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Designing Your Life Worth Living | Dave Evans & Bill Burnett

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The Veritas Forum

Bill Burnett and Dave Evans teach the most popular class at Stanford, "Designing Your Life." It helps students reframe the question, "How do I live a meaningful life?" Burnett, an atheist, and Evans, a Christian, believe the key to a joyful and fulfilling life starts with thinking like a designer. At a recent Veritas Forum, Burnett and Evans, co-authors of a New York Times Best Seller, sat down with Berkeley professor Amani Nuru-Jeter to discuss how to design a worthwhile life and how they do it themselves from their respective worldviews.

Transcript

The reason design works is it's inadvertently Christian. I don't mean that cheaply. It's inadvertently Christian because it started with a question, "What does it mean to be a human person?" And it said, "And we're going to look at that ruthlessly, honestly, now with a bias.

We're going to take an open mind and they looked carefully, and frankly it's not that hard to understand what people are really like. If you are open and honest, and so design openly and honestly reveres the human person and tries to respond to it in a constantly teachable way, so the posture of prototype better, and the habituation is infinitely teachable and infinitely humble. So of course it works.

Bill Burnett and Dave Evans teach the most popular class at Stanford, designing your life. It helps students reframe the question, "How do I live a meaningful life?" Burnett, an atheist, and Evans, a Christian, believe the key to a joyful and fulfilling life starts with thinking like a designer. At a recent veritas form, Burnett and Evans co-authors at the New York Times bestseller sat down with Berkeley professor Amani Nuru-Jeter to discuss how to design a worthwhile life and how they do it themselves from their respective worldviews.

Good evening everyone. Come on. This is church.

You know, we do call and response. Good evening everyone. Thank you.

It is a pleasure to be here with you this evening to moderate what promises to be a thrilling and exciting event this evening. So thank you all for coming. My task as moderator is first to introduce our two illustrious speakers and then to engage in a discussion essentially with them on the topic for the evening on how to live a worthwhile and meaningful life or a well lived and joyous life.

And so I hope that as we get into conversation that you all will also, well you definitely will have an opportunity to ask questions and engage with the speakers yourselves. So I'm going to start by introducing our two speakers. We have Bill Burnett and Dave Evans co-founders of the Stanford Life Design Lab and already told them that we'll forgive them for coming to us tonight from Stanford.

So co-founders of the Stanford Life Design Lab, the two of them started working together back in 2007 when they started of course designing your life which culminated in the publication of their book last September titled *Designing Your Life How to Build a Well Lived and Joyful Life*. So we're delighted to have them with us this evening. So let's all give a big round of applause to Dave and Bill co-authors of the New York Times.

Wait a minute, I'm not finished, sorry. Of the New York Times, number one best-selling book *Designing Your Life, How to Build a Well Live and Joyful Life*. Welcome, Bill and Dave.

First thing is first, that's Bill. I'm Bill. That's Dave, okay.

So welcome, thank you for coming tonight. It's good to be here, thanks. So when I was reading all about this methodology, you all call life design methodology and I was really intrigued one about your story.

So we'll get around to talking about that, kind of how you came to work together and how it's been to work together as two people with very different world views. And I just want to repeat that, you know, this is really not about pitting Christianity against atheism. What this is really about is having a constructive and evocative conversation about what it means to live a worthwhile and meaningful life.

And how you all have enjoyed working together and how you've come to collaborate to help people live a worthwhile and meaningful life. But what I want to start with is what is life design methodology, this idea of designing your life. What is that all about? Well, the life design lab at Stanford, we claim that our mission statement is that we apply the innovation principles of design thinking to the wicked problem of designing your life at and after the university.

What does that mean? It means we're the guys that teach the class to help you figure out what you want to be when you grow up. Which we reframe, because we think given

that's a bad question, we're the guys to hopefully help you figure out what you want to be next as you continue growing. And then the key thing there is how do you apply design thinking to the challenge of life design? So what is basically design thinking and what's it going to do with life? Yeah, you know, we've been working on this since the '60s at Stanford.

It's this idea of human centered design. We used to just design products and services and things. In fact, when I did the major it was called product design.

But we use principles of ethnography and anthropology. We try to really understand humans and have empathy for their situation and then design things for them that are appropriate. And this comes up in universal design for people with handicaps.

It comes up with, I think we're kind of all handicapped when it comes to technology. So we're trying to make technology easy to use. And Dave came over, I was teaching over at Berkeley, came over in 2007 and he said, hey, do you think we could, when do you think your design students need help launching, getting out in the world? I said, absolutely.

Because design is a little bit different than being an engineer or a pre-med or something. It's a very open field. It's not really clear just because you have a degree what you're going to do with it.

So I said, yeah, they need help. And why don't we try using our own method, our own human centered design to design something to help students launch? And that led to a whole series of prototypes and classes and building little experiences for the students and seeing how they reacted to it. I think we just taught a full day seminar on Thursday.

There were 15, 16 different modules in that seminar. And I think each of those modules, we've probably prototyped and iterated a dozen times. We've really been through 40 of them to get to those 14.

So it's using that same idea of how do you design in a human centered way if the problem is me and my life. So empathy for me, empathy for the world that I'm going to go into and try and then prototyping things that allow you to kind of sneak up on your future. So that's an interesting concept.

Both of you have mentioned this idea. So you're saying sneak up on your future. And you mentioned before, not planning out maybe to paraphrase what you're going to be or do 20 years from now, but just figure out what you're going to do next.

My mother would cringe if she heard you say that. So, you know, we're here on a college campus. She's a lovely woman, but she's raw.

She is a lovely woman. So we're here on a college campus and many of us, I can

remember when I was in college, you know, you plan your life out. This is what you want to be.

This is the person you aspire to be, the career you aspire to have. And you figure out every step along the way to get there. Many of us might say that our parents would be a little nervous if we told them, well, I just know what I'm doing tomorrow.

I don't yet know what I'm going to do 20 years from now. So can you talk a little bit about that concept in relation to the idea of what it really is in essence to live in meaningful? What does that mean to live in meaningful and worthwhile life? I'd be glad to be. First of all, you just clear, right? Tell me exactly what's going on in 2037.

I am. No, no, no, in the world in large. And so what's going on in medicine, what's going on? How's the whole medical field working now? What are the issues you're dealing with in 20 years? I have no idea.

You're supposed to have a 20-year plan. Your mother's going to be upset. I had a 20-year plan.

That's how I got to where I am now. Okay, just need one. So the problem is when you're designing your life, you're designing a thing called the future.

None of us have been there yet. We might want to get you more than to next Friday, I think we might go a week. When we actually do a planning exercise in our classes, we run three five-year plans because all of us can be more than one lived experience in the world.

We say there's more aliveness in each of us than one lifetime permits us to live. So there's more than one of you in there. And there's more than one right answer to you.

There's not a single right answer to you. And in the world at large, now the technological engineering mindset has sort of begun to mislead people to believe there is an optimal solution. There's got to be a way to do this right.

It's sort of attempting thing to want to believe. But there are a lot of questions to which there are not right answers, only a series of potentially good answers. And by the way, you'll never even know if you have the best answer because you only lived one of them.

And so what we're trying to do is give people the tools to live into the empirical process of iterating their lives for life as a lived experience, not an analytical experience. You can't know the future, you can build the future. You can still have a plan.

I mean, you can still say, "Hey, I'm in Berkeley and I want to major in political science or mathematics or history or whatever." And have an aspirational mission. I want to see the end of food injustice in the urban centers of the top 15 cities in the US by 2050. That's

fine.

But what happened, what the data tells us is that about 7 to 10 years out of school, only 20% of the people are doing anything that had anything to do with what they majored in. So we like to talk about these, what we call dysfunctional beliefs that sort of hold you back. Like, whatever I major in, that's what I'm going to do for the rest of my life.

Well, 20% of you, that's true. And 80% of you are going to take that thing and then build on it and do something else. It doesn't mean you majored in the wrong thing.

It just means then you did that for a little while and then you decided, "Hey, maybe I'll get an MBA because really the weight I want to have impact is through marketing or through business." Or maybe I'll go into a non-profit because that's where I see myself now as having impact. So we like these little five-year plans, but we like to have three of them because you want to be flexible. The world can throw you a curveball, right? I mean, not everything goes the way it's supposed to.

And then we like to give people tools so that the data says you're going to have three different careers. The data says, "It's not going to be based on your major." The data says, "This general, I see a lot of people look like they're in school here at Berkeley. You're probably going to live to be 100.

You're going to work for 70 of those years. I'm pretty sure it won't be the same job all 70 years." How many of you hope you can't talk about what you're doing 20 years from now because it doesn't exist yet? We want to work on stuff that doesn't mean you want to work on a cool thing. I mean, Dave and I have seen whole portions of our industry just disappear.

When I got out of school, one of the jobs you could have with my training was as an engineering, what was called an engineering draftsman. You drew up the drawings of what was going to be made on paper with a pencil. Actually with an ink pen.

That's all just computers do that now. Nobody even knows what a draftsman is. You want to have a set of tools that are flexible because the world's going to change and you want to be able to grow into the next thing that you're going to be.

It's not like, "Oh, don't worry about it. If you can get to the party on Friday, you're fine." That's not what we're talking about. We do talk about five-year plans and imagining yourself into the future.

It's actually probably better to think of it that way and really imagine it well than to try to plan something when you really don't have a lot of data. We're going to get back to that. I have a follow-up question for that.

We'll get back to that in a minute. We've got a book you're going to be doing. I'm going

to get your book.

I wanted to ask you about going back to this idea. In your classes and in your book, you call it a well-lived and joyous life. Tonight we're here talking about living a meaningful and worthwhile life.

Would you say that those are essentially the same concepts? Are they different? What is the difference? Or can you compare in contrast the idea of a well-lived and joyous versus a meaningful life? There's a concept we use in our classes we call it. We encourage people to live the coherent life. But the coherent life, we mean a life where who you are, what you believe in what you are doing are in alignment.

That you can articulate what you believe what you believe system is. You are aware of what role you're trying to play in the world. You're looking at what you're doing and aware of your personality and identity.

You can say, "Are these all in all? Am I being a consistent person?" Now, whether or not well-lived and even joyful or even meaningful, I can remember one student in one of my small groups in class, we got to a discussion on meaning making. She said, "I'm a nihilist. I've finally worked long and hard to discover there is no such thing as meaning.

I would like to skip the rest of this conversation." I said, "Fine. As long as you respectfully listen to the other students, yeah, well, they're really kind of ticking me off because I'm sitting there going, "That's so stupid. There is no meaning." So for her living meaninglessly with authenticity was as meaningful as it could get, so it took risks for her.

It's coherent that she could be. She was pretty happy. Because we're teachers, we are two people in our role as teachers, our job is to help people get into alignment with the truth as they understand it.

And their truth as they understand it. So what's meaningful to them is entirely up to their value system. We know a lot about two different kinds of things.

How do you help people experience meaning? That's different than how do you help people define meaning? So we do not define meaning making in our Stanford class because that's not a job. You define what is meaning full, then we can help you get your hands on that. Finding purpose in life is one thing, defining the purpose of life is quite another.

So we define it individually differently, but we do not tell people the purpose of life. We try to help them get their hands on finding it. But the other thing is the data, when we talked to all our students, they were like, "Well, I don't want to just take some crummy job.

I want to do something that's purposeful and useful. I want to be useful in the world. I

want my life to be meaningful, right, to help meaning." And so we went back to the positive psychology stuff and we said, "Okay, well, what psychology, when you live a healthy, you know, joyful life or you're thriving life, what are the elements that the psychologists have determined contribute to that?" And then we looked at them because we're kind of data-driven guys.

You can't just make stuff up. It's a university. You can't, you know, you can't just make things up.

This isn't politics. So, and you know, the work of Martin Seligman and Chexette Mahay and other psychologists who studied what makes people thrive, what makes them healthy, what makes their lives feel meaningful. It's, you know, having strong relationships, having working on something bigger than yourself, having accomplishment, you know, something that you can feel that you've accomplished and mastered.

And so we've taken those ideas and we've just put them into the class and made them clear for students so they can be actionable. They can do something, just discover, "Oh, well, this feels like it might, you know, this feels like it might be something that I would be good at and that I could understand in the world. The world would want it, you know, just because I want to do something doesn't mean the world wants to pay me to do it or to support me." And so we looked at that stuff.

We boiled it down to some very, there's a thing in design about a biased action, like, "Let's just try stuff." So all of these things turn into little exercises that the students do and they come back and they say, "Wow, that was really useful. That helped me sort out what I was thinking." So we don't say, "You should think this," but we say, "Try these things. It will help you figure out how to be the best version of you that you can be." Right? That's what we're trying to do.

So you mentioned there's a difference in, there's a difference between purpose in life and purpose of life and I kind of hear that in what both of you all are saying. When you said that, I immediately thought, "Well, isn't the purpose of life to have purpose in life? Is there really a difference between the two?" If you're purposely minded, but not everybody is. I mean, the, you know, my purpose in life is as much fun as I can.

You know, I personally would not affirm that it's a brilliant way to go, but, you know, as a Christian, I believe in free will and, you know, and I believe that God actually gave a sovereignty over our lives, including whether it's acknowledging or not acknowledging God or what have you. So if you want to go do that, you've actually got the authority to do that. Now, you know, I can say, "My personal worldview or my personal lived experience might disagree with that." And if you care about my opinion, you could ask me about that personally.

If you care about the thinking of the tradition that I aspire to, you could ask about that. If you want to ask what psychology observes that makes most people happy according to the psychologist that studied people a certain kind of way, you can listen to that or not. Or you can do it over the heck you want.

So, you know, we, in terms, as Stanford instructors, we do not necessarily claim that we have access to universal truth about those questions. You can say, "Okay, positive emotion, engagement, relationships, you know, what's meaningful to you and achievement are elements that go into the thriving lives of many, many people. You know, which one is more important than the other?" And by achievement, you mean achievement like, "I helped that individual this afternoon," or, "I wrote a piece of code that millions of people used." So, what kind of achievement matters to you? Those are, there's lots of essay questions here that are always driven by the individual.

So, we can suggest things that people can try to work toward, because we've learned a lot about what works for others, this might work for you. But is it working or not, is the individual's decision? The distinction, though, does get into the fundamental difference in our worldviews. And again, I'm not here to, I am neither a scholar of existentialism nor a spokesperson for atheism.

But in my worldview, there is no such thing as ultimate purpose. It doesn't exist. It comes out of, you know, existence precedes essence.

It comes out of the notion that we're here, we, you know, we are here, there is no purpose to for it. Therefore, we are forced to create our own framework for meaning. That is the freedom where that's the anxiety of freedom, and you either figured out or you don't.

But at the end of this, it's over. The transcendent principle that would organize meaning making did not precede our existence. We got here, we got consciousness, we decided purpose would work as part of the consciousness experiment.

Yeah, right. I mean, I started out as a physics major, and I thought, because I thought physics, physics is so interesting. It actually turned out to be too hard.

I wasn't a very good physicist, but design is easier. But, you know, like physics, I was like, physics asks the big question, like, why is there anything instead of just nothing? Why is there anything and just nothing? And then I took this class in existentialism and I found out there was this guy in the 1880s, named Gottfried Leibniz, who asked, why is there anything and not nothing? And he came up with a whole world view around that. And then that led me to Nietzsche and Sartre and all the sort of 20th century existentialists.

And they had a really good argument for how this works. And it didn't posit something

that I didn't, I couldn't, I kind of like the simplest explanation for things. And it didn't include, and it hadn't since, like as I mentioned, I was raised in the church, but it didn't survive college.

So it was, you know, it was this thing like, oh, well, this explanation works, it works very well. It provides me with happiness in a world view. And it doesn't require inventing something that I can't, that I can't kind of put my finger on.

So you all have getting kind of talking more about the differences in your world views. How has that come into play in the nature of your collaboration together? I actually hear, despite the fact that you all have different world views, some similarities, some differences, but also some similarities. And I'm curious when you think about this kind of, what's in my mind, is purpose driven life for some reason, Rick Warren, and all of the stuff he's doing.

And then the idea that there is no purpose, I create it, right? But what I hear both of you saying is that there's liberation from both of those perspectives. But I would imagine that in doing the work that you do, those world views might mean that you kind of come down very differently on some concepts that might be important to the work that you do. So how has it been kind of working together from that perspective and moving this field forward? So how we begin, we started working on wrestling this question.

How does, you know, the happy existential atheist and the happy Christian, you know, contemplative practitioner get along well, you know, and teach the same thing without stopping each other all the time saying, "No, no, no, that's not it." And so very shortly after we made the decision to work together, I said, "Okay, so now we have to work the question." You know, because what I mean? Well, you know, they got a question. You know, "I do God, you don't do God, we get to work through it." It goes, "Ah, I think it's going to be an issue." It kind of going, "No, no, no, trust me. It's going to be an issue." And then he goes, "I said, we have to talk about it." I don't think we need to talk about it.

Go, Bill, here's the deal. You know, we need to work this through so that if it comes over to our students that's already been worked through, there are at least questions you really need to ask me, because technically I worked for Bill, Bill is the executive director, and I get my appointment because he said, "I hired him." So academically legitimate. Ultimately, if we disagree, he's not very dangerous to me.

I am technically very dangerous to him. I said, "You need to ask me really hard questions. If you don't, I'll give you the questions and then you ask them." So we went up to a beer garden up in the mountains and we sat down for a whole afternoon and killed a pitcher beer and we worked it through.

And sure enough, it was no problem. The reason it's no problem is not because we agree on those issues, but it turns out for happily different reasons, and we probably both think

we know why this is true for different approaches, but our worldviews both lead us to an understanding of the definition of a human person, which is quite coincident. And so the matter that I think what it means to act like a human being, the ultimate example, which is lute in following the aspirational example of Jesus Christ, the way you treat people, the way you think about people, the way you invite people to be their noble selves, the principles I hold about that turn out to be for a pretty different initial set of reasons, the same kind of principles, Bill Holt.

So our worldviews are very different, and our class language, our work views are virtually identical. And so on those bounding principles, we agree on the how and what's important, but we disagree on some of the answers, but because we don't give our students the right answer to these questions, we give our students the right questions. That's not an issue.

It's not necessary for us to agree on that, but I think it's also, I would say it's also true that Dave's theology is relatively liberal, and the notion that God gives you free will is not held by all Christians. I read Rick Warren's book, and I was astonished by it. It was part of the marketing plan for our book, and it's because he sold a lot of books.

So, you know, had we had that conversation at Zott's over Bob Sanko's two pictures of beer, and I don't really remember it. And had it been, you know, I had Dave said, look, this is the way it is, and it's no other way. And I need to bring that into the classroom, or I can't be an authentic person, then I would have said, you know, we can't do this.

But I know, I think you have, you have, you know, theology, as we've discussed it, is relatively liberal. It's quite forward-thinking. It's less 14th century than many Christians I know.

It's not bad for Jesus' reak, I know. Yeah, it's, yeah. So what are some of those similarities and some of those differences? Well, for instance, I believe that we have ultimate freedom, that we decide, we decide the, we decide how our lives unfold, that we don't, we don't get to deal with, there's a thing called facticity.

We don't get to deal with, we can't change the laws of physics, we can't change the things that happen to us, we can't change the weather. But we have a choice to decide how we move in the world, how we interpret the things that happen to us, that we are ultimately responsible for creating meaning in our lives. And so, you know, and Dave's version of, you know, his idea of, saying very similar things, live a Christian life, is very similar.

He has a, there's a different, certainly a different endpoint, and a different reason why maybe you do those things. But, but essentially the human that we're describing is the same human. And there, I'm certain there are students in the class who connect the dots with each of us in a different way.

And we do a thing at the end, when we teach together, we haven't done this in a while, but when we, when we do have the opportunity to teach together, we have a thing at the end of class called Ask Bill and Dave, and you can ask us anything, and ask us how much I mean you can ask me, you know, my session will be. You get to do that a little bit later about it. Yeah, whatever you want.

And, how much beer, how much beer was above, right? And ultimately, and somebody says, hey, you guys, you know, you guys seem to talk about some things really differently. What's, what's, what's the deal? And I will say I'm an atheist, and Dave will say I'm a Christian, and they'll say, how's that work? And then we tell them. We find, we just tell them.

We're just fine. Yeah. So we don't, we don't hide it, but it's not part of the curriculum.

Maybe on that point. So yeah, I'm, I'm definitely a believer in free will. I'm one of the reviews of the book we most appreciate was clearly the authors respect the autonomy of the reader, and we both do.

You know, we, you know, I respect the autonomy of the individual because I understand it since, in his beneficence, God decided to, you know, to allow creation to occur out of himself, because I think actually was taught that physics is really good at the how of reality, not the why, because the pre-being bang stuff is kind of, and now it's hard to talk about time before it existed, but, but you know, what gets the big bang going and, and which is a cheap argument, by the way, for God, but it's, it's really kind of part of the trick stuff. If the, if you got to rely on that, you're in your own church, but you know, on you go, and so that in wanting to reflect God's glory, which is aliveness and love and reality, that the human person moves fully into that and for love to occur, which is the essence of it all, free will has to happen. You can't have true love of that true freedom.

So I've got a, I've got a rootedness in what freedom is fundamentally all about, you know, which, which I think Bill of Characterizes the essential nature of the matter that happens to acquire consciousness over the long and arduously accidental process called natural evolution development. You know, so there's, you know, so we got to this reality in a very, very different way, but we still both say I'm responsible for making sure that I don't violate your responsibility. We spent a lot of time, by the way, working really hard.

One of the reasons our course has, in our book has, has, you know, gotten a lot of response was for many, many years in the, in the secular university, you know, the university didn't think there was a way to try to nurture or to affect the formation of lives without messing with the answer to life, you know, in a post-enlightenment modernity model, you know, first do no harm and I'm not going to manipulate you by abusing the power I have as being your instructor, being your professor. So I'm not going to touch that stuff. And so for almost a century, we didn't.

And, and I always believed that it was criminally negligent and, and, and so in five minutes, everything, hey Bill, what if we taught this, because totally let's do this thing, my students are struggling all the time, we should do it, the fall is prototype at the summer, let's go. It was like a two minute deal, because, we have the belief that you can put together a very, very structural, very, very disciplined model that can hold people freely, you know, enough structure to get somewhere, but enough, not so much prescription is to tell you the answer. And so far it seems to be working.

And that's why I think that's why, you know, fundamentally this human centered design thing works. It's human. You know, what do you want to be when you grow up? I don't know.

Okay, well, let's try some stuff. And let's, let's explore that. Let's explore that question.

And, and, you know, what we found is the students, you know, I don't know how you guys feel about this, but you have a lot of conversations, you know, as a student in the dorm and, you know, over, you know, late at night in the, in the, in the stairwell, but they're not, they're not that helpful sometimes, because, because you're just, you're both, you're, everybody's confessing this sort of anxiety that they have around, you know, how do I make these choices and what do I do? And all we do is we give it a little bit of, you know, we put a container around it, we give it a little bit of structure, and help people discover for themselves, you know, well, what do you want to grow into? And why are you made? I mean, I get students, you know, you know, I have lots of advisees and they come in and they want, I want a major in engineering and go, why? And they go, I don't know. My, my dad wants me to be an engineer. It's really good major.

Yeah. Yeah. My dad wants to be an engineer.

My dad wants me to do CS, you know, my mom wants me to be a doctor and I'm like, okay, well, we're gonna stop right there. So one of the things that I hear in what you're saying from when you first started talking, what keeps ringing in my head is living a stress-free life. It sounds like living a stress-free life, and I mentioned that and it's probably resonating with me in that way because I do work on stress.

You know, I do work on racial health disparities and think a lot about kind of how our social world, how I lived in social experience impacts in the kind of stress that goes along with that. So this idea of chronic stress, how that gets into the body, how it can dysregulate our physiologic systems, how it can impact our mental health, and we know that there's a connection between the mind and the body. So not having to think 20 years from now and thinking about the next moment, this idea about the purpose in life being kind of capturing or figuring out what it is that you care most about and just seeking that, whatever that looks, just like kind of letting it play out, not stressing about stuff, right? And so what I'm thinking about is how, what your thoughts might be on how this living a well-lived and joyful life, this human design thinking, how it might be related

to this construct of stress that we know has very real manifestations for people's physical bodies.

You know, it's interesting. I don't know the data at Berkeley, I imagine is pretty similar. My students are incredibly stressed.

They're stressed about school, they're stressed about the grades, they're stressed about, you know, they have this fear of missing out, FOMO, oh, what if I don't do everything, I've got to do everything on campus, otherwise, you know, I'm not getting enough of this thing and then there's, oh my gosh. How many blocks do you have to walk to get some out of roll? One, maybe two? Yeah. So there's a lot of stress on campus and that was one of the first things we were thinking about.

I had never really thought about it in terms of the class being an antidote to stress. I think, you know, if you... The research shows the disirredution endings, we reduce anxiety. We reduce anxiety.

In fact, if you don't take the class, you get more upset. Yeah. So we have a piece of research from Bill Damon's lab that says if you take the class, you have less anxiety.

You're more susceptible to dysfunctional beliefs. You're more likely to think things that are not truly and be upset about it. But I'd also suggest that as soon as you decide you want to live a purposeful life, your stress goes way up.

Way up. Because now you have to answer a whole bunch of questions. And if you go down my path, you know, be careful if you look into the abyss.

The abyss looks back. But if you allow yourself to create it as you go along as opposed to... So I have a very good friend. We were in the same cohort at Johns Hopkins together in graduate school.

And I can remember being in the hallway there, in the hallways there, night after night, day after day. And she would always say, "I'm doing what I feel like I should be doing. What everyone has told me I should be doing my whole life." But something doesn't feel right.

But she went ahead and she graduated, got her doctorate, went on and got a tenure track faculty position in Chicago. And the year before she went up for tenure, she just said, "I'm not happy. I'm done." And she walked away from it all.

And there was a lot of investment in what she had done. And the idea of walking away brought her tremendous angst. And she didn't really know what she wanted to do after it.

And surprisingly, she's in this field now called, "So I say research design. It's design

research. I have to say my way to figure out that she does it the other way." No, design thinking is not, "Don't worry, be happy." You know, it sounds like, "Hey, darling, you know, like, just figure out what you want to do this week until they go with that." And it will all work out.

The universe loves you. You know, it's just gonna be fine. You know, that is not where we're coming from at all.

I mean, it often-- But this should idea like the not-- That's okay. That's not should. The thing is big.

And that-- And that-- And we're trying to-- Wait, we're trying to-- We don't shit on you. You shouldn't shit on you either. Don't be-- Should.

F-H-O-U-L-D. Yeah, yeah. So I'll tell you.

But we've been doing workshops all over the place. And I-- The one that strikes me is, we were doing this exercise and this lady raised her hand and she said, "I can't do it. I don't want to think about my life this way." And I said, "What do you do for a living?" She said, "I'm a corporate lawyer." I said, "Do you like it?" She said, "I hate it.

Every day I go to work. I lose a little piece of my soul." I said, "Why are you doing it?" Because I have to. I have to.

You don't understand. I have to. My whole life is built around this.

My whole persona is built around this. This is what I wanted. And I got it.

It's highly successful. And I hate it. And I told her we knew.

She told the story about-- You know, she's 42 years old. She's out in the field. She's on the road.

She's just-- She just killed it that day. You know, out there with a client. She's-- Went to bed at the hotel.

Four o'clock in the morning. She wakes up. She runs into the bathroom, flips on the light, looks at the woman and mirror goes, "Oh, shoot." That's not what she said.

And she goes, "I'm really good at this. And I hate it." You know, I'm making a ton of money. They love what I'm doing.

You know, "Oh my God, how am I going to get out of this thing?" So we were running out of this kind of stuff all the time. So when you're doing designing your life and if you're going to live coherently, look, you know, even if you have these-- I really think I might want to do work with kids. I want to do TFA.

Then I want to go get my master's in education. I want to work with at-risk kids in the city. Oh, and I really want to work for Mackenzie because I really want to work on changing and do in the social innovation practice because I want to really change the way the nonprofit world can transform what's going on in society.

And oh, yeah, I really want-- I picked up a minor in mathematics and I really want to work on big data and how that stuff can really use what's going on in the civic sector. These are radically different lives. You know, very different ways of living, very different outcomes, very different experiences.

But which one is right? Well, there's not a right. Oh, it's up to me. Yeah, wow.

Now, that's a really stressful reality. And then we do choose some say, so if you're going to do this, I mean, you know, this is a contact sport. You want to live consciously, we say, "We're here to help you gain a competent consciousness in life and vocational wayfinding." And if you want to actually be awake, I mean, all the great teachers, you know, there's the Buddha, you know, it's Jesus, you know, you've heard it said that I say unto you, if you want to wake up and smell the coffee and live in reality and then take responsibility for it, it gets really serious.

And then you have to be willing to learn how to let go what you're not doing, you have to learn how to decide when to judge yourself and when not to. And we do work on those issues a lot. But I mean, in advising my students, it's like that student who comes in and says, "Well, my mom wants to be me.

I want you to be a doctor, wants me to be in the chair." It's like, "Okay, I don't want to be responsible for you waking up at 40 and realizing that you have wasted 25 years of your life doing your mom's life and not your life." And I'm still waiting for the angry calls from mom because I talk students out of the wrong major all the time. But that's the thing, you know, your friend, you know, was doing what she should do. She was getting great accomplishment.

And she's very happy now, by the way, because she found the thing. Yeah, right. Or just let go of the thing that wasn't real for her.

None to beat these examples. Right of the street at Coffee Strada when I was teaching here for 14 semesters for eight years at a lovely time, I love counts at great school to practice at. So one of my students came to office hours and she said, you know, she was a junior in a pre-med, she was majoring in bio, she was doing really well, she had already done some pre-admittance in the medical school, you know, blah, blah, blah.

But I'm really not at all. I don't think I like people that much. I'm not sure.

I definitely don't want to do blah. I just, you know, I'm just not sure I can do this. You know, I said, okay.

So you want to talk about maybe changing your major and changing your direction. She goes, what are you saying? It's true story. I go, wow, you just kind of sounded like you think about it.

Maybe you don't. We're like medicine. No, no, I don't.

I'm going medicine. So you're probably not thinking about going to medical school. I never said that.

I never said that. Are you saying I shouldn't go to medical school? And I said, I'm not saying anything. What are you saying? Yeah.

And she got really upset and I said, look, I'm not trying to tell me to do I'm not trying to tell you to do anything. I was just, you just told me this. What does that mean to you? She goes, I don't like the way you're talking to me.

I don't like the way you're talking to me. You got to give you an added valuation. You know, it was worse.

And I find she said, she said, look, you don't understand. I've been on a track to go to medical school since I was 12 years old. And I know I'm 20.

And if I change my mind now, that means I have been wrong for eight years. I have wasted my life. I can't.

I can't. I can't. And she got up and she ran.

She ran down bankrupt. Kind of a bull true story. Something going on.

Getting a call from a dean. First a mom, then a dean didn't come back to class. I thought, here it comes three weeks later.

She didn't come back to class. Came back to office hours. Said, I'm sorry.

You really upset my guy. Yeah, that seemed like a pretty upsetting time. What's going on? You know.

But that idea, I mean, I made this decision when I was 12. And my 20 year old self could not forgive. I mean, you really want your 12 year old self to run the next 85 years of your life.

Right. Have you met 12 year olds? I mean, you know, you're mostly 2021-22. Do you really? I mean, would you delegate the rest of your life to your 21 year old? No.

And you know, we often, you know, people, one of the questions that they're like, there's a rumor that college is the best years of your life, right? Four years of best year of your life. Trust me. It's way better to be in your 50s.

Way. I say 40s. 40s.

50s are awesome. You got money. You got power.

People pay attention to you. You can do whatever you want. The 20s are nice.

Enjoy them. Nothing like the 50s. But in your 60s, you really, yeah, it's really great.

So let me ask you a question before we break for Q&A. Can you give us some examples of how you have implemented this idea of human design thinking in your own personal lives? How have you addressed this issue of what's a meaningful life for Dave, what's a meaningful, and joyful, or well-lived life for Bill, and how have you been intentional about that? And let me go ahead and sort of explicitly frame that in inter-Christian context. So what does it mean to be called? I believe there is a caller.

I believe there actually is intelligence in the universe with a beckoning. I don't think it's FedEx envelope waiting somewhere hidden under a bush in order to name on it, even though we'd all love to get one, except you really wouldn't. That'd be nice.

I got one. I changed my line. Maybe that's how we did it today.

The FedEx envelope under the bush instead of the burning bush. Don't get cute on me, though. Okay.

I'm not going to go snarky on you now, because you're an example. I understand. That if you are living a God-centered, if you're living godwardly, sort of, if you're living into your best intentions and into what you hope the spirit might be inviting you to, making yourself available of how God might be leading you.

And you find certain things are demanding your attention. I keep noticing, I'm hanging out with 18 to 32 year olds all the time. They're always on my mind remembering how hard it was from you when I was in college.

Never goes away to you. What's up with those people? So what do you do? You just lean into it. You lean into the curiosity.

You lean into, okay, Lord, show me this question that won't go away. Show me what you want to do with this question. Not the answer.

Like, sit on my couch and just pray forever until the answer falls out of the sky like a little bird going, do this. That doesn't happen. And so you lean into it.

So I talked to everybody. I couldn't. I had coffee with Randy Berry, you know, 18 years ago now.

And he goes, you should teach a cow. I kind of go, that's a great idea. But I have no

curriculum, no PhD, I'm not on the faculty end.

You know, I have no relationships with anybody who do. But other than that, it's a great idea. You know, and he goes, no, no, no, there's decal.

There's this decal thing and I'll set you up and, well, you know, four weeks later, I'm in front of a bunch of students, you know, and had that. And I thought I'd do it once. I'd do it once as an experiment, it was a prototype.

And then at the end of my first semester in the fall, a student walks up and goes, you're teaching in the spring, right? Because my friend wants to take the class. And I'm driving over from Santa Cruz, for God's sake, you know. And literally, there's a phrase when Nehemiah, the cupboard of art is actually says, and the king asks, why are you sad? And there's one of my favorite sentences in the scripture says, so I prayed to the Lord of heaven and I said to the king, and I don't think you let the king like, I'll be back in a minute.

I don't think that works that way. I think it's like, so, so that you pray on the inbreath and you respond on the outbreath and I pray on the inbreath, so, what's the deal? Okay. Okay, here's the deal.

You send them, I'll show up. Yes. 14 semesters later.

Apparently, I'm an educator. So that's how calling works for me. And so calling and prototype iteration, I mean, the reason design works is it's inadvertently Christian.

And it's inadvertently, I don't mean that cheaply. It's inadvertently Christian because it started with a question, what does it mean to be a human person? And it said, and we're going to look at that ruthlessly honestly, now the bias, we're going to take an open mind and they looked carefully, and frankly, it's not that hard to understand what people are really like. If you are open and honest, and so design openly and honestly reveres the human person and tries to respond to it in a constantly teachable way, so the posture of prototype iteration is infinitely teachable and infinitely humble.

So of course, what works? You know, I'm I think deeply flawed human being. It was just working on this idea of coherence, right? I would argue that, you know, you want to live a life of integrity, and integrity is a mountain with no top. You try their best and then you fail and then you get up and you climb a little bit higher and you fall, but there's never, you never get to the top of that mountain.

I think living a well-lived, you know, purpose, as purposeful a life as I can live, is just trying to stay in some kind of integrity with my values. One of the things I told Dave, when we started teaching this class, I said, you know, the problem with this kind of class is, we're either doing this stuff, or the biggest hypocrites you've ever met, right? And so, I work on my personal practices. I'm trying to do a mindfulness thing.

I get up every day and I say two things, which it turns out are actually from existentialists. I didn't know this, but looking it up, you know, I get up every morning and I say, I live in the best of all possible worlds, because that's that has to be true. I have no other world I can live in.

And everything I do today I choose to do. I chose to come here. I chose to tap this conversation.

I chose things. Now, you know, my incredible wife Cynthia is sitting in the audience and she can enumerate the number ways in which I am not always an integrity or a good person or, you know, a good listener. I'm not infrequently here, my wife say, you know, there's this guy, he teaches a class at Stanford, you should take it.

Yeah, so, you know, for me, it's a very practical sort of thing that you get up in every day and you try not to try to put something back in the world. Keep the campsite, you know, leave the campsite better than you found it. Don't hurt people.

You know, play, play. There's a book that we used to use in class, actually written by a guy who's, I guess, is a, it's not a minister, but James Carson. Well, he was a theologian and a philosopher.

Yeah, it's a book called finite and infinite games. I play the infinite game of life. I play the game to continue to play.

But the finite games of did I teach my class? Well, did I treat the student with respect that I helped this person figure out, you know, a problem they're working on in design is how I measure, you know, how you measure your life. That's how I measure it. I don't want to say the opportunity to say something about Bill.

One of the great joys, and we both have the privilege of saying in various places when we're together and apart, this is the best guy I ever got to work with. And we both think that, and that's really true. But one of the really great joys, I will say, quite honestly, if you want to partner with people, I'll take coherency over conviction.

Probably my best accountability partner on maintaining my spirituality is an atheist. When I was on the fence about whether or not to take the invitation to become an entrepreneur in residence at the Center for Faith and Work in New York City and missed my first quarter in 37 quarters of teaching at Stanford, Bill said, "What do you, what do you, you're agony? You have to do this." Well, no, I don't actually have to do it because no, you do have to do it. This is who you are.

I mean, are you actually going to miss this? What's wrong with you? We'll figure it out. We'll cover this, you know. I mean, so he, and that's not just, "Oh, go have a good time." He's holding me accountable to my opinion.

He says, "You keep saying you're all like, this is the best place in faith and work in the world and you want to be a national thought leader." And they just said, "Come, you can't not do this." And, you know, a nice Christian whose sloppy at her Christianity isn't going to help me near as much as a coherent and disciplined person. I mean, he knows what he thinks and he's really trying to live that way. And so am I. That's more help to me than a crummy Christian.

And the nicest thing Dave's ever said to me is, "Why are you so happy?" Not supposed to be happy. I'm supposed to be the happy guy. I've got God.

Think about it. It's not working for you. We can come on over to myself.

Well, but, you know, you've been vulnerable. I remember the time you call me on the phone. Yep.

You're walking across the quad. It's a sunny afternoon. The sun is going down.

You're listening to Stephen Wunder's. And I think you used the term, you know. I'm having a spiritual experience.

Yeah. Which he's actually not allowed to have. But he understands that the semantic of that has to do with this experience of new monosity, which, you know, his consciousness.

We stayed up late really late one night in London after we were really tired and kind of worked with the stuff through. But, you know, he's, that's an act of vulnerability and candor. That, you know, it's a great privilege and honor that he knows I'm not going to abuse that.

You know, and we've talked about this. My worldview includes mystery. Right.

Right. I don't know how this stuff works. That's kind of nice, actually.

That leaves mystery in the world.

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