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Designing Your Life Worth Living | Dave Evans

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The Veritas Forum

Dave Evans teaches “Designing Your Life” – Stanford University’s most popular class. He is an entrepreneur who led the design of Apple’s first mouse, and co-founded Electronic Arts before becoming a Consulting Assistant Professor at Stanford.

Transcript

Welcome to the Veritas Forum. This is the Veritas Forum Podcast. A place where ideas and beliefs converge.

What I'm really going to be watching is which one has the resources in their worldview to be tolerant, respectful, and humble toward the people they disagree with. How do we know whether the lives that we're living are meaningful? If energy, light, gravity, and consciousness are in history, don't be surprised if you're going to get an element of this in God. Today we're from Dave Evans, Adjunct Lecturer, Product Design Program at Stanford, Management Consultant, and Co-Founder of Electronic Arts, as he discusses the methodology and philosophy of designing your life worth living.

Moderated by Professor of Religious Studies at Cal Poly, Stephen Lloyd Moffatt, from the stage at Cal Poly and San Luis Obispo. So we're talking about designing your life worth living, right? How do you think your life's like interesting to you? You're like "It's like matters to you." Okay, yeah. So that's what we're talking about.

Now, so we're coming from a couple of different points of view. So first of all, sure enough, I am the co-founder of the Stanford Life Design Lab, the D Life Lab in the design school. We love to put a D in front of things and call it "designy." And so, you know, we teach courses, we develop material, and now actually teach other universities how to do the kind of things that we're doing.

And then over time we wrote this book that Megan mentioned, which is now like all over the place, 600,000 copies, 23 different languages. Actually, the second book "Designing Your Work Life" is actually on pre-sale now, shipping in a couple of weeks. So we're doing

this book thing, and then you're going to these veritas people say, "Hey, come down to Cal Poly and talk to these people." So really, the question comes up right off the bat.

You know, this "Designing Your Life Worth Living." This is like the big question, but against that big question, so where are you coming from? I mean, who is this guy? You know, so are we getting the Stanford Design Education Guide? We're in the Silicon Valley Startup Guide? We're getting like the popular book guy? You know, are we getting like the Christianly approved, talk to large groups of people guy? So, because you're getting over the field we're coming from, right? So here's the thing. So veritas people, so, you know, they think Jesus rocks the house, and accordingly, we would like to not so much, you know, proselytize that, or what have you, but facilitate thoughtful conversations on questions of importance, because if we want to be thoughtful people living meaningful lives, you know, they're asking the same big questions that people have been asking since the beginning of consciousness, you know, and the ability to think. It turns out if you're a person of faith, actually, in any wisdom tradition, certainly Christianity would be included here, then hopefully you have a core competency in what we in the Design School would call "Life and Vocational Wayfinding." You know, that we're trying to help have a core competency in "Life and Vocational Wayfinding," i.e. this figure it out thing.

Turns out life is actually an improv skit, you are just making it up as you go, but you can get good at making it up as you go. So, faith traditions claim to be good at making it up as you go, or learning how to discern your way forward. So, the reason Veritas wants to host the conversation is because that's something we care about.

Now, tonight, this is not an explicitly Christian presentation per se, it's not an explicitly un-Christian one. My partner at Stanford, Bill Burnett, is a Nietzsche-loving atheist. I'm a Jesus-revering person trying to live in a faithful world.

You know, we agree on most everything we do together. This is an inclusive conversation. Why is it an inclusive conversation? By the way, am I talking too fast for you? No, good.

I'm not going to slow it down. I just wanted to know. We haven't got much time.

Because the current moniker of design thing, we talk about design thinking. We have the D school at Stanford. We teach this stuff all the time.

That's actually the new name about a dozen, 15 years old for a thing that's about 60 years old called human-centered design, HCD. Anybody working on HCI stuff? Human computer interface stuff? UX? UI? Okay. All that stuff is downstream of what was originally HCD.

Human-centered design. Human-centered design is human in two ways, not just one, but 90 percent of the time, 90 percent of the people get it 50 percent right, which is we think

human-centered means ergonomic as good for the human user. It's about that for sure.

But it's also about how do human designers design? How do we work together? How does collaboration occur? How do we think? How do we ideate? So I want to humanly design things that humans can humanly use. That's like way human. That's what we're trying to go for here.

And it turns out that if Jesus were here, he would say, look, I would argue that the fundamental invitation of the Christian faith is to become fully human. So really on the same page, or if you get the human thing right, you can't go wrong, which is why I design thinking, Christian, you get along just fine. You know, and I happen to teach them both.

And so I can speak out of you just out of my mouth tonight without having any hypocrisy problems. So that's the whole sort of where these people coming from. I do ascribe to the faith that was the motivation for Veritas to do this thing, but this isn't a Bible class.

This is a question being looked at from a very broad human point of view about what does it mean to design a life worth living? Okay, so that's where we're coming. So what does it mean to design a life worth living? What's that all about? Well, you know, that brings up the question, what is my purpose? I want my life to matter. I want my life to be worth living.

But I have to figure out my purpose so that I can direct my life accordingly, right? Doesn't that make sense? Now, maybe that's not necessarily the killer word that you maybe that's not the primary word you had in mind. But it's really I need to figure it out. Maybe it's my passion.

What's my passion? Or what's my calling or what's my meaning making thing? What's what means something to me? You know, what's what's my superpower? That's post-marble movies. That's what we want to ask now. It's my superpower, you know, or what is my vocation? That's got an old word.

What what mission am I on? What impact do I want to have in the world? You know, these are the kind of words that come up when we talk about this stuff. There's a whole bunch of words in addition to purpose. Now, there's a problem with purpose.

So my friend Bill Damon at Stanford who runs the Center for Adolescence. He runs the Center for Adolescence at Stanford. He's a worldwide recognized person in a young adult formation, particularly focusing on the question of purpose.

So his book, *The Path to Purpose* is one of the more regarded things on the science of purpose navigation. Now, by the way, since he studies adolescence, does that apply to you? Up to what age do you think Bill studies people? Because he studies adolescence. 27, that's right.

Why? Because your near cortex isn't even formed until you're 27 years old, a little later in men. Oh, what a surprise. Okay.

So, so Bill goes out and tries to orient himself to how are people relating to purpose and how purpose fall, if you will, are people becoming? And with no pre-wired orientation, he finds that people fall into four categories and the roughly, particularly young adults, fall in four categories, roughly the same size and they are these. Number one, there are the disengaged. About 25% of people are disengaged.

They're disengaged on the question of purpose for a variety of reasons. They're just distracted. Now, thinking about it, their disillusioned, they tried and they failed and I'm giving up, you know, the world is not my friend or they're dysfunctional.

You know, I mean, you got to get off that meth thing. You got to stop being manager mom before we can even have the conversation. There's something going on in the way.

So, a lot of ways to be disengaged, one in four people are disengaged. Then we have the dabblers, 31%. Dabblers and the next category, the dreamers.

You got dabblers and dreamers. Dabblers are people who are, I'll try a little of this. I'll try a little of that.

You know, I think, no, maybe not that, maybe this other thing, you know, they keep trying things out and they sort of never get there and they're dabbling, dabbling, dabbling, never really able to connect with anything in particular. The dreamer, very different, really cares, real climate change. It is about climate change, you know, and they're so committed, they are not going to sell out.

You know, they're waiting for the right thing, you know, so they're still pulling lattes on the swing shift, Starbucks, you know, waiting for the right climate change opportunity, but they're dreaming, you know, is keeping them from engaging because they won't compromise. We used to say they're so heavenly minded, they're no earthly good. Here's the deal.

I don't think in history, there has ever been a time when there are more things to distract you that can get you disengaged. When it is easier to be a dabbler, it's called the gig economy now, we can't fix it, we featured it. So it turns out, you know, doing lots of different things at the same time, multitasking is now a feature, not a bug.

So it's really easy to be a dabbler. How many of you have a miner who's got two who's doing a fifth year? Okay, yeah, so you know, who's, I mean, Bill's pretty convinced 80% of master's degrees are just an unwillingness to graduate. You know, it's a form of dabbling, at great expense, you know, so it's really easy to dabbler right now.

And if you want to be a dreamer, we have a terrific set of global issues around which to

connect yourself to a dreaming concern, and whether it's income inequality or racism, or gender, fairness, and justice, or whether, you know, it's climate change, there are some really upsetting things going on right now, worldwide and populist polarization, and you could really get committed to those things. And so the risk of being disengaged, dabbling, or dreaming has never been greater. And even awakening to one of those things late in the day can be kind of terrifying.

And only about 20%, it was about 10 years ago, were well directed, had figured out a direction they wanted to go, were able to navigate the compromise of making the real decision of doing a real thing in real time. It's not perfect. It's not a dreamer job, but it's on the way to get somewhere.

And what we don't want to do, of course, is I think we want to be the directed people, we don't need to get stuck in one of these other holes. Okay, so that's what I want. How do you get there? Back to what is my purpose? I want to be one of these purposeful directed people.

What is my purpose? I got to answer that question, right? Actually, I think wrong. I'm going to give you three reasons why that's the wrong question. Three reasons why what's my purpose trying to solve that problem is a bad problem.

In design, we talk about problem finding before problem solving. That's what the empathy step is all about. And frankly, most of the time things don't work, it's because you're working on the wrong thing.

So the first thing up, why is this the wrong question, Dave? Well, according to my buddy, George Valiant, that's kind of George Valiant, who was the last and the longest running project manager of the Grant Study. Anybody heard of the Grant Study? Any sec majors? The Grant Study was a long running behavioral study. It started in 1936.

It's not referenced often because it's a profoundly undiverse study. 236 white male sophomores at Harvard College. Let's study them.

How representative? Oh, and they did a working class, mostly white construction workers studied the same time to balance the study out. Now, for the purposes of our conversations, and I will argue that that astonishing lack of diversity actually empowers the particular takeaway we're going to look for. So we're going to drop in briefly on a short video that's hopefully a lot enough to hear.

It's bad graininess, but you can hear George talking about. So finally, once everybody died, by the way, interesting people were in this thing, including John F. Kennedy, the president, and William Bradley, the head of the Washington Post, and Watergate came out, and a bunch of people you never heard of. And he talked about what did we learn watching these men over a 50, 60 year period of time at different stages of their life.

And he's chatting about you. He's chatting about the young adult phase and the SM interesting things to say. I mean, the take home lesson is always to enjoy where you are.

The latter. It's all right that young people can do the things that they can do. I mean, the youth, that the old envy is accompanied by the miserable process of getting from 25 to 35.

We've got all this health and all this youth, and you're scared, stiff, but when it's all said and done, you're not going to amount to a hill of beans. And if you just wait, virtually all the men, by the time they were 45 or 50, amount it to something. Knowing that is such relief, and you just don't know it at 30.

Okay. Thanks, George. I mean, so, you know, the miserable process of getting from 25 to 35, isn't that encouraging? And because what? Because you're scared, stiff.

The life is not really going to work out, you know, but if you just wait, I mean, all of them in by 45 or 55, and most of you, I'm sure, are thrilled to wait 30 years until life makes sense, you know, it all kind of works out and that's such relief. You just don't know it at 30. And most of you are somewhere on the order of a decade away from that.

So good luck. We'll just see you later. Here's the point.

Now, first of all, think, who are these guys? You have a sophomore class of 1936. How old are you in your sophomore or second year? You're 19. Okay, so what's going on around 1936? We're a little after that.

Think of World War II, right? So you're 25 years older in World War II. What do you do? You go to the war. So, you know, only the guys that survived the war stayed in the study.

So who are these guys? White, male, World War II veteran, Harvard graduates, working in the 1950s, coming out of a war era during the greatest expansion of capitalism on the face of the Earth, making the world safer democracy and capitalism. Now, do you think these are the guys? They're all guys, white guys, you know, who would say, gosh, I'm so upset. My boss won't let me bring my yoga mat to work.

I just don't think he really gets me. I don't think so. I think these guys are kicking button, taking names and making the world safer democracy and succeeding.

And yet, even those kind of guys, these greatest generation men behind the closed door with the people the white coats and the clipboards, when they're asked the honest question, how's it going? They're scared stiff. Is this really what I had in mind? Is this really the life I meant to live? If they're feeling it, maybe we would too. From the little tip to the religious story, you know, and Moses, when it was about 40 years old, took it in his mind to go down to visit the children visual.

He was the chief of staff to Pharaoh at the time undercover. That was a long time ago. Moses started thinking about who I really want to be in his 40s.

All right, Jesus says, a mama's boy doesn't even leave home until he's 31. I mean, come on. Takes a long time to make a Messiah, apparently.

So here, look, so this has been going on for some time. Now reason number two, this is a lousy question like, which one? Which life should it be? Which purpose maybe should it be? So we have to ask an important question here, which is how many lives are you? This is what we're going to do. This is a scientifically minded university.

So we're going to do a Godokan experiment. Who knows what that says? Somebody here should know. I thought experiment.

Godokan is German for thinking. So we're going to think and experiment. These are very important in the history of science.

Without Godokan experiments, we wouldn't have the theory of relativity. Einstein did them all the time. Without them, we wouldn't have the Hubble telescope.

You know, that's kind of stuff. So stuff we can do in our head because the conditions on earth don't work or the science isn't available yet. But we can imagine our way into it.

We're going to do one of these right now. Here are the conditions of your Godokan experiment. Assume with me, if you will.

Number one, the multiverse is true. There are infinite parallel universes, but angstroms are part of what we knew how to measure in the 19th dimension. Just assume with me that that is true.

Thing one, thing two, thing two, string theory is correct. We actually now have access to it so we can run worm hole management systems where you actually can obtain concurrent consciousness across the veils of the multiverse universes. I.e., you can be as many people as you want and aware of all of your parallel selves.

How cool is that? But there's this one. Number three thing about the multiverse is kind of weird. The multiverse abhors a vacuum, a wasted space of consciousness.

So you can have a life in as many universes as you want, but not more than you will actually use. It doesn't want you to waste lives. So the question is how many lives are you? See one thing Bill and I have noticed in her work is that all of us contain more aliveness than one life time will permit you to live out.

I.e., there's more than one of you in there. Another question is how many? How many you got? Imagine you could live as many lives as you wanted to. You could be as many versions of you as you wanted.

You could even take the ones you really like and repeat them like my daughter Lisa. First time at Disneyland, age of eight thought a really interesting way to spend seven and a half hours of us ride Dumbo 42 times in a row. You want to do 42 Dumbo lives? Go for it.

That's fine. You can have all you want, just don't waste them. So I want you to be thinking of a number right now.

How many lives, how many alive nuses worth of living are you? If they're free, just don't waste them. I'm going to go one, two, three. When I would have said four, you shot out your number nice and loud because I want to hear what this group thinks about how many lives you are.

Okay, get your number. I am, how many slots in the multiverse? You're ready. One, two, three, or three thousand.

I didn't. I very often I'll hear one using it in the back of the room. One.

I'm committed to the one life I have. I'm not asking for more. And if there are any ones in the room, I get that that ideological position.

Bless you for that, but that's okay. Now, so I heard a thousand right over here. Here's the interesting thing.

By the way, I lied. That's a complete lie. You only get one.

But back to the purpose question, if there's more than one lifetime's worth of you in there, might there be more than one purpose for you? And could that change over time? How many of you are hoping that when you leave this place 20 years from now, you are doing something we can't even talk about today because it doesn't exist yet. Who wants that life? Okay, about a third of you. How do you plan for that? How are you supposed to discern right now the purpose of the thing that doesn't even exist yet? All right, you're going to be thinking about these relationships with this purpose question.

Okay, reason three, this is the wrong question. It's the wrong metaphor. That's a guy named Alan Watts.

Alan Watts is no longer with us, been gone a long time. One of the first guys in the West to bring Eastern thinking to the West. And he said a lot of very interesting things.

And he particularly talked about education and life goals that we're preparing young people for, i.e. you. And of course, because they're so philosophically minded, the guys at South Park decided that they should illustrate this talk. Now, so the South Park guys illustrated a little talk by Alan Watts, which I'm not going to let you listen into.

And we'll see if this sounds resonant to anybody in the room. In music, one doesn't make the end of a composition the point of the composition. If that were so, the best

conductors would be those who play fast.

And there would be composers who wrote only a finale. People go to conference, just see how one crashing chord. Because that's the end.

But we don't see that as something brought by our education into our everyday conduct. We've got a system of schooling that gives a completely different impression. It's all graded.

And what we do is we put the child into the corridor of this grade system with the kind of, "Come on kitty kitty kitty!" And yeah, you're going to kindergarten, you know. And that's a great thing because when you finish that, you'll get into first grade. And then come on, first grade leads to second grade and so on.

And then you get out of grade school, you've got high school, and it's revving up. The thing is coming. Then you're going to go to college, by a job and you get into graduate school.

And when you're through with graduate school, you go out to join the world. And then you get into some racket where you're selling insurance. And they've got that quota to make.

And you're going to make that. And all the time, the thing is coming. It's coming.

It's coming. That great thing, the success you're working for. Then when you wake up one day, about 40 years old, you say, "My God, I've arrived.

I'm there!" And you don't feel very different from what you always felt. And there's a slight letdown because you feel there's a hoax. And there was a hoax, a dreadful hoax.

They made you miss everything. And we thought of life by analogy with a journey, with a pilgrimage, which had a serious purpose at the end. The thing was to get to that end.

Success or whatever it is, or maybe heaven after your dead. But we missed the point the whole way along. It was a musical thing.

And you were supposed to sing or dance while the music was being played. Now again, that's just one point of view. But how many of you recognize that here kitty-kitty thing? Everybody here ever taken an advanced class, you know, getting to the honors group, here kitty-kitty, you can get him to Cal Poly.

If you major in the right thing. Now, here's the thing. You talked about the destination versus the journey.

There's a classic situation. Is it the journey that... No, no, no. It's not about the destination.

It's about the journey. The journey is the destination. The journey is the destination.

Yeah. It must be present to win. All that really cool kind of stuff.

Here's the problem. That's not what he said. I mean, you may think the journey is the destination.

That's fine. I'm not heard argue with you. But what Alan was saying was not that the journey is the destination.

Because even then, if the point of the journey is rationalized by virtue of the quality or the nobility of its destination, you're just supposed to pay attention along the way. You're still missing it. He's saying it's no.

It's not the journey versus the destinations. The journey versus the dance. Are you joining the dance? It's actually about the participative experience, not the purposeful end per se.

That's a different metaphor. Now, is that the right one or not? That's a fugitive side. We're going to get to that.

But so, what I'm going to suggest to you, I'm going to send out on the question of purpose. What we do reframes all the time in design is we talk about dysfunctional beliefs. Everybody here actually opened the book.

Can we actually like out the book? Or have you been forced to read it by somebody? Okay. So, the books are organized around a bunch of dysfunctional beliefs, followed by a reframe. By the way, Jesus used to do that all the time.

You go, you have heard it said, but I say unto you. That's a reframe. So, dysfunctional beliefs is, I have to know my purpose in order to plan and pursue a life worth living.

And I'm saying, no, you don't. In fact, it's a bad idea. The reframe is, I can live purposefully starting right now, and I can keep building a worthwhile life as I go along.

So, my shift is going to be from, it may seem a minor one grammatically, but I think operationally it's huge. So, I need to know my purpose. So, I'm going to live purposefully.

It's a way of doing things, not a thing of doing things. Okay. Now, this thing about way, versus thing, that in fact actually was what Jesus was mostly talking about.

So, if you, you've, regardless of what your relationship with Jesus is, you've probably heard of doubting Thomas. Yeah. Well, doubting Thomas is known for him to put my hand in his side, I won't believe and all that stuff.

But then a conversation continues. As interesting, regardless of what you think about the

historicity of all this, it's from the part of the gospels that include the risen Jesus, post-resurrection Jesus, talking with Thomas. So, this is like the really, really important Jesus, totally listened to him.

We know he's the credible guy, he raised from the dead, and that's a very credibleizing thing on your CV. So, and Jesus had just been talking to people and he said, "And you know the way where I am going." And Thomas pops up and he goes, "Lord, how do we know the way if we do not know where you're going?" Now, Thomas is all of us. Thomas goes, "Whoa, whoa, whoa." He just said, "You know the way, I don't know the way because I don't know where I'm going.

I can't know the way unless I know where I'm going." It's all about the destination. And Jesus replies, "I am the way." What I meant by that was this way of being in the world, this consciousness, this manner of living I'm talking about, that's it. It's about the way it's about a kind of a personhood that I'm talking to you about.

So, this idea of what is my way versus what is my thing or my destination or my outcome or my goal are really different ways of being in the world. So, do you want to be a knowing person or a living person? I've got time to get into the knowing thing that's kind of a Greek orientation. You know, let's know stuff.

And what Jesus is talking about, what I'm talking about with design talks about because we have a bias to action is let's do stuff. So, living purposefully is different than knowing your purpose. Okay, now the pre-rec, pre-rec reset to living purposefully, one of many, could be coherency.

What do I mean by coherency? What I mean by that is connecting these three doubts. Who you are, what you believe in, what you do. If you can, according to the research on meaning-making, which is a broad field of psychology now, in the positive psychology realm, if you can interconnect these dots, which means of course you have to be able to articulate them, your chance of experiencing meaning-making goes way up.

So, if you take our class, you actually do the exercises in the book, we have some stuff to help you figure this out and work on some of these definitions on what it means about who am I, what I believe and what I'm doing. Now, the question then becomes, okay, where do we start? I didn't get my dots. I went through a new student orientation that didn't hand me my little package of dots to connect.

Where do I get these? How do we start this conversation? Well, very often when we start this conversation, we run into the classic tension, again, particularly in Western culture, between being and doing. Am I human being or am I human doing? Hi, what do you do? We get so tired of being treated like I'm a human doing. Hi, what are you studying? Hi, oh, what are you going to do with that? I'm majoring in an anthro.

You want to do the two anthro majors here at Cal Poly. You know, and then of course, hey, what are you going to do with that? As though that's who you are. I'm sick of that.

I'm sick of that. I'm not a doing I'm a being. This is a zero sum game.

Most dichotomies are. So the reframe on this is don't get stuck in this human doing being thing. What you want to do is have what we call the generative cycle of being doing and becoming.

See, if we're actually embodied persons, if you're actually you're an embodied intelligence, you're not a brand on a transport system, you are a human being. And you're going to grow over time. And life's going to be like totally different after your 2070.

You have an entire brain working with you. So you start with who you are. You got to start with the reality of who you are.

And it includes who you're not. I don't know if mom told you you can be anything you want to be. It's not true.

You can be lots of things. We're going to be a thousand things, but you can't be anything. I mean, there's like no fast twitch muscles anywhere in my gene pool.

I may be tall, but I am white and I cannot jump. So basketball is not in my future, other than on the couch. And in this year, the war is not even that's working.

So I can be a human being, then I go do stuff, get out of the world and do things. And if you're paying attention while you're doing things, which again is optional, change is inevitable, growth is optional. If I'm going to grow by paying attention, I'm going to be becoming.

In fact, I start noticing even the things I choose to do, I can anticipate what part of my personality, what part of my personhood I'm going to be investing in as I become part of what you're doing is choosing who you're going to grow into of the many people you could actually find a assemble finally assemble right there standing in your own shoes. So let's get this thing working for us. Now that means a bias toward action, I joined the dance get out there and started doing stuff.

So it's story time. So I'm not going to give you a couple of illustrations out of my own life. And by the way, I've got more material than I think the time has because I'm never giving this talk this way.

I have no idea how long it's going to last. We'll just see. So let's talk about how to do the B do become, how to do this generative cycle really badly.

You know, so out of my own left can talk about how not to do this at all. And then talk

about a certain angle on this we want to learn something about and make some sense out of a piece of paper that you found when you walked in, we'll get to that later. And then maybe one more story about doing it right.

So literally, why do we teach this course? Where did this really come from? This comes from the intense pain I experienced as a sophomore, 19 year old sophomore in 1973. I'm by the way, I'm 66, about to be 67. I got five adult kids, I got eight grandkids.

Anybody here got more than eight grandkids? I didn't think so. I win. Okay.

So like I'm way old. I've had time to do a lot of things wrong. And so I go to college and I wanted to become a marine biologist.

I wanted to follow Jacques Cousteau. I fell in love with Jacques Cousteau and I was a kid watching the TV show. I loved the TV show, The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau.

Jacques Cousteau invented the Aqualung. You may not have even done that. And I noticed he was doing this really cool work because he got to make movies swimming with seals that go cool.

You can be paid to swim with the seal. I want that job. And I noticed that he's getting old and I go, oh, when Jacques dies, I will take over the clip.

So that's my life plan. That was his research. But I forgot to notice he had three sons, by the way, who were in line ahead of me and took over the work.

But nonetheless, that was my plan. I didn't do any checking it out. I didn't do any of the kind of stuff I would recommend you do.

I just made this thing up watching television and stuck with it for about the next 12 years. I go to Stanford, I get in, they let me in, I go, they have no marine biology program for undergraduates. Nobody even cares about that stuff.

So well, biology's in the name. Let's just major in biology is probably pretty similar, not even close. And I'm going along.

And while I'm major in biology, I really don't like it at all. I'm not very good at it. And in my sophomore year, one of my TAs, my lab TAs, comes to me and says, Dave, we'd like to have a conversation with you.

We notice you're not really enjoying the work. And by the way, you don't do it very well. We have a recommendation.

We would like to recommend you drop the major and do something else. The only thing you do well is argue for your grade. Somebody thought maybe you should be a lawyer.

Please quit. How many of you had a TA? Literally say, please leave my department. It's a really affirming experience.

So of course, I knew the guy was full of crap. I blew him off, stuck with it. You know, it's not only go to the fall of my junior year and at the end of that quarter, the same thing in the next lecture.

You know, Dave, I was talking to John, your TA last quarter. We've gotten together. Really, we love it if you quit, Dave.

You socket this. You're really bad and you're argumentative and you're annoying the other students. Please leave.

We can't make you, but please leave. So I'm beginning to get the sense that maybe this doesn't work. And I'm thinking maybe I should change my mind.

Maybe I should do something different. And it suddenly occurs to me. I'm on scholarship.

I'm on California State Scholarship. My family's broke. My father died when I was a kid.

We have no money. And I got to get out in four years. Everybody here got that get out in four years thing, kind of making a little nervous.

Yeah. Welcome to Cal Poly. It's impossible.

It's getting better. Stephen tells me, it's getting better. You just get impossible.

But you can't even get the classes, right? So I got to get done. And there's no fifth year stick around, do the intern thing. That's not going to work.

I can't afford it. So I suddenly realized on Thanksgiving break, right, in the fall quarter of my junior year at Stanford, I want to dump biology and change majors. Oh my God, if I'm going to get some other degree, I probably got to get a go.

I have five quarters left to finish something that isn't biology. And I have no idea what it is. So the day after Thanksgiving, Friday morning, I sit down with then was a book rather than a website called the courses and degrees about that thick.

And I started reading the description of every single one of the 64 majors, assuming one of them's going to jump out and say, it's me. I'm your purpose in life. And you're going to love it.

And then I'll jump to that and I'll get through it. And about three in the afternoon comes along. And I've read through the whole thing.

Nothing. Nothing jumps up and says, it's worth doing. I must admit, do it again.

So read them through again quickly. Second path, nothing. That's the technical term.

The part in the French. And my mother, bless her heart, is in the kitchen, you know, and she goes, well, that I'm interning. She goes, I've always thought you'd make a good engineer, just thought I'd mentioned that.

And of course, in my day, because I was an anti-war guy during the Vietnam era, you know, and you know, engineers make me bomb and kill people, not going there. A very broad minded understanding of the field of engineering. And so I went back to the engineering school and started reading not the majors, but the classes, the class.

I mean, maybe there's one class out of the 1500 classes they teach at Stanford. Maybe there's one worth taking. Just one.

And I found one. ME 103, introduction to machines, where you got to make a cool thing. And I've been, you know, just just maddling and not reassembling things in the garage for a long time.

My mother was actually right. And well, that looks like it's kind of fun. Okay, I'll be a mechanical engineer.

I don't even know what that means. Eight o'clock in the morning, the next Monday, I come in to Wild Bill Reynolds office who is the chair of the mechanical engineering department, because I know I'm going to need help to get through this thing. And I said, Dr. Reynolds, my name is David.

I'm on scholarship. I got five quarters to go. I'm a bio major.

Can you get me an Emmy degree by a year from June? And he said, did you bring a transcript? As a matter of fact, I did. So I handed my transcript. It goes, okay.

And he gets out the green quadrilateral pad that all engineers have handed at all times. And he opens the courses and degrees and he puts his head down and he's in a bit office floppy here. He's a mathematician and he starts writing.

45 minutes ago. 35 minutes of those 45 ago. Dr. Reynolds.

And he goes, he goes, he goes, he goes, he throws away a wrench and then he finds goes, he's got one. He goes, good. Here.

And I go, what's that? It goes walking to the mechanical engineering department. I'm your major. Take those classes.

You get a degree. Get out of my office. So I got breath credit for basket weaving.

I barely got and then halfway through my senior year, I was taking advanced

thermodynamics and freshman physics at the same time. The prof would say things like, now you may recall from your early physics, it goes, we haven't covered that yet. It was horrible.

This is an incredibly bad way to go to college. Okay. Do not do this.

How many of you are already senior? How do you see? Junior's and seniors? First and second years? Okay. Don't do this. Okay.

The, dear God, if nothing else happens, just don't do this. The, so, you know, then I'm almost on my senior year and Dr. Reynolds company says, by the way, please apply for the co-term master's degree. The fifth year getting a master's say, well, gosh, Dr. Reynolds, I'm not really sure I want to do that.

I can't wait for it. He says, I don't think you heard me apply for the master's degree. Well, you know, I only said, you're not listening.

I've already secured funding for you. You haven't learned a damn thing. You got to stay here another year.

I won't give you a bachelor's unless you get the master's sign up. That's the deal. Do you understand? Got it.

So I have a master's in thermosciences, because it was required. I hate it every minute of it. The, now, while I was working on the master's, I'm still trying to make some sense out of this thing.

And then I'm walking through the student union and they look up and there's a news special. There's oil crisis. The OPEC, OPEC invented itself about this time.

And there were hour long lines of cars at the gas station where gas was \$1. \$1. My god, you know, Western capitalism will crash on that.

So, and I went, oh, that's it. That's my purpose. I will solve the energy crisis.

I found one, you know, like climate change. So, and I, and so I came out with a master's in thermosciences. I was a designated Stanford advanced energy technologist in 1976.

A little thing that was not in the brochure was open away, nobody cares. You have now been carefully trained for an industry that will not exist for the next 35 years. I spent four years trying to be an advanced energy technologist and an advanced energy field that wasn't there.

Very hard to go to a party that hasn't started. And I'll stop here because I'm running way over time. Then I got a phone call with a welding torch in my hand doing a little bit of labor on the side for some guys trying to do a startup and solar energy that failed, of

course.

But I'm welding together a solar energy test rig and a guy at Apple Computer Calls and says, we'd like to talk to you. And he said, oh, you mean that Dave Evans did to you the packer. Dave Evans is a very common white guy name.

I'm the fourth, my son's the fifth, he's the sixth. We just can't think of a new name. You know, there were 4,000 Dave Evans's on AOL, the first week it opened.

I mean, you can get Dave Evans's in six packs at Costco anytime you want. And I'd been getting the other Dave Evans's mail for years. So no, no, you want the computer scientist guy at Hewlett Packer named Dave Evans, not me.

And I hung up the phone. And they called back and they called back and no, no, we want to talk to you. I go, no, you don't, you don't want to talk to me.

You're wrong. And by the way, I don't want to talk to you anyway, because computers are so boring. So don't bother me.

You know, by the way, this is not how to get a job. Apple Venice now is so arrogant if anybody hangs up if that's not you, they persisted until they finally forced me to having lunch with them 14 conversations later to their great surprise they offered me a job into my astonishment. I took it because I had no interest in this technology.

That's how I became the world's first mouse product manager in 1979. I have no interest in what they're doing at all at the time. But they had a purpose which is to make computing friendly.

And maybe the person should be in charge, not the machine should be in charge. And that was happening. That was a happening thing.

This energy thing was not happening. And I suddenly realized you just got invited to get a front row seat on a bus going to a very cool destination that you don't want to go to with a bunch of smart people that you're going to work really hard and try to change the world. Or you can stay in this corner, I'll buy yourself naked with a sand board sandrit sign on to going stop killing the dinosaurs.

You know, what do you want to do, Dave? You want to get nowhere on the thing you care about? You want to get somewhere in the thing maybe you could learn your way into? And I said, try the bus. So purposefully got me into a totally different place. And I learned over time ways of thinking that might be and more happened and more happened and we go to this thing we're doing now.

But you know, if I had stuck to my purpose, nothing would have happened. It makes something happen in the world. Do you care? Are you any good at it? Is it even

happening yet? Is there some way to get in? You got to get a lot of things going at the same time to make a connection.

And you might want to be a little adaptable. Now, one more thing. So the second story that will get us to this little thing we're going to do very briefly is another conversation.

So I spent a lot of time talking to a lot of people like you and this one woman who is just about done reaching her passion goal, which is to become a public health policy developer serving communities, moving health care from remediation of illness and pathology toward wellness. So she was an early wellness advocate and wanted to bring it into the public sector. Great noble enterprise.

And she was just about there being done with her MPH master's in public health. And she was doing an internship with the county and about to get the job that would allow her to do exactly what she'd been trying to do for 12 years. She's well into her 30s now.

But I'm going to school forever. It comes from a poor family had to work full time all the way through school. I go, you know, this is great.

This is working fine. What are we talking about? She goes, wow, I'm struggling. Well, Helen, what's the problem? Well, I'm finally doing what I really want to do.

And it's just not working for me. It doesn't feel like the other things I've done to go what else have you done? Well, I was an E911 dispatcher. I worked in the fire department, the police department when somebody answers the phone, you dial E911.

I was the person on that phone. And before that, I was a Starbucks barista. I said, well, great.

I mean, so you've been a Starbucks barista. You've been an E911 dispatcher. And I used to be a fireman.

So I kind of know what that's like. And you're now starting to be a policy wonk. If you're honest, which job did you love the most? It's Tanya.

Barista. Say more. Well, you know, what happens for me was, you know, it sets an anonymous world we live in now.

I would learn my customer's name. I would see all the regulars and I would memorize their favorite drink and they would walk in and go, hey, John, small soy latte, double pump of the caramel twist on top? Sure. They're regular for you once again.

And if I was really careful, when I would hand them their drink, frankly, I would turn it so that we would be holding the cup, maybe even touching hands a little bit brief at the same time. So I went person to person and I would see them smile and I changed their day. And I loved that.

And I said, and when you're writing policy, you can't see anybody. Because actually, no, I can't. So it's not that you're doing the wrong work.

It's the nature of the work we're doing. So we're trying to make an impact in the world. And it's not just what you care about.

It's how you do it and who you do it with and where you do it. There's a lot more going on here than just what's the theme of my purpose, which is what that little worksheets about. So I'm going to give you a few minutes now.

This is not going to solve your purpose problem. It's going to get into let's get smart about this thing. So she was asking the question, where do I fit and fit isn't just role, isn't just industry or topic.

It's also location in the sense of a role. So is this really the contribution I want to make? Is this a good fit for me? And what is she really talking about? Well, back to our coherency model. She's talking about that what you do think.

What role in the world works for me situationally, because the role you adopt in the world is the point where you can make an impact, which is where you're living purposefully, or is meaningful to you. It's this impact point, which means it's time for us to do the impact map, or if you will, lay out the dance floor on which we get to dance in this pursuit of purpose and making a difference in the world. So I'm going to briefly describe you what this is, then I want you to work on this thing a little bit.

We're going to do this really fast to make sure we still have plenty of time for Q and APN. Now, the horizontal axis is the type of impact we might have in the world, which I will generally say there are three kinds. Okay, I can do sustaining and supporting things.

I can maintain what's running currently in the world. I can renew, repair, or remediate things. I can fix things that are broken or get rid of things that are bad, right? Or I can introduce new things to the world that weren't there before.

So I can sort of sustain things. I can subtract things, or I can add things. And those are all fine, but they're different qualitatively.

And they're sort of like, you know, these are not units. It's not like six points of newness versus minus two points of repair. It's just, these are types of work.

And I'll give you some illustrations. Now, on the vertical axis, there's the point of impact. Where specifically do I connect with the world? Am I connecting near or far from if you will myself? At the near level, if the individual level, that's what Helen was really enjoying as a barista at the far level, it's maybe at the global level.

And in between, it could be, you know, a small group. It could be an institution or a

segment or all of California or the California State University system. The national, you know, how big does it go? And she was about to go from the individual to an entire county.

Wasn't a bad thing, just a very different thing. So when you put these together, the kind of work I do, the kind of impact I'm making and the place I'm making it combined to generate the location of your impact. Now, a good or bad impact and that bigger, small impact, just different examples.

Okay, if I'm an investment banking systems analyst, what am I, unless I'm working in the medical industry, I'm the analyst for medicine at Goldman Sachs. Well, I'm not changing the way capital structures work. I'm not changing the capital market industry, but I'm running at an institutional level, the medical field, this thing.

I'm something right there on the sustain level. I'm the Gates program malaria person. I'm getting rid of malaria for the entire planet.

That's a remediation at the global level. I'm a brain surgeon, a very, very highly, anybody want to go to med school? Any med school people? You know, I want to be a brain surgeon, a highly trained, highly regarded person who, you know, removes tumors one at a time. Right? I'm just pulling that.

I can't even be a yet to know the ambidextrous brain surgeon who can do like two. So still just a very remedial thing. You're not smarter after the brain tumors out.

You're barely back where you started. So I'm just remediating one person at a time. I'm a homeless center chef where I feed maybe 50 people and train a couple of them how to feed themselves and maybe get a job in the food industry.

So I'm moving toward supporting them. I'm also remediating their hunger and moving them toward self sustainability. It's a small group to people in my kitchen.

You know, I'm the Google autonomous car person. Really new thing that's going to change the world for many, not all people because that's what all doesn't touch all 7.7 billion of us yet. But that's a new kind of thing.

Or I'm Bill or Dave in frankly three roles. Now we have as most jobs are, most jobs have more than one role. So I'm both a teacher and it's day for design thinking is kind of old hat.

So you know, it's not that avant-garde a thing. It's kind of new. It's a small group called Stanford students.

When we are speaking at conferences on education and training of the universities, we're very avant-garde. I'm very new. And that's working at the educational sector level.

We're now trying over 150 universities to do what we're doing. We're getting published in research. That's kind of a big deal.

And then when I do the author thing, you know, I mean, a book isn't that powerful a change agent thing. It can help, you know, but it's not the same as in-person experience. But it's a lot of people.

It's a half a million people. So many more. You know, in 13 years at Stanford, we've taught a couple of thousands of Stanford students.

And in three years, we've reached over half a million people in the book. So it's just a different math. So my job looks like that.

That's my job. So now the question is for you. Take a second and do this worksheet.

I want you to write down a couple of the roles you have had in at least one or two or three that you would like to in the future. I have been, you know, maybe you have some internship, write that role down. And write down, I would like to become, you know, this doctor, I would like to become that kind of an engineer.

I'd like to become a teacher, you know, think and about what roles you anticipate in the future, you might want to give a try to. And then try to locate those roles on the map based on what's my point of impact. If I'm working in the school room with 30 kids, then that's a small group.

That's part way up on the vertical, right? And I'm teaching them the new math. That's a little bit new. Teaching them ancient history that's sustaining, right? So now where you put the dot is up to you, by the way, there's different narratives you could give for different roles.

But how do you see it? How does it feel to you and locate where those different roles are? Well, the key thing here is there is no better or worse place on this map. The brain surgeon is not in a bad place and the Google guy is in a good place because he's in the upper right. Anywhere on here is fine.

There's no right answer. We don't observe that people have a particular like my good place is. You may have different roles all over the place.

I wouldn't say that, you know, personalities or psychologies aligned with this per se, Helen, the woman who was struggling with her policy role, ended up going that route and becoming a policy person very happily, but she had to change the way she thought about it. Okay. After you've got a couple of these down, then one of our favorite questions is just what do you notice? When you look at your own map, what questions surface for you? Like, oh, for some reason that quadrant's empty.

Is that a good thing or a bad thing? Or everything seems to be clustering in one spot? Or, boy, this is all one to one. It's all I've been doing incredibly one on one stuff most of my life. And that's most of what I envision.

I wonder, how do I feel about that? Again, not good or bad. We're not judging when we do these questions. We're just looking at noticing what's going on in your own life that can start informing not just what is my purpose, but where could I even deliver on that in a meaningful way? I got to find a place on the field to dance.

The takeaway is, and this, by the way, is there's no right or wrong place, but as we're getting into this question of what impact do I want to have in the world with my purpose? You want to be thinking more deeply about that and you really want to be able to get to know yourself well enough that this stuff is working for you. We find everybody that we work with really cares about their purpose, really cares about their impact, and they're not even sure what they mean by that. So start giving yourself a chance to succeed by even knowing what are these you're talking about.

So on this generative cycle thing that I mentioned earlier, you'll notice that I didn't actually tell you how to do this yet. He says, wait a minute, you didn't really give us the tools to do this yet. Can you operationalize this? And actually, we can.

We had asked to summarize the whole thing in like a sentence and we came up with the following. It's not a sentence. It's four very short sentences.

So how do you do the be, do, become thing? How do you turn that into this generative cycle, which really is what designing your life is about? Oh, well, you do it this way. You get curious, you talk to people, you try stuff and you tell your story, which we would call the generative cycle. Now, the vision cycle, or I'm going to get curious, particularly what do I get curious that I care about? What do I am I curious about in the world that matters to me? I want to do that purposefully, then go out and talk to people that are doing that and get their story long before you go get a masters in thermosciences at Stanford for a year and a half and then suddenly realize it doesn't even work.

You know, then go try stuff, do things in the world with other people. And while you're learning, keep telling your story in an interesting way, which keeps the cycle going, but people will go, well, gosh, now that I hear about you, have you met this other person? Did you know this is going on? And you get this generative thing going on. And you what you're really doing is giving your curiosity a walk.

You're taking your curiosity out behaviorally into the world and letting it find its friends. You keep that going purposefully until something engages you and just keep iterating that process. That's in fact what it means to design the worthwhile life according to all.

Now that would lead me into story time two, which I'll do the massively short version of,

which is so let's update now all the way to how to end up on this stage. I'll take about a five minute story doing about two sentences. So back around 1990, I had been doing high tech stuff for years.

I wasn't doing any of this kind of stuff necessarily, but I had been away from youth work for a long time. I've always been a YMCA counselor and coach Lidlig and that kind of stuff. I was mostly working with high school and college age people for years.

Got so busy for a while I lost track of all that and went back to it. And long story short, I just started talking to some people, got invited to teach a class at Berkeley, which is bizarre. I thought it was going to happen once.

The students liked it. We did it for eight years and 14 semesters. Then my buddy, and so I started telling that story.

I got curious. I've talked to a lot of people about what's going on with youth these days. I got invited to teach a class by this one guy named Randy.

And then I did that thing. I tried stuff. I just taught one class one time one semester.

And surprisingly, we worked with it again. I did it again. I did it 14 times in a row at the end of that 14.

Then my buddy, Bill, gets the job at Stanford and that's a lot shorter drive, frankly. That's really the reason for it. We got together for lunch, which I thought would take a year of talking about this weird thing called life design that I was sort of working up.

You know, and he says, this is a great idea. Let's start at this fall. We'll prototype at the summer.

I got to go. Thanks for having that great idea. Let's start right now.

And bang, we start teaching at Stanford in 2008. So, you know, and then that thing went on and the classes went going and the kids liked it. They said, please write the book.

I tried real hard not to write the book for two years because I thought it was a stupid idea. And then we wrote the book and surprisingly enough worked and people thought it was interesting. And then one thing began another.

And 20 years ago, if you had asked me, I'd be here talking about this because of the stuff that's going on. There's not a chance in the world, that would be true. But I got curious.

I talked to people. I tried some stuff. I kept telling my story.

And if you keep doing that, sometimes things can happen. So, you might be saying, but

are you saying they've just go out there and try stuff and wait for purpose to come and get us? Are we supposed to have something in mind? No, no, absolutely do go for it. Have something in mind and live purposefully in the way to try to get out there on that dance floor.

You can do this. So, the bottom line for this talk is do want to live purposefully. Do care about something and get going.

Do get started. Don't wait to know for sure you're doing the right thing. Don't demand of yourself.

You have to change the world. Don't wait necessarily for the world to make you rich, sexy and famous all at the same time while having the meeting, making experience you want to do, go get on the dance floor somewhere that you possibly can repeat, repeat, repeat. It's an iterative process.

And go do the work. This is hard. It takes time, but that's okay because we're in it for the dance, not just for the destination, because the joy is living purposefully, which really is just about go and live.

All right. Well, thanks for coming out. And my first question is what is your purpose, but now I know I'm not supposed to ask that question.

That's not a good question. So, we'll cross that one out. But this is a Veritas forum.

So, a lot of your book doesn't directly deal with spirituality. So, as you develop this whole thing, what role did your personal spirituality play and developing this very intricate system with lots of graphs and things? The book actually doesn't deal with spirituality. It just doesn't deal with it in the in-house jargon of the religious craft.

So, I've even written a paper called "The Christian Companion to Designing Your Life," which is a 14-page white paper on the underlong doctrinal collaboration and compatibility between the gospel and designing your life. But my own story starts with when that sophomore was lost, I, at those right at the beginning of my own faith experience, and I first place I went was to the church and I found them useless. They didn't help at all, but just made you feel guilty here.

Because they say, "Well, what do you think I ought to do with your life, young man? I'm kind of God boy, I really, I really know. I really, well, what do you think God's will for your life is?" I go, "Well, I don't really know." I go, "Well, have you prayed about that son? Have you prayed about it?" I go, "Yes." I go, "Well, what have you heard, Dave?" I go, "Yeah, how's that hearing thing working? What's that? I mean, do you get like a note or something?" And they would go, "Well, Dave, if you feel far from God, who moved?" So, you know, they were as unhelpful as the people in the Career Center, but they just made you feel more morally guilty about it. So, that was the beginning.

And eventually, I found my way, and I was sure that the Christians were holding out for some reason. I knew the Christianity couldn't be a large and fairly viable worldview and be as bad at this as most people seem to be, which turns out to be true, the whole idea of vocational discernment. How does one find one's way is a really big part, actually, of the Christian tradition.

They just don't teach it very much. They do more than they used to. So, that is where I began.

So, designing your life is kind of Christian vocational discernment on design thinking. As you go through it, so much of the book is this mix of career personal life together. Is your spiritual life underlying all that, or is it above it all, or how does it fit? It fits in the fabric.

It fits entirely in the fabric. What I'm not doing is what I would call platonic dualism where, you know, spiritualism, in the Greek tradition, as you all know, spirituality, or divinity, or transcendency, is over here. And materiality is over here, and they have nothing to do with each other.

In fact, they're hierarchically organized, and spirit is more real, and material is less real and kind of crummy. That's not a Christian understanding. A Christian understanding would be that the world is a great place that God thinks is really interesting, and is a deep part of everything.

And so, rather than like, I run over to my spiritual life and then I run back to my career, I'm trying to walk out what does it mean to be a co-participant in the reality we call God that is a part of everything we do always and everywhere, and then engage fully with that. So, for me, the walk of faith is a manner of living all the time. There are certain aspects of, I mean, part of life includes, you know, just like you get your car tuned up and you go and get the oil changed, but most of the time you're driving it.

I mean, so sometimes I pull away and go to a retreat center and get my oil changed, but most of the time I'm driving the car. I feel like this is like the Oprah part of the class. Now, tell me about your Now, as you go through, though, especially when you're talking about moral compass and that area, well, so much of the book talks about how there's many possible lives that could be meaningful, purposeful for you.

Don't get stuck on. This is the only one. Is that also true of your moral compass or your being? Are there many possible moral compasses that are equally of value or is there a hierarchy among them? If I have a roommate, for example, says my moral compass tells me, maximize profit for myself.

That is a compass. Is there no difference between the person who says my moral compass is I am going to live for the poor and the needy, or I'm going to live for Christ or I'm going to live to enable the Buddhist teachings to play out in my life? Is there, how do

you think it does matter? Yeah, it does matter. Yeah, it totally matters.

I got him Dallas Willard, who was the chair of the philosophy department at USC from many years died. Unfortunately, too early in his 50s, also was it was a deeply believing Quaker wrote a lot in spiritual disciplines. I heard him talking with him, and he was talking about hello.

There are all these different paths up the spiritual mountain. There's the Dallas path and the Buddhist path of Nicholas, and he said, you know, and you're a professor of comparative religion, that those who say that all the religions are just saying the same thing don't understand any of them. I mean, whether or not they're pursuing a similar outcome or even the mystics talk about shared experience, they are profoundly different and living entirely for self, a grandizing experience and and hedonism is entirely different than living in service to my fellow man.

Even secular psychology in the field of positive psychology now will argue, which is report, the large majority of people who report the experience of a meaningful life are living oriented toward being in service to one another. So it turns out serving one another and caring about something beyond yourself correlates highly. Now, and I think I would think that the reason that's true is because that's in fact how God made us.

So what's not true is that all world value systems are equal. I do think what is true, and I believe I'm obligated to think this as a Christian. So, you know, I think God accepts God's decision to include free will as part of being human.

So if God thinks you're capable of being responsible for setting your own path and the consequences attached there too, then I should probably accept that too. So if my roommate thought very differently from me in ways that I didn't regard, I would accept his or her permission to do that, their right to do that, that would mean a firm that is a good idea. So are you working on designing your spiritual life sequel? We have been asked about designing your afterlife, which we're not sure how that would go over.

But the I think the actually people are designing the spiritualize around me. So the I'm not religious, but I'm spiritual. That's the number one, that's the fastest growing religion in this country.

I'm not religious, but I'm spiritual. There are atheist churches all over the country, springing up, you know, and around, hey, community and singing songs and hearing ennobling words that inspire me. We like that too.

Just forget that silly God stuff. So I think a lot of people are moving into designing what they think they're going to do with their lives. Now, a buddy of mine, Scott McLean, who's written on this, is in favor of religion because from millennia, human beings have been trying to figure out how to live.

And hey, I think I'm just going to make this up from scratch. The spiritual mountain is a difficult one to climb. And I know there are well-worn paths that people have given their lives for to try to make some sense of.

But no, I'd rather just take a machete and hack my way up from scratch. And that's sort of like I'll start on my own and make the whole thing up. You could probably borrow from other people's wisdom.

So this is a question from from an audience member that I think will touch upon this because it says, what's the difference between dabbling and living the generative cycle? In other words, why can't I just experience, I'm going to turn to spirituality because I like that stuff. Why don't I just dabble? I'll be a little Buddhist on Monday, a little Dallas on Tuesday, a little Christian on Wednesday. How is that different from living a generative cycle? I think the difference is the difference between doing laps and being an aspiring.

So I'm going around and trying a couple of things, whether it's a career thing, whether it's a spirituality thing, you know, a little bit, a little bit, a little bit. Now if I get to the end of that cycle, I'm just back where I started. Well, that was okay.

I think I'll do pancakes again, you know, you know, and let's go back around. I had an incredibly bad idea in my 20s. You know, I really wanted, I was so busy in college, managing college so badly as I already told you, I had no time to date.

And so when I graduated, I found out, man, I'm only working 40 hours a week. I get all this time. I could actually date.

I could actually like see women in person. But I don't want to get involved. I want to get too involved, you know, so I can't take anybody out too often if they'll get the wrong idea.

So I made a list of 10 women and I just dated in the circle. I dated one, two, three, four, five, six, 79. And they all knew each other by the way.

And like, what is Dave doing? So it was a terrible idea. But so I just went around and around and around. And they all began to realize I'm just entertaining myself.

He's not getting anywhere. And so if you're just going around the lap, then you're simply kind of entertaining yourself. If I'm going to grow, I should be getting to some clarity.

So if I tried these things, what did I learn? What did I move into next? Am I moving toward some kind of coalescence into something that's cohesive and mean something? Or am I just, you know, running all over Walmart having a good time? Yeah. Well, and this goes to a number of people seem to be asking, how do I know when I've got to that clarity spot? Like, how do I know that, hey, I've experimented and this is pretty good. It's good enough.

Right. Let's stop. Let's stop exploring.

I think, well, okay, first of all, you know, and the last line in looks in Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man, but actually in unusual sentence, that Jesus grew over time. In fact, Jesus even grew in God's, Jesus is supposed to be perfect theoretically. We say that often.

But over time, God looked in better. How does perfect get better? Well, perfect gets better if you have an organic model, not a mechanical model. An organic model would say from the seed to the shoot to the bud to the fully blossomed rose, it's all perfect.

But the fully blossomed rose is more rosy. It's more realized, it's more revealed. So no matter what convictions I come to, let's say I land on some worldview, I land on Christian, I land on a Buddhist practice, you're not done.

You make enough of a commitment to say, I'm now going to commit myself to implementing this and see where it takes me. Now, anyone on any serious path will tell you that that path continues. If you're going to have a practice that's sincere, it's going to make something of you.

It's going to bite you to take another step, another step, and another step. And so I don't think there's any version of done that works for very long. And I'm on about my fourth or fifth, depending on you count fourth or fifth conversion of the Christian like four or five times, because the version Christianity had before ran out of gas, I was either going to lose it, or it's going to either going to move on or move out.

I'm going to go big or go home. That's happened like four times. But so falling up on that, you know, let's take your dating life again, because you are an Oprah.

And, you know, yeah, one could argue your dabbling was the thing that sabotaged you. Right. You were willing to make a commitment to one or two things.

I just wanted to be entertained. You just wanted to be entertained. So how do you how do you still balance this like, Hey, I want to I'm going to try a little bit baristing and I'm going to, you know, be a policy wonk.

And I'm going to do this. Well, aren't you going to do none of them well? It depends what the question is. Let's say there's a period of my life when I try a couple of things out and what I'm looking for.

I'm not looking for a life or a career. What I'm looking for is some feedback that says, is this is this worth investing in more deeply? So it depends entirely on what question you're asking. And so like in the dating example, for me, what happened was the question is, you know, how long can you just want to hang out with people? Do you want to have a relationship where you get more intimate? You want a relationship where

you're talking about building a life together? Well, that doesn't happen doing that.

And and so the game changes. I think people who I think people can get stuck in dabbling a couple of ways. One is it's just busying and entertaining.

It's distracting enough you never wake up or it's it's so scary and scary because is this good enough? And at some point you realize you can't know there is no knowing beyond the shadow. There no certainty that this is it. And so that's why we are arguing for this prototype model is set the bar low and clear it.

I mean, find ways to take a little more step and a little more step and a little more step. There's very often a lot more small steps you can take that give you a discernment input than having to go for the big decision like, well, I really want to get a master's degree or not. Whoa, I mean, go visit somebody have a couple of cups of coffee, try a small project on the side.

There are lots of ways I can experiment with things that aren't unduly costly. And if I'm listening into those things and I'm growing through those things and I'm reflecting on what they mean to me, I'll have more confidence to make bigger steps bigger steps and finally bigger steps. So how much of it is just slowing down and listening and being observant? Like, I'm not going to figure out my life tonight.

No matter how much I read your book. And so slowing down talking to people, letting it go again because I think there is a sort of this notion probably driven by parents saying, you know, you better tell me by Christmas, right? How you're going to pay me back for everything you've invested in me. Right.

So is it just, hey, take time to listen? And take time isn't sit on the couch and just wait for it to fall on you, listen, like go live. I'm saying, I mean, look, I already told you, you don't have a neocortex fully baked until you're 27. This like five years post graduation for most of you.

What do I do in the meantime? Just wait for my brain to harden? I mean, you know, no, get out there and do. I mean, do what you have in mind. Maybe self supporting, get a job, maybe get a couple of dollars, do the gig economy if that works for you.

But move through it. You can be a self supporting generative person who's still learning their way forward. David Brooks called this 20 to 30 decade the Odyssey years and an op ed years ago, that all we call our primary exercise, the Odyssey plan.

Part of what you're doing is generatively growing yourself into the person who has the capacity to hear the insight that life will give you at the age you're ready to hear it. You know, you're growing the 30 year old who's gonna have a better idea. Give her or him a shot.

That's part of what you're doing. So there's a lot of listening. There's a lot of paying attention and capturing the inside of what I'm growing into, asking two bigger questions, is this it? Is this it? Is this it? It's like, are we very in the back of the car? Every five minutes, like it's not gonna work.

Slow it down and live your way into this thing is to have a time. So we talked before about the monastic life. Yep.

I spent a year living in monasteries. You spent a lot of time up in Newcoma Dolly. Yep.

You know, and there they talk a lot about vocation and discernment. Yes. Being an interactive process between a spiritual mentor.

Yep. And you, how is that different from what you're calling for in everybody's life? It's just one instance of exactly what we're calling for. So one thing we'll talk about is we define this.

How do you do this lifelong? The one thing we all know we're gonna do is keep making decisions about the future that hasn't been revealed yet. I'm 66 years old. I've got these eight grandkids.

I'm still trying to decide what to do with the rest of my life. It keeps coming up. So discernment, I would define as a decision made employing more than one form of knowing, not just cognitive knowing or evaluative knowing, but also emotional knowing and spiritual knowing and social knowing, so that we think the tools that go into that discernment process include, again, knowing who you are and your compass and that.

So and then what are those practices, the spiritual and personal practices that keep you on your a game? What are the, who are the mentors in your life that can listen to you and speak into you and help you find your own wisdom? Virtually nobody can do this alone. You know, we hear and converse our way into our clarity. We don't just sit there any motive out of nowhere.

And what's the community of people around whom I can be with that will support me in a way to help me find who it is that I am? When you take the Stanford class, you're in a group of six or nine students, you know, for two hours a week, for 10 weeks, you know, and they become a mirror to help you hear yourself think out loud. It's almost impossible to hear yourself by yourself. So the kind of things that monks can do for one another or a spiritual director can do for you.

We think everybody needs to find a place where they can be heard and they can hear. You know, a number of students sort of say, okay, I'm getting a sense of who I am, what I want. Right.

But what they're, what they're asking is, sometimes the world doesn't conform. Right. I

want to work 20 hours a week, but I also want health care.

Right. And I want to, you know, be able to one day, you know, have actually a car. Sure.

So those. And not as a residence. Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah. And, and so, you know, maybe the world doesn't.

Maybe I said as a life value to travel. Right. But I also said as a life value to be near to my family.

Right. What do you do when, you know, you honestly look at yourself and you have things that either the world can't provide or are contradictory to each other. Right.

That fits in the whole category what we call anchor problems. Okay. They're anchor problems and they're gravity problems.

And they're different. They're both places people get stuck for a long time. So a gravity problem is, is gravity a problem.

So I'm a cyclist, you know, I didn't put on the freshman 15 when I was a freshman, but it did put on the 60 year old 10 when I became 60. And so now my bike is going much slower now that I weigh 10 or 15 pounds more than I'm supposed to. It's really pissing me off.

And so I've got, hey, Stephen, I got this problem. It's called gravity. It's really slowing down.

Can you help me with this gravity problem? And the answer is no, I can't because gravity isn't a problem. It's just a thing. So when something is a circumstance, it's not a problem because it's in actionable.

So as a designer, we would say if it's not actionable, it's not a problem. It's a circumstance. The only thing you can do is accept it and then try to design around what actually is actionable.

So let's say, okay, I can't find a job at 20 hours a week that pays me enough to live the lifestyle I want or to get the insurance. I'm here. Okay, that doesn't, that doesn't exist in the current economy.

Then that's maybe something you'd like, but doesn't exist. And the answer that is, I'm sorry. So which 40-hour-a-week job did you want? You got it, you can't have it both ways.

We had a student some years back who decided, you know, this whole capitalism thing is crap. I'm not doing this. And I've decided I'm going to live really simply, I'm going to live radically simply.

In fact, I've decided I'm only going to own what I can carry around all the time. And I'm only going to finish my major because I think it's crap too, is to make my parents happy. They work really hard for this.

It matters to them. I'm just going to do it as an homage to parents that I'm out of here. And he did it.

And he got down to 15 pounds of stuff. He carried it within 24 hours a day. He started learning how to sleep in trees and parks so he could live on about six to seven thousand dollars a year.

So he just do a little bit of, you know, skilled labor or unskilled labor here and there to keep things, he was incredibly cheap to operate. And so he simply made the cohesive and the coherent decision too. I'm going to live radically simply.

And in so doing, I'm going to step out of all these systems that I don't believe in. Now if you're willing to pay the cost, that's fine. So the truth is, you can't have this, that and the other thing, you simply get to decide which one you want to let go.

Which is very freeing by the way. Yeah. But then is there a way to discern between, hey, I'm going to value radical simplicity and that's the only thing that matters.

And I'll live on somebody else's lawn versus, hey, I want to be able to give to many, many people. Right. And so this means I'm going to have a job that kind of allows me to take time off or whatever.

I mean, how do you think through though, are both those goals equally valid? If I actually believe in your autonomy, which again, my faith obligates me that I do, you know, I really do think you're up to deciding what your life is about. So could simply living the instantiation of an incredibly simple lifestyle, be as noble as, you know, working with the purpose of, you know, empowering a whole bunch of social change through donation and nonprofit work, what have you, you know, it depends on who's doing that. I mean, I was hung out with these monks who retreated from the active world decades ago and through one lens, haven't gotten a darn thing to show for what they've done.

And they would argue they've lived a life where they took their soul and they put it into a profound intimacy with the presence of the reality of God. And then so doing, connected to the entire world through their prayer lives as a sacrifice of concern and are one of the most deeply involved in the world persons alive today. Those are completely different narratives.

And you can decide whether or not you think that is merit or not. And now how do you, let's say you're torn between some pretty dramatically different ways of being alive. I would suggest you can prototype anything.

You can prototype living like a monk, you can prototype, making enough money and giving it away for, I'm going to go make like 5,000 bucks and give it all away and just see how that feels. You know, try these things out and ask myself the question, what's more coherent? What is it? What's the honest way of aligning? Who am I? What do I believe and what am I doing? Can I be that kind of a person in the world? And there might be more than one version of you. And then you just get a pick because of it at least show up.

So there's a number of questions of people asking specifically about Christian backing for some of this stuff. And Christian backing, okay, support for some of this. So, I mean, Jesus had a goal in mind that was to die for our sins.

Where do you see him dancing to use your metaphor? Where do you see him encouraging the dance versus a goal? Okay. By the way, whether or not Jesus consciously thought he came in order to die for our sins is a very arguable thing, theologically and Anselm's little bit of work on substitutionary atonement at around 1100 was the beginning of that idea, which is not my favorite way of looking at the atonement. So I'll just stop that right there because he's getting a lot of trouble.

But the point being, what was Jesus about? Well, first of all, it's interesting to notice. Let's go to the wedding at Canaan. So Jesus turning water into wine.

With anything about your stories. Huh? One of my stories. So water turns into wine.

His first public ministry story. And there's this bizarre interaction between he and his mother. And his mother comes to him and says, they've run out of wine.

Jesus says, woman, my time has not yet come. Implying that he thinks his mother is implying maybe ought to do something about the fact that the wine is run out. And then she says to the servants, well, do whatever he says.

Then he says, go get those urns and fill them up with water. And then you know how the rest of the story goes, assuming you buy the story. Now, what's really interesting about that is apparently at the time Jesus is kind of softly invited by his mother to consider doing something special about this wine problem, he says, it's not today.

And three minutes later, it is today. Now, we can get into a whole long Bible said, but what's going on there? I would argue that what happened there is when Jesus said, my time has not yet come. That was his conviction.

He really didn't think it was coming out day today. When he got up that day and put on the clean tuner, because I'm going to the wedding party, you know, today's not the day. During the party, today's not the day.

When mom actually comes up to him toward the latter part of the reception, today's not

the day. Then she goes, oh, well, whatever. Now, by the way, she gave him an hour, do whatever he says.

He says, "Silk, here's 20 bucks. Go down to 7-11. Pick up a couple of beers.

What do you want from me?" I mean, there's a lot of ways out of this story where that filling up urns and doing this wild thing. And yet he changes. That looks to me like real time discernment.

Turns out that Jesus grew into a guy that could hear the invitation, which was a bank shop off of his mother from God, that maybe today is the day. So I see Jesus as a very real time person who's growing into the reality of himself. And the whole story is what we're invited to follow.

And then he's rather reticent. He's rather unpublic about scary things for most of his public ministry. You know, and then he says, "I turned his face towards Jerusalem," and he went down there, and then he'd get in a bunch of trouble and confronted power directly and got himself killed.

But so what was Jesus doing? I think Jesus would say in John 5:19, "I do only that, which the Father shows me." So I think Jesus is actually doing exactly what I'm borrowing from, living purposefully into what is it I'm called to be doing today. And even he grows into that, you know, the way I understand the gospel. It's not like, "Here's this guy from the age of 12, kind of like, you know, I got a dime about 20 years and 19 years.

I'm just waiting this thing out." You know, because wait until I blow that rock off the tomb, everybody's going to think that's really cool. That's Superman, Jesus. That's not the gospel, Jesus.

There's so many good questions here, but we need to wrap up in a couple of minutes. But here's one that I like a lot. What is a dream too big and what is a dream too small? Boy, when is a dream too big or too small? Let me answer this sideways.

One of my older sisters who runs the graduate school of education at President Pacific and deals with a lot of people moving into teaching is that this noble profession and a lot of them moving into teaching as a second career. And they have a certain picture in their mind about how it's supposed to come out. And she advises them, "Be very careful if you set your life goal as being something that only other people can decide you have because you put yourself at great risk." And I think what came out of that for me was I think our goals or our hopes or our dreams can be stacked.

I'm a big fan of stacked dreams. So when I started this thing at Stanford, when Bill said, "Hey, let's do this thing." I thought, "You know, maybe this is going to go." I had a sixth level objective stack. Level one is, "If we're lucky, we might even affect a couple of kids lives here." Who knows? That's level one.

Level two. Maybe we do that well enough that enough students say this was kind of interesting that the word gets out that this is the kind of thing Stanford ought to be offering us. I mean, the University ought to be helping you not just learn stuff but figure out life stuff, what we call life, you know, wayfinding.

And that should be something we do. So I know from a couple of students to student culture at Stanford. And then if student culture at Stanford expects this, level three would be the administration notices and goes, "Hey, what are you guys doing over there? Maybe that's an okay thing we should support." And then level four would be not only the administration thinks that's interesting, but we do it well enough that other colleges kind of go, "Well, hey, what are you doing? Maybe you can help us do that too." And now this starts to become an educational reform.

And then actually, that gets out into the populace at large and people around the world start saying, "You know, maybe we're asking stupid questions like, 'What are you going to do with that?'" and throw major, which is a totally stupid question. And we stop thinking about young adulthood in these incredibly retrograde ways. And we've helped a couple of kids at Stanford and changed that culture and movie administration and started doing educational reform and then changed the meta narrative of young adulthood in the society at large and in so doing empower a bunch of lives to stop being upset about the wrong thing and get upset about the right thing.

Now, when I started, if you hit level one, it's a good day. And we're actually now kind of like about level four, which I never believed would have happened. So my recommendation about too big or too small, I don't think either break it up.

If you're dreaming about something, bring it all the way down to the ground where you've got a good shot at actually getting the ball through the uprights, super bullish, you know, and have that change the world thing too, because who knows you might actually get a shot at it. And give yourself a shot at, you know, the little thing, the bigger thing, the way bigger thing, and who knows the amazing thing. But if you're stuck on only one of those along the way, your chances of success are way too small.

So give yourself enough, give yourself some options. We'll take Prognative on the last question. Yeah, you obviously love graphs.

You love, you know, quadrants. Yes. Oh, that's a you've got the engineer's mind.

Where does the idea of God works in mysterious ways fit? Well, that's where we get back. So if discernment is a decision-making supported by more than one form of knowing, and the reason we support people developing personal practices for these affective forms of knowing, emotional knowing, and bodily knowing, and social knowing, and spiritual knowing, these other forms that don't show up on an Excel spreadsheet or a graph. And how do you get your hands on those things? How do you articulate those

things? So where that all fits, I think probably the simplest way to say it fits in story, it fits in narrative.

We do a lot of work on story time. That's why the, you know, get curious, talk to people, try stuff, tell your story. And so what would the story of your life sound like? There's no old adage that God sometimes comes to us disguised as our lives.

Well, if that's true, if God is sneaking up on you disguised as your life, are you listening to the story of your life well enough to know what the message is? So I think for me, it has to do with listening into the story. What's the heart of the story? And where are you in it? And do you have practices that support that? Yeah. In your daily life? Yeah.

I mean, most of my practice is hail from, you know, the antiquity of the Christian tradition. I realized I was so bad at this stuff once I realized that Christianity wasn't just a bunch of answers to good, bad questions. I spent about six minutes a year thinking about stuff that's right versus wrong or good versus bad.

Virtually never comes up and it's simple when it does. I spend the overwhelming majority of my time on good versus good, on light gray versus a little less light gray. And that's all discernment space.

Yeah. So in the discernment space, you know, how do you figure this stuff out? How do you hear what the truth really means to you? I realized I was so bad at that. I went back to seminary.

So I went back to seminary. I got a graduate diploma in contemplative spirituality, but simply there's a big multi-syllabic way of saying, "Learning how to pray," learning how to listen to your life. So I think people need to work.

And so I have a series of things I do that help me try to tap into the story of what life and God is saying to me that you've learned that.

(gentle music)