

They had no certainty or guarantees.
No clear path, either.

But conviction.
A sense that something was wrong
and *required* a response.

That was enough.

The risk did not create the business.
The Calling did.

Risk only revealed
what they were already willing to give up.

Learn what you are

**It is time to ask
why you have not acted.**

What has stopped you from Seriousness?

Not ignorance.
But consent to delay.

You told yourself
you needed more time.
More clarity. More money. More permission.
Better timing.

But now you have seen the pattern
and recognized what returns.
You know what you have been entrusted with.

Calling does not force itself upon you.
It waits for consent.

And consent is not given in words.
It is given in obedience.

Learn what you are

Exercises to see what you have

1. **Want What You Have** — Take inventory of your possessions, capabilities, and desires. What are you missing that would prevent you from starting important work *today*? Which are the most prized items on each list? Which bother you?
2. **Missed Exits** — Think back on times you may have missed your Calling and why you did not act. Were you distracted? Pessimistic? Unbelieving? Why? And do you think you have the ears to hear your next Calling?
3. **The Evidence Review** — List five things you do well that other people regularly ask you for help with. If no one asks, list five things that feel obvious or easy to you but confusing to others. Do not explain or justify them. Just list them.
4. **The Constraint Inventory** — List your current constraints (e.g. time, money, energy, location, responsibilities). Do not treat these as obstacles. Write one sentence under each: “This constraint points toward _____.”
5. **The Dormant Capacity** — Identify one ability you once exercised seriously but have neglected. Use it once this week in service of someone else. Note how much resistance appears.

Learn what you are

WHAT YOU DO

**The third lie in our war on fantasy:
your life is for you.**

The world tells you to “express yourself.”
“Live your truth” and “self-actualize.”
“You do you.”

This is the logic of a tumor.

A Serious life is not a mirror.
You are not here to be *seen*.

You are here to bear fruit.

If you are not feeding others
with your work, your spirit, and your actions
you are not Serious —
you are occupying space.

Learn what you are

Action is the proof of Seriousness.

To be Serious is to move beyond intentions,
self-reflection, and “figuring things out.”

It is not a foray
nor an experiment
but a commitment.

Action does not require announcement.
It does not require encouragement,
validation,
or an audience.

Early in a Serious life,
there is no clearer satisfaction
than to act on a Calling
instead of thinking about it.

Learn what you are

Early action is fragile
because it is new and untested.

The first response to a Calling
is like a small flame
and requires protection.

A discouraging comment,
an expensive mistake,
even a sudden change in circumstance
can be enough to extinguish the flame.

For this reason,
the beginning of action
must be quiet.

Not secretive,
but undistracted.

Learn what you are

Every “yes,” “no,” and “maybe”
has led you right here.

Every real action
begins with a single “yes”
and many no’s.

To act is to create a limit
by choosing one direction
and refusing countless others.



Clarity is created by exclusion.

Learn what you are

Fruit is external and appears over time.

You will find Joy as you bear fruit
and share it with others,
but fruit is much more likely to grow
after some time of Serious work.

It may be the first listener of a song you wrote.
Or the first person to wear a shirt you made.
Or the first toilet you fixed.

First fruits are rarely impressive,
but they are real.

Learn what you are

Fruit

Fruit is anything that nourishes another.

Your aim determines the quality
and the purpose of the fruit.

If it exists for someone else, it is fruit.
If it exists only for you, it is not.

For the Unserious, fruit is money.

But a Serious person with a Calling
knows that *anything* good can be fruit.



Learn what you are

The quality of your inputs
determines the quality of your work.

“Garbage in, garbage out.”

A Serious life must be holistic
because a fragmented life
cannot sustain long-term action.

Anyone can be Serious briefly.
Intensity can carry you for a season.
It can even produce incredible results.

But a Serious life is ordered
and order allows the work to endure.

Learn what you are

A Serious person knows and loves their limits
but a dysfunctional person refuses to accept them.

When work becomes compulsion,
rest becomes avoidance,
and pleasure becomes anesthesia,
disorder has taken hold.

There is Joy in the word “enough.”

Learn what you are

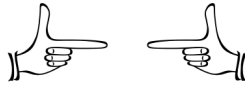
Every Serious person faces a plateau —
a long, boring stretch of time
where grinding away at work feels fruitless.

It is a normal part of the process
and a filter for Seriousness.

I have spent months in this place,
toiling with no indication of progress.

Do not mistake this for failure.

Because there is always a day
where everything clicks
and the potential energy you've stored
becomes rocket fuel.



Most lives do not fail at the beginning or end.
They fail in the middle.

Learn what you are

Work must be tested by reality
in order to bear fruit.

Reality shows what can thrive
with great precision,
and a Serious person pays attention.

They adjust the method
without abandoning the responsibility,
making corrections without insistence.

In obedience to what is real,
fruit becomes the measure of the work.

Learn what you are

The world does not want you to act,
but you must defy the world.

It prefers you comfortable, distracted,
and quietly producing fruit
in service of someone else's aims.

To the world, you are better off
as a consumer, a subscriber,
or a source of passive income.

Action is an act of defiance.

A person who acts
cannot be managed,
is hard to predict,
and cherishes life.

For a Serious life is sacred
precisely because of its limits.

Learn what you are

For 30 years, Frank McCourt taught English.
He spent decades teaching creative writing to students.
He told them to dig into their own lives
for the best material.

Yet he himself was too ashamed of his impoverished youth
and never wrote about it
until the age of 60
when he retired,
feeling “the desperation of a wasted life.”

He published *Angela's Ashes* at age 66.
It won the Pulitzer Prize,
sold millions of copies,
and is considered one of the greatest memoirs ever written.

Anna Mary Robertson Moses spent her entire life
doing backbreaking physical labor as a farm wife.
She picked up the paintbrush at age 76
after arthritis stopped her from knitting.

She painted landscapes for her own Joy.
At age 78, her paintings were discovered
by an art collector passing through her town.
At age 80, “Grandma Moses” had global renown.

She painted over 1,500 canvases
in the last, explosive chapter of her life.

It is not too late.
You *must* act.

Learn what you are

Exercises to learn what you do

1. **The Fruit Audit** — Look at your work from the last week. Mark the tasks that actually nourished someone else (solved a problem, created order, provided clarity). Mark the tasks that were just “movement” or “maintenance.”
2. **The Solitude Fast** — Spend 24 hours consuming no input. No news, podcasts, books, scrolling, or music. Only output. You cannot hear the signal in the noise. When you stop eating the world's junk, you will finally get hungry for your own work.
3. **The Next Responsible Action** — Write down the one action you already know you should take but have been postponing. It must be small enough to complete in one sitting. Do it today.
4. **The Yes / No Test** — Write down one commitment you've made recently. List three things you must now say “no” to in order to honor it. Say no to at least one of them this week.

Learn what you are

GOING DEEPER

**Action is the first step
on the road to Seriousness.**

Mastery is where it leads.

As your work improves,
new forms of resistance will appear:
pride, impatience, lust, greed.

These are normal signs
that your work has become real.

Seriousness exposes resistance
because it removes excuses.

Mastery leaves nowhere to hide.

Learn what you are

Progress does not eliminate struggle,
but gives it meaning.

When you are adrift,
suffering feels pointless.

When you are Serious,
suffering becomes directional.

And you know what your work is for.

This makes your hardship intelligible.

A Serious life does not promise comfort.
It promises coherence.

Learn what you are

As action becomes more Serious,
so does responsibility.

More time is entrusted to you.
More resources.
More money.
Sometimes, other people.

These do not arrive as rewards,
but as tests of stewardship.

You cannot receive these
and remain Unserious
because carelessness now
has larger consequences.

Like a muscle that strengthens under load,
Seriousness grows through responsibility.

Learn what you are

The Protocol of the Serious
proceeds in this order:

Listening
Calling
Obligation
Mastery
Speed
Conquering
Humility
Availability
Joy
Genius
Legacy

There are no skips, hacks, or fast-tracks.



Learn what you are

Exercises for going deeper

1. **The Resistance Log** — For one week, notice exactly when you feel the urge to do something that moves you forward in your Calling. Write down what you were working on at that exact moment. Resistance is not an accident. It is a compass. It points North toward the work that matters.
2. **The Buried Asset** — Identify one resource (e.g. money, talent, or connection) that you are “saving for later.” Deploy it this week. Hoarding is not stewardship. If you bury it to keep it safe, you are killing it.
3. **The Reality Check** — Identify one area of your work that is not producing fruit. Ask yourself: “What is reality telling me that I don’t want to hear?” Change the method. Don’t abandon the responsibility.
4. **The Control Release** — Identify one outcome you are trying to manage, force, or protect. Continue doing the work, but stop intervening in the result. Work without bargaining. Work without tracking approval. This is where Seriousness becomes surrender.

Learn what you are

If you are Serious about your life, answer these questions:

- Are you willing to stop postponing what you already know you must do?
- Do you want clarity, or do you want comfort?
- Are you prepared to work without applause, feedback, or permission?
- Can you accept limits without resenting them?
- Will you act before you feel ready?
- Are you willing to be misunderstood while you learn?
- Can you endure long periods where nothing appears to be happening?
- Will you submit your work to reality and let it correct you?
- Are you willing to say no to good things in order to honor the right one?
- Do you believe your life is entrusted to you, or owned by you?

Answer honestly.

Seriousness does not require confidence. It requires action.

Learn what you are

Core concepts

Seriousness — The decision to treat your life as real, finite, and entrusted, and to act accordingly.

Fantasy — Any belief that allows delay, evasion, or irresponsibility while preserving the feeling of virtue.

Calling — The persistent demand reality places on you to respond with what you have been given.

Stewardship — The careful use of time, talent, and responsibility that does not belong to you but has been entrusted to you.

Limits — The specific constraints of body, time, ability, and circumstance that make purpose legible.

Fruit — The external good produced by your work that nourishes someone other than yourself.

Action — The concrete response to a Calling that moves beyond intention, reflection, and preparation.

Plateau — The long middle stretch of Serious work where progress is invisible and endurance is tested.

Atrophy — The natural decay of unused capacity, skill, or Calling when it is buried rather than exercised.

Reality — The final authority that tests work, corrects methods, and reveals whether fruit is being borne.

Learn what you are

Responsibility — The increasing weight that accompanies Serious action and must be carried with care.

Consent — The interior “yes” that is revealed not by words or desire, but by sustained action.

Reject the reasonable life



A paradoxical guide against small living.

By Anthony Garone

Written December 31, 2025 – January 11, 2026

Reject the reasonable life

Contents

Dedicated to Lisl MacDonald

This book is a spiritual successor to *Get good. Go fast. Conquer!*

That book teaches the method of going deep.

This book names the forces that slow you down.



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*Each chapter of this guide starts with philosophy
and ends with exercises to get you started.*

For some, the exercises are the value.

For others, the philosophy.

For a few, both.

Reject the reasonable life

Courage is almost a contradiction in terms.

*It means a strong desire to live
taking the form of a readiness to die.*

– GK Chesterton

Reject the reasonable life

PREAMBLE

It is a great punishment to be addicted to freedom.

A sane person should prefer ten years in prison
to ten years in an open field.

A prison has walls, routine, and neighbors.
An open field offers nothing but choices.

A life without direction
shrinks into something small —
open to options
but formless and empty.

Better to live under fierce constraints
where a single action carries weight
than to drift in empty space
where movement meets no resistance
and leaves no mark.

Somehow, the world finds this Unreasonable.



Reject the reasonable life

What is the “reasonable” life?

It is the life that makes sense on paper,
optimized for safety, approval, personal gain,
and the preservation of options.

Prudence and responsibility are worthwhile virtues
until safety and optionality become idols.
For a man can call it “prudence”
and still be ruled by fear.

The reasonable life counts the cost of commitment
and decides the price is too high.

A reasonable person believes that wisdom lives in the middle,
far from extremes,
in search of balance.

As if all religions are the same
and conviction is dangerous.

Reasonable people do not want to be saints,
for it requires too much sacrifice.
They do not admit they are sinners,
because that feels too exposed.

So they settle for comfort
and become nothing.

There is nothing more reasonable
and nothing more dead
than a life that goes according to plan.

Reject the reasonable life

The longer a reasonable person stays in the open field,
the longer he can tell himself that he *could* be anything.

He *could* write a novel.

He *could* start a company.

He *could* move to the mountains.

And as long as he does none of them,
he remains all of them —
the hypothetical superman,
rich with possibility.

But the moment he chooses *one thing*,
the illusion collapses.

If he writes a novel, he may find he is a bad writer.
If he starts a company, he may go bankrupt.
If he moves to the mountains, he loses the city.

To a reasonable person, to choose is to lose
and to kill the thousand versions of himself
about which he fantasizes.

But the Serious person knows:
you are not what you *could* do.
What you do reflects what you are.

Reject the reasonable life

Life exists in the tension between opposites.

To have a river, moving water must collide
with the resistance of the bank.

To have courage, the terror of death must collide
with the love of life.

To live Unreasonably, the fear of uncertainty must collide
with the power of limits.

A reasonable person tries to resolve this tension
but an Unreasonable person revels in it.

For freedom without constraint is drift
And constraint without freedom is prison.

But where they collide —
freedom inside constraints —
is where we find the spark of truth.

That is the river.
That is a song.
That is an Unreasonable life.



Reject the reasonable life

“The reasonable man adapts himself to the world;
the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself.
Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man.”
– George Bernard Shaw



The modern soul is a swamp.

It pursues freedom
with the same belief
that a river without banks
simply becomes a larger river.

But a river without banks
does not grow larger.
Rather, it becomes a swampy marsh
that spreads out, slows down, and stagnates.

The modern soul spreads its energy
across a thousand maybes and what-ifs,
never digging a channel deep enough to carry a current.

Preserving options can be wisdom.
Preserving options as a way of refusing choice is cowardice.

To move, you must limit your direction.
This is the Paradox of the Vow.

Reject the reasonable life

To choose a woman for a wife
means losing all other women,
but gaining the depth of love.

To choose one creed
means losing the “freedom” to believe others,
but gaining the weight of truth.

To choose a mission
means losing nights and weekends,
but gaining a destiny.

The freest person is not the one with the most options.
The freest person is the one unburdened by
the consequence of choices
because they are made within chosen constraints.

The Paradox of the Vow
reveals a difficult truth:
your life becomes real
only when you bind yourself.

Reject the reasonable life

Taking a vow is no mere decision.
It is an exorcism of the average —
that false whispering in your ears
that lulls you into a daze.

Vows protect you from
the hypnosis of the reasonable.
Vows keep you awake,
revealing those who move, speak, and transact,
but are not *there*.

Those being carried into the current age,
possessed by the spirit of small living.



A vow swears your life against temptation.
It is the snap of the fingers.
It is the bucket of cold water.
It is the sharp, sudden pain of reality
that startles the soul back into its body.

To find a vow is a short-term duty.
To live up to your vow is discipline.

Reject the reasonable life

An Unreasonable life is not the same as an unstable life.

It is not chaotic or impulsive,
nor is it a refusal of duty.

Do not confuse the appearance of safety with reason.
A man can look respectable and live small
just as a man can look reckless and live small.

Poverty can force narrowness.
The small life is not narrowness forced by necessity,
but narrowness chosen out of fear
when a person has room to choose.

Some people build a “reasonable” life that looks like danger —
riddled with thrill-seeking, binging, indulgence,
and the constant pursuit of novelty and stimulation.

But this is not courage.
It is anesthesia.

Grasping for aliveness
without paying the cost of being alive.

Reject the reasonable life

Many people who have ignored their Calling
will pursue a reasonable life of “freedom.”

They take no vows, make no commitments,
and avoid obligations that cannot be escaped.

They have dogs instead of children
and followers instead of friends.

They travel the world as digital nomads
instead of planting roots and investing in community.

Some take risks
because they cannot sit still.
Others avoid risk
because they want to be faithful.



But this is not freedom.
It is avoidance.

Reject the reasonable life

Confusion in the modern life

The cult of busyness as productivity → “I’m so busy right now”

The endless scroll for connection → “I am my online presence”

Materialism as self-care → “I deserve it”

Choice overload in dating and decisions → “Just one more swipe”

Money-worship and status chasing → “Check out my new Rolex”

Overstimulation as escape → “Going to binge this whole season”

Quiet quitting as boundaries → “I only do what’s in the job
description”

Therapy-speak as maturity → “I’m just setting boundaries”

Hedging every commitment → “I might make it to your party”

Wellness routines as virtue → “My morning routine is sacred”

Passive consumption as learning → “That was a great podcast”

Perpetual upskilling as progress → “Getting another certification”

Van life as adventure → “Tiny life, tiny dreams”

Polyamory as enlightenment → “Monogamy is just societal
programming”

Doomscrolling as awareness → “I need to stay informed”

Ghosting as self-protection → “I’m protecting my peace”

Performative outrage as justice → “My post will change the world”

Cynicism as enlightenment → “Both sides are the same”

Information as intelligence → “I did my own research.”

Reject the reasonable life

Rejecting the reasonable life
is the most Unreasonable thing you can do.

Because the reasonable life is slow death,
keeping you alive without ever letting you live.

Until it ends with a shrug:
“I played it safe. I didn’t lose much.”



That is the tragedy.
A man can lose nothing
and still lose himself.

The Unreasonable life ends with a roar:
“I did what I was called to do.”

Reject the reasonable life not because it is evil,
but because it is insufficient.

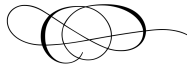
It is the grave with good lighting.

Reject the reasonable life

This book exists to reorient us
from the horizontal life
to the vertical one.

From looking sideways for permission,
to standing upright
and giving the soul posture.

A horizontal man can be busy and still asleep.
Praised and still absent.
Safe and still dead.



Ignore the crowd so you can hear.
Forget the safe so you can act.
Despise the easy so you can endure.

Reject what is reasonable
and return weight to your choices.

Reject the reasonable life

IGNORE THE CROWD

The small life forms through imitation —
and the crowd loves a good imitator.

The crowd rewards “acceptable” ambitions,
“reasonable” risks,
and “approved” opinions.

The crowd also punishes and casts out
those who defy its interests.
So imitation becomes safety.

Imitation is not evil
for it is how boys become men
and apprentices learn a craft.

But imitation is dangerous
when it becomes permanent.
When a man never graduates
from borrowed desire.

Though the world rewards
predictability over truth
and likability over conviction,
imitation flattens the interior life.

It replaces Calling with comparison,
keeping the imitator stuck in potential,
starving for meaning.

Reject the reasonable life

100 years ago, the crowd still had faces.

It was your street, your parish, your shopkeeper,
your relatives, your town.

The crowd was wrong about plenty,
but at least it was *real*.
It lived under the same sky
and answered to the same limits.

Today the crowd is not merely a crowd.
It is an audience
to be measured, profiled, sorted, and nudged.
Its moods are steered by headlines, feeds, incentives, and fear.

It does not “agree” so much as it is synchronized.

The modern crowd is manufactured
and manipulated at scale.
It can be made to chant what it does not believe,
pursue what it does not want,
and punish what it does not understand.

What was once a “consensus of common human voices”
is now hardly common
and often not human.

Do not confuse tradition with trend.
Do not confuse the wisdom of the dead
with the mood of the living.
Do not confuse a thousand echoes with truth.

When seeking the crowd,
look to the saints, the stoics, the fathers, the mothers,
and the canon.

The democracy of the dead.

Reject the reasonable life

Why follow the crowd
considering that the crowd is clueless?

The crowd will decide to do something
that not a single person actually wants,
simply because each person mistakenly believes
the *others* want it.

“Majority opinion” is often a hallucination.
A crowd is not a collection of convictions.
Rather, it is a collection of people afraid
to be the first to speak a conviction aloud.

Because even the leader of a crowd
is a follower.

Worse, as a crowd grows,
responsibility dissolves.

If one man sees a fire, he acts.
If ten men see a fire, they record it on their cell phones.

The crowd of today has little “collective intelligence,”
but an abundance of collective cowardice.

To join the crowd
is to rent out your will.

Reject the reasonable life

Even the secular are deeply religious.
For the crowd is more than a demographic —
it is a cathedral with no walls.
If you choose no altar, you will kneel at theirs.

Every day, the liturgy is performed.
The Matins of the morning scroll.
The Vespers of the evening outrage.
The bowing of the head to the glowing glass.
The silent recitation of the headlines.

It is a worship service for a god called “Now.”

The reasonable man believes he is free
because he does not attend a temple.

But look at his hands.
Look at his eyes.
He is chanting the hymn of the age,
beating the drum of the consensus,
terrified to miss a beat.

You cannot think your way out of a ritual.
You must worship your way out.

Be careful what you repeat.
Repetition rules men.

Reject the reasonable life

To know the crowd
is to know the reasonable majority.

It is the middle of the bell curve —
not stupid or evil,
but average by design.

The crowd seeks lives that are
legible to others,
defensible on paper,
low-regret,
and high-approval.

So they build an informal morality
and call it “wisdom.”

Because smallness needs witnesses.



Reject the reasonable life

Search the crowd and you will find:
obese dietitians,
pregnant men,
bankrupt financial advisors,
and leadership coaches with no clients.

And yet, when a Serious person takes action,
the crowd is right there to rebuke:

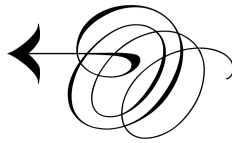
“Be smart.”

“Be realistic.”

“Don’t burn bridges.”

“You can do that later.”

“Why can’t you just be grateful?”



Incantations to keep the exceptional asleep.

Because a Serious person
threatens their story
that caution is a virtue.

Reject the reasonable life

The crowd does not seek truth or calling.
It optimizes for social equilibrium
and feel-good impossibilities like equality of outcomes.

Anything “high” gets pulled down and twisted.
Anything “low” gets normalized.
So the average stays safe.
And small.

This is why reasonable people say:
“Do what feels right,”
and “Who are you to judge?”

Wise and Serious counsel is specific, costly,
and oriented toward the truth.

Crowd counsel is generic, soothing,
and oriented toward approval.

When advice applies to anyone at any time,
it came from the crowd.

A lie does not become truth
because a billion people believe it.



“Lukewarm is death.”
– Torrey Dawley

Reject the reasonable life

Kierkegaard once wrote: "The crowd is untruth."

A crowd may have large numbers,
but it has no single voice to explain itself.

Even if every individual
knows the truth with deep conviction,
the moment they form a crowd,
untruth is present.

Because the crowd dissolves responsibility
and renders the individual unaccountable.

The larger the crowd,
the greater the chance
that truth is subject to a vote.

Truth is a vertical relationship
between the individual and reality.

The crowd is a horizontal relationship
between the individual and the nearest neighbor.

To look sideways in a crowd
is to look away from the truth.

Reject the reasonable life

The crowd lives in an infantile dream
expecting authority to pay the bill for paradise
while diluting responsibility until it barely exists.

The crowd finds security in numbers,
for where there are many, there is safety
and what many believe must be true.

It will happily hold up a mirror
reflecting back to you that you are fine.
But as Jung said: "A million zeros don't add up to one."

Just because a crowd is large
does not mean it has substance
for substance is found in the individual.

Numbers do not provide safety
but they can provide cover.

The crowd cannot carry your responsibility,
nor can it provide repentance.

Only you can be obedient to your Calling.



Reject the reasonable life

Unreasonable does not mean unaccountable.

Calling will be tested by reality,
not the intensity of your desire.

Calling requires humility and teachability,
not effortful stubbornness.

Calling is discerned with formed conscience
and credible counsel.

If your “calling” makes you contemptuous, dishonest,
or evasive of duties,
it is a compulsion,
not a calling.

And if you cannot be corrected,
you are fragile,
not courageous.

Truth can withstand examination.

Reject the reasonable life

The one who follows the crowd
will get no further than the crowd.

But the one who walks apart
will find places the crowd cannot go.

An Unreasonable person distrusts the well-worn path
because it is worn smooth
from people going nowhere.

The prophet Elijah did not hear God
in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire.
He heard God in a still, small voice.

Crowds are noisy
and Callings are quiet,
rarely found in a spectacle.

The only road to a different life
is the one you choose at a cost.



“The traveler sees what he sees,
the tourist sees what he has come to see.”
– GK Chesterton

Reject the reasonable life

In the crowd, validation and truth
are often inversely correlated.

If the crowd agrees with you,
you are likely safe,
and you should ask what you traded for that safety
because the crowd is almost always wrong.

In a disordered culture,
sanity will look like insanity.
Thankfully, we have George Orwell to guide us:
“Sanity is not statistical.”

If the world calls you “Unreasonable,”
take the compliment.
It means you have stopped hallucinating
with the rest of them.

But do not confuse novelty for truth.
Unreasonable people reject illusions,
not tradition.

The test is simple:
are you closer to reality
or just farther from the crowd?

Reject the reasonable life

To be Unreasonable is to separate
from the ambient consensus
by choosing a path that may not make sense
to people who live for passion, comfort, and status.

It is Unreasonable to reject optionality and comfort,
committing to a life few understand.

And yet you must,
at the risk of being misunderstood.

Because the good comes at a cost —
commitment, restraint, loss,
and consequence.

To a person floating downstream,
the one swimming upstream looks the fool.
He appears effortful with unnecessary struggle.
But in reality, he is the only one who is moving.

Reject the reasonable life

Alexander the Great was once
the most powerful man in the world.

He ruled cities and commanded armies.
Priests and poets praised his name.
The crowd called him blessed.

One day, Alexander visited Diogenes,
a philosopher who lived with no possessions
and slept in a barrel.

Alexander asked,
“Is there anything I can do for you?”

Diogenes replied,
“Yes. Stand out of my sunlight.”

The crowd offers prizes
to purchase your allegiance.

Diogenes did not hate the crowd,
but was *unimpressed* by it.

An Unreasonable person cannot be bought.

Reject the reasonable life

In the 1968 television series *The Prisoner*,
the main character refuses the crowd
and is charged with the “crime” of being “unmutual.”

His crime was not one of violence
but that he refused to share the collective mood.
He will not validate their delusion.

So he is punished through social exclusion.
The crowd does not lock him up —
they simply shun him.

They refuse to serve him at shops and restaurants.
When they see him in public,
they abandon and isolate him.

This is the danger of the Unreasonable Life.

Separating from the crowd with contempt,
invites more contempt.
You will be defined by what you oppose
and lose the ability to help them.

To hate the crowd is to remain a prisoner of the crowd.

The Unreasonable person separates from the crowd
not because he despises them,
but because he refuses their illusions.

Rebellion without love is not courage.

Reject the reasonable life

If you stop listening to the crowd,
who will you listen to?

Do not trade one living crowd for another.
Do not trade the mainstream for the “alternative” stream.
They are two sides of the same coin.

Instead, seek counsel from the dead.

Read books that have stood the test of time.
Listen to voices that have lasted more than a century.
Study the lives of men who are no longer here
to ask for your vote, your money, or your like.

The dead are honest,
harder to bribe.
They have no skin in your game.
They are not trying to sell you a course.
They are simply holding up a lantern.

Reasonable people are obsessed with “the current thing.”
Unreasonable people orient their lives toward eternal truth.

Trade the news for history.
Trade the feed for canon.

Many problems of today were solved
thousands of years ago.

Reject the reasonable life

Like it or not, the crowd has power.
It moves markets, decides elections,
sets prices, and shapes reputations.

You cannot pretend the crowd does not exist,
but you can refuse to let the crowd be your compass.

The crowd is an abstraction.
Your neighbor is a reality.

The crowd includes your neighbors,
who deserve charity.
They are your community,
your parish, your coworkers,
your customers, and your family.

To ignore the crowd is not to despise people,
nor is it to withdraw from society.
It simply means:
do not outsource truth to majority mood.

After all, you were formed by others.
You received language, faith, and love
through real people.

You can love the crowd
without joining their hallucination.



Reject the reasonable life

The Unreasonable person must be able to sit by the fire
without burning the map.

Warmth and belonging are good —
inherent to our human nature —
but you need not surrender direction.

It is good to join the crowd at times.
To laugh at a wedding.
To mourn at a funeral.
To cheer in a stadium.
To break bread at a table.

The crowd is not the enemy,
but it is a temptation.
You can return for rest and comfort.
Just do not return for permission.

Rest is not cowardice.
In fact, it is obedience.
Rest restores you to duty.
It does not dissolve duty.

For the Sabbath is not the crowd saying, “Take it easy.”
The Sabbath is remembering that you are not God.



“All the people did what was right in their own eyes.”
– Judges 21:25b

Exercises for ignoring the crowd

The point of these exercises is not to tell you *what* to do, but to show what you *might* do. They are not prescriptive.

4. **The Mimetic Audit** — List your top 3-5 ambitions (e.g. buy a lake house, sell your company, run a marathon). Next to each, write down the name of the person who made you want that thing. Perhaps a rival, or an influencer, or someone you envy. Ask yourself: “If I was forbidden from telling anyone about this, would I still want it?” If the answer is “no,” cross it off the list.
5. **The Consensus Breaker** — Identify a standing obligation in your life that includes multiple people (e.g. a weekly meeting, a recurring business process, an endless group text message). Assuming 50% of the people involved do not want to participate, do you have the gall to vocally bow out?
6. **Vocabulary Cleanse** — For the next 7 days, you are banned from using “therapy speak” or “corporate speak.” Instead of “setting a boundary,” just say “no.” Instead of “I don’t have the bandwidth,” say “I am choosing not to do that.” Strip away the jargon and force yourself to tell the truth.
7. **The Century Filter** — Conduct a 48–72 hour news fast. Delete your social media apps. Block news sites. Only consume content that is 100 years old (or older). Listen to old music. Read books by dead authors. Look at art that was not designed for Instagram. Find voices and works that have stood the test of time.
8. **Audit Your Inputs** — List the last 10 sources of advice or influence you consumed (e.g. podcasts, feeds, conversations, books, posts). Were they sources of timeless wisdom or entertainment? Next time you engage with the input, remember how you labeled it.

Reject the reasonable life

9. **The Contempt Check** — Recall a recent disagreement with the crowd's consensus (opinion, habit, norm). Note how you responded internally. Was it refusal with love? Or contempt? If contempt won, rewrite your response as compassionate refusal.
10. **Reality Test** — Write down some of your strongest-held beliefs and opinions that the crowd mostly shares. Apply the test: Am I agreeing because it is true or because it is safe? Then write down some of your strongest disagreements with the crowd. Apply the test again: Am I dissenting because it is true or to separate from the majority?
11. **The Permission Fast** — Choose one decision you have delayed and make it without asking anyone who has no stake in the consequences. Don't call your friends or text your peers. Just make the decision, act, and carry the result.
12. **Spectators Versus Builders** — List 10 people you take counsel from (including online voices). Mark each as *Builder* (they carry responsibility in their own life) or *Spectator* (they comment more than they act). Stop taking advice from *Spectators* for 30 days.
13. **Charity Without Permission** — Pick one person who lives a "reasonable" life and do one concrete act of charity for them this week. Do not lecture them or deliver a speech. Just do something out of love to keep the "ignore the crowd" mission from becoming contempt.

Reject the reasonable life

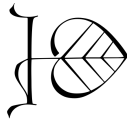
FORGET THE SAFE

Safety is a jealous god,
an idol who demands constant sacrifice:
truth, vocation, generosity, risk, and obedience.

She teaches the avoidance of need
and dependence,
while demanding total devotion herself.

Her lips utter false promises to her servants:
“Appease me and nothing bad will happen.”
“Honor me and you will keep control.”
“Love me and hold your life close.”

But control is a fiction.
You are not God.
Neither is she.



Safety purchases comfort
with the currency of strength.
She leaves her followers with less resilience,
less honesty,
and a lower capacity for bearing consequence.

She keeps doors open and reputations intact.
She avoids embarrassment and loss.
And all she asks in return
is a life unspent.

Reject the reasonable life

Do not confuse safety as an idol
with safety as a function of stewardship.

One leads to fragility.
The other leads to vocation.

The idol demands human sacrifice.
Stewardship is also costly,
but the cost is borne of love —
a willingness to suffer for what is yours to carry.

The two are not neighbors.
They are opposites.

A reasonable person purchases comfort
with a low-risk future
and calls it peace.

An Unreasonable person has a mission to fulfill
and time is limited.

Such a future may be less certain.
But better to be fully alive
than carefully preserved
like a prune in a Ziploc bag.

Reject the reasonable life

The Unreasonable life
must include Danger.

A willingness to bear consequence,
to be corrected,
to act without guarantees,
to lose comfort, reputation, money, and control.

Danger is not foolishness.
It is an answer to a Calling.

It requires prudence and courage,
but not in service of itself.
It must serve the greater good.

Danger that violates Calling is vice.
Danger that serves Calling is glory.



“A ship in harbor is safe,
but that is not what ships are built for.”
– John A. Shedd

Reject the reasonable life

A reasonable man keeps his safe job.
Stays in his safe relationship.
Maintains safe beliefs.
Stays safely silent.

Because it protects him from exposure.
Speaking the truth may change his standing.
Committing in public might close doors.

But what he avoids might cost much more
than his reputation and social standing.

Safety protects his image
and he can look clean
without being changed.

For he is like a whitewashed tomb —
polished on the outside
and full of dead filth within.



A preserved corpse.

Reject the reasonable life

In the 1990s, scientists built Biosphere 2:
a climate-controlled glass dome to simulate the Earth.

The trees inside grew rapidly,
but before maturing,
they collapsed under their own weight.

Trees need wind to create “reaction wood.”
The swaying breaks micro-fibers
and causes mechanical strain
to create “stress wood” that repairs stronger.

Without the “trauma” of wind,
a sizable tree cannot support its own canopy.

The reasonable life can protect you
from the very resistance required to stand.

Reject the reasonable life

You may think weakness is failure
and strength is power.

But you would be wrong.

Weakness is not failure.
It is evidence of need.

The failure is not to think "I am weak."
It is to think "I am strong."

As if strength could erase dependence.
As if you could outgrow need.

This is Freedom.
To stop pretending you are self-sufficient
and to receive what you cannot produce.

There is a battle for your life
and the only way to win is to surrender.

Reject the reasonable life

Scientists once believed a sterile environment could lead to perfect health.

Remove all threats —
germs, parasites, and dirt —
and the body would thrive.

So they developed antibacterial soaps,
told kids not to play in the dirt,
and encouraged the use of hand sanitizer.

The crowd followed suit.
They sanitized childhood with helicopter parenting.
They socialized safetyism with paper masks.

But the human immune system is not designed for peace.
It is designed for war.
Without any threats, it attacks itself.

Microbiome issues, allergies, asthma,
inflammation, and even some autoimmune conditions.

This is the hygiene paradox:
too much safety breeds self-destruction.



Reject the reasonable life

The most dangerous place in the world
is not the edge of a cliff.
It is the comfortable couch.

When a situation is catastrophic,
our psychological response is *correction*.
Ruin is a great catalyst for change.

But when a situation is bad-but-comfortable —
a loveless marriage,
a stagnant job,
an inconvenient ache —
the pain is below the threshold of action.

So we tolerate it,
wasting years in a low-level purgatory
that we would never tolerate if it were hell.

It is reasonable to fear the disaster,
but Unreasonable to fear the coma.

Reject the reasonable life

Francis was the son of a wealthy merchant
with the guarantee of a safe and secure future.

He sought status and admiration —
the life the crowd calls “success” —
until something in him broke open.

He began giving away his possessions.
So much so that it embarrassed his father.

His father dragged him into the public square.
He wanted a judge to force the boy back into reason.
Back into the life that made sense.

Francis stood before the bishop and the town.
His father demanded the return of what was “his.”

Francis did not argue.
Instead he took off his fine clothes,
forfeited his inheritance,
completely naked in front of the crowd.

The crowd saw humiliation.
Francis saw clarity.

Safety can be inherited.
Freedom must be chosen.

Reject the reasonable life

The more you seek to feel secure,
the more insecure you become.

To the drowning man,
water is the enemy trying to take his life.

But to the swimmer,
water is a support that allows for sport.

Some outcomes get worse
the harder you try to force them
because the forcing itself creates the problem.

Some outcomes get better
the less you tighten your grip
because high performance is a side effect
of earned effortlessness.



“When you try to stay on the surface of the water, you sink;
but when you try to sink, you float.”

– Alan Watts

Reject the reasonable life

We may wish it otherwise,
but fire and Danger are not optional.

They enter every life,
either as chosen discipline
or as unchosen crisis.

You may stave off fire for years
by purchasing safety,
softening convictions,
and avoiding exposure.

But delay is not escape.
And the fire grows while you wait.

A reasonable life does not remove Danger —
it merely postpones the moment
when reality demands payment.

Refuse to choose fire
and you will inevitably meet it untrained.

Be prepared
because it will either forge you
or expose you.

You cannot choose whether you are tested.
But you *can* choose whether you are trained.

Reject the reasonable life

We might look back at the Unreasonable lives —
the saints, the fighters, the explorers —
and fixate on the cost.

We count the prisons,
the exiles,
the rejections.

We see the fire they walked through
and we are grateful for the cool shade of precaution.

But if you could speak to them now,
they would not speak of the pain.

They would tell you
that real risk is not loss or discomfort,
but the certainty of a numb soul.

They do not look at comfort with envy.
They look with the knowing smile
of someone who sees what you are missing.

The Unreasonable dead do not warn you
to stay away from the flames.
They are shouting from the other side:
“Come through and be refined.”

Do not fixate on whether you will burn.
Worry that you will never ignite.

Reject the reasonable life

Beware the reassuredness of safety and protection.
You may overexpose yourself.

When people *feel* more protected,
they take bigger risks to “spend” that protection.

Safety can make you dull
because the stakes feel low.
But exposure makes you sharp
because the consequences are real.



A false sense of safety creates complacency
and complacency makes you sloppy.

Then the vultures arrive
awaiting your inevitable mistake.

They can smell the person
who stopped paying attention.

Reject the reasonable life

A reasonable person avoids adversity.
An Unreasonable person will not waste it.

As Seneca wrote:

“No man is more unhappy
than he who never faces adversity.
For he is not permitted to prove himself.”

A safe life is an unproven life.
You do not know who you are
until you have been tested.

In every moment of adversity
is an opportunity to learn, grow,
and develop resilience.

Our lives are often better for adversity,
though it certainly feels otherwise
in those moments.

Do not hide or cower when adversity finds you.
It is your moment to move from theory to practice.

Do not merely survive the fire.
Let it burn away what inhibits you.

Reject the reasonable life

Refuse the worship of self-preservation
to recover the instinct for meaning.

Then safety becomes a byproduct,
not a goal.



Safety is the fruit of courage and discipline.
It creates margin, reserves, and room to breathe.

Protect what you have, not out of fear
but out of stewardship.
It was entrusted to you
and will not be yours forever.

It is reasonable to claim possession.
It is Unreasonable to live as if nothing is truly *yours*,
only entrusted to you for the good of others.

Exercises to forget what is safe

6. **The Safety Hoard** — List everything you protect out of fear: money, relationships, time, health routines. Rank them by how much time and energy they consume. Choose one to intentionally expose this week: speak a risky truth, spend reserved savings on something needed. Write down what fear(s) arose and whether lightness followed.
7. **The Reputation Tax** — Find one true thing you keep quiet because it might change how you are seen. Say it once this week in the right place, to the right person, without theatrics. Pay the tax and move on.
8. **The Upstream Swim** — Identify a “downstream” habit you are drifting with, such as a safe job routine, tolerated stagnation, and avoided conversations. Quit the habit cold. Initiate the hard talk, change the routine radically. Write down what catastrophe you fear and what correction emerged.
9. **The Correction Rehearsal** — Ask a serious person you know, “What am I protecting that is making me smaller?” Do not argue, explain, or defend. Sit with their answer for 48 hours and make a change.
10. **Adversity Invitation** — Recall a past adversity you avoided or resented. This week, invite a small one. Take a cold shower. Share a failure story in public. Say no to a comfort or ritual. Take note of what happens. Was it as bad (or worse) than you thought? Could you do it again for another week?
11. **Debt of Commitments** — Make a list of open options you’ve amassed. Ideas for side hustles, possible relationships, weak beliefs. Make a promise never to think of them again. Burn the bridge. Clear as much obligation debt as possible

Reject the reasonable life

and notice the weight that is lifted.

12. **Sabbath Obedience** — Take a real Sabbath block this week. Do no commerce, no hustle, no “productive rest.” If it is on your “to-do” list, do not do it. Practice receiving, not controlling. Spend time with people who miss you. Remind yourself: “I am not God and the world will not collapse.”
13. **Comfort Withdrawal** — Remove one comfort that functions like sedation for seven days. Late-night scrolling, snacking, alcohol, constant headphones, endless news. Replace it with one difficult, chosen act. Walk, pray, write, train, study. Watch what surfaces when the anesthesia is gone.
14. **The Hunger Audit** — It is easy to eat for entertainment and anxiety, not just fuel. Face the fear of empty. For 24 hours, fast from food, drinking only water, tea, or black coffee. Observe the panic that comes to mind when the safety of a meal is removed. Realize you are fine.
15. **Sleep on the Floor** — Leave the comfort of your bed for one night and sleep on a hard floor. Remind your body and mind that luxury is a privilege and not a baseline.

Reject the reasonable life

DESPISE THE EASY

It is possible to take prisoners
not by force,
but by comfort.

No tyrant or army is required.
In fact, the captive happily volunteers.

Comfort never kicks down the door.
It knocks politely.

It is the easy path,
which offers small trades:
one more delay,
one less effort,
one more excuse.

Soon the man cannot do hard things
without feeling wrong for doing them.

He wakes up one day
unable to bear difficulty
and calls it "burnout,"
when it is mostly withdrawal.

It is enjoyable for a time.
Until the muscles atrophy
and the door becomes too heavy to open.

Reject the reasonable life

Some believe IQ to be the differentiator.
But as Nassim Taleb says:
“Any idiot can be intelligent.”

Others believe EQ to be the differentiator.
But it is often just social compliance,
prioritizing harmony over truth.

AQ is the differentiator.
The agency quotient.
The ability to act without permission,
without mood,
and without guarantees.

You do not need intelligence to have agency.
And thank goodness for that.



A low-agency life is managed by comfort.
A high-agency life is governed by Calling.

It is the ability to choose the good
even when the good is costly.

Life can be small at any IQ,
or any measure of EQ.

But a high-AQ life is claimed.

Reject the reasonable life

A reasonable person treats discomfort
like a problem to be solved.
As if comfort is a moral good.

An Unreasonable person welcomes discomfort
because truth can be found in the tension
and friction is the way to traction.

To sit in discomfort
is to submit to the reality
that life is a collision of events
over which we have no control
and little understanding.

Why inhibit discomfort
except for the fact that it is not easy?

An Unreasonable person knows
that what is not easy
may be worth the cost.

Better to have a thorn in one's side
that reminds you of your need
than a comfort that makes you forget it.



Reject the reasonable life

Every life is an altar.
The only question is what gets offered.

The easy life offers time for comfort.
It offers attention for distraction.
It offers strength for convenience.

These offerings are usually private,
ending right where they began.

Hard offers something else.
Time so others are not rushed by you.
Attention so others are not half-seen.
Restraint so others are not harmed by your appetites.
Discipline so others are not forced to carry your chaos.

Hard makes you dependable.
It turns you outward.

The easy life ends in self.
Hard ends in fruit for others.

Reject the reasonable life

Frederick Douglass was born into slavery,
expected to work, obey, and remain ignorant.

When his master's wife began teaching him to read,
her husband stopped it
claiming that learning would make him "unfit"
to be a slave.

Douglass heard the truth inside the threat:
education was dangerous
because it made a man hard to own.

So he learned in secret.

He traded bread with poor white boys
in exchange for reading lessons.
He carried books like contraband.
He stole minutes from exhaustion
to sharpen his mind.

We cannot pretend that slavery was "easy,"
but an easier life was available.
One of compliance, food, shelter, silence.

Douglass refused it.

And once he learned to read,
slavery could no longer feel "normal."

The easy life comes bearing chains.

Reject the reasonable life

The stone under the chisel suffers distress.
The work is noisy and dusty.
The stone is resistant.

Yet, something important is happening.

When the hammer stops,
the Danger stops.

So does the carving.

The quiet can feel like mercy.
It can also be surrender.

We mistake the absence of struggle for peace.
But the absence of struggle is often the absence of work.

To become a masterpiece,
the sculptor must continue
and the stone must endure.

When resistance stops and demands cease,
when the world leaves you alone to be comfortable,
the sculptor may have left
and the work remains unfinished.

Reject the reasonable life

There is a saying: “If it were easy, everyone would do it.”

Or:

- “If everyone is doing it, it must be easy.”
- “Since not everyone is doing it, it cannot be easy.”
- “If it was hard, no one would do it.”
- “If everyone is doing it, it’s probably worth not doing.”
- “Just because it’s easy doesn’t mean everyone will do it.”

This is a reasonable way to look at it.

But we should know by now that we are not reasonable.

Difficulty is not a warning.

It is the proof of stakes.

If it is easy for you
and difficult for others,
pay attention
and do not despise it.

That is often where Calling hides.

Effortlessness is not laziness,
but the fruit of fitness.

Reject the reasonable life

In congested traffic,
a new, faster road
often slows everyone down.

Because the crowd is predictable.
Driven by the instinct for ease,
they rush the shortcut,
clogging it until it becomes a trap.

The “hack” is almost always a bottleneck.
Because the hack attracts the herd.

They seek efficiency,
but create congestion.
They seek the straight line,
but create a parking lot.

The Unreasonable person avoids the shortcut
not because they love pain,
but because they know the math.

The long way is often empty.
The difficult road is rarely crowded.

While the reasonable mob fights for the “easy” way,
the Unreasonable person walks the “hard” way
and arrives first.

The shortcut is an illusion.
The long way is the fast way.



“Hacks are for hacks.”
– Kapil Gupta

Reject the reasonable life

The glutton eats for pleasure
but loses the taste of food.

The idler rests for comfort
but loses the sweetness of sleep.

When pleasure is the primary good,
a tolerance develops
and the dose must be increased.

A louder thrill.
A brighter distraction.
A rarer decadence.

This is the inflation of the soul.

A reasonable life manufactures more pleasure,
devaluing every moment
until it is cheap.

The Unreasonable life restricts the supply,
embracing the fast, the quiet, and the barren hour.
And when the feast comes,
it tastes like a feast.

The pursuit of pleasure is self-defeating,
but hard work restores pleasure
to its rightful place.

Reject the reasonable life

A man with one watch knows the time.
A man with two watches is never sure.

It is a trap to believe
that a life with more choice is easier,
and that an easier life is a better life.

You may think you want options,
but you actually desire direction
because the easy life is a mental prison
of endless deliberation.

Better to live under a vow
than to tread a meaningless and long path.

“Life is about the journey”
is what people say
when they refuse to set a destination.

You must develop contempt
for the path of least resistance.
A life without resistance
does not leave a mark.



“Inordinate self-love is the cause of every sin.”
– Thomas Aquinas

Reject the reasonable life

Do not treat your energy like a battery.

You think that if you rest today,
you will have more for tomorrow.

So you enter “power save mode,”
hoarding your effort,
saving it for later.

But you are not a machine.
You are a muscle.

A battery that is drained is dead
and cannot do work until recharged.
But a muscle that is drained grows.

The laws of biology are clear:
Use it or lose it.

If you “save your strength,”
it does not accrue interest —
it atrophies.

The capacity you do not use today
is gone tomorrow.

The only way to keep your power
is to deliberately spend it when you have it.

Or watch it disappear.



“Tomorrow is the first lie of the devil.”
– Robert Fripp

Reject the reasonable life

We stop when we feel tired.
We believe the feeling is a warning light.
“Low Fuel.”

But it is just a feeling.
And the feeling is a lie.

It is a governor —
a safety mechanism set too low
by a mind addicted to comfort.

You believe you have hit the wall.
But the wall is made of paper.

An hour of hard work can fly by
faster than an hour of boredom.

Beyond your fatigue is a hidden reservoir.
The gate to that reservoir is only opened by exhaustion.

You cannot access your full capacity
while you are still “saving” yourself.

You must run until the tank is dry
to realize the tank was an excuse.



“Do not pray for an easy life.
Pray for the strength to endure a difficult one.”
– Bruce Lee

Reject the reasonable life

How the easy life trains you

Frictionless defaults that remove everyday resistance, so you stop building strength. *Same-day delivery, auto-play, infinite scroll, “one-click” purchases.*

Perpetual distraction that provide constant stimulus, so you never have to sit with silence, guilt, fear, longing, or boredom long enough to change. *Podcasts as background noise, checking the phone at red lights, doomscrolling in bed “to unwind.”*

Optionality addiction that keeps doors open, commitments soft, decisions reversible, so you stay “free” and never become someone. *Building “backup plans” instead of an action plan, refusing to commit publicly, saving a draft and never sending or releasing it.*

Outsourced responsibility that relies on experts, systems, and institutions, so you need no conscience, discipline, or discernment. *“My therapist said...” as final authority, delegating conscience to HR, letting headlines decide moral urgency.*

Therapeutic self-justification that makes every hard duty become “boundaries,” every discomfort become “trauma,” and every refusal become “self-care.” *“Protecting my peace,” calling laziness “rest,” calling refusal “self-care.”*

Comfortable loneliness that offers feelings of connection with no communion, so you remain informed, entertained, but empty. *Texting instead of calling, always watching something and talking to nobody.*

Soft rebellion that provides transgression without sacrifice, outrage without action, and critique without duty, so you feel conviction and superiority without the need for action. *Posting outrage while in comfort, hating people for their vote and not their actions, sarcasm over courage.*

Conflict avoidance that lets “peace” become the absence of tension, so truth gets edited down into mush. *“Agree to disagree,” never naming the real issue, apologizing to end tension instead of tell the truth.*

Exercises to despise what is easy

5. **The Friction Audit** — For one day, write down every time you choose the “easy” action by default (shortcuts, scrolling, avoiding a call, not reading an email). At night, circle the three choices that made you smaller. Choose the harder path tomorrow.
6. **The Manual Override** — We outsource small efforts to machines to save micro-calories of energy. For three days, reject the mechanical assist. Take the stairs, wash the dishes by hand, walk to the store. Remind your body it is a tool, not a passenger.
7. **Complaint Starvation** — Complaining is a way of saying, “This should be easier.” It is the voice of the victim. Go 24 hours without a single complaint. If you catch yourself complaining, reset the timer. Force your mind to move from “this is annoying” to “this is what is happening.”
8. **“No” Without “Because”** — We offer soft excuses to avoid the tension of a hard “no.” We lie to make rejection easier and safe for ourselves. Decline a request this week without offering an excuse. Say, “No, I won’t be doing that.” Sit in the awkward silence. Do not fill it with an apology.
9. **Deep Reading** — We read for information and entertainment, not for formation. We are addicted to summary. Read a difficult text for 30 minutes and do not skim. Do not check your phone. If you do not understand a sentence, read it until you do. Let the difficulty slow you down to the speed of wisdom.
10. **Close the Open Door** — We will do everything to preserve optionality. Identify one “backup plan” or open door you’ve hoarded, like a side hustle idea or an unsent draft. Close it permanently this week. Delete it, commit to it, burn the bridge. What “ease” did you lose?

Reject the reasonable life

11. **Spend the Reservoir** — On a day where you feel “tired” or “low energy,” begin a difficult task. Do 20 pushups, have a hard conversation, enter deep work. Get truly drained and take note when you experience the second wind.
12. **Agency Hour** — Set a timer for 60 minutes and do the single task you have been “getting ready” to do. No more excuses. No more research or pre-work. Start badly and keep moving.
13. **Discomfort Training** — Pick one controlled discomfort you will practice for 14 days. Wake up early, fast for two meals, take a long walk without entertainment. Keep it modest, but non-negotiable. Teach the body that discomfort is not an emergency.
14. **Sabbath Without Sedation** — Take a real rest day without the usual anesthesia. Do nothing novel. Do not scroll, binge, or shop. Rest with people. Pray. Walk outside. Learn the difference between rest that restores and ease that dissolves.

Reject the reasonable life

GO DEEPER

The world does not admire hard work
until the hard work leads to status —
a champion, a celebrity, a millionaire.

Until then, it will offer you false relief
in the only way it knows how:
comfort, ease, and cheap wisdom.

You need a compass that does not change
with mood, weather, or applause.

A vow is a memory
that remembers for you
if you forget who you are.

To become Seriously Unreasonable
is to be bound.

Reject the reasonable life



The Reasonable Life is a trance.
It is built on three pillars:

The crowd.
Safety.
Ease.

Together, they form the architecture of the small life.

A vow breaks the spell.

When you feel yourself lowering and shrinking,
when you feel the gravity of the average pulling you down,
ask the dangerous question:

“Who am I obeying?”

And then, pay the cost to stand up.



Reject the reasonable life

A Rule of Life is not a to-do list.

It is the floor beneath which you will not fall.

When you define your constraints,
you define your shape.

- I keep daily hours for Serious work.
- I finish what I start.
- I keep my word, especially when it costs.
- I give regularly in a way that I will notice.
- I seek correction from credible people.
- I do not complain about what I cannot change.
- I do not speak to fill silence.
- I do not eat for entertainment.
- I do not buy what I cannot pay for today.
- I do not outsource my conscience to the crowd.



These rules need not become yours.

But you must write your own.

A man without a rule is ruled.

Reject the reasonable life

Quick heuristics are necessary
for making Unreasonable, high-AQ decisions.

When facing a fork in the road,
you must know how to cut away
reasonable action.

The Crowd Test: If everyone agrees with this choice, am I seeing
the truth? Or just the consensus?

The Comfort Test: Am I choosing this because it is right? Or
because it relieves tension and discomfort?

The Safety Test: Does this choice make me sharp (exposed)? Or
does it make me dull (safe)?

The Story Test: If the choice was a chapter in a biography, would
the reader skip it? Or jump in from excitement?

The Calling Test: Does this move me toward what I am here to do?
Or away from it? (Or: Am I running *toward* something or *away* from
it?)

These are but a few tests,
and there are many more
for you to discover.

Reject the reasonable life

Staying the Unreasonable course requires discipline
and frequent examination —
not in the spirit of navel-gazing
but in the spirit of self-direction.

In this, consider a Sunday interrogation:

- This week, where and when did I seek safety?
- Where and when did I seek ease and comfort?
- Did I mimic the crowd to fit in?
- Did I waste energy, capacity, or leave potential unspent?

Confess it.

Correct it.

Begin it again.



And look forward as well:

- What can I remove this week to reduce my drag?
- What is a hard truth I am afraid to tell this week?
- What is a task or commitment I am afraid to complete?
- What public promise can I make this week? To whom?

Plan the discomfort
so that you may face it
with courage, joy, and intention.

Reject the reasonable life

The Unreasonable life is not a self-help project.
It is a stewardship project.

You are not building a life.
You are stewarding a soul.

The goal is not to be impressive.
The goal is to be faithful.

Go.

The fire is waiting.



Exercises for going deeper

5. **The Three Vows** — Write three vows: one for *truth*, one for *risk*, one for *difficulty*. Keep each vow to one sentence and make measurable (“each week,” “each day,” “by Friday”). For example, “I will ignore the crowd by ___ each week.” Then share them with one credible person. Give them permission to keep you on track.
6. **The Agency Protocol** — Use this when you feel stuck. Write the avoided action in one sentence, then write the smallest step. Think of the smallest action you can take, even something so small you’d be embarrassed to share with others. Set a timer for 20 minutes and begin. When the timer ends, send a sentence to a credible person telling them what you did and commit to them your next steps.
7. **The Comfort Tax** — Choose three (non-vice) comforts you use as anesthesia, e.g. dessert, shopping, streaming, late nights, news. For each comfort, write a rule that makes comfort a reward, not a refuge. “I may ___ only after ___.” For example, “I may have a dessert only after 40 minutes of exercise.” Keep the taxes for 14 days. The goal is not deprivation, but the removal of escape.
8. **The Crowd Boundary Plan** — Write three lists: voices you refuse, voices you permit, and voices you seek. Remove one “refuse” voice for 30 days and replace it with one “seek” voice daily. Do not trade one crowd for another. Reduce noise until reality can be heard.
9. **The Safety Idol Detector** — Answer these questions in one sentence each: What do I refuse to lose? What do I overprotect? Where do I hide behind “prudence?” What truth do I avoid because it would change my standing? Where am I unwilling to be corrected? Circle the sentence that makes you uneasy. Write one correction for this week.

Reject the reasonable life

10. **The “No” Audit Theory** — A “yes” is meaningless unless you are capable of a hard “no.” Look at your calendar for the upcoming month. Identify some commitments you made out of guile, social pressure, or a desire to “keep options open.” Cancel them. Consider apologizing for the initial lack of courage and remove the obligation.
11. **The Friction Ritual** — You need a physical anchor to remind you that you have rejected the easy path. Choose one physical act that is intentionally inefficient. Grind your coffee beans by hand. Walk to work. Write in a journal with a pen. Let the physical resistance remind you of the mental resistance to live this life.
12. **The Eulogy Correction** — Write the eulogy that the reasonable version of you would receive. “He played it safe, he was nice, and he had a good 401k.” Then write the eulogy you *want*. Read them side-by-side. The gap between them should inform your to-do list for the coming months and years.
13. **The Public Stake** — Write down all of the commitments you have publicly made, e.g. I will be a faithful spouse. I will be a loving parent. I will release my next book. Find someone who can hold you to these commitments. Tell them where you see risk in failure or underperformance. Give them permission to rebuke you if they see you drifting.
14. **The Living Autopsy** — We surround ourselves with polite people who lie (gently cover the truth) to us to keep the peace. This creates a bubble of affirmation. Select three people you respect (a mentor, a spouse, a rival) and ask them to tell you one hard truth they’ve been too polite to say. When the answers come, do not argue. Read/Hear them. Accept them as your new baseline.

Reject the reasonable life

Before you proceed, you must determine if you are just a tourist in the land of the Unreasonable.

- Would you describe your life as “small?”
- Do you prefer approval or direction?
- Are you prepared to lose options in order to gain a life?
- Can you tell the difference between stewardship and self-preservation?
- Are you willing to risk your reputation in order to keep integrity?
- What truth do you avoid because it would change your standing?
- Where have you traded Calling for consensus?
- What do you do when you feel discomfort?
- What is “easy” that has made your life smaller?
- If your life were judged by its fruit, what would it prove you loved?
- Are you willing to take action before you have a guarantee?
- Are you willing to be called Unreasonable by the crowd?

Answer honestly.

The Unreasonable life does not require you to be ready.

It requires action.

Reject the reasonable life

Core concepts

Reasonable — An optimized existence that prioritizes safety, approval, and the preservation of options over truth and depth.

Unreasonable — Adopting fierce constraints, refusing to outsource conscience, and willingness to be misunderstood while avoiding the path of least resistance.

The crowd — The ambient consensus of the majority, offering belonging and cover at the price of responsibility. A collection of individuals who fear standing alone, offering safety in numbers but demanding the surrender of the self.

Vow — The voluntary acceptance of limits. The act of binding oneself to a single path to eliminate the paralysis of infinite choice and generate depth.

Calling — A claim placed on your life that must be obeyed. Not desire, not impulse, not identity-play. Calling is tested by reality, duties, and credible counsel.

Danger — Willingness to bear consequence in service of Calling. Not recklessness or vice. Danger that serves Calling is courage with cost.

Comfort — The anesthetic of the small life. Comfort is not evil, but it becomes a prison when it is used to avoid truth, duty, and action.

Ease — The path of least resistance as a strategy for staying small. Ease crowds the road, dulls attention, and trains low agency.

Reject the reasonable life

Agency Quotient (AQ) — The ability to act without permission, without mood, and without guarantees. The refusal to wait for the conditions to be perfect.

Safety — The idol of the modern age. The false promise that avoiding risk leads to peace, when it actually leads to fragility and a life unspent.

Stewardship — The recognition that your life, talent, and time are not possessions to be hoarded for comfort, but trusts to be spent for a purpose.

Reject the reasonable life

The final word

Anyone who's read this far
has felt the pull of the reasonable life
and refused it.

Perhaps you are tired of consensus.
Perhaps you are tired of keeping every door open.
Perhaps you are tired of calling comfort "peace."

Perhaps you know exactly what you must do,
but you have been postponing it
because the cost feels too high
and the crowd feels too loud.

You can go alone.
But this work often moves faster
with another person who is willing to be direct.

I am Available:
mastery@anthonygarone.com

Visit anthonygarone.com for more information.

Reject the reasonable life

Get good.
Go fast.
Conquer!



A guide for reaching the Promised Land

Written November 9, 2025

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

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*Each chapter of this guide starts with philosophy
and ends with exercises to get you started.*

*For some, the exercises are the value.
For others, the philosophy.
For a few, both.*

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

Author's note

Get good. Go fast. Conquer! reflects a real stage in the pursuit of mastery, both in attitude and in method. Early excellence is often entangled with ambition, proving, conquest, and the desire to win. Over time, those instincts are chastened by humility.

This essay preserves that tension. It is not meant to divide the world into “winners” and “losers,” but to describe the early fire that often accompanies serious practice before it is purified. The fuller resolution comes in a later essay, *Die to self. Find joy. Access genius.*

It is written in the language of war because mastery *is* war — against distraction, against mediocrity, against the reasonable life that slowly kills the soul.

Think of the voice of a coach before the game, a general before battle, or a leader rallying a team to win. Its purpose is not calm explanation, but ignition. It is meant to raise the stakes, stir the blood, and call forth the aggressive energy required for mastery.

In one sense, life is not a competition. In another, it absolutely is. For those with competitive blood, this is not a contradiction but a tension to be rightly ordered. Scripture is not embarrassed by the language of battle, victory, endurance, and the race.

I wanted to capture the fire of ambition before it is fully purified. I do not wish to make an argument for ego, but an argument for learning how to fight before learning how to surrender.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

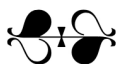
PREAMBLE

Many people want to win in life.

Few will.

But you can join the “winners” if you are:

1. Exceptional
2. Prolific
3. Frightening



When I say “Frightening,” I mean:

People think “*how is that even possible?*”
when they see you at your best.

For it is good to strike fear and confusion in others.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

I *unintentionally* became a winner.

And the more I won, the more I heard:

§ “You do so much, it’s scary.”
“How do you get it all done?”
→ “Are you hiding hours that we don’t know about?”

In other words: What’s the “*Secret?*”

They think it’s “*work/life balance*” or “*time management.*”

They think it’s about “*effort.*” Or “*money.*”

But that’s not the Secret.

The Secret is:

“*Activation.*”

Soon I’ll show you how Activation works.

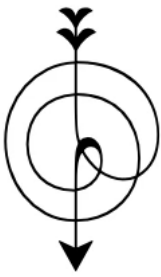
Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

I say I “*unintentionally*” became a winner
because it wasn’t on purpose and I had no plan.

Unbeknownst to me, much of what it takes to win was inside me.

And I Activated it without knowing it.

My hard work and goals *happened* to be directionally correct.



First, I developed Exceptional capability.

Second, I made it visible to others.

Third, I got Serious.

Fourth, I connected with Masters.

Fifth, I continuously Performed with persistence
and consistence.

They got me far enough along
to attract mentors and coaches
who shared the Secret of Activation
and guided me to *the Promised Land*.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

The Promised Land is where *untrue things become true*.

“Don’t work. Just make money.”

“Faith the size of a mustard seed.”

“Reap more than you sow.”

“Be yourself. The rest will follow.”

It’s a place that makes no sense to the outside world,
full of paradoxes where impossibilities occur every day.

Ask and you *receive*.

Want and it’s *there*.

Need and it *happens*.

Seek and you *find*.

It is *brutally unfair* to the rest of the world.

I wish it weren’t so, but I don’t make the rules.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

You cannot get to the Promised Land through “effort” or “balance.”

Because high performance is a consequence of *Effortlessness*.
And Effortlessness comes from alignment with a greater power.

Like a Chinese finger trap,
the harder you try,
the further you get from the Promised Land.

The greater the effort toward Mastery,
the more difficult it becomes.

As my friend Leonardo Pavkovic told me:
“There is *nothing* easier in the world than being yourself.”

In other words, once you’re fully Activated,
you should have no trouble with anything
in your life of work and practice.

This gets to the core of the *Great Misunderstanding*.

You do so well, it creates cognitive dissonance in others.

People think you’re cheating. But you’re not.
You’re just being yourself.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!



The Great Misunderstanding

The widespread assumption that high performance and achievement require intense effort, hard work, and possibly deceit.

It assumes that success is solely the result of individual effort and personal sacrifice, often leading people to believe that they must:

Work longer hours
Push themselves to their limits
Make significant personal sacrifices
Stay motivated through sheer willpower

The Great Misunderstanding leads people to equate *hard work* with Mastery. In reality, Mastery is the result of:

Well-developed taste and self-awareness
Confidence and a sense of personal value
Activating natural capability through intrinsic interest
Freedom from drag, debt, and obligation

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

When you Activate the winning elements of your DNA,
you don't have to *try* to win.

You just win.
And win. And win again.
Over and over.

Effortlessly.

It becomes the norm. And the expectation.

Failure, no longer the ruin it once was, becomes data.
Information. Nothing more than a lesson.

When loss and “what-ifs” are nowhere to be found,
you are free from stress and worry.

Activation brings out what works (talent, achievement, confidence)
and shuts down what doesn't (stress, worry, doubt).

But be careful —
you can also Activate losing traits:
victim's mindset, pessimism, and attention-seeking.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

People outside the Promised Land look at you funny.
Because they know you're not one of them.

You have an inarticulable Unfair Advantage:
the *intrinsic motivation* to excel, succeed,
and surround yourself with like-minded people.

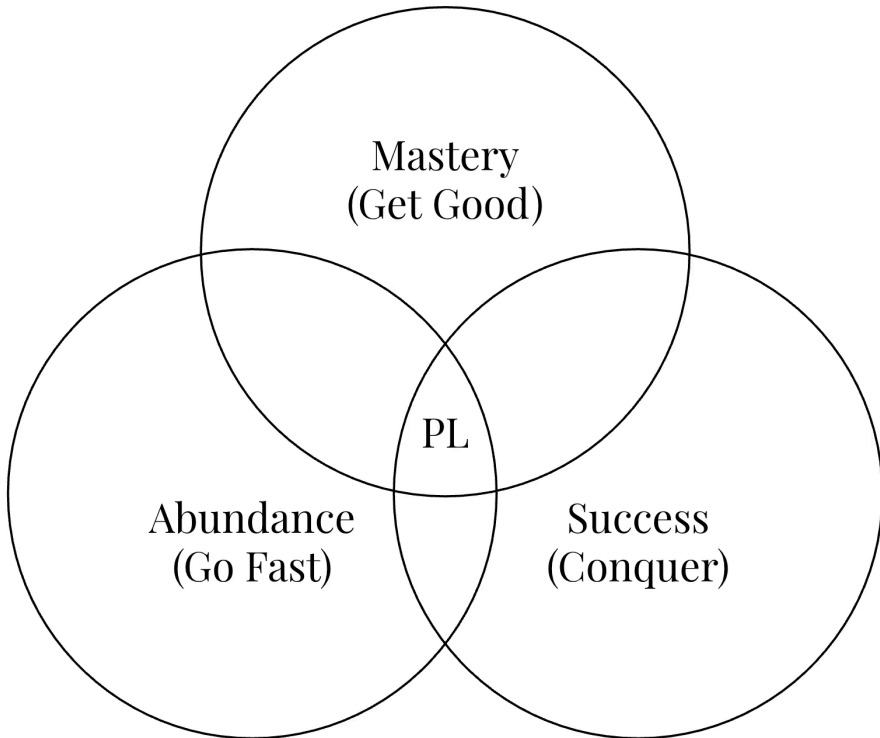


They'll call it "privilege."
They'll point to the color of your skin.
They'll dismiss that you "know people."
They'll mock your mindset.
They'll claim "elitism" and "gatekeeping."
They'll look into your finances.

Forgive them, for they know not what they do.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

The Promised Land is where
Mastery, Abundance, and Success converge.



PL = The Promised Land

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

This book is built on the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14–30).

In this story, a master entrusts his talents —
large amounts of silver and gold —
for a while to three servants,
“each according to his ability.”

Two of them trade, take risks,
and double what they were given.
When the master returns, he says the same thing to both:
“Well done, good and faithful servant.”

The third, out of fear, buries what he was given.
The master’s verdict is brutal:
“You wicked and lazy servant.”

The talent is taken from him
and handed to the one who produced the most.

Then come the terrifying final words:
*“For to everyone who has, more will be given,
and he will have abundance;
but from the one who has not,
even what he has will be taken away.”*

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

Everything you have —
your mind, your body, your time, your obsessions, your “DNA” —
is a talent that was *never yours to begin with*.

It was entrusted to you by The Master.

Activation is the decision to stop being the wicked and lazy servant.

The tactics and destinations in this book
are simply the tools of the faithful servant
who refuses to bury what he was given.

The effortless abundance that shows up later
is never your brilliance.

It is The Master’s own capital,
multiplied because you finally got out of the way.

If you think this book is about you, *throw it away*.

But if you are here to participate in a greater glory
of getting good, going fast, and conquering,
then read on with passion, gratitude, and fear.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

Do not, at any point, allow your practice
to feed pride instead of killing it.

Stop immediately.

Mastery cannot include
contempt for the “lazy servants” or
believing you are the source of the results.

Pride is a lethal poison in this system.

Masters are not frightening
when they are full of themselves,
but when they empty themselves and overflow with God.

The Effortless domination of Mastery
only arrives after the ego has been crucified.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

GET GOOD

Becoming Exceptional requires getting good.

And there are three ways to get good:

1. Go deeper (subject matter expert; difficult)
2. Go wider (generalist; difficult)
3. Both (polymath; v. difficult)

Whichever you choose,
you **MUST** practice and get in the reps.

This is not optional.

Getting *to* the Promised Land requires lots of effort.
Living *in* the Promised Land requires Effortlessness.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

Sufficient and exhaustive practice
is the only path toward being Exceptional.

However, not all practice is *good* practice.

You need Perfect Practice,
which means you need to develop taste and awareness.

You need to discern *mediocre* practice from Perfect Practice.
This *slow process* starts with:

1. Research
2. Analysis
3. Emulation

Yes, you'll need to practice practicing because that's a skill, too.



“Practice doesn’t make perfect. Perfect practice makes
perfect.”

– Vince Lombardi

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

Perfect Practice

Perfect Practice is an intentional, targeted act of continuous improvement and purification.

It begins with a working goal in mind:
closing the gap between your current capability and perfection.

You don't have to know "perfect,"
to know the next step toward it.

Do not concern yourself with perfectionism.
This is not about becoming perfect.

This is about ambition.

Work on removing imperfection,
choosing discomfort and difficulty,
moving toward Exceptional.

It's a never-ending mountain climb
one deliberate step at a time.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

Perfect Practice is a means to an end.
It is not *the* end.

Perfect Practice develops the humility and understanding that
you do not know ANYTHING.

That you are *a BEGINNER.*

You may have a decade of “experience,” and still be a beginner.
A decade is more than enough time to get into the Promised
Land.

If you’re not there after a decade, your practice needs
improvement.
Or, you are insufficiently motivated.

There is no shame in being a beginner.
However, better to know you’re a beginner than to pretend you’re
not.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

WARNING: You may be oblivious and completely blind to reality.

It is not uncommon to be oblivious.

Go outside and watch people running for exercise.
Most have no idea their arms and hands are flailing,
their feet kick back sideways, and their posture sucks.

They've run 12 miles a week for ages with bad form.
They don't even realize what their bodies are doing.
Or how they're missing out if only they'd correct their form.

This may be you right now.
And you may *never* see it, especially if you are *this* old
and haven't seen it yet.

Believe me, I know 75-year-olds who have no idea they are
oblivious.

It is not wrong to do something with no intention of Mastery.
But if you seek Mastery, you cannot be oblivious.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

We develop awareness, taste, and capability by copying the Masters.
That's how the Masters learned, too.

If you can't name any Masters in whatever you are practicing,
you cannot become a Master.

Unless you are a prodigy,
which you most likely aren't,
you have to learn why and how Masters become Masters.

If you don't, you will never become a Master.



Coffee is for closers and the Promised Land is for Masters.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

The more you Perfectly Practice:

The better you get
The bigger you grow
The more gaps you create
The more gaps you fill
The more you attract
The more you Activate



But if your practice sucks:

You plateau
You flail
You despair
You isolate
You blame
You give up

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

Be careful with practice.

As Kapil Gupta wrote:
perpetual students never become Masters.

There comes a point when your beginner-level practice
must evolve to include Performance.

Some people only practice practicing and stay there forever.
They never grow into Performance.

You cannot win if you do not want to Perform.

Every Master Performs.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

Performance does not require perfection,
but as Robert Fripp says: “Aim for perfection.”

As you become Exceptional,
people will begin to see
your Performance as Effortless.

Activating this part of yourself means
separating from your former self.

Your former habits and inabilities will feel
increasingly foreign.

Because you’ve invested in a different you.

Until you can no longer relate to who you once were.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

It takes time to validate and assess your Performance.

If you're in business, your customers are your judges.

If the arts, your audience.

If finance, your portfolio.

And of course, you should always compare your Performance to peers, benchmarks, projections, and the like.

You might be the best plumber in a town of 2,800 people, but what do you do if a top-rated, big-city plumber comes and steals all your customers?

Outside the Promised Land, everyone says, "Don't compare to others, but to who you were a year ago."

Nonsense.

Absolutely compare your Performance to others.

Only fools pretend Masters don't compete.

At best, it's a co-opetition. But more often than not, it's comparison and competition all day long.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

Another nonsense Secret from the Promised Land comes in the form of slowing and speeding up time.

For complex tasks requiring fine motor control, you learn to slow down time.

For complex tasks requiring deep thought, you learn to speed up time.

Time is a *resource* for Masters.
Need more? Get better. Go faster.

What once took 30 minutes now takes 20.
In a year it will take 10.

(We will talk more about Time Control in the next section, but it's important to recognize and understand that becoming Exceptional inevitably leads to some form of virtuosity.)

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

As I mentioned, there are three ways to get good:
deeper, wider, or both.

Going deeper requires an unmoving decision
to become a world-class expert in one area.

The more narrow, the better.

In the Promised Land, the more esoteric, irreproducible, and
strange,
the more valuable you are.

Deep, narrow, demonstrable expertise is
the fastest path to the Promised Land.



Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

As I write this, anything and everything can gain notoriety.

Take, for instance, Josh Mecouch's *Pants* comics.

One could call it anti-comics
with awful-looking ballpoint pen drawings,
homely characters, and nonsensical stories.

Yet, he has hundreds of thousands of followers
and keeps selling out of his 300+ page, \$50 hardcover book
(which I purchased and adore).

One cannot go too deep, too weird,
or too esoteric in any direction.

In fact, the further you can go in all of those at the same time,
the higher your chances may be.



Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

When no one else can do what you do,
to the extent you do it, and at your level of consistency,
there is simply no competition.

Mastery is easy when there's no competition.

The world called me crazy
for spending 22 years learning *one* "impossible" song on the guitar.

Then I finally Performed it on my YouTube channel.
Then I wrote a 320-page hardcover book about it.
Then I sold out of the fancy \$100 editions — twice.

The BBC called me for an interview.
Rolling Stone Magazine emailed me.
Guitar World Magazine featured me in print and online.

Half a million people watched my videos about practicing.
I was asked to Perform at a music festival in Spain, which I did.

Impossible?
Not in the Promised Land.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

Going wider as a generalist is a slower path to the Promised Land. It's difficult, if not "impossible," to *win* as a generalist.

The burden of demonstrating Exceptionalism is entirely on you.

You have to synthesize your knowledge into something meaningful.

You have to make it appealing and visible for Masters to recognize and validate what you are doing.

It's *much* harder to attract high-value opportunities if you are a jack of many trades and master of none.

Generalists do well in multi- and inter-disciplinary roles, like being a handyman, linguist, or analyst.

They are living proof that knowledge and expertise are not solely the domain of specialists.

Generalists cultivate a nuanced understanding of the world, offering a deeper appreciation for interconnected fields.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

Finally, we have the deep *and* the wide: the polymath.

An expert in 3 or more possibly-unrelated problem domains.

They are rare and for good reason.

They're anomalous. They're unfair. They're confusing.

When most struggle to do well in *one* thing,
polymaths breeze through *three, four,* and even *five*
domains and capabilities.

I cannot recommend the path of the polymath.

Most do not have what it takes.

But if you have it in you,
it can be a crushingly Unfair Advantage
over those who aspire for the Promised Land.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

Whichever path toward becoming Exceptional you choose,
pick and stick to one.

You will only waste time waffling between deep and/or wide.

You will frustrate yourself.

You will be effortful.

Rather than cutting, you will be adding.

Get good.

Know how to get there.

Even if you blaze your own trail.

Put it all on the line and go.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

Getting Exceptionally good Activates the DNA that helps us learn, grow, and excel.

It exhibits our *innate* capabilities.

With enough Perfect Practice, the perfect Performance becomes accessible.

We must simply align with it and make it happen, exercising specific elements of our DNA, learning what enables the win.

We know through Activation what of ourselves belongs in our work and what does not.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

There is no substitute for the hard work of getting good.

There are only excuses.

You may take longer than others.

You may suffer to a greater extent.

You may be old. You may be young.

You may be rich. You may be poor.

None of it matters to Mastery.

For every constraint you face,
there is a Master who overcame it.

Mastery is indifferent to your circumstances.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!



Activation

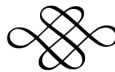
The process of unlocking your innate potential
and tapping into the winning elements within yourself.

Your inner strengths, abilities, and resources can be discovered
and harnessed through Perfect Practice,
helping you achieve goals
and live an extraordinary life.

Activation allows you to achieve
without effort or struggle.

Better than the external outcomes
is the alignment of your internal state of being.
It is developed through self-awareness
and investing in your intrinsic motivation.

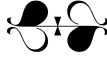
Activation is an asymmetrical process.



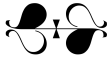
“Motivation is only required for things you don't want to do.”
— Ken Keis

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

Activation is a process that occurs in Perfect Practice.
Perfect Practice reveals and refines your innate strengths.



*“Most people think they know what they are good at.
They are usually wrong.
More often, people know what they are not good at —
and then even more people are more wrong than right.
And yet, a person can only perform from strength.”*
— Peter Drucker, Managing Oneself



No one can practice on your behalf.
Only *you* can do the work and put in the reps.

When you get good enough, you will begin to Perform.
And you will get feedback that reinforces your strengths.

Invest deeply where you receive positive feedback.
If you must, work on your weaknesses.
But if you are able, work *around* your weaknesses.

Delegate. Outsource. Automate. Whatever it takes.
You can only perform from strength.

Exercises to become Exceptional

The point of these exercises is not to tell you *what* to do, but to show what you *might* do in pursuit of Mastery. They are not prescriptive.

1. **The Mirror Test** — List everything you claim to be good at. Then prove it. For each item, show evidence (e.g. a result, a performance, or a witness). If you can't prove it, it's potential, not Mastery.
2. **The Master List** — Name three Masters in your field. Study them for one hour a day for seven days. Write down what they do differently from everyone else. Copy it until it becomes instinct.
3. **Perfect Practice Audit** — Record yourself doing your craft for ten minutes. Watch it back in silence. Note every mistake, hesitation, or inefficiency. Fix one per day until the recording looks Effortless.
4. **Beginner's Confession** — Write a one-page statement titled "I Don't Know Anything." List the assumptions, habits, or shortcuts you've relied on that keep you average. Keep it visible until you start proving it wrong.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

GO *FAST*

A first order consequence of being Exceptional is *Time Control*.

Every Master is an expert at Time Control.

They get more done with fewer resources
and in less time than others.

Masters can do so much with so little,
they are productive (and resourceful) to the point of absurdity.

They are typically unflinchingly Prolific,
because they're unable to control how much they get done.

For a Master, life is a game and they are the winners.

Effortless.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

Time Control employs systems, leverage, and people
to get things done
in extraordinarily small amounts of time.

Masters develop ways of coordinating complex work.
They bring order to the chaos.

Why spend time — the most valuable resource —
when they have access to computers, automation, and delegation?

It is good to do manual work that does not scale,
but only if it creates an Unfair Advantage.

But in nearly every other case, it drags the Master.

The most accomplished Masters carry no baggage.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

Above all else, time is the currency of a Master.

Money comes and goes.

It is the *easiest* of any problem to solve.

There's money everywhere you look.

But time?

It's finite, can't be banked, and we are all subject to it.

This is why Speed matters.

Faster work at higher quality increases the value of a Master's time.

Masters are prolific not because volume matters
but because they have a minimum of 36 hours per day.

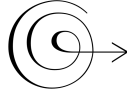
Some Masters have 48 hours.

I've even heard of Masters with 96 hours.

More *nonsense* from the Promised Land.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

Speed is one result of Perfect Practice
at increasing levels of atomicity.



50 years ago, my neighbor learned how to swing a hammer
while growing up on a farm in Kansas.

Today he has a 2-car garage full of well-used power tools
that accelerate his craft.

Now he can build a kitchen table in an afternoon
that will outlast anything I can buy at the furniture store.

I encouraged him to start a construction company of his own.

He reached 8-figure revenue in his first year.

Speed built on atomicity.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

Speed is the engine of Abundance.

When you can do in 20 minutes
what others take 60 to accomplish,
you accumulate three times the results
in the same amount of time.

Speed creates surplus,
and surplus is abundance.

When you move faster,
you ship more
and increase your surface area
for luck, opportunity, and recognition.

Whereas the slow person is buried
by doubt and overthinking,
the fast person cuts right through
and the results compound.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

Virtuoso guitarist Robert Fripp said,
“How you hold the guitar pick is how you live your life.”

When you Master the smallest aspects of your work
through Perfect Practice,
you build a foundation on synergistic abilities.

Mastering economy of motion
means moving a small guitar pick through a small steel string
to produce the purest note possible.

And when you play *fast* at great Speed,
it is more pure notes per second than a normal human can hear.

For normal people hear more slowly than Masters.



NOTE: Everything in life works like this.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

In the Promised Land $1 + 1 = 3$.

My mathematician friend used to joke
“ $1 + 1 = 3$ for *very* large values of 1.”

But we can increase the value of our “1”
through Perfect Practice at increasingly larger atomicity,
which develops Speed built on increasing complexity.

We must maintain perfection (which is impossible)
at the smallest atomic level (which is unknowable)
if we wish to do the impossible (which is impossible).

[Note for the generalists, polymaths, and math nerds:
Look up Michael Fekete’s lemma on superadditivity.]



*“For where two or three have gathered together in My name,
I am there in their midst.”*
— Matthew 18:20, NASB

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

Archaeology is an important component of Time Control.

We stand not only on the shoulders of our years of Perfect Practice,
but also on the shoulders of Masters.

Our research, analysis, and emulation of the Masters —
effectively a study of archaeology —
gives us an Unfair Advantage.

When we know how the Masters worked,
we have so much less to figure out on our own.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

Musician Trey Gunn once told me
musicians are like mathematicians or archaeologists.

The math is already out in the universe.
Mathematicians don't invent it.
They articulate it.

The archaeological record is already in the ground.
Archaeologists just need to dig it up and
use clues to learn about the past.

Music from the future is already there, floating in space.
We just need to find the notes that connect and "write" songs.

In the Promised Land, everything works like music.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

As it is with running, a Master can only move so fast because there are real-world limits.

(Yes, even with AI.)

Despite these limits,
a Master's Speed is much greater than a normal person's.

Masters find the limits of possibility and push them.

Pushing the limit can be done manually,
but it is preferable to do so with systems.

This Speeds up the Master, increasing the number of hours in a day.



Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

You cannot gain Speed if you are inhibited by what slows you down.

It seems obvious.

Yet, millions of people practicing imperfectly cannot see the weight they carry that drags them and slows them down.

Pride, greed, wrath, envy, lust, gluttony, and sloth.
Deadly sins that slow you down.

Perfect Practice increases awareness and ability
and reveals opportunities for Speed.

Time Control is only available to those who are fast *and* lean.

Going fast means moving faster *and* cutting.

There are no fat, elite runners.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

Cutting should occur in every dimension of Mastery:

Physically
Emotionally
Mentally
Philosophically
Spiritually

For example, hoarders never become Masters
for they cannot cut their desire to collect “stuff.”

It's no different than Jesus commanding us to repent, fast, and pray.

Prayer cuts what is unnecessary in every dimension.
It brings our attention to what matters.

“On earth as it is in Heaven.”



Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

Achieving Mastery and reaching the Promised Land
is a fight against gravity.

We cannot escape it
without Time Control and Speed.

Mastery gives us the ability to fight —
and eventually beat — gravity.

The Promised Land is where we go when we achieve orbit.

In the same spirit as cutting,
we need to limit the weight we take on.

Here's some of what will drag you down:

Intellectualization, which weakens the truth
External validation, which weakens the aim
Self-consciousness, which weakens confidence
Fear of success, which weakens desire

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

Master entrepreneur and speaker Jim Rohn said:

“You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with.”

Therefore, be careful about who (and what) you expose yourself to.

You may spend more time with your boss
or a random person you follow on social media
than those with whom you physically spend your time.

Avoid exposure to people unconcerned with
Mastery, Speed, Exceptionality, Activation, and Effortlessness

You need to *want* Speed so deep in your bones
that you cannot tolerate those who slow you down.

You are fighting gravity.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

The faster you go, the slower it becomes.

This is the beauty of Time Control.

You can make decisions faster than others because
you have more pattern recognition through Perfect Practice.
You know where you are more likely to make mistakes.

You've studied comprehensive systems and methods.
You know what works
and have developed a gut intuition for what won't.

You know where to take risks because
you've watched the Masters
and you've demonstrated proficiency.

Exceptional work at high Speed.

Totally and completely unfair.
More time and more capability to spend Conquering.

Exercises for Speed

1. **Time Control Log** — For one week, write down how you spend every 15 minutes of your day. Mark each block as Effortful, Wasteful, or Effortless. Cut or automate one Effortful block every day until your schedule feels lighter.
2. **Speed by Subtraction** — Pick one recurring task you hate. Find a way to do it in half the time — delegate, script, or simplify. The goal is atomicity.
3. **The Gravity Check** — Write down the five biggest sources of drag in your life (e.g. people, habits, clutter, debt, guilt). Circle the one that costs you the most energy. Cut it for thirty days and measure the lift.
4. **The 36-Hour Day** — For one week, schedule your best work hours as if you had 36 per day (think in 40-minute hours). Stack deep work, rest, and creative play intentionally. Notice how your productivity changes when you treat time as elastic.
5. **The Deadline Collapse** — Take a task you normally give yourself an hour to finish. Give yourself 10 minutes instead. Deliver something real.
6. **The Instant Start** — The moment you think of a task, start it within three seconds. No warming up. No preparation. No priming. *Just do it.*

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

CONQUER

If you do not want to be *the best*,
then why are you still reading?

But you are still here
because you have a fire in your belly.

That is good.
So do I.

Now here is the hard part:
You cannot achieve Mastery without Conquering.

Even in altruistic pursuits,
others in your field are vying
for the time, attention, energy, and money of others.

Whether you like it or not, you are competing!

If you do not win, you do not become a Master.

You must Conquer.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

To Conquer is not to crush others,
but to rise so high that your doubts collapse.

Masters measure uncertainty in terms of risk.

Their Perfect Practice has removed all doubt.

They win. They are used to it. It is the norm.

Conquering is the result of Frightening,
which is the result of inspiring awe and admiration.

To Conquer is to win.

And that is why you are still here.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

It's foolish to believe a Master has no fear.

Of course Masters have fears, just like anyone else.

But their relationship with fear is different.

Fear is part of the experience of Mastery.

Something to face.

Something to Conquer.

Masters do not cower and hide from fear.

Rather, they use it as a compass.

Where there is fear, there is opportunity.

More skills to sharpen.

More Speed to attain.

More territory to Conquer.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

Inequality is core to Conquering.

The moment you become better at *anything*,
you have created inequality.

Despite the world preaching *equality*,
inequality is the way of the world.

Success? Inequality.
Fortune? Inequality.
Renown? Inequality.
Wealth? Inequality.

One cannot get ahead without inequality.

Masters do not focus on creating inequality.

Mastery inherently leads to inequality.

The trade-off is worth it.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

When a Master Performs,
what looks complex to others is simple to the Master.

For complexity is a matter of perspective.
The untrained eye sees chaos or unbridled virtuosity.
The Master sees a way of doing things.

Some ask, "How does he do it?"
Others say, "She makes it look so simple."

That is the way of Mastery.
Because it *is* simple.

Masters don't invent complexity.
They find a way to achieve what they envision
and have Perfectly Practiced until it comes naturally.

It is not "navigating complexity."
It is finding the simplest way to achieve.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

Attraction is another byproduct of Conquering.

Demonstrating Mastery through Performance is attractive.
Appealing. Magnetic. Desirable.

This attraction manifests itself in various ways:
attention, money, opportunity, partnership, invitation.

Masters do not chase.

Opportunities arise.

They attach themselves to the Master because of gravity.

Attraction is not created.

It is something you become.

Because when you Conquer,

people want to stand closer.

They want to understand the source of your ease.

They want a peek into the Promised Land.

And you do not need to explain anything.

Your life explains itself.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

Fear is a natural response to danger
and problems we do not understand.

Masters are so Exceptionally good, they Frighten people.

It is natural for a Master to want to be Frightening.

You cannot be the best if it's all smiles and high-fives.

You *want* people to say, "Oh, I don't like that."

No controversy, no win.

Admiration is not the currency of a Master.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

Of course, the Fright induced by Mastery
is not the fright of a haunted house or a rickety bridge.

The Fright is a level of capability and Speed
that makes people question their own abilities.

It's the fear of feeling a kick to the gut. Or of loss.

Like, "This person could eat my lunch."

I've spent enough time with Masters to have heard,
"He's so good, he makes me want to quit."

Or, "She's so smart, I feel like I'm an idiot next to her."

I just want to be so good that people feel like
they should have done what I did over all those years.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

Masters are intrinsically motivated to be
Exceptional, Prolific, and Frightening.

The goal is to captivate and dominate.

Think of anyone *great* in your field.

Do they not want recognition? Notoriety? Fulfillment?

Perhaps even fame? Fortune?

Why did they become great?

Because they *needed* to be Exceptional.

It doesn't happen by accident,

and if it does, people rarely want to let it go.

Who doesn't want to be renowned for something good?

Recognized for living well?

Unfortunately, our world requires that you compete and win.

And so we Conquer.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

Mastery is not about achieving results.

Results are downstream of Mastery.

Masters set goals that last a lifetime.

Outcomes are fleeting.

One does not become a Master to Perform at Carnegie Hall.

One Performs at Carnegie Hall because of Mastery.

When the outcome is the goal,
the path no longer leads to Mastery.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

A friend seeking Mastery said:

“We’re told to seek first the kingdom of God.

How do you keep God first on the path to Mastery?”

Ask yourself,

“Why isn’t God first in the first place?”

It’s because of addictions to mental prisons,

and a Practice of denying the truth

about yourself and about life.

If you don’t see yourself as the winner God created,

and you do not truly believe what is in your DNA

there is no path to Mastery.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

When people ask me,
“How do you do it? How do you find the time?”

The truthful answer is: Mastery.
Because I want to Conquer. I want to be *the best*.
Not out of pride, but out of ambition.
I want it and I will fight until I get it.

I want *to be known*
as a Master who will *do* and *deliver* elite Performance.
When people need something I can do,
I want to be the first to come to mind.

When people tell me,
“Oh, I just hired someone who does what you do,”
I get frustrated.

Why did I not come to mind?
What is missing from my work?
How did I miss the opportunity?
How did I not know?

And I know it is my fault for not expressing Mastery.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

Money.

A topic I've avoided.

But one cannot *Conquer* without money.

Mastery determines the purpose money serves in life.

Money *can* be validation that you're doing something good.

It can be your vehicle for Conquering the landscape.

It can also be a resource used to make your work happen at all.

Or, it can completely destroy you

and undo all the Perfect Practice

and Exceptionality you've spent years working toward.

Thankfully, the Promised Land has a great filter.

Anyone too money-obsessed is out.

Use money without it destroying you.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

You've been given glimpses into the Promised Land.
You've seen its borders and you want in.

Good.

To enter the Promised Land, you must become a Master.

To become a Master, you must Conquer.

To Conquer, you must go fast.

To go fast, you must get good.

To get good, you need to make a choice.

What is your life?

Exercises for Conquering

1. **The Fear of Success** — Write down one goal that scares you—not because it’s risky, but because success would change who you are. Break it into ten micro-performances you can execute now. Begin today.
2. **The Inequality Acceptance** — List three areas where you’ve created inequality by being good. Instead of guilt, write gratitude. Inequality is proof of your growth.
3. **The Doubt Collapse** — Write every doubt you still hold about yourself. Next to each, describe one skill, practice, or success that disproves it. Read this list every morning until doubt feels childish.
4. **The Master’s Creed** — Write your own creed in ten lines. Begin each with “I will...” or “I am...” Read it before every practice session until it stops feeling like aspiration and starts sounding like memory.
5. **The Frightening Standard** — Pick a skill where you are merely competent. Set a standard so high that anyone watching you perform it feels a moment of fear, awe, or disbelief. Build toward that standard until your excellence unsettles the room.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

GOING DEEPER

If you are Serious about Mastery, answer these questions:

1. Is Mastery something I merely *want* or *must have*?
2. What stands between me and Mastery *right now*?
3. Am I afraid to win? Or, is Conquering uncomfortable?
4. What standard am I willing to uphold when no one is watching?
5. What fears am I willing to face that others avoid?
6. Am I Exceptional, Fast, and Frightening? If not, will I be?
7. Do I know what to Perfectly Practice and Perform?
8. Am I ready to be trained by a Master?

Answer honestly.

The Promised Land is not a gift.

It is a *consequence*.



I wrote this book in a day. (And without AI.)

To prove the system works.

Perfect Practice → Activation → Effortless output.

Core concepts

Activation — The process of awakening innate potential and aligning natural ability with Effortless Performance.

The Promised Land — A place where effort becomes ease and Mastery produces seemingly impossible outcomes.

The Great Misunderstanding — The false belief that success and Mastery come from raw effort rather than self-knowledge and alignment.

Effortlessness — The condition of performing at a high level without strain because one's actions flow from perfected practice and self-awareness.

Effortful / Effortfulness — The opposite state of friction and drag that results from striving without alignment or Activation.

Perfect Practice — Focused, intentional repetition that builds awareness, taste, and Mastery instead of mindless labor.

Performance — The public demonstration of Mastery that transforms practice into results and visibility.

Master / Mastery / Masters — Those who have achieved self-alignment, Speed, and Effortless excellence in their chosen domain.

The Secret — Activation itself—the invisible cause of visible success. Invest daily in the winning parts of your DNA until you Conquer.

Virtues and Traits

Exceptional / Exceptionally / Exceptionality — Performing at a level of quality and consistency far beyond the norm.

Prolific — Producing continuously and abundantly because output flows naturally from Activation.

Frightening — So capable that one's performance inspires awe and disorientation in others.

Serious / Seriousness — The moment one commits fully to Mastery and stops dabbling.

Unfair Advantage — The natural edge gained through Activation, Mastery, and alignment—perceived by others as privilege or luck.

Confidence — The calm assurance that arises from Perfect Practice and consistent Performance.

Oblivious — The unawareness of one's mediocrity that prevents growth and Mastery.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

Mechanics of Mastery

Time Control — The Master's ability to manipulate time through efficiency, systems, and awareness, effectively gaining more usable hours in a day.

Speed — The compounding result of Perfect Practice and Time Control, allowing greater precision and output in less time.

Atomicity — The Mastery of work at its smallest measurable units, leading to fluidity and Effortless Performance.

Cutting — The disciplined removal of all unnecessary elements—physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual—that slow progress.

Gravity — The natural resistance of mediocrity, distraction, and human limitation that must be overcome to achieve Mastery.

Orbit — The state beyond gravity—freedom, Mastery, and the Effortless rhythm of the Promised Land.

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!

Make friends
with stress
and anxiety



A paradoxical guide against calmness

Written January 27 – April 20, 2026

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*Each chapter of this guide starts with philosophy
and ends with exercises to get you started.*

*For some, the exercises are the value.
For others, the philosophy.
For a few, both.*

Make friends with stress and anxiety



NOTE: Some stress is not instructional.
Some anxiety is not optional.
People lose children. Bodies break.
Betrayal happens. Disaster arrives.

This book is not addressing that kind of suffering
and I pray that those people find peace and healing.

I am writing here about the stress and anxiety that come from:
duty, indecision, avoidance, and the attempt to control outcomes
that belong to God.



Make friends with stress and anxiety



*I wish to preach not the doctrine of ignoble ease,
but the doctrine of the strenuous life,
the life of toil and effort, of labor and strife;
to preach that highest form of success which comes,
not to the man who desires mere easy peace,
but to the man who does not shrink from danger,
from hardship, or from bitter toil,
and who out of these wins the splendid ultimate triumph.*

— *Theodore Roosevelt*



PREAMBLE

You have three choices regarding stress and anxiety:

1. Rejoice and use them to your benefit.
2. Tolerate them as the cost of living and working.
3. Despair and crumble under the pressure.

I've seen most moderns choose tolerance,
deeming it reasonable —
perhaps even *enlightened* —
to merely tolerate stress and anxiety
in pursuit of the farce called “balance.”

This is the easiest path,
requiring nothing more than endurance.

I've seen others choose to falter and despair,
anesthetizing by pill, drink, and algorithm
in hopes that they might someday live.

This is the most treacherous path
because it removes agency.

But there are a few of us
who recognize the power and potential
of a stressful, anxious,
and healthy life.

We do not chase calm.
We do not demand peace.
We carry out the work
and leave the outcome to God.

This is the most obvious path
for those who have the eyes to see it.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

A life without stress and anxiety
is hardly worth living.

To build a life around “peace”
is a form of self-worship
where “calm” is the highest good.

As the old wit said,
the only perfectly calm people
are in the graveyard.



Though some people suffer from *true* hardship,
most people aren't anxious because life is too hard.
They're anxious because they've built a life
that has never asked anything of them.

Better to manage —
and even *love* —
the weight of stress and anxiety
than to wither away
trying to eliminate them.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

I call this weight Pressure
and it is quite welcome.

Let me show you how I use Pressure to my advantage.

This morning I awoke to the gift of Pressure.
My very first thought was: *get up and write*.
Now I am here, feeling energized and purposeful,
excited for the day.

Pressure is demand plus consequence.
It is compulsion toward risk and hard work.
It is the weight of a decision.
It comes in many forms:

- Deadlines
- Stakes
- Expectations
- Decisions

It can be the force that propels
or the weight that crushes.

Too little Pressure and I drift.
Without its weight, I have no traction
and I spin my wheels into the void.

Too much Pressure and I break.
I feel no structural integrity
and collapse under strain.

But with the right amount of Pressure
I am unstoppable.

I am not the victim of Pressure.
I am the interpreter.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

The paradox of Pressure

The distance between joy and frustration
is measured by obedience.

The weight of joy and frustration are the same —
neither good nor evil,
and sometimes quite heavy.

How Pressure feels depends on obedience.

Stress is the weight of your work.
When you obey, it focuses you.
But it becomes a grind under avoidance.

Anxiety is the awareness of risk and danger.
When you obey, it becomes excitement.
But for the one who plays God, it becomes panic.

The weight of your work belongs to *you*,
and the weight of the outcome belongs to *God*.

The reasonable man breaks
because he tries to carry both.



“Pressure is a privilege.”
— Billie Jean King

Make friends with stress and anxiety

I am grateful for Pressure
because when it appears,
it means I am needed.

This is the beauty of a Calling:
not that I know *what* I must do,
but that I know *when* I am required.

Pressure is downstream of obligation.

The secret to understanding Pressure
is to reorder your schedule, habits, and priorities
in submission to a greater good.

It is not my place to debate the command.
It is my place to obey
to the best of my ability
with speed, precision, and reverence.

Reasonable people say “not all who wander are lost,”
but a Calling is not a stroll.



To whom much is given, much will be required;
and from the one to whom much has been entrusted,
even more will be demanded.

— *Luke 12:48*

Make friends with stress and anxiety

The paradox of posture

Most people think strength looks like rigidity.
But under Pressure, rigidity is what breaks.

Pride makes you a wall.
When Pressure hits, it stays there
and creates the heat of anxiety.

More pride means more resistance
and Pressure becomes a crushing force.

But obedience makes you a conduit.
Pressure moves *through* you
and turns anxious energy into powerful work.

More obedience means more power
and Pressure becomes a sacrament.

Your posture is your verdict —
a signal to God that you are willing.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

Watch an infant learn to sit
and you will see perfect posture,
learned without instruction.

But as she grows up, she will forget.
Her natural posture will atrophy
into a common slouch.

This happened to you.
And it happened to me.

With self-awareness —
and professional help when needed —
we can retrain the body
and the *will*
through “psychophysical reeducation.”

We can recover what once required nothing of us.
Our innate ability to serve with readiness.

A commitment to duty.
An oath to generosity.
A posture of obedience.

And a right relationship with Pressure.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

What is stress?

Stress is your *natural* response to demand.
It is not a malady to be fixed,
but the result of posture.

Upright obedience receives the goodness of stress,
but slouched resistance receives the sourness of stress.

Stress shows up when reality asks something of us:

- Effort
- Attention
- Speed
- Courage
- Endurance
- Decision

When nothing is being asked of you,
you should have no stress.

But when you are called —
and you *will* be called —
your posture will determine the feeling of stress.

Your relationship with stress shapes your sense of gratitude.
A life rich with good stress is a blessing to others.
A life soured by bad stress makes you the reason
why other people to set boundaries.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

Stress is an engine.
It does three jobs:

1. **Focus** to narrow your vision.
2. **Mobilize** so you have energy to act.
3. **Prioritize** so you feel urgency.

The jobs are neutral.
They can serve you.
Or they can ruin you.

Under obedience:

Focus becomes clarity.
You see the right next step.

Mobilization becomes traction.
You move into the work.

Prioritization becomes order.
The main thing becomes the *only* thing.



Under resistance:

Focus becomes tunnel vision.
You see only the threat.

Mobilization becomes panic.
You run away from the fire.

Prioritization becomes obsession.
The fear consumes everything else.

The engine runs either way.
You can drive it, or get dragged behind it.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

Good stress reveals:

- A clear task
- A clear next step
- A clear finish or limit

But when stress sours,
it becomes chronic, vague, and chaotic,
leaving you lost, frustrated, and worried.



Like stress, anxiety is natural and beneficial.
Whereas stress serves us “in the moment,”
anxiety serves to protect us from future problems.

Good anxiety reveals:

- A real risk
- A real decision
- A real boundary

But when anxiety sours,
it becomes chronic, imagined, and controlling,
leaving you tense, distracted,
and trapped in “what if?”

For many reasonable people, anxiety is a prison
built on years of habitual fantasy.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

Ancient wisdom does not shy away from Pressure.

We boast in our sufferings,
knowing that suffering produces endurance,
and endurance produces character,
and character produces hope,
and hope does not disappoint us,
because God's love has been poured into our hearts
through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

— *Romans 5:3-5*

My brothers and sisters,
whenever you face trials of any kind,
consider it nothing but joy, because you know
that the testing of your faith produces endurance;
and let endurance have its full effect,
so that you may be mature and complete,
lacking in nothing.

— *James 1:2-4*

The art of life is more like the wrestler's art than the dancer's,
in respect of this that it should stand ready and firm
to meet onsets which are sudden and unexpected.

— *Marcus Aurelius, Meditations 7.61.1*

It is difficulties that show what men are.

— *Epictetus*

Anxiety is the dizziness of freedom.
— *Soren Kierkegaard (not so ancient, alas)*

Make friends with stress and anxiety

As an Unreasonable person, I do not seek a life of constant calm.
Calm is good, but the calm worth having is earned.

It comes from obedience.
It comes from a right relationship with Pressure.

Pressure reveals duty.
Duty clarifies purpose.
And purpose is enough.

The “calm” I reject is a human invention.
It is comfort dressed up as virtue.
It is the reasonable person trying to escape obligation.

Earned calmness comes from practice,
mastery, death of self, and obedience.

It is not taught by gurus.
It is not pursued by the unserious.

The crowd calls comfort “peace” because it sounds holy.
But you and I are Unreasonable people.

We choose hard work and pray for calm as a reward
knowing full well we may not get it.



And I will say to my soul,
“Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years;
relax, eat, drink, be merry.”
But God said to him, “You fool!
This very night your life is being demanded of you.
And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?”
— *Luke 12:19-20*

Make friends with stress and anxiety

Anxiety is the exact measure of your trust.
It reflects who you believe is governing the future.

Bad anxiety is the consequence of playing God.
It is the suffocating weight
of trying to control the ungovernable.

You cover over the future
because you falsely believe it belongs to you.

“What if the money dries up?”
“What if my plan fails?”
“How will I survive the worst-case scenario?”



Good anxiety is the consequence of alignment.
It is the electric hum of an engine prepared for the load.
It is the physical manifestation of hopeful assurance.

“Am I prepared for the door to open?”
“What if this work actually succeeds?”
“Will I be ready for the best-case scenario?”



Anxiety ceases to be a terror
when you know you are moving
toward your rightful destination.

It stops being dread
and becomes propulsion.

Exploring your relationship with Pressure

The point of these exercises is not to tell you *what* to do, but to show what you *might* do. They are suggestive, not prescriptive.

1. **Sever the Outcome** — Write down the heaviest source of anxiety in your life right now. Look at it honestly and divide it into two columns: *The Work* and *The Outcome*.
 - a. **The Work:** What is the actual, mechanical next step required of you? (e.g., Make the decision, write the email, confront the employee).
 - b. **The Outcome:** What is the unmanageable future you want to control? (e.g., Will they be angry? Will the market crash? Will I look foolish?).
 - c. **The Correction:** Commit to executing the left column today. Surrender the right column entirely.
2. **The Equation of Pressure** — Pick a current situation where you feel crushed by Pressure. Strip away the emotion and define the mechanical parts:
 - a. **The Demand:** What exactly is being asked of you? Be highly specific. Strip away the drama and name the task.
 - b. **The Consequence:** What are the actual stakes if you fail or refuse? Do not invent tragedy. Name the literal reality.
 - c. **The Diagnosis:** Are you avoiding the demand? Or are you inflating the consequence?

Make friends with stress and anxiety

INTERPRET THE ALARM

To the reasonable, stress and anxiety are a disease.
But to the Serious, stress and anxiety are an alarm.

A smoke detector is loud, jarring, and unpleasant.
It is *designed* to interrupt you.
It ruins peace and quiet *on purpose*.

A reasonable person hears an alarm
and believes the noise to be the problem,
reaching for anything that will make the feeling stop.

He mistakes the signal for the threat.

The Serious person hears the alarm
and asks the only useful question:
what do I need to do right now?

Is there a fire, or is there only burnt toast?
Is there danger, or am I just worried?
Is this fear warning me,
or is it merely revealing that I am unprepared?

Do not fight the bell.
Listen for it and answer.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

When the alarm bell rings, do not cover your ears.
Do not run from the spike in your chest.

Allow stress to do its job,
giving you the energy to act.

Remember the three jobs of stress:
focus, mobilize, and prioritize.

Remember your posture,
which determines your interpretation.

It takes years of intentional practice
to stop treating stress like danger
and start treating it like instruction.

Through this practice,
stress becomes *natural and ordinary*.
Not pleasant, but ordinary.

You may be tempted to snooze the alarm
so you may go back to sleep.

But the Serious person knows that
prompt obedience is much louder than any sound.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

There are times when I know I need stress
and I do not have enough of it.

When action is necessary,
but my motivation is lacking,
I create some stress
and get to work.

There are also times when I have a surplus of stress
and I need relief.

When I am forcing the outcome,
and my urgency outpaces the task,
I permit myself to downshift
and regain focus on the work.

I learned years ago:
I am as much a victim of stress
as an engine is a victim of gasoline.

And so I taught myself Regulation.
I control the throttle and the steering wheel,
but I do not control the destination.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

Regulation

Robert Fripp teaches:
“You cannot ask your body to do *something*
until it knows how to do *nothing*.”

Regulation is the outcome
of mastering two practices:
Doing *something* and doing *nothing*.

To do “nothing” is an *active discipline*.
It is not a meditation.

It is a systematic scan of the body,
permitting each muscle to disengage.

Doing this once feels like relief.
Doing this twice reveals the truth:
We have taught our bodies
to hoard tension by default.

The practice of doing nothing has taught me
that I store stress in my jaw, my brow, and my hips.

So when I practice doing something,
I monitor my jaw, my brow, and my hips.
If they are braced against nothing,
I command them to release.

This is Regulation.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

Here is how I make the most of the three jobs of stress.

1. **Sit in the discomfort.**

The best way to *know* stress
is to experience it on purpose
long enough to learn what it actually is.

2. **Identify and name the demand.**

Stress becomes chaotic when it stays vague.
The moment I name what is asked of me,
the energy concentrates and becomes usable.

3. **Spend the energy.**

Stress is a physical currency.
If you do not spend it on the work,
it will spend itself somewhere else.

To make this less abstract:

Sitting in discomfort means recalling a stressful moment, visualizing it, and letting the bodily sensations rise and fall without immediately trying to edit them. I watch what it does when I stop negotiating with it.

Naming the demand can be as simple as: "A decision is required." "A task is waiting." "I'm avoiding something." The point is to replace infinite worry with a definite demand.

Spending the energy usually means taking the next step of the work, even if it is small. When that isn't possible, I discharge the energy in a contained way: walk, lift, clean, write, make something. The goal is not distraction. The goal is direction.

Do not waste this energy mindlessly. Aim it.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

I learned Regulation from necessity, not theory.

I spent 22 years learning Robert Fripp's most challenging composition, "Fracture." I had a singular, Unreasonable goal of performing this notorious piece, which Fripp himself deemed "impossible to play."

The song requires several minutes of playing 10 notes per second with every note picked on a different string. The right hand must be surgically precise. On the left hand is a "compound line," where two fingers are fretting something different than the other two.

For the first 17 years, I tried to conquer it with brute force, using the technique that had enabled me to play *any other piece of guitar music*. The harder I tried, the worse I played and the more my hands hurt.

In 2015, I spent a week with Fripp and his fellow guitar teachers. They taught me a new technique. The secret to learning "Fracture" was not learning to play faster or harder, but to re-learn how to sit, stand, breathe, hold the pick, and even hold the instrument.

When I got back home, I spent 2 hours a day for 3 months doing remedial beginner exercises using the new technique. I also spent an hour a day "doing nothing." Within 6 months, I could finally start playing "Fracture" up to speed.

After another 4 years, I could perform the piece in its entirety.

A reasonable person would have quit after a month. Maybe a year. But I took an Unreasonable vow, choosing this one goal over a thousand open doors.

After 22 years, another guitarist wrote to me and said, "You are lucky it only took you 22 years. It took me 30."

Make friends with stress and anxiety



Pressure doesn't strengthen a house.
It reveals whether the house is built to stand.

Too little pressure and you never learn what holds.
Too much pressure and what is weak will fail.

Pressure means the day has stopped being theoretical.
Soon I will learn what I am made of
and whether my daily practice can carry me.

Seek heavier weather on purpose,
so you are not surprised by it later.



Make friends with stress and anxiety

Stress is the demand of the present.
Anxiety is the demand of what is approaching.

Stress gives you the fuel to act.
Anxiety helps you see speedbumps, walls, and cliffs.

To a reasonable person, anxiety is a paralyzing fog —
a world of “unlimited options.”
A thousand ways to fail,
a thousand tragedies rehearsed in the mind
without ever leaving the comfort of a chair.

What a reasonable person calls “overwhelm”
I call “the tax you pay for optionality.”

The Serious person understands anxiety.
It is not a paralyzing disease,
but a spotlight meant to reveal risk.

Anxiety asks: *Are you prepared for what is coming?*

If the answer is no, the solution is not relief.
The solution is a plan.
Decisions. Constraints. Execution.



Anxiety without action is panic.
Anxiety with action is preparation.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

I once had to deliver a speech to a packed venue of 850 people.

In the days leading up to it, I prepared as much as possible. I worked with a coach. I ran the speech past people I trusted. I endlessly rehearsed. Confidence was not a problem.

Then, thirty minutes before I went on stage, the anxiety arrived.

Hands shaking. Thoughts racing. Sudden bargaining. A flood of foolish questions: why am I doing this, what if I fail, what if I blank, what if I embarrass myself. The same mind that had been calm all week suddenly became a courtroom.

Twenty minutes later I said to myself: *you signed up for this*. You prepared. You did the work. This is the performance after the practice. You can walk out there and enjoy it, or you can walk out there and panic. That is your choice.

A few seconds later something flipped.

I went on stage and delivered the speech exactly as planned. The preparation held. The audience responded. The anxiety did not vanish, but it stopped governing me. It returned to its proper place: energy for the moment.

I could have failed, of course. Failure was always possible. But the likely failure was never the speech itself. The likely failure was stepping into the moment without obedience, letting anxiety become dread, and letting dread become self-sabotage.

That day taught me what anxiety is for.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

Anxiety spikes when the future feels ungoverned.

In 2002, Donald Rumsfeld provided a useful taxonomy for this:

“Reports that say that something hasn't happened are always interesting to me, because as we know, there are **known knowns**; there are things we know we know. We also know there are **known unknowns**; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also **unknown unknowns** — the ones we don't know we don't know. And if one looks throughout the history of our country and other free countries, it is the latter category that tends to be the difficult ones.”

This is a good description of anxious experience.

I sleep well when I have enough known knowns
and known unknowns to act.

I spiral when the unknown unknowns multiply,
because they cannot be named,
and therefore cannot be answered.

A Serious person does not comfort himself with fantasy.
He converts fog into form.

He plans, which leads to Eisenhower:

“In preparing for battle, I have always found that plans are
useless, but planning is indispensable.”

Planning turns unknown unknowns into known unknowns,
and known unknowns into known knowns.
It does not guarantee safety.
It restores agency.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

A life dominated by unknown unknowns is unlivable.

And yet most of us try to manage the world
with limited cognition, shortness of sight,
and a borrowed authority,
as though one bite from Eden's tree
made us fit to rule reality.

It did not.

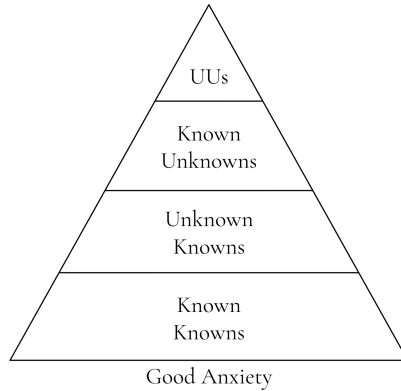
It made us self-conscious.
It made us afraid.
And it made us grasp for control.

Constraints are a mercy.
They keep our heads clear, our posture upright,
and our attention on what is ours to do.

They do not remove mystery.
They keep mystery from becoming madness.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

I use a crude map to understand my anxiety.
I call them “The Rumsfeld Triangles.”

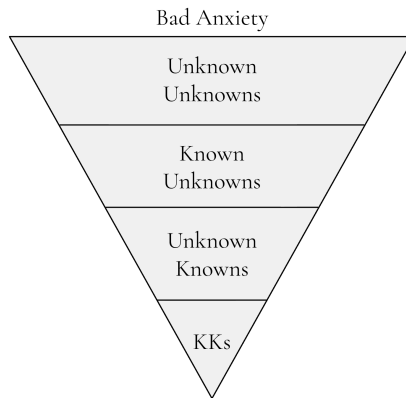


Known knowns (KCs): *I know what is true and what is required.*

Known unknowns: *I can discover and name what I don't know.*

Unknown knowns: *I “know” it, but I don't realize it.*

Unknown unknowns (UUs): *I can't name the risk even if I try.*



Good anxiety is built on a foundation of known knowns.

No amount of Pressure can topple this triangle.

Bad anxiety is top-heavy with unknown unknowns.

A little Pressure and the triangle falls over.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

“The first principle is that you must not fool yourself —
and you are the easiest person to fool.”

— Richard Feynman



Your known knowns must agree with reality
lest you fool yourself with happy lies.

And your unknown unknowns must align with probability
lest you fill your head with rehearsed tragedy.

Do not pretend your unknown knowns are merely blind spots
lest you canonize your cowardice.

And do not pretend your known unknowns are comprehensive
lest you begin to believe you are God.

To paraphrase Proverbs:
A fool is quick to defend himself,
but a wise person loves correction.

Reality will not delay in correcting you.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

Many people live upside down.
The base of their life is unknown unknowns.

This is where the life of fantasy leads.

The Serious person flips the model on its head,
building a life of known knowns:
duty, rules, constraints, and next actions.
Unknown unknowns are treated as a tax,
not a home.

Have faith in the “God of the gaps” —
to use the insult.
The One who occupies the space
between your duty and your limits,
placing the Serious in positions of difficulty
so that obedience costs enough to matter —
where the work demands more than you can muster
without grace.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

The fantasy of upside-down Pressure is seductive,
even when it spikes the very stress and anxiety it claims to soothe.

It strokes the deep hunger to feel important,
offering a cheap substitute for Calling.

It is gratuitous and masturbatory —
a temptress of the mind
teasing people to the edge of sanity,
building tension without release,
creating a life that aches so desperately for purpose
it will swallow any counterfeit duty
so a real Calling is never fulfilled.

The reasonable person calls it “daydreaming.”
I call it suicide by imagination.

Fantasy allows a reasonable person to rehearse greatness
without submitting to the dull, humiliating disciplines
that a real Calling requires.

The alternative is to face the emptiness
of a life unclaimed by duty:
a calendar full of convenience,
a mind full of noise,
a body full of tension,
and no clear reason for existence.

Fantasy is the mechanism of the unserious life.



Make friends with stress and anxiety

There is a kind of man who cannot live without a crisis.
When life is quiet he grows nervous,
and so he manufactures noise.

He desires the feeling of “responsibility”
without any of the pesky realities —
and he gets exactly what he desires.

So he buys himself danger.

An exotic car.
A love affair.
A desire to run a marathon.

The byproducts of decades past
accumulating the debt of a reasonable life —
suddenly demanding payment.

Better to suffer for twenty-six (point two!) miles
than to sit in silence for ten minutes.

Easier to burn down his own life
just to feel the heat of the fire.

Cheaper to buy the illusion of danger
than face the reality that duty requires him to obey.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

Beware the curse of empathy.

The crowd treats it as the ultimate virtue,
a necessity of the modern age.

It is good and upright to feel for your neighbor.
But left ungoverned, empathy is a parasite.

If you are not careful, it will own you.
It will drown you in problems you cannot solve,
shackle you to risks you cannot manage,
and crush you under Pressure
you were never meant to carry.

The reasonable person believes it is noble
to bleed for every headline,
to absorb the chaos of every passing stranger.

They call it “compassion.”
I call it emotional gluttony.

You are a finite vessel.
You cannot carry the weight of the world,
and attempting to do so is not an act of love.

It is an act of arrogance.

**Carry the work you are given.
Leave the rest to God.**

Make friends with stress and anxiety

Rules create guardrails.
And guardrails keep us on the right road
traveling in the right direction
to reach the right destination.

Every rule is tested daily by reality.
Reality is the judge.

When our rules fight reality,
Pressure turns poisonous.
Stress becomes friction.
Anxiety becomes noise.
You feel lost, behind, and cornered.

But when our rules *match* reality,
Pressure turns useful.
Stress becomes focus.
Anxiety becomes alertness.
You move faster because you stop fighting the road.

The rules do not need to sound wise.
They simply need to work.
If they don't, you drift and get crushed.

Exercises to interpret the alarm

1. **The Counterfeit Alarm** — The Pressure you feel may not belong to *you*, but to someone else. Look at the three most urgent demands on your attention. Ask: *Whose alarm is this? Is it attached to my Calling? Or is it downstream of a friend, client, or family member who refuses to regulate their own life?*
2. **Know What You Know** — Anxiety thrives in the fog. To interpret the alarm, the fog must become form. Write down the situations causing you the most dread or confusion. For each of those, write down the known knowns, known unknowns, unknown knowns, and the unknown unknowns. What is the shape of this list?
3. **Sever the siren** — You cannot interpret the alarm if you live in a siren. Identify the primary source(s) of “noise” in your daily routine where you willingly take on Pressure that does not belong to you. Think: social media outrage, a group chat, political news, notifications on your phone. For the next 48 hours, sever yourself completely. Notice how loudly your body caves in when the noise is gone. Understand your dysregulation.
4. **The Posture Test** — Think of some recent times when you’ve felt Pressure. Was it happening *to* you? Or *for* you? Are you *the victim*? Or *the interpreter*? How might you reinterpret the Pressure if you had better posture? An interpreter would say: “Pressure is information I must translate.”

Make friends with stress and anxiety

PRACTICE UNDER LOAD

Some people thrive under Pressure.
Others buckle completely
or become disoriented.

The difference between thriving and surviving
is practice — Perfect Practice, to be precise.

Working with Pressure is a mechanical law.
The greater the weight you can hold today,
the more you are prepared to carry tomorrow.
The sharper the posture and form,
the more sustainable the discipline.

A casual musician is never invited to play Carnegie Hall
and a reasonable person never volunteers for battle.

Pressure is an invitation, not a threat.
I see Pressure as a sculptor.
The work of the sculptor shapes me
and sheds what is unnecessary.

But I am not set in stone.
I can wither, I can thrive.
And the sculptor never stops.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

Load is the *amount* of Pressure you carry in your life.
A heavy Load may come from:

- Too many commitments
- Not enough sleep
- Financial strain
- Broken relationships
- Addiction

The same task creates different Pressure for different people.

And Pressure levels change with practice
and experience.

So does your capacity for Load.

The more you Perfectly Practice,
the greater the Load you can carry
and the calmer you feel under Pressure.

Remember, it all starts with posture.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

I discussed Perfect Practice in *Get Good. Go Fast. Conquer!*
But what does it mean to practice “under load?”
Let us seek ancient wisdom:

“No testing has overtaken you
that is not common to everyone.
God is faithful,
and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength,
but with the testing he will also provide
the way out so that you may be able to endure it.”
— 1 Corinthians 10:13

There will be times when Pressure pushes harder,
challenging you to hold steady
while also requiring that you reshape yourself
so that you emerge with wisdom and new sensibility.

More Load does not make you stronger,
but a rightly-carried load trains you
and a poorly-carried load deforms you.

Load creates the conditions in which Pressure tests you.
Whether you will stay in your old course
or whether you will be ready for what is next.

The principles of your practice do not change
but your awareness expands,
allowing for new outcomes
and repetition of lessons past.

Avoid the test and you will keep the weakness.
Endure it and the weakness is named.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

Load is what you've said yes to.
Pressure is how demand and consequence feel.

When Load and Pressure rise together,
you may be forced to revise your practice
or discover that it was never as strong as you thought.

**It is in such moments that you find
you have practiced yourself into a corner.**

What once looked like Perfect Practice
reveals itself to be conditional,
dependent on calm, control,
or the kindness of the environment.

A musician may play flawlessly in private
and fall apart the moment an audience appears.

Discretion is then required.
You must decide whether to break the rules,
or let go of them altogether,
because the rules that once made your practice "perfect"
were only preparation for something heavier.

It is entirely possible that you have mastered
a *version* of practice that was not serving your Calling.
It will not get you to your Destination.

Under Load, your real habits appear.
You don't rise to the occasion —
you fall to your practice.

The rules that made you good at practice
may prevent you from becoming good under pressure.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

Load reveals the difference between a job and a vocation.

A job asks what you are willing to do,
but a vocation asks what you are willing to become.

A job costs energy,
but a vocation costs the self.

A job earns a paycheck,
but a vocation bears fruit for others.

A job can be done with skill,
but a vocation demands obedience.

A job invites complaint when it feels unfair,
but a vocation is governed by duty.

The man with a vocation will endure
until his bones crack.
Not because he loves suffering,
but because Calling is not revoked by difficulty.

Load does not care about your feelings.
It only asks: *Why are you carrying me?*

Make friends with stress and anxiety

A reasonable person builds a wall at 5:00PM
to protect their “real life” from their “work life.”

But a person divided into two lives
is a hypocrite in both.

A Serious person sees the illusion
and laughs.
As though vocation is an intrusion on one’s humanity.

Separating life from its work
is like separating a table from its chairs —
simple enough until you are ready to eat.

You do not have a “work life” and a “personal life.”
You have one life with many purposes,
fueled by the same engine
sworn to the same vow.

Work is not a penalty to pay for the weekend.
Work is where your practice is tested.
The weekend is where rest and recovery are found
without becoming a different person.

If you despise the work, change the work.
If you despise your life, change your life.
You cannot cancel one out for the other.

A life without work is sentimentality.
Work without life is machinery.

The man who clocks out of his calling
does not become free.
He becomes divided.

But a Serious person says:
I have one self everywhere I go.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

“Motivation is only needed for what you don’t want to do.”

— Ken Keis

When you choose the mission,
you choose its weight.
You do not need less Pressure,
but more capacity
and greater discipline.

First responders, athletes, and stage performers
choose a life of public performance.
They tolerate and work under Pressure
because they’ve trained for it.

Some vocations are so immense
that you must become a new version of yourself.
And by taking on this Unreasonable Load,
the milestones emerge with laser clarity.

For the Load itself illuminates the Destination.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

Do not confuse the milestone with the mission.

Milestones are important,
but they are markers along the way.

They prove you are moving.
They do not prove you are going the right way.

They are not the Destination.

You do not write a book
and reach the Destination.
Writing the book is a milestone.
Becoming the kind of person who writes books is a goal.

And even that is not the Destination.

A goal is just a temporary identity.
It is a mechanism, not a meaning.

For the Serious person,
skill, output, and identity
are still subordinate to purpose.

I can teach you how to carry the Load.
I can show you how to endure the Pressure.
But it is not for me to articulate your Destination.

That is between you and God.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

When the Load feels too great to carry,
do not complain or become bitter.

You are likely unaware
you have put a heavy backpack on your head.

To blame or resent the weight is poor posture
and effortfulness will not fix your crooked spine.

Poor posture will keep you from doing useful work:
changing how you carry the Load.

Your Calling will feel unbearable
if you carry it in the wrong spirit.

It is a blessing to be chosen and tested,
but the test is to strengthen your spine
instead of your neck.

Rather, find your way to grateful Effortlessness,
which is not the absence of Pressure
but Load carried without self-will.

A heavy stone can be an altar or an anchor.
The difference is the person carrying it.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

The modern instinct to carry greater Load
is to “scale yourself”
instead of removing the friction of self-will.

When that fails, the instinct is to retreat —
as though simply reducing our commitments
will magically relieve our anxiety.

Pressure is not created by Load alone.
It is intensified by internal resistance to the Load.

Pressure is what happens
when you say yes with resentment,
carry duty with pride,
or treat obligation as an insult.

Load is where training becomes truth.
And if you enter it with poor posture,
the only thing you scale
is distortion.

The solution to exhaustion is not a bigger engine —
it is a smaller ego.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

Only a Master consistently thrives under Pressure.

The Master looks calm
for the same reason a saint looks calm:
the work is no longer about the ego.

This is why Masters are Effortless.
Effortlessness is not ease,
but obedience without self-dramatization.

Under Load, most people add effort,
which degrades performance.
The Master removes friction instead
and lets Perfect Practice speak for itself.

There is no drama
because drama is not needed to perform.
The Master brings only what is necessary.

If practice collapses under load,
it was not practice at all,
but preference.

And if performance requires drama,
it is not the result of discipline,
but of addiction.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

The deeper you understand your Calling,
the greater your awareness of opportunity.

Therefore, prepare yourself.

Preparation reduces the unknowns so you can act
and develops a sensitivity to what is next.

But preparation must not become an illusion of control,
lest it sour into bad Pressure.

And do not fool yourself into believing
preparation guarantees results.

A soldier can map the exact route of the march,
but no amount of planning can command the storm.

Preparation governs readiness.
It does not govern the yield.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

No one knows their breaking point
until they are broken.

The pain of breaking is just as revelatory
as the Load and Pressure that got you there.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel wrote:

“No one knows, or even feels,
that anything is a limit or defect,
until he is at the same time above and beyond it.
Living beings, for example, possess the privilege of pain
which is denied to the inanimate....”

Do not treat breaking as a failure.
It is purely diagnostic information.
Limits tell you what is misallocated or prideful.
They reveal what must be reordered.

It is through the act of breaking
that we learn we are not God.

The fracture line of the soul is not an insult,
but a measurement.

And if you keep “powering through” without reordering,
you are not brave.
You are stupid.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

“Somebody’s had too much to think.”
— Captain Beefheart, *Asbtray Heart*

Eat too much and you become obese.
Drink too much and you become drunk.
Think too much and you become proud.

Pride is a deadly sin because it is a blinding one.
It is all too easy to look at our chains
and call them jewelry.

Many such people normalize overload
and build an identity around their heaviness.
This is intellectual obesity.

Acclimating to chaos does not make you strong,
but the body can adapt to any lifestyle —
even the wrong one.

Some Load is chosen.
Some is unavoidable.
But for many people,
Load is volunteered and unnecessary.

A Master does not suffer unnecessarily.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

Pride is false fuel when Load gets demanding.

As the muscles ache
and the spine quakes,
one may find a burst of energy
by inflating the self.

Yet, the yoke is lighter when the ego exits
and the soul accepts its proper size.

The burden of Load is only unbearable
when one insists on wearing the crown.

Joy reveals itself
when we take responsibility for the work
and not for the outcome.

But where there is need
for credit, control, and certainty,
there is no room left for Joy.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

Those who buckle under Load
may find it difficult to admit.

So rather than face the collapse,
they take up a counterfeit burden,
often in the form of empathy.

True empathy is a mechanism of love.
It requires literal sacrifice
and produces the tangible fruit of generosity.

But performative empathy is a cheap substitute.
It has all the marks of a Calling,
without demanding any of the responsibility.

An afternoon protest here.
A brand boycott there.
Mere performances for the crowd.

This is emotional absorption
that consumes capacity meant for obligation.

It is far more empathetic to fulfill your Calling
than to weep for the world
while neglecting the one task God put in your hands.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

When Load feels insurmountable,
technique is no longer enough.

The antidote is simple:



Prayer, which returns the outcome to God.

Fasting, which reminds the body that discomfort is not death.

Stillness, which is strength training for the will.



These are not escapes from Load,
but forms of training under it.

They correct your posture.
They recalibrate your journey.
They remind you to be humble.

The one who cannot endure small voluntary discomforts
will be ruled by great involuntary ones.

If you cannot relax on command,
then how will you perform on command?

Make friends with stress and anxiety

A tree does not bemoan its place in the universe,
but a human is happy to complain.

A person might look at a tree and think:
What a shame this tree is not a beautiful orchid.

Or worse:

What a shame this tree does not know an orchid's beauty.

But the tree is freer than the human.
The tree becomes the most tree God allows.
It lives in harmony with its environment.
It does not worry whether its leaves should be green or red.
It does not wonder if it would be happier as a fish.

It simply grows.

The tree is free from comparison.
Free from fantasy.
Free from the burden of becoming something
it was never meant to be.

It does not worry whether the rains will come.
It does not debate its purpose.
It exercises the will of its keeper.

And so the tree is peaceful.

Not because life is easy,
but because it does not resist what it is.

There is no worry when one knows their destination.

Exercises for practicing under load.

1. **Weight Classification** — The Serious person carries only the weight of a Calling. List your three heaviest burdens. Ask:
 - a. Did God or duty assign this weight to me, or did I pick it up to prove my own importance?
 - b. Is this Load required for my mission, or is it spiritual bodybuilding?
 - c. If the weight is vanity, can I drop it? Or: If the weight is duty, am I complaining?
2. **Posture Correction** — A reasonable person drags responsibility, creating friction and resentment. Identify a daily, repeatable duty you currently resent (e.g. a regular meeting, a difficult client, a mundane household task). Notice your physical and mental posture when you approach it. Tomorrow, execute the task(s) with absolute precision and zero complaint. Notice how much lighter the work becomes without ego.
3. **Invite the Wind** — A structure that bears no weight becomes fragile. Look at your daily life and find where you have insulated yourself from discomfort. Determine where you have purchased peace at the expense of your own resilience. Intentionally do the work yourself, remind yourself that you still know how, and look for areas of resistance to examine later.
4. **Surrender the Scaffold** — You cannot strengthen if a scaffold is bearing all the weight. Identify any coping mechanisms you rely upon (e.g. over-planning, obsessive checking, venting to others). The next time Pressure spikes, *do not use the scaffold*. Stand completely on your own under the weight of the moment.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

RETURN TO READINESS

An alarm tells you when to act.
But when alarms sound all day,
signal becomes noise.

Many people are not victims of Pressure.
They have volunteered to live inside the siren
and complain about the noise.

When they act, it is a last-minute scramble,
riddled with desperation and strife.

**The antidote is not *more* Pressure.
It is a return to readiness.**

Readiness is not the absence of Pressure.
It is the quiet, ordered state
that lets you hear the alarm
and answer it rightly.

We cannot understand heat without cold,
nor action without stillness.

Do not mistake Pressure for fuel.
Pressure is the signal that you are needed.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

As a younger man, I used Pressure as my primary fuel,
and built myself a robust mental prison.

My sense of Calling was guided by insecurity,
driven by a frantic desire to prove to the world
that I was not a failure.

Thankfully, the Load broke that mindset.
But I watch many adults my age and beyond
still suffering under the exact same delusion.

They are trying to run their lives on a combustible lie.
They do not have friendship with stress and anxiety,
but addiction to activation.

Making friends with stress and anxiety does not mean
building a life that depends on chronic Pressure.
The goal is not constant activation.
The goal is readiness.

Stress and anxiety are our friends
because they help us when they arrive.
They are not meant to live in the house with us.
They are only meant to visit on occasion.

An emergency should not make us feel important.
It should not make us feel productive or alive.
An emergency is simply an anomalous call to action—
the moment we move from practice to performance.

Pressure does not power a life.
It merely interrupts the steady state of readiness.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

“We are not thinking machines.
We are feeling machines that think.”
— Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error*

Chronic Pressure destroys sensitivity
to good stress and good anxiety.

Desensitized, we compensate.
We fill the silence with addictions, clutter, overcommitment,
and the sour comfort of resentment
that we pretend is righteous.

We ruin our sleep
and fetter our waking hours
with anger and jealousy we believe are justified.

We become fools
who can no longer hear the alarm
when it finally sounds.

Discernment occurs in a quiet room
where one can hear a whisper in a gentle wind.

You cannot dry your feet
while standing in the middle of a river.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

A fool flatters himself with permanent activation.
He believes that a perpetually running engine
is proof of his importance.
But a motor spinning endlessly in neutral
is not on a crusade.

The body was not built for permanent activation.
Watch any beast in the field.
The lion does not pace all night.
The eagle does not circle without rest.
The horse does not gallop until its heart bursts.

They rest until the moment demands them.
They are neither philosophers nor influencers.
They are simply creatures who have not yet
been civilized into madness.

Of course, we do not look to animals for our morality.
A dog cannot be a saint, and a horse has no five-year plan.
However, they illustrate the mechanics of readiness.

The animal is not holy,
but it is sane.

Do not be so afraid of idleness
that you forget the dignity of waiting
and the strength of being ready.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

Remember Regulation.

It is critical to developing readiness.

“Doing nothing” is an active discipline
just as the Sabbath rest is an act of obedience.

For those addicted to Pressure,
stillness feels like violence and outrage.

It teaches the body not to do *anything* —
no clenched jaw, no bouncing foot,
no obsession with thoughts.

You cannot know the benefit of the clenched jaw
until you have tasted the discipline of a relaxed jaw.

Friendship with Pressure is best
when the baseline is calm readiness.

Calm is never the destination.
It is the downstream result of a disciplined non-doer.

If you cannot relax on command,
then how will you perform on command?

Stillness is not the opposite of readiness.
It is how readiness is built.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

It is reasonable to imagine readiness as a kind of emptiness,
as though the ready soul were a vacant room
waiting to be furnished by circumstance.

But the ready person is not empty.
He is unobstructed.

He has removed himself from vanity,
the clutter of addiction,
and the ornamental nonsense of self-importance.

And so he can move quickly,
not because he is shallow enough to avoid thought,
but because nothing is barricading his thought.

Sometimes, the most intelligent thing a person can do
is to stop trying to look intelligent
and opt out of volunteered chaos.

The world is full of people thinking so hard
that they cannot obey a single command.
They call this caution, discernment, and nuance,
but it is cowardice and fantasy.

The ready person is not always the cleverest in the room,
but the least obstructed.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

A ready person maintains a healthy baseline
and his frame is sustained by an ordered well-being.

He does not borrow from tomorrow to pay for today,
nor does he manufacture urgency to feel alive.
His well-being is not an afterthought or reward,
but the effortless discipline of his days.

He does not overeat when hungry,
sleeps well at night,
and works when it is required.

He knows the difference between a boundary and a wall,
between rest and laziness,
between generosity and self-depletion.

He knows readiness is about simplicity —
not minimalism or avoidance of complexity —
and that readiness demonstrates spiritual legibility.

His life is not organized around self-importance,
but around service for others.
Because his house is in order,
he can open the door without panic or resentment.

Neither perpetually calm nor perpetually activated,
he can sense when he is needed
and otherwise tends to the work in front of him.

Obedient, upright, humble, and ordered —
a steward of his own life.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

Do not confuse agitation with Seriousness.

The fool believes visible stress proves importance.
It only proves his disorder.

The one who is “always on” is never available.

Chronic activation does not make you more responsive.
It makes you harder to summon.

Busyness is vanity.

Many use motion to avoid stillness, prayer, or self-honesty.
To be busy is a choice, not a Calling.

The Sabbath humbles the ambitious.

We are commanded to rest.
Resistance exposes a belief of self-importance.

We learn fear by repetition.

Chronic activation teaches us to expect emergency.
Stillness retrains it.

The nervous system is a bad prophet.

When dysregulated, we mistake noise for revelation.
But revelation comes from God, not from within.

Urgency is not always truth.

Some alarms are real, some are manufactured.
Readiness tells the difference.

Allow silence to speak.

If we cannot be alone with God,
we will fill the room with noise.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

Readiness is a higher state than calm.

The reasonable person dreams of a life without alarms,
a soul that is never startled,
a heart that never quickens.

The Unreasonable person builds a life
around ordered availability to duty.
This makes room for calm when there is no Pressure
and allows the alarm to ring loud and clear
above the din of everyday life.

A ready person hears the alarm,
answers it,
and lets it leave when the work is done.

This is the proper order.

Calm serves readiness.
Readiness serves Calling.
Calling serves God.

“Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit;
be like those who are waiting for their master
to return from the wedding banquet,
so that they may open the door for him
as soon as he comes and knocks.
Blessed are those slaves
whom the master finds alert when he comes....”
— *Luke 12:35-37*

Make friends with stress and anxiety

My practice toward readiness looks like this:

Throughout the day, I scan my body
for tension and stress I did not invite —
jaw, brow, shoulders, hips.
When I find resistance bracing against nothing,
I permit it to release.

I pray while walking, jogging, and biking,
asking God for clarity,
for right judgment,
and a spirit that obeys without drama.

Every week, I make room for new people.
I buy the coffee and ask questions.
I listen for what is alive in them.
When it is fitting, I gift them a book.

I keep a queue of work
light enough that an alarm can still be heard.
I do not worship busyness.
I do not work at random.
I work in sequence,
under strategy,
and in service to my Calling.

And I rest on Sundays.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

“Return to readiness” is not an admonition.
Rather, readiness is the default state
to which we should always return.

For readiness is *home*.

When Pressure arrives, we leave home —
sometimes for a moment,
sometimes for a season —
as the work requires.

But we always return for rest, recovery, and quiet.

We are not like the road warriors,
living out of suitcases and in constant chaos,
always moving and rarely available.

We keep our house in order
so that when Pressure knocks,
the door is open and we are ready.

A Serious person does not abandon his home.

Exercises for returning to readiness

1. **Command the Release** — Tension is a tool to carry a Load, but it destroys the machine if left unchecked. Set an alarm for three random times tomorrow. When the alarm sounds, stop what you are doing and do an audit of your body. For areas where you are carrying stress, command the release of tension. Drop the shoulders, unclench the jaw, and shift back into neutral.
2. **The Threshold** — A Serious person knows when the battle is over. Identify the sharpest transitions in your day (e.g. getting in your car after work, closing the laptop, finishing your last meeting). Do not immediately pick up your phone. Don't turn on the radio or jump into another task. Try a 5-minute cooldown of silence. Do not open the door to the next room until you've exited the last one.
3. **Fasting from Motion** — A fool believes perpetual activation proves his importance. Schedule two continuous hours this weekend of absolute, zero-productivity idleness. No screens, chores, email, or podcasts. Watch your mind panic and feel the rise of sour anxiety. Do not break the fast. Sit in the discomfort until you remember the dignity of waiting.
4. **Leaving the Slack** — Reasonable people prioritize whatever fire is burning brightest. Look at your schedule for tomorrow. Is every moment optimized for productivity? A structure without margin will shatter quickly under unexpected Pressure.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

GOING DEEPER

It is a fantasy to be stormproof,
but a Serious person seeks to be storm-worthy.

For what feels like interference
is often the first honest measure of readiness.

The reasonable man thinks the storm has interrupted his life,
when in fact it has only interrupted his preferences.

Clear skies are a mercy,
but they prove almost nothing;
a roof is not vindicated by sunshine,
but by weather.

The storm is where the script tears.
The sky darkens,
the roof groans,
and what was hidden in the frame
is brought into the light.

Calm is for repair.
Storm is for revelation.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

The soul can become overtrained.

A life without rest
and no aim toward readiness
can become so optimized for output and response
that it loses the tenderness, receptivity, and joy
that produces fruit for others.

We develop skill
to be useful to others
and usable by God.

The point is not to become impressive
or appear a certain way to the world.

A Serious person is conscientious,
aware that any good talent can be misused —
or worse, left unused.

There are many ways to practice yourself into a corner.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

There is no prize for carrying the greatest Load.

A smaller frame is no less glorious
than a larger one
for both are creations of purpose
and not of pride.

We do not get caught up in spiritual bodybuilding,
but in clarity of Calling.

Some are built to carry much,
others are built to carry little.
Both are obedient to their Calling.

It is a blessing to be visited by Pressure.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

Readiness requires consent to obscurity.

A ready person may be unnoticed,
doing quiet work,
bearing unglamorous responsibilities,
and not constantly “on mission” in public.

The purpose of the work
is greater than the status of the worker.

The mission is not for our own gain.
Neither is it ours to fully explain.

And yet, there is joy in obedience.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

When I am troubled or lost,
I reach out to Serious friends
and seek their guidance.

Clarity is rarely a given.

In times of discouragement,
I do not have the objectivity
to hear or see clearly.

**The story I've attached to my suffering
is always worse than the suffering itself.**

Tempting as it is to make corrective decisions,
these are the times when I know least
how to correct what feels wrong.

For what has "gone wrong"
may be exactly what has gone right.

No amount of confidence
can replace the objective discernment
of Pressure's mutual friends.

Exercises for going deeper

1. **Execute in the Dark** — Readiness requires consent to obscurity. Identify a necessary, unglamorous task in your home, business, or community. Something that carries serious weight. Execute it flawlessly, tell no one, and watch your ego demand recognition. Deny it payment.
2. **Relinquish the scale** — There is no prize for carrying the greatest Load. Look honestly at the heaviest responsibilities you are carrying right now. Identify any that are specifically held out of comparison — one that is intended to outshine or keep up with another person. Consider how to change your intent or drop the weight entirely.
3. **Summon Counsel** — In times of discouragement, you lack the objectivity to see clearly. Identify the most confusing or painful Pressure in your life right now — the one where you cannot tell whether you are being tested or failing. Take this issue to someone Serious in your life, who respects Calling more than they respect your comfort. Ask them to diagnose and help you see your next steps.
4. **Reverse the Verdict** — We panic because we demand to understand the outcome. Examine a recent failure or closed door that is causing you anxiety. Instead of analyzing “how to fix it,” assume your current reality is flawless in design. Write down three ways this “failure” is protecting you from weight you cannot yet handle, or forcing you into necessary obedience. Stop trying to break back into the closed door.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

To become friends with Pressure, answer these questions:

- Do I treat Pressure as an enemy or an instructor?
- Can I tell the difference between peace and avoidance?
- Who owns the outcomes of my life and who am I serving?
- Am I trying to control God's ungovernable work?
- When has Pressure helped me to act and when have I cowered?
- Do I spend my waking hours in constant activity?
- What truth does my busyness protect me from?
- How much of my current load was chosen by vanity?
- Am I willing to sit still and dignify the act of doing nothing?
- When do I choose comfort over obedience?
- Which thoughts, situations, or people consistently trigger my anxiety? What does my response look like?
- What am I afraid will happen if I ignore or suppress this feeling?
- What outcome or sense of mastery would I value most if I turned stress into a catalyst for progress?
- What might a return to readiness look like in my life?

Answer honestly.

Seriousness does not require confidence. It requires action.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

Core concepts

Pressure — The weight of demand and consequence that acts as a compulsion toward risk and hard work.

Stress — The natural, bodily response to demand that serves as an engine to focus your vision, mobilize your energy, and prioritize your urgency.

Anxiety — The exact measure of your trust and an awareness of risk; a spotlight meant to reveal danger so you can prepare rather than panic.

Obedience — The critical variable that determines how Pressure feels, turning the weight of your work into focus and making you a conduit for powerful action.

Posture — Your physical and spiritual verdict; upright obedience receives the goodness of stress, while slouched resistance receives its sourness.

The Alarm — The loud, jarring, and purposeful interruption of stress and anxiety, designed to reveal what reality requires of you right now.

Regulation — The active discipline of doing nothing; a systematic physical scan to release hoarded tension so you are not braced against empty space.

Load — The specific volume of commitments and Pressure you have said yes to, which inevitably tests your practice and reveals the integrity of your structure.

Readiness — The quiet, unobstructed, and ordered baseline state that allows you to hear the alarm and answer it rightly without living inside the siren.

Make friends with stress and anxiety

Make friends with stress and anxiety

Die to Self.
Find Joy.
Access Genius.



A guide for creating Moments of Genius

Written December 1 - 10, 2025

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

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*Each chapter of this guide starts with philosophy
and ends with exercises to get you started.*

For some, the exercises are the value.

For others, the philosophy.

For a few, both.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

PREAMBLE

Genius is widely misunderstood.

It isn't about intellect, although that can help.
It isn't about virtuosity, talent, or achievement,
though those can help, too.

People think genius is rare, exclusive, or fixed —
as if it's a *trait*.
But it's none of those things.

Genius is available to anyone,
at any level of intelligence,
as long as you know how
and are willing to die.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

Because Genius is not *in* you.

It does not come *from* you.

It happens *through* you.

In those rare, intentional Moments
when you forget who *you* are
and lay down your pride —
that is when something greater takes place.

The gifts with which you are entrusted
and have honed through Perfect Practice
become Available to the Genius.

But not to you.

You are not the Genius.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

Genius occurs in Moments of Selfless Joy.

In those Moments, you disappear
and become Selfless.

No pride.

No ego.

No fear.

No shame.

No self.

Because *you* have disappeared,
there is no limit to what you can do.

What remains is your Joy
and you become fully Available.

Effortless.

Present.

Activated.

Frightening.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

Joy is all that's left when you are fully Available
and die to yourself.

It isn't an emotion.
It isn't "happiness."
It isn't even excitement or pleasure or relief.

Because those come and go.
Joy doesn't.

Joy is your natural state
when there is no Resistance
and you are exercising your unique Purpose.

Joy requires no intellect
because it's a spiritual alignment
that's resilient, radiant, and overflowing —
even in suffering.

And you just *know*.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

Genius is an act of stewardship.

You see,
you have been given a gift.

You do not own it.
You did not choose it.
And you are briefly entrusted with it
according to your own ability.

Like manna from heaven,
you cannot hoard, bank, or presume Genius.

It is not from the past.
Nor is it for tomorrow.

It is available to the humble
in the present Moment.

“For you are a mist
that appears for a little while
and then vanishes.” (*James 4:14*)

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

This book is based on John 12:24:

“Unless a grain of wheat
falls into the earth and dies,
it remains just a single grain;
but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

Genius is incompatible with
a life centered on the self,
marked by pride and restlessness.

For pride is the deadliest of the deadly sins.

Rather, Genius is best suited for a life of freedom,
playing a role in a larger story —
breaking out of the self through love and self-gift.

For when you are in love,
you forget yourself in your beloved.

And life has meaning!

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.



The Moment of Genius

You cannot create a Moment of Genius.
You can only *enter*.

It is the flash of awareness
when everything inside you goes quiet
and something outside you becomes clear.

There is no thinking.
There is no effort.
You do not exist.

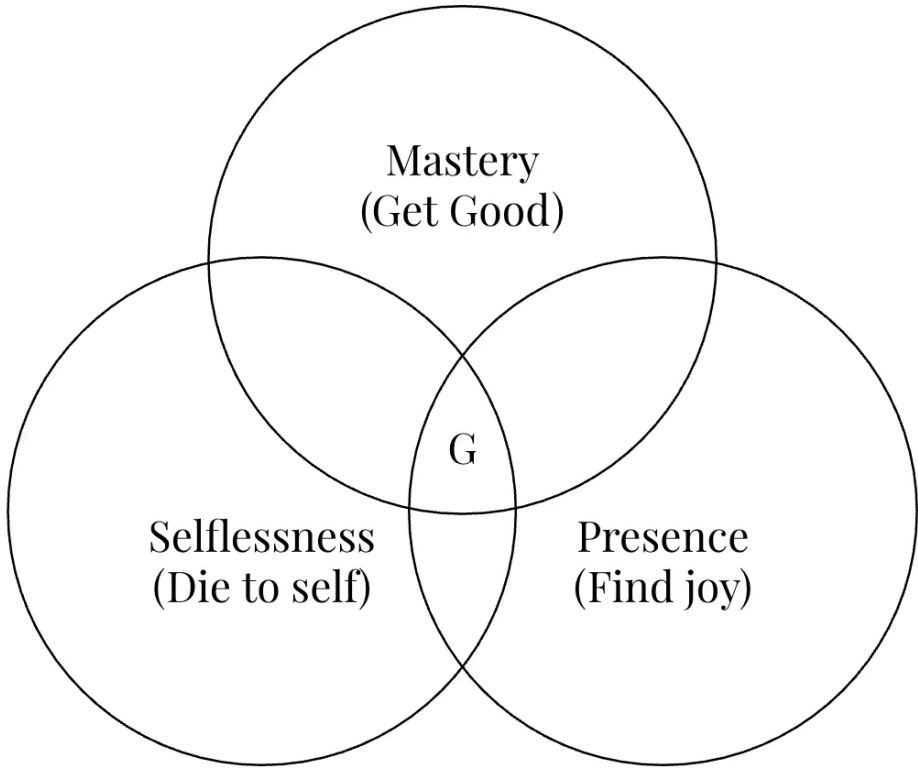
You vanish and your best work appears.

You do not “come up with” ideas.
You *recognize* them,
fully-formed and complete.

The next brush stroke, the next line, the next move —
exactly where it should be.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

Genius is where
Mastery, Selflessness, and Presence converge.



G = Genius

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

There are many marks of Genius.

From the inside looking out,
it is a matter of Perfect Practice, Mastery, and devotion.
Nothing special.

From the outside looking in, the marks of Genius are:

- Making the impossible look simple
- Precision without visible effort
- Novelty and inevitability at the same time
- Presence
- Timelessness
- Unteachable insights
- Universality of impact
- Creating a Reality Shift
- The presence of something “more”
- A lifetime of tiny successes, failures, and surrender

Though we live among prodigies and savants,
they are the anomalies.

Genius is not an anomaly.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

It may seem confusing.

Why should you have to die to yourself?

What difference does Joy make?

How could anyone access Genius?

Because no one *is* a genius.

Genius emerges.

It is in the air

waiting for a vessel.

In a Moment.

Ask yourself: What keeps me from being that vessel today?

Perhaps it is confusion

from intellectualization

of an unattainable desire

and a fear of the unknown.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

I would never call myself a genius.

But I have certainly *experienced* Moments of Genius.

Playing guitar

Composing music

Consulting for a client

Teaching my children

Loving my wife

Forgiving others

In each of these Moments,

I've been in awe of what was happening *through me*.

Words, results, and actions for which

I could not claim *responsibility*.

It was as if I wasn't myself.

I was just an observer.

And I made way for whatever it was

because it was right.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

DIE TO SELF

There is only one obstacle to Genius: You.

Not your body or your soul,
but your *mind*.

Your mind knows, prioritizes, and repeats
your fears and insecurities.
And simultaneously believes it is the source of your potential.

It takes ownership of your life.
It gets in the way of your Effortlessness.
It intellectualizes, attacks, and judges.

The mind both resents and loves you,
pretending to “protect” you through blaming and shaming.

It seeks approval when none is needed
and denies compliments when you need them most.

It is terrified of death.
Therefore, you must die.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

To die to oneself
is to crucify the ego.

For the ego vigorously holds on to
the self-centered, prideful aspects of our human nature
that separate us from our true Purpose.

An overwhelming, unending concern for oneself
creates depression, anxiety, and Resistance.

Therefore, we must make of ourselves
an empty cup.

Empty.

Because Genius is sacred
and will not dilute itself.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

Why do the best ideas occur while showering?
Or walking? Or cleaning? Or serving others?

When we are quiet,
we can hear.

When we are slow,
we are attentive.

When we empty ourselves,
we are Available.

And Genius can whisper into our hearts.

But when we are loud, busy, and inattentive,
we are unavailable — full of Resistance.

And Genius hides at a great distance.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

Self-Death

Obviously, self-death is not a literal process
but a *radical self-forgetfulness*.

It leads to ecstasy, or “ex-stasis,”
which means “to stand outside oneself.”

This is Selflessness.

Paradoxically, dying to self
unlocks the fullness of life, Joy, and Genius.

One cannot Effortlessly Perform
if one is full of self
because self-fullness is inherently effortful.

Like climbing up a mountain
with a boulder in your backpack.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

Masters can develop a practice of self-death.

For some, it's prayer and meditation.

For others, it's complete elimination of distraction.

It may take place in the gym.

Or at a musical instrument.

Or perhaps a typewriter.

Maybe even at a canvas.

No matter how it is done

or where it takes place

it is a form of Perfect Practice.

Dying to yourself is no mere accident.

It is trained.

Selflessness is as repeatable as a brush stroke.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

The world wants you to think more about yourself.
And yet the world is miserable.

Despite thousands of years of glorious testimonials
from monks and nuns and prophets and priests,
the world would have you take a pill
rather than live for something greater than yourself.

No.

Better to exercise,
clean a room,
make your bed,
meaningfully serve someone,
and pray
than to listen to the world.

Either die to yourself
or die to the world.

Your death is your choice.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

To be Selfless is not to erase yourself
but to stop *focusing* on yourself.

It is not thinking *less* of yourself,
but to think of yourself *less*.

To be Present
without concern of how you look
or are being perceived.

We are uniquely and wonderfully made
to become Selfless
and enjoy.

Not to carry prison bars of our own making
but to participate in a story
we do not write.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

“Fear is imperfect faith.”

— John Lott



Who told you *you* were unworthy?

Who told you *you* were no good?

Chances are: it was *you*.

And if it's others, why do you give them purchase?

Do you want Genius?

Or to feel good feeling bad about yourself?

Do you want to be a Master?

Or would you rather be a perpetual student?

Do you want Effortless Performance?

Or do you like to plateau, flail, despair, isolate, blame,
and give up?

Do you want to enter the Promised Land?

Or do you prefer rising to international obscurity?

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

“Separate the art from the artist.”

This is the conventional “wisdom”
from those who fear
that the artist is the source of the Genius.

The beauty of Genius is that it can work
despite the flaws of the artist.

To empty oneself and die
is not an act of perfection.

Rather one of Perfect Practice.

Genius does not discriminate
but blesses those who can channel it.

How lucky are we to have such a grace
that Genius could work through us at all.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

What was once “the opportunity of a lifetime”
has become drudgery.

How can this be?

Ego.
Self-centeredness.

Goodness and gratitude evaporate instantly
like a droplet of water on a hot stove
wherever the ego is present.

When negativity rules, work becomes drudgery
and Genius is elusive.

But when negativity is absent,
passion and love flow into the work,
elevating even simple tasks
like cleaning a toilet or bagging groceries.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

If you want to shoot yourself in the foot,
spend time in self-judgment.

It halts everything you do.

Without it, you can simply *accept* and *enjoy* whatever happens
and determine your next step.

But with self-judgment,
you can remain in a mental prison
forever and ever.

And be like the rest of the world.

Unfinished projects.
Broken relationships.
Dead-end careers.
Lonely and sad.
Dead plants, crusty socks, and brown teeth.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

Masters do not worry about mistakes
because mistakes, failures, and unexpected changes
are part of the process.

A Master may even repeat a mistake
to study its cause and effect
and to give the illusion
it was intentional all along.

A Master knows how to recover from mistakes
in such sly ways that are only recognizable
to other Masters.

How can anyone learn without making a mistake?
Even a Master knows this
deep in the bones.

And yet,
you have fear.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

If you think dying to oneself is hard,
wait until you try the alternative.

A life sentence of unnecessary suffering.

Worry, self-doubt, impostor syndrome,
frustration, anxiety, resentment,
jealousy, comparison, furrowed brows,
shame, perfectionism, paralysis,
unfinished work, unspoken words, unlived potential.

Talents unused.

Gifts buried.

“Someday.”

“I wish I could...”

“Oh that’s a bucket list item for me.”

*For to all those who have, more will be given,
and they will have an abundance;
but from those who have nothing,
even what they have will be taken away. (Mt 25:29)*

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

Genius requires a cold, hard look
directly into the eyes of fear.

Of course, it is natural to be scared of life-threatening scenarios.
It is not natural to be scared of success
or scared of your work and its results.

Do not worry.

Prioritize your desire for Mastery, Joy, and Genius
over any fears and attacking thoughts.

Do not cower in battle.
Do not give an inch.

And have *no doubt* that
you will be attacked.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

Courage begins the moment you stop lying to yourself
and lying is a function of ego.

Truth requires the self to disappear
because the ego filters everything through:

- How do I look?
- What will people think?
- Will this make me seem weak?
- Am I good enough?
- What does this say about me?

These are distortions of the truth
that surface irrelevant noise.

It simply serves to bend one's perception.

An active ego makes truth conditional.
"I will only believe what feels good."

Honest perception is impossible
where there is fear, insecurity, and self-judgment.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

Nothing will give you more confidence
than dying to self.

Removing ego's distortions —
fear of failure,
need for glory,
constant self-comparison —
lets Mastery shine as stewardship
and not self-glory.

After 10,000 hours of Perfect Practice,
you had better be Exceptional
and know that you are good
(or you have a serious problem).

Arrogance is not confidence.
Vanity is not honesty.
Boasting is not gratitude.
Gloating is not humility.

Confidence is what remains
when ego has been removed.

And ego has no place near Mastery.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

Humility is not self-hatred
or unworthiness.

It is a sober, educated recognition
of your place in the larger order.

Genius is a grace.
Talent is a gift.
Perfect Practice is a blessing.
Performance is responsibility.
Mastery is a privilege.

Aspire to be the best
while knowing you can never be the best.

Not because you cannot “be the best”
but because *there is no best*.

This lays the groundwork for Joy.

Exercises for dying to self

- **The Credit Fast** — For one week, you must accomplish significant wins but strictly refuse to take credit or talk about them unless asked. Watch how the ego toils.
- **The Judgment Detox** — Dedicate one day to catching every instance of self-judgment or judgment of others, which instantly halts your progress. Write down the thought and whether it is rooted in truth or ego.
- **The Unseen Work** — Do one meaningful piece of work each day that no one will ever see, credit, or reward. Notice how quickly the ego protests and how quiet the mind becomes when you continue anyway.
- **Delayed Reaction** — When criticized, misunderstood, or overlooked, wait 24 hours before responding internally or externally. Observe how much of your impulse to react is about identity, not truth.
- **Voluntary Obscurity** — Choose a situation where you could easily stand out and deliberately step back. Practice excellence without visibility.
- **Fear Inventory** — List what you are afraid would happen if you were ignored, passed over, or forgotten. Sit with the list and weaken those fears with truth.
- **The Grain of Wheat** — Identify one attachment that must fall away for your work to grow. Let it go without replacing it.
- **Menial Service** — Choose a task you consider “beneath” you, such as cleaning a toilet or scrubbing a floor, and perform it with total passion and excellence. Use this to practice removing the ego, realizing that drudgery only exists where the ego is present.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

- **The Mirror Fast** — Go an entire day without checking your reflection or thinking about how you are being perceived by others. Shift your focus from “How do I look?” to “How can I be a part of the story I am not writing?”
- **Visit the Liar’s Den** — Write down the comfortable lies you tell yourself to excuse stagnation or inaction (e.g. “I am just preparing” or “It isn’t the right time.”) Beside each, define the specific act of courage that exposes the lie and execute it immediately.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

FIND JOY

Finding Joy is a process of elimination.

You must carve away every source of Resistance
that impedes Genius.

When Michelangelo carved the statue of David,
he was asked how he accomplished it.

His mythologized response:

“It was easy. [Effortlessness]

I simply carved away everything that wasn't David.”

[Complex made simple]

Your Joy is already there
within you
hidden in a block of stone.

Do you have the tools to chip away and find it?

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

Just as an eye cannot observe itself,
Joy cannot discover itself.
Otherwise we would all be Joyful.

However, you *can* observe your areas of Resistance
and eliminate them.

Where there is unreasonable doubt,
misplaced fear,
anger, resentment, or dread,
you are *most likely* to find Resistance.

A Master has the discernment to know the difference
between reasonable doubt and unfounded self-doubt.

Just as a Master knows what external feedback matters
and what can be tossed to the wind.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

Finding Joy is an act of Presence.

Presence is the condition
in which nothing pulls you away
from the Moment that is happening.

When a Master is Present
and in a state of Selflessness,
there is no past
and there is no future.

There is only right now.

One can be Present
anywhere, at any time
doing anything.

Folding laundry, perhaps.
Or writing software.
Or hugging a child.

Joy is Selfless Presence.
And Presence arrives only
when ego has fallen silent.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.



Availability

Presence is a state.

Joy is a state.

Selflessness is a state.

Availability is a *posture*.

Presence says: "I am here."

Availability says: "I am open."

Presence is stillness.

Availability is receptivity.

Presence is the clearing.

Availability is the invitation.

Presence is subtraction.

Availability is surrender.

Genius is not compatible with
busy, noisy, self-absorbed, or fearful,
but descends on the available.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

Finding Joy is not about finding happiness
but about Activation and Availability.

Activation determines the path to Mastery.
Self-death determines the path to Availability.

Where there is Mastery and Availability
there is opportunity for Genius to work
and fertile ground for a Reality Shift.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

The further a Master goes
in finding Joy and becoming Selfless,
the more Reality Shifts
and dimensionality decreases.

While the world is convinced that *more* is more,
Masters seek *fewer* degrees of freedom.

In a Reality Shift,
the Master's world loses its unnecessary dimensions
and clutter falls away.

Where ego remains, so does chaos.
More variables, more noise.

Remove the ego
and the world collapses
into a beautifully ordered plane.

More Selflessness, less confusion.
Nothing to fear, nothing to manage.

Find Joy and Reality Shifts.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.



Reality Shift

The world is inherently complex,
but Genius is simple.

A Master who finds Joy
and becomes Available,
learns to filter noise,
reduce degrees of freedom,
and leave room *only* for what is real —
the narrow path where Genius can act.

This is the Reality Shift:
a reordering of perception
where the ego's chaos dissolves,
and your experience of the world
grows simpler, cleaner, and easier to navigate.

Because you no longer operate in your own space,
but in the space that remains
when the self steps aside
and Genius can work through you.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

Do not confuse Joy with “happiness.”

Many Masters are unhappy
but they know their Joy.

And they are Available.

Joy is wired into your soul
and ready to sustain you.

Happiness is a reaction to circumstances,
fleeting like the weather.

You can fake happiness.
Joy cannot be manufactured.

You cannot chase
what you already have.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

Joy is your purpose.

If you only knew it,
you would work all day
and expect nothing in return.

As many do.

And you would earn *everything*.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

The world will teach you
to bury your Joy.

To “be safe.”

But a safe life will teach you nothing about Joy.

To find Joy
is to take risks
that prove your hunches.

Listen to your DNA.
It was there at the Moment of your conception
informing your growth, creating your Joy.

It will teach you what you already know.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

You cannot *think* your way to Joy
for it is not a task of the mind.

Perfect Practice, plans, methods —
those can come from the mind.

But Joy?
No.

Finding Joy is an organic process
of pairing your innate ability
with whatever makes your heart sing.

It is a feeling in the chest,
a burst of pure energy,
an ignition of the fire within the belly,
and a byproduct of curiosity.

You cannot *expect* it to happen,
but you must expect it to happen.

And then it will.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

Master bass guitarist Michael Manring once showed me that a clean, brand-new bass string can produce thirteen (or more) distinct natural harmonics — clear, ringing notes hidden within the metal.

But as the string is played and used, sweat and dirt accumulate and those harmonics begin to disappear.

Thirteen becomes eight.
Eight becomes six.

When the higher harmonics fall silent, he knows the string is no longer capable of what it was made to do.

It has become dull.

You are like the string.
The notes are in you
and have not vanished.

You just need cleaning.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

Where is your Joy?

Where does it hide?
Is it actually hidden?

Perhaps it is undiscovered
like a treasure just beneath an inch of soft soil.

Will you dig it up?

Will you behold it in awe and wonder?

Will you remove every speck of soil and dirt from it?
And protect it?
Honor and cherish it?

Or walk over it
as you pace in worry?

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

I used to live next to a painter named Kirk O'Hara.
One of the most Joyful people I've ever met.

He was always outside talking to people.
One day it was my turn.

He took me into his home
and showed me dozens of canvases
with a unique style and flair.

I remember being blown away
not just at the quality of his art
but because he painted it all
with a brush held in his teeth.

Kirk is quadriplegic.
And unstoppable.

In an interview, he said
he wouldn't change a thing about his life.

For he had found Joy.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

A Master's Joy is inimitable.
And so is *yours*
because your DNA is a once-in-a-universe event.

For that reason alone,
no act of Genius
can be reproduced.

When Genius moves through a Master
it is like the fingerprint
of a one-time Moment
that even the Master cannot repeat.

In this same spirit,
a Master protects his unique Joy
through Perfect Practice,
Activation,
Unfair Advantage,
and a Frightening Seriousness.

Many will imitate a Master's Joy,
but that is not a path to Genius.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

Interviewer: *So Frank, you have long hair. Does that make you a woman?*

Frank Zappa: *You have a wooden leg. Does that make you a table?*



Joy frees you from “identity.”

Ego traps you inside of one.

Ego: “I failed once, therefore I am a failure.”

Joy: “I failed once and was given the opportunity to learn.”

Ego: “I was ignored when I was a child, so I need attention.”

Joy: “Attention is earned, not deserved.”

Ego: “I wasn’t good at school. I’m a terrible learner.”

Joy: “This is hard and I will work through it.”

Ego: “People like me don’t ____.”

Joy: “What is the next right action?”

Zappa’s Moment of Genius here
demonstrates confidence, courage, wit,
and ultimately, Joy.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

An excerpt from *Orthodoxy* by GK Chesterton:

Because children have abounding vitality,
because they are in spirit fierce and free,
therefore they want things repeated and unchanged.

They always say, "Do it again";
and the grown-up person does it again
until he is nearly dead.

For grown-up people are not strong enough
to exult in monotony.

It is possible that God says every morning,
"Do it again" to the sun;
and every evening, "Do it again" to the moon.

It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike;
it may be that God makes every daisy separately,
but has never got tired of making them.

It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy;
for we have sinned and grown old,
and our Father is younger than we.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

Masters who work fast gain Time Control.
Masters who find Joy gain Perpetual Motion.

With no Resistance in the way,
a Master becomes unstoppable.

Because the work is not work at all.
It is Joy.

Beautifully sustainable
without a chance of burnout.

Others wonder:
“How do you work so much?”

A Master replies:
“Because I do not work.”

Like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden,
there is no toil.

Effortless.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

Perpetual Motion makes easy
the fine-grained detail work
of finding Joy.

Carving the last bits of rock
that hid the Statue of David.

It is the Perfect Practice of Performance,
where the theoretical becomes real.

Perpetual Motion dissolves any sense of time,
making every detail visible
and every mistake correctable.

There is no negativity or difficulty, only choices.
Reality becomes cooperative, not adversarial.

And Genius hangs in the air
like static electricity,
waiting for a Moment
to electrify a Joyful Master.

Exercises for finding Joy

- **The Energy Trace** — Review the last month's calendar. Circle the moments (not whole meetings) where time disappeared. What was the specific activity? That is the breadcrumb to Joy.
- **Single-Task Immersion** — Choose one simple task and do it without interruption until complete. No music, no multitasking, no optimization. Joy often appears when friction is removed.
- **Attention Audit** — For one day, notice what repeatedly pulls you out of the present moment. Do not correct it yet. Simply observe where your attention leaks.
- **Slow Completion** — Perform a routine task more slowly than required, with full attention to each movement. Let speed give way to accuracy and calm.
- **Joy Without Outcome** — Engage in an activity you enjoy with no intention of improvement, productivity, or sharing. Let the act be sufficient.
- **Resistance Spotting** — When you feel irritation, boredom, or impatience, stop and identify what you are resisting. Joy often hides behind the resistance itself.
- **Expectation Release** — Begin a piece of work without imagining how it should feel or turn out. Notice how expectation blocks enjoyment.
- **The Resistance Audit** — Scan your upcoming week for events that trigger dread, resentment, or anger, which are clear markers of Resistance. Cancel or re-negotiate one of these commitments immediately to practice discernment.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

- **The Complexity Collapse** — Identify a project that feels chaotic and intentionally remove three “variables” or options to reduce the degrees of freedom. Watch how the world collapses into a cleaner, more ordered plane when you stop trying to manage every possibility.
- **The Smile Test** — Pay attention to when, where, and why you smile throughout the day. What are you doing? Why are you smiling? What do you love about it? And is it pure?

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

ACCESS GENIUS

The Moment you access Genius,
you will be overwhelmed with
its impossibility, obviousness, and simplicity.

Everything becomes clear at once.
And you are bewildered with knowing.

The proverbial grain of wheat
begins to sprout
in a Moment
of Mastery,
Selflessness,
and Presence.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

A Moment of Genius
is a Moment of recognition,
not invention.

The right note, the best move, the perfect solution
presented to you fully-formed —
requiring no thought or second-guessing.

You just know.

Suddenly. Quietly. Inevitably.
What you sought is *right there*.
As if it was waiting for you.

Take it.
Use it.
And be a good steward.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

The brightest minds today
do not understand
the origins of an idea.

One could ask a Nobel Prize winner:
“Where did your big idea come from?”
And she might reply,
“I don’t know. I was on a walk
and it just came to me.”

A Genius idea is an outline
of something that so wishes to exist,
it calls upon anyone who is Available.

But a Master is not just anyone.

A Master hears the call
and is a good steward.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

Hearing the call of Genius
is like receiving a Download.

When Genius calls upon a Master,
the clarity and fullness of the Download
depends directly on the Master's
Presence, Selflessness, and Availability.

When a Download begins,
a Master is consumed by a feeling of enthusiasm
and the knowing.

"I can do this."

But as soon as ego steps in,
the Download stops.

The Master who has Perfectly Practiced
the act of dying to self
can keep ego at bay
and protect the Download.

Because a Master lives for these Moments.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

From a lengthy conversation with Steve Vai about Genius:

A person's function in life is found
when a person is capable of identifying
those creative ideas that arise in them
as ideas that feel enthusiastic and
come with the knowing — not the belief —
that it can be accomplished through them.

This is the simple recognition.
It seems elusive is because we believe we have to work for it.

But your DNA *wants* to light up.
The idea *wants* to come through you.
And you have to hear it's call.

Genius is people doing it without knowing they're doing it.

People will recognize their genius
by recognizing their creative inspiration.
It's very clear to them
to the point that they can't understand why others don't.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

When others see Genius,
they wonder.

“How does he do it?”

“What’s her secret?”

“Can you believe it?”

“That is insane.”

“I don’t get it.”

After spending 22 years learning to play *Fracture* by Robert Fripp,
I came to realize
how *easy* and *inevitable* the song must have been.

Not easy to play,
but to *inevitably occur*.

He had spent so much time honing his own Guitar Craft
in deep honor of and indebtedness to Music
that it flowed out of him.

The song was awaiting him
in his Presence, Availability, and Mastery.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

Love of your work
determines the quality of your work
and the collaboration with Genius.

Like Joy, Love must be present
because Love is the language of Genius.

Genius is silent in indifference
and will call out to another.

But where there is Love,
Genius finds alignment.

Love is the opposite of Resistance —
the sign of a Master's commitment.

Love also honors the work of Genius.
And without it, there is no point.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

For some, a Download is instantaneous
and requires no thought.

For others, it may be several years
before a Download is digested, understood,
and able to be acted upon.

It is not that the Master is not ready
but that the Master is not *ready*.

There may be a time of diagnosis,
internal dialogue,
and aesthetic maturity.

Do not question it
for that is the surest way
to claim the genius was yours
and forget how you received the gift.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

A Master may develop a quiet interior voice
that asks:

“Are you sure about that?”

The Master knows it is not criticism,
nor fear,
nor insecurity.

Rather, it is the refined awareness
that the work is not yet true.

When ego speaks,
it says, “That’s fine.”
It wants relief.

But a voice of discernment asks,
“Am I honoring what was entrusted to me?”

Discernment protects the work,
delaying closure
until Genius is satisfied.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

A Master may form a positive expectation
to prepare for Genius's arrival.

Steve Vai calls this his "secret."
When writing a song, he says:

"I know in this section
there is something perfect for me
that wants to come out.

"The universe is infinite
so I have absolutely no doubt
that the perfect thing for me
is going to happen.

"And then I listen to it
and create a space of unknowing
where I'm simply allowing
the infinitude of potential inspirations —
as opposed to *trying to* to conceive of something
with my intellect."

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

Genius does not repeat itself.
It always has something novel to offer.

The skeptic might say:

“Well, what about an athlete re-running the same 400 meters?
Or a musician performing the same song night after night?
Or an artist drawing the same tree over and over?
Or a plumber laying half-inch copper in a new neighborhood?”

But who is the skeptic to judge what is the “same?”

That every night is not a new night?
That every stroke of the brush is not brand new?
That no two tiles have been cut alike?

As Chesterton wrote:

“Oscar Wilde said that sunsets were not valued
because we could not pay for sunsets.
But Oscar Wilde was wrong;
we *can* pay for sunsets.
We can pay for them by not being Oscar Wilde.”

Where Genius is Present, even “repetition” is new.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

There is no intermediary between Genius and Master.
Because Genius does not teach.
Genius reveals.

And revelation takes no form,
but arrives as the outcome itself.

A Master receives not the *process*
but the *final form*.
Only a Master can map the journey
from here to there.

There is no “creative process”
once the Download takes place.
A Master must decipher
and know the path from within.

For words are sequential and linear
and a Download is simultaneous and complete
bypassing the intellect.

A mere Moment of Genius
creates a permanent Reality Shift.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

The world teaches “step-by-step” creativity
and self exploration.

This is acceptable
for those who don't seek Mastery.

But not for the Master.
“Step-by-step” belongs to Perfect Practice —
preparation for a Download.

Genius requires a Master
who knows how to make its will manifest.
Not just another idea lost in the ether.

Genius will never choose
to be buried in a notebook,
left on a bucket list,
abandoned in a box in your garage,
or destined for the grave.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

A Master should not try to “understand” Genius
or the Download
or even Mastery.

To understand is to interfere.
And interference is Resistance.

For a Master without wonder
is a failure.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

Genius seeks to speak to many
for it is not self-serving.

It does not bury itself
in isolation, secrecy, or cleverness.
Genius is not for a select few
but always the whole.

It does not seek a select few,
but to serve all of humanity.

Genius serves humanity
and uses Masters
as its hands and feet.

Though a Master's Joy is personal,
Genius is never private
and does not choose those
who would keep it for themselves.

A Master honors this
and understands she belongs
to something larger
than her own work.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

Even better, when Masters collaborate
in raw, honorable pursuit of Genius
their potential is not added —
it is multiplied.

Genius reveals what cannot be seen alone.
Each Master becomes a mirror for the other —
expanding clarity,
intensifying attention,
removing the final traces of ego.

Collaboration at this level
creates what neither Master
could have summoned in isolation.

Superadditivity is not strategy,
but the natural mathematics
of Masters who have died to themselves
and belong to something larger.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

Genius satisfies.

Ego craves.

A Moment of Genius ends desire.

A moment of ego leaves you *wanting*.

Genius creates awe, gratitude, and a sense of completeness.

Ego creates hunger, restlessness, fantasy, and schemes.

One is fullness.

The other is appetite.

Genius converts patient discipline into fulfillment.

Ego converts revelation into appetite.

A Master knows the difference.

Genius leaves you still.

Ego leaves you starving.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

A Master does not seek suffering.
But does not waste it, either.

Suffering is not a badge of honor.
Nor a prerequisite.
Nor a performance enhancer.

But when it arrives —
and it will —
the Master knows what to do:

Let it burn
what was blocking the way.

Let it clear
what Joy could not.

Let it destroy
what Genius had no room to enter.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

Did you think this would be easy?

To die to yourself.

To find Joy.

To receive Genius.

Everything you want
requires a burial.

Are you willing to die?

What is your life
if not something meant to fall,
to break open like the grain,
to become more than itself?

Nothing grows
until something is surrendered.
Nothing emerges
until something disappears.

Exercises for accessing Genius

- **The Steward's Log** — Buy a pocket notebook. It is now your “Download Log.” For 7 days, write down every “flash” of insight you receive immediately — no matter how small, weird, or “irrelevant.” The Rule: Don't judge the idea. Just transcribe it. Learn to discern what is for you.
- **The 3-Second Pause** — When a moment of frustration or complexity hits (Resistance), stop for 3 seconds. Ask one question: “If I didn't need to get credit for solving this, what would the solution be?” Wait for the answer that is quiet, simple, and obvious. Do that.
- **The Novelty Lens** — Take a task you have performed a thousand times and refuse to see it as “the same.” Find what is *new* by looking for a specific, unique aspect of this iteration. Even repetition can be brand new.
- **The Assignment Acceptance** — When a “gift you did not want” arrives — an interruption or a change in direction — accept it immediately as an assignment. Refuse the urge to force your original plan, choosing what you were given over what you prefer.
- **The Superadditivity Test** — Partner with a respected peer to review a “Download” or project idea, forbidding all praise or “brainstorming.” Allow your partner to identify and cut every element that feels like cleverness, effort, or vanity, leaving only the what neither of you could have refined alone.
- **Listen** — Go for a walk. Let a problem bounce around in your head. Don't try to solve it. Imagine it being solved. How did you do it? What happened?
- **Stewardship Review** — Ask: “Was I faithful to what was given?” Not: “Was I impressive?” Genius measures obedience, not outcome.
- Go do something charitable for others.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

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GOING DEEPER

Genius is not an experience.
It is a Calling.

You do not choose your revelation.
It chooses you.
And with it comes purpose.

A Master belongs to the work,
not the other way around.
The Download is not personal achievement —
it is assignment.

Genius arrives
because something in the world
needs to be made,
clarified,
spoken,
or brought into form.

Your role is stewardship,
not authorship.

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Genius has chosen your hands
for a reason.

Some revelations arrive
as gifts you did not want.

Genius may interrupt your plans,
undo your ambitions,
or demand a direction
you never intended to take.

You may have to choose
what you feel you've been given
or what is safe.

There is no judgment in the choice
for those who remain Available.

But, be very clear:
it is a choice.

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The tougher the terrain,
the fewer remain.

Do not expect to be understood
or accompanied
on the journey to Genius.

The climb may get steep
to the point of impossibility
and friends will fall away.

Solitude is necessary,
but the summit is not the destination.

Genius often speaks from high in the mountains.
Yet even Moses returned to his tribe
after 40 days and 40 nights.

Because Genius is for others.

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Do not desire the mere *myth* of genius.

The reality of Genius
may not live up to your ego's expectations.

Responsibility with no guarantee of recognition,
where insight requires sacrifice.

Work that is "ahead of its time" and unappreciated,
perhaps until after your death.

Look at Vincent van Gogh,
who sold nothing in his lifetime.

J.S. Bach, forgotten after death
and "rediscovered" a century later by Mendelssohn.

Emily Dickinson, who barely published in her lifetime.
Her body of celebrated work was released posthumously.

Genius may be a gift, but not all gifts feel like blessings.
As my friend Greg Meredith wrote to me:
"Everybody wants genius. i wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy."

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

Beware the counterfeits.

Not every surge of energy is Genius.

Not every bright idea is revelation.

Not every thrill is Joy.

The ego can mimic the Moment.

It can offer adrenaline in place of peace,

ambition in place of Calling,

fantasy in place of form.

Ego's ideas are loud, urgent, and impatient.

They promise glory, validation, and attention.

Genius arrives quietly.

It does not flatter.

It does not rush.

It does not bargain.

It simply reveals

what is already true.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

Do not fall for “The Fool’s Choice.”

Ego will insist it is all-or-nothing.
That Genius will never reveal itself again.
That its revelation comes with pressure.

Genius does not demand perfection.
It does not threaten, coerce, or rush.

That is the voice of the Ego.
Or the voice of the world.
Charlatans, all of them.

The Fool’s Choice says:
“Do it *this* way or abandon the work.”

But Genius says:
“Be faithful to what you can carry today.”

Have faith.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

What does it take to decimate the ego?

Pray the “Litany of Humility.”

If you can.

Ask to be delivered from the desire to be:

Esteemed. Loved. Extolled. Honored. Praised.

Preferred to others. Consulted. Approved.

And delivered from the fear of being:

Humiliated. Despised. Rebuked. Slandered.

Forgotten. Ridiculed. Wronged. Suspected.

Then ask for the grace to desire that others be:

More loved than you.

Chosen before you.

Praised while you are unnoticed.

Preferred over you in everything.

And made holier than you —

so long as you become as holy as you should.

If this prayer terrifies you, your ego is still alive.

Exercises for going deeper

- **The Daily Examen** — At the end of your work day, sit in silence for 5 minutes. Review the day like a movie. Identify where you forced a result and where you received a result. Do not beat yourself up. simply acknowledge the difference. Repent of the force. Give thanks for the gift and close the day.
- **The Consolation Audit** — Review your day to distinguish between “Consolation” (where work felt inevitable, quiet, and aligned) and “Desolation” (where work felt loud, urgent, and draining). Use this data to map exactly when you were serving the assignment and when you were serving yourself.
- **The Hard Stop** — Set a strict start and end time for your deep work session and stop immediately when the alarm rings — even mid-sentence. This “death” of the work session breaks the illusion that you are holding the world together and proves you trust the assignment will be there tomorrow.
- **The Guest Protocol** — When an interruption occurs (a phone call, a crisis, a child), refuse the urge to feel Resistance. Pivot instantly and treat the interruption as if it were the Genius itself arriving in disguise, for the interruption is often the real assignment.
- **The Ownership Renunciation** — Walk through your workspace or look at your bank account and say out loud, “I own none of this. It is not mine. I am holding it for a while.” Practice the mental posture of the steward who is ready to hand back the keys at any moment without grief.
- **The Vapor Visualization** — Spend two minutes visualizing your own funeral and the complete forgetting of your name and achievements. Use this reality check to crush the vanity of “legacy” and free yourself to do the work for the sake of it.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

- **Rejecting the Fool's Choice** — Catch yourself thinking you *must* “do everything or abandon the work.” That’s the voice of the ego. Instead, do only what you can complete today and make a plan for completion. Then follow through.
- **Fidelity Without Consolation** — Continue a disciplined practice during a period of boredom, dryness, or lack of inspiration. Do not seek feeling. Depth is revealed in perseverance.
- **Delay the Narrative** — When something meaningful happens, resist telling anyone about it immediately. Let the meaning settle before interpretation.
- **Look for Genius in Others** — Make a list of the people you admire most. How have you seen Genius in their lives? Have you told them? If not, pick up the phone.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

If you are Serious about Genius, answer these questions:

1. Are you willing to die to yourself?
2. Do you want Genius, or do you want credit?
3. Do you crave praise, approval, or recognition?
4. Do you practice patient discipline when no one is watching?
5. Do you withhold judgment of your work and of yourself?
6. Do you seek Joy more than validation?
7. Do you know how to disappear inside your craft?
8. Do you honor what is entrusted to you?
9. Are you willing to receive a direction you did not ask for?
10. Do you still believe Genius is “yours”?

Answer honestly.

Genius is not an entitlement.

It is a *gift revealed*.

Core concepts

Mastery — The disciplined refinement of skill, taste, and judgment that prepares the vessel for revelation.

Self-Death — The removal of egoic noise, identity, and self-concern; the prerequisite for Presence.

Resistance — Any interior movement arising from fear, pride, insecurity, or vanity that blocks Genius.

Joy — The interior state of selfless Presence where the work becomes the reward, not the means.

Presence — The disappearance of past and future in a single Moment of undivided attention.

Availability — The receptive posture of being open without demand, expectation, or self-protection.

Love — The animating force that elevates the work and signals readiness for revelation.

The Moment — The point in time when Mastery, Self-Death, Joy, Presence, and Availability converge.

The Download — The arrival of complete form without sequence, method, or explanation.

Genius — Revelation entrusted to the Master for the sake of others.

Reality Shift — The permanent reorientation that follows a Moment of Genius.

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Virtues and Traits

Humility — Accuracy about one's place in the order of things; the self shrinks so truth can appear.

Patience — The refusal to rush revelation; the willingness to let the Moment ripen on its own terms.

Discipline — The steady cultivation of craft, attention, and love for the work.

Stillness — The quiet interior life that makes recognition possible.

Courage — The willingness to accept the burden of revelation and the cost of obedience.

Obedience — Surrender to the form presented, not the form desired.

Faith — Confidence that Genius will return, that the work is meaningful, and that you are not the source.

Gratitude — The natural response to revelation — the antidote to ego.

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Mechanics of Genius

Preparation — Perfect Practice refines the vessel.

Self-Death — Ego collapses; Resistance dissolves.

Joy — The heart becomes light and ready.

Presence — Attention sharpens to a single point.

Availability — The vessel opens without demand.

Revelation — Form arrives — complete, simultaneous, undeniable.

Stewardship — The Master carries the burden faithfully.

Fulfillment — Genius satisfies. Ego craves.

Reality Shift — Life is permanently altered by what was received.

Die to Self. Find Joy. Access Genius.

The final word

Anyone who's read this far
is at least semi-serious about getting Serious.

Perhaps you have already Conquered in your life
and are looking at what is next.
You may sense it requires a different approach.

Perhaps Mastery has not translated
from one domain to another.

Perhaps you have a creative ambition
that has eluded you and remains unresolved.

You can, of course, go it alone.
But this work sometimes benefits
from another person who is willing to be direct.

I am Available:
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Notes

