
The Connected Leader

Insights on Balancing Purpose, Mission,
Family, and Spiritual Connection



Claire Annelise Smith

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Mission, Family, and Spiritual
Connection**



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Dedication

To the successful leader navigating career commitments that affect their alignment with their purpose and their connection with God and loved ones.

A letter from The Author

Dear Reader,

"She doesn't really live here. She just visits sometimes." Those were the words my brother said to a friend of mine who asked him how I was doing. This was several years ago. At the time, I thought it was amusing. But now, in retrospect?

You see, during the period at which the above conversation took place, I was wearing several leadership hats. Although I shared a home with my brother, we did not see much of each other.

I served as a program coordinator for several denominational departments, was an executive member of an international organization, and participated in one of its advisory groups. Additionally, I held the positions of deputy chair and then chair for another international group. Describing my schedule as busy with national and international travel, managing residential programs, pastoring, and performing various administrative and executive duties would be an understatement.

Indeed, I was always on the go.

One thing I realized when I stepped down from these leadership positions to pursue postgraduate studies was that I had been overlooking the cost of my success. The price was my health and some meaningful relationships that I had neglected along the way.

The period of study I undertook provided me with the space to reassess the expectations I had set for myself, even more so

than those imposed by others. I focused intently on God's purpose for me.

With renewed clarity, I sought to realign my personal expectations with my God-given purpose, accompanied by a realistic understanding of the time I had. This shift improved how I viewed and navigated relationships. Needless to say, I developed stronger connections and enjoyed a better quality of life in my next leadership position.

Over the years, I have faced many changes—some anticipated, others unexpected, and some even caused by life-changing illnesses. Yet through it all, my connection with God has kept me grounded, along with the support of others who continue to stand by me. I cherish these relationships and strive to make time for them, even as I continually seek to remain aligned with God's purpose.

This book tells the story of intersecting journeys through life's changes, exploring the pursuit of meaningful connections and a life grounded in faith and aligned with a God-given purpose. Follow two successful leaders, George and Richard, along with their families, as they navigate the highs and lows of life to cultivate strong relationships with God, others, and themselves.

Happy Reading!

Claire A Smith, PhD

Author, Speaker, Personal Spiritual Mentor and Coach

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Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:29 - 31 NRSV).

Introduction



What happens when you have a strong understanding of your life purpose? Let us take it one step further. What happens when your mission at work strongly aligns with this purpose and your vision is crystal clear?

If you are like George and Richard in this book, you face a danger. What is that danger? Giving total commitment to your work to the detriment of your relationships. You see, when your life purpose and the mission and vision at work align, it is easy to become absorbed by that work

You see, amid the changes of your challenges and successes, it is very easy to become disconnected from God, others, and yourself. Yes, you will find fulfilment in your work. But there is also a void that comes from this disconnection. Then, wittingly

or unwittingly, you layer it over with work related busyness. The void gets deeper beneath that layer.

Thus, you must exercise awareness so that you can deal with any arising disconnection in a timely manner. If you do not do so, you may find those life-giving, life-sustaining connections disintegrating around you, leaving you emotionally and relationally bankrupt. You also feel shame and guilt; shame that you are not measuring up on the personal level and guilt when you miss key aspects of the lives of those who are most dear to you.

Without the safeguard of awareness, the void and emptiness that arise from your disconnection will leave you isolated, both now and in the future. Hence, the tree silhouette on the cover—with its strong roots and branches, along with the handshake—symbolizes leadership, wisdom, family, and spirituality. These elements must be united to achieve ultimate fulfillment.

I invite you to follow George and Richard on their life journeys to stay connected and to reconnect with God, others, and themselves as they navigate significant life changes.

Connections matter. It is time to be a purposeful, connected leader.

Chapter One: What Could Possibly Go Wrong?



George gave himself a pat on the back. He smiled. He had completed another project successfully. George felt the thrill that comes after you have worked hard and pushed through the obstacles that arise. Then before your eyes, it all comes together. Your dream, your vision is here. Ah!

“What a great team!” George thought to himself. They had worked incredibly hard. No doubt about it. He had not done this on his own. Now it was time to move on to the next project.

But first, George would allow himself this moment to bask in the thrill of accomplishment. And it was not just personal. Many people would be helped by this.

Yet, this success wasn’t enough. So many ideas, so many people to help. George was driven as he saw the close alignment between his mission at work and his life purpose. At least that’s

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what he told himself, shaking off any nagging feelings of doubt that tried to sneak in.

The phone rang, interrupting his thoughts.

“Time to come back to earth,” George said to himself. And so he did with a bang.

“Hey. Are you going to meet us at the restaurant? I thought you’d be home by now. I guess you changed plans.” It was Christine, his wife, on the line.

George slapped his forehead. In the intensity of the final push, he had ignored all his reminders. He had even told Hyacinth, his executive assistant, “It’s a wrap. You can leave now. I’ll take care of the final pieces.”

“I’ll meet you there,” George said decisively. Inwardly, he groaned. The plan had been that he would get home early so that they could go to dinner as a family at 6.00 pm.

As George jumped into his Audi and drove off, he thought about life’s complexities. Then he focused on his driving as he darted in and out of traffic, just hoping he would get there safely and on time.

“Not too shabby,” George said to himself as he pulled into the restaurant’s parking lot. He had made good time. But the truth was, he was late, 5 minutes late.

George sat at the table ignoring all the warning signs. He was still on his high from their successfully executed project. Barely registering that it was unusual for his children to be out with them for dinner during the school week, he exclaimed, “Honey, we did it. We pulled it off.”

The silence that followed his pronouncement was anything but golden.

“Haven’t you forgotten something?” Christine asked.

What Could Possibly Go Wrong?

For the first time, George paid attention to his children's presence at the table. It was a weekday night. Why were they there? He tried to remember what was going on.

Christine rescued him. "Tiffany, tell dad how your birthday is going."

"Yes. Tell me," George said. "I'm all ears."

Tiffany stared at him with the penetrating gaze that twelve-year-olds have perfected.

"Happy birthday, sweetheart! I'm sorry I had to leave before I could greet you this morning. What did you do today?"

Slowly, George was beginning to reconnect mentally and emotionally with his family.

Tiffany smiled a knowing smile. "I used the gift cards that you and mommy gave me, and I bought more books from my favorite series."

As he ate his meal, George thought about his life and his various commitments and connections. He had dropped the ball on this one. Normally, unlike a lot of dads in his position, he remembered his children's birthdays. But this time, with everything else going on, he had missed it.

George felt like a jerk for missing it, like the world's worst dad. He had always told himself that he would never be like those dads who were disconnected from their families, missing out on important moments. Yet here he was. He had forgotten his daughter's birthday. His feeling of shame and guilt was real.

Because it was a school night, they left the restaurant early. Tiffany had opted for family time on the day of her birthday rather than a party and he had almost missed it.

"I'll find a way to make this up to her," George told himself. As they departed, George junior, or Georgi as they called him,

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asked him for a ride. He wanted to ride home with his dad. This made George happy as they got in his car.

“You forgot, didn’t you?”

George ignored the question and tried to change the subject. “How was school?”

“You forgot, didn’t you? Georgi persisted. “But don’t worry. Your secret’s safe with me.”

Once again, George tried to change the subject. This time, he succeeded. “How was school?”

“Oh. The usual,” was the reply.

“What about the computer science classes? How are they going?”

“Oh, dad. That was so yesterday.”

“So, what’s today?”

Soon they were home.

After they got home, George had a quick catch up with Tiffany. Once he saw her off to bed, he went to his bedroom. He was tuckered.

No sooner had he made it inside the door, than Christine confronted him. “You know I’m proud of you and the work you do. I love that you are making a difference in people’s lives. And you are a good provider. No two ways about it. But we cannot take second place. I know that you forgot Tiffany’s birthday and all our plans. That is not acceptable.”

George breathed deeply. There was not a lot that he could say without starting an argument. He was tired. “You’re right.”

“I’m just glad that you made it, even though you were late, and we couldn’t travel together as planned,” Christine continued. “Tiffany would have been heart-broken if you had not come. She loves her daddy and still looks up to you. She was upset when

What Could Possibly Go Wrong?

you did not make it home in time to travel with us. She is a very sensitive child, but she is also a forgiving child. I would hate for you to mess her up with your thoughtlessness.”

George wanted to say that he wasn’t thoughtless, but he felt too tired for arguments. In any case, he was already beating himself up for having forgotten Tiffany’s birthday. It was better to let Christine have her say.

“There’s not much I can say except that I got carried away when the project was finally completed and the vision had become a reality.”

Christine responded. “I know that you worked hard. I’ll cut you some slack this time because I know you have been trying hard to be present with us, but recently . . .” Christine’s voice trailed off.

“I know,” George said.

“Do you really? Anyway, how are you going to celebrate the team?”

“Hmm. I hadn’t thought about that. What would I do without you?”

“Good question,” Christine said. “I hope it never comes to that. But, we’re losing our connection with each other.”

Chapter Two: Connecting?



As George drove to the office the next morning, he thought about what Christine had said last night about losing their connection. “Were they really losing their connection?” he wondered?

“It’s funny,” he reflected. “Connections mean everything to me. Indeed, I could not have made it this far without Christine. And then there is the team at work and many other people who have been pivotal along my journey.”

George thought about the people at various stages of his life who had supported and encouraged him. He realized that this had started in his childhood. There had always been people who had opened doors for him and/or connected him with those who could do so.

“Connections – they are all around me . . . and yet I have begun to take them for granted.”

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Just at that moment, George drove past a sign that read, “Quality Assurance.” For some reason, the word, “quality,” jumped out at him. He had passed that sign every day, but today was different.

George parked and went up to his office. The first thing he did when he sat down was to write on a notepad, “prioritize quality connections.” He also put it in his phone. Then, for emphasis he wrote, “prioritize quality relationships.” Having done this, he called his team together.

“Congratulations, everyone. You’ve done an incredible job.”

“Ready for an update on the next project?” Gary asked.

“Have I become a slave driver?” George asked himself.

“It’s really inspiring to see the mission and vision come together,” Cindy added excitedly. “We are pumped up and ready to go!”

George looked at them. As he looked, really looked, he got emotional, though he was able to hide it. He was taking their loyalty and commitment for granted. Not good. If he wasn’t careful, they would burn out and he would have to find a new team. He did not want that. He did not want to lose them.

At the same time, it hit George that when you peeled away the layers, his team comprised people with lives outside of the projects on which they worked. While he did not need to be involved with these lives, he needed to be aware of them. And, deep down, he did care.

“Quality connections.” This was the phrase that came to George. How could he have quality connections with his team? He did not need to get into the nitty gritty of their lives; didn’t need to force friendships. But he did need to see them as people

rather than cogs in the wheel. This meant he needed to show interest in all aspects of their lives.

Just then, Hyacinth reminded him of a scheduled Zoom meeting. “Reschedule it,” he told her. Then he turned to the team and told them, “Come on. Let’s go get some coffee. Where do you want to go?”

They recommended their favorite place.

As they drank their coffee and nibbled on their pastries, George could feel the tension ebbing away. They teased each other. Then, the tone shifted as they talked about their families and interests. Soon it was time to go.

While they walked back, Cindy, ever the cheerleader, said, “Yes! We are a team again.” Jack hung back.

“What’s up?” George asked him.

“Man, it’s been intense around here. I love the mission and everything, but . . .” Jack’s voice trailed off.

“What are you saying?” George asked him.

“I don’t know. I came in this morning with my letter of resignation. This stuff has been killing me.”

George felt as if he had been sucker punched. He had not seen that coming. Jack continued.

“My family is in crisis and . . . I don’t know. I feel that if you don’t care about me, why should I care about your projects? It’s not even about the pay. No complaints there. But I’ve only hung on this long because of the difference we are making in people’s lives. However, this coffee break has me thinking. Maybe you do have a heart. Maybe it is not just about your ego. I’ve got to think about it.”

“Jack, I’m sorry it’s been like that for you.”

By this time, they were back at the office.

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“Let’s get you on my calendar. I’d like to get more of your feedback and hear more about your family situation.”

Jack hesitated before replying, “Sure.”

After George had gotten Hyacinth to schedule Jack, he turned to her: “Do I ask too much of my team?”

She chuckled.

“Well, do I?”

Realizing that he was serious, Hyacinth chose her words carefully.

“You know what you want, how you want it, and when you want it. That’s good. You get results.”

Then Hyacinth went face-to-face with George and looked him straight in the eyes as she continued, “But sometimes you forget that we are humans. Now, you haven’t always been like this, but the more you succeed, the more you want to do and faster and faster. Success has become like a drug for you. You’re always looking for the next hit. It has always been there, underlying what you do. But it got much worse after your most recent promotion.”

“Thank you for your honesty,” George said.

“So, I’m not in trouble?”

They both laughed. Hyacinth knew she could get away with just about anything. They went back a long way.

“As a matter of fact, we are going out to lunch,” George said.

“See you then,” Hyacinth replied as she returned to her desk and got back to business.

“Quality Connections.” George looked at what he had written on his notepad earlier – “”Prioritize quality connections.

Prioritize quality relationships.” He affirmed to himself that connections are about relationships, and they matter.

When you get right down to it, these quality connections start with remembering that people are human beings first. They each have their strengths and weaknesses as well as challenges. They bring these to the organization.

Even though George paid them well and the work they did was rewarding, this was not enough. He realized that they needed to know that he was seeing them as individual people and not, “cogs in the wheel.” He had to find a way to let them know that he cared and valued them for who they were and not just what they brought to the organization; that even though he was mission and vision driven, what he was doing was more than vanity driven. It was about purpose, and it was about people. And that included them.

As George thought about what Jack and Hyacinth had told him, he recognized an element of truth in what they had said. The thrill and satisfaction of accomplishment along with the accolades had taken over. He had stopped seeing people. As a result, he had broken connections.

Chapter Three: Divine Connections



Half an hour later, George was ready for lunch. He did a quick check-in with Christine to ensure that everything was okay, and more importantly to say, “I love you.”

“Am I getting the old George back?” Christine asked. George shook his head to himself as he hung up the phone. Christine was always a bit extra. Then, realizing he still had a few minutes, he did something he had not done in a long time.

George reached into his desk drawer and pulled out his daily devotional. Sure, he had it on his phone. But sometimes, he just liked to hold the paper copy. George had started keeping the devotional in his desk drawer because some mornings he was too

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busy before leaving home or he forgot. He walked from his desk and settled in his plush armchair. Today's reading was "The Great Commandments."

Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

Mark 12:29-31

"Wow! It's funny," George thought. When I think about God, I think about duty. I don't think about love."

At lunch with Hyacinth, he asked her, "I know you have a strong faith in God, but do you love God?"

"Well, yes. Don't you?"

"I don't know. When I think about God, I think about duty. I don't think of love. It is not a feeling."

"Oh! How so?"

"Well, you know – go to church, serve on the board, feel guilty if I don't want to go, or worse yet don't go, give money (they love my money) . . . and that's it."

"That's it?"

"Oh, read your Bible. Actually, I read it today after a long time. The Scripture reading was the great commandments. That's what got me thinking about this whole loving God business."

"Well for me, when I think about God loving me . . . Seeing that you mentioned the Bible, John 3:16 is a verse I treasure.

You know, I learned it in the King James Version of the Bible as, ‘For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’ I learned it as a child, and I carry it in my heart to this day.

“When I think about that verse and God’s love, how could I not love God? Through Jesus Christ, God has forgiven my sins, saved me from the guilt of them and from the tyranny of sin, death, and destruction. God guides me. And you know what? God gives me such peace in all kinds of circumstances that sometimes I can’t even understand where it comes from. I am so grateful and feel so much love for God.

“You know, I do go to church, but my love is for God. Church is where I meet with other people who are serving God and I learn more about God, God’s love, what God wants from me, and I am empowered to serve him more. I love the people there, though God knows, none of us is perfect. But it is about my love relationship with God.

“And another thing, my love-commitment to God is as much an emotion as it is a decision I made. I am determined. Love is more than an emotion.”

Hyacinth gave a self-deprecating laugh and sat back in her chair. She had gotten intense.

“It’s a connection!” George exclaimed.

“Yes,” Hyacinth replied. “A divine connection. God reached out to me in love. I reached back and returned that love. I’m connected with God. God’s love fills me and frees me to love and connect with other people.”

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“I’m still puzzled. Where does loving yourself, as mentioned in these verses, fit in? George knitted his brow as he looked at Hyacinth for an answer.

“God’s love is a freeing love. Knowing that God made me, loves me no matter what, that God accepts me as I am . . . it’s freedom,” Hyacinth said. “I no longer have to struggle to accept myself because somebody thinks that I am not pretty enough or good enough or smart enough or any of that stuff. God says that I am enough.

“I don’t need to avoid taking a good look at myself because I might not like what I see. God says, ‘Redeemed. I am changing you into the likeness of my son, Jesus Christ, if you let me.’

“Yes! God’s love is enough, and I am free to love God, love you, and most definitely love myself. God gave me his best, his Son. Now, I want the best for you, and I want the best for myself. It is a divine connection.”

“Hmm. That’s a lot to think about.” George did not know what else to say.

“Stop thinking and start feeling and being,” was Hyacinth’s rejoinder.

They chatted some more on general topics before going back to the office. Once there, George soon got absorbed in finalizing the parameters of the next project. But he felt unsettled.

There was something missing that George could not quite put his finger on. He decided to take a break and come back to it tomorrow with a fresh mind. Sometimes a break would do that. In any case, it had been a while since he had gone home early. So, the break would have two purposes – come back with a fresh mind with new ideas for finalizing the parameters of the next project and have more time with his family.

Sure enough, his family was happy to see him. They had not given up on him yet, though it had been closer than he wanted to admit. Georgi gave him a knowing look, which George ignored. Tiffany told him all about her new books.

All in all, it was a satisfying evening. He needed to do this more often.

In bed, he asked Christine, “Do you love God?”

“Of course,” she replied. “Don’t you?” Then she turned off the light.

As he did his morning workout in their gym, George wondered where it had gone wrong with God, and with everyone else for that matter. As he pumped iron and pondered the issue of loving God, he realized that there had been a time when he felt a connection with God. Now, not so much.

It was as if all his connections were frayed or fraying. What could he do?

Time. It came down to time.

George realized that his projects succeeded because he had invested time, energy, creativity, thought, and heart into them. He needed to apply these to all areas of his life. However, he also needed to trust his team more. This would result in him handing over aspects of the projects that were not dependent on him, but to which he had been holding on. He would stop struggling to have quality time for his family, himself, and other key connections. He would be able to pray and read the Bible more.

Okay. But that would be difficult. Truth be told, he enjoyed being able to say, “I did it,” knowing that while supported by the team, he had done the lion’s share after he had done the work of envisioning and strategizing.

Ego. Yes. That ego did get in the way.

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George whistled. It hit him like a ton of bricks. He had started feeling disconnected from God when he had stopped praying and reading the Bible.

“Too busy,” George had said. He went to church as often as possible, and that was it. Time was the excuse, but he was the one who had allowed his busyness to knock out his joy and tamp down his love. As a result, praying and reading his Bible had become another unwanted chore, a duty. That shrinking connection with God had affected other areas and connections in his life negatively. No heart.

“Dear God, thank you for loving me. Please forgive me for treating you as an optional chore. I open my heart to once again receive your love through Jesus Christ. Holy Spirit, please sweep over me.”

While George was praying with all his heart, he felt God’s light and peace flood his entire being. “Hallelujah!” he shouted out. “Thank you, Lord!”

He now felt invigorated and ready to face the day.

Chapter Four: On the Frontline



The new day went well until George saw the news headline and read the article. It stung. The writer had deliberately twisted what he had said at the launch of the new project. The article had distorted his good intentions.

George was angry for himself, but he was also angry on behalf of the others who had worked so hard on this project. And what about those who were benefitting from it?

“Don’t these journalists care about any of that? Don’t they care about the people? Are they even human?” George asked himself. It was time to talk with the team.

“Your work will stand the test of time. Don’t let these people get to you,” George said, referring to the journalists and the

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article. “Do not let them get to you. Keep your eyes on the vision and mission, and the people you are serving. You know the truth. The people you are serving know the truth. The truth will prevail.”

George went straight from his pep talk to his meeting with Jack. He was feeling the pressure.

George took deep breaths. He wanted to be relaxed and attentive when he spoke with Jack.

Jack wasted no time once he was seated. “You’ve got to remember that we have lives. And we can’t see things exactly as you do.”

“That’s a good point,” George responded.

“You know, sometimes I feel that no matter how hard I try, I will never measure up. I’m not quick-witted. I’m not full of energy like Cindy. I’m not the one to go to the front and make things happen like Gary. I honestly don’t think that there is a place for me here.”

George scratched his head. “Lord, help me,” he prayed silently. He felt blind-sided and out of his depth. Then he remembered his conversation with Hyacinth.

“Jack, I do not want you to be anyone but yourself. Greg has his role. Cindy has her role. I rely on you to be the one who will take his time to dig deep, then come at things from a different angle we had not considered before. You are the one who catches the things the rest of us miss.

“God made you your own special person. You have a place here.”

“Really?” Jack queried incredulously.

“Really. And what’s going on with your family?”

“Ah man. These long hours have been killing my relationship with my wife. She’s been threatening to leave me.”

George leaned forward, paused, and then said, “I’m so sorry to hear that.”

“Yes. You know, my staff doesn’t always pull their weight, so to keep my end up, I usually put in extra-long hours.”

“Have you spoken to HR?”

“I don’t want to get anyone in trouble.”

It occurred to George that while Jack was excellent in his job, they had not trained him in managing people. This was a weak spot Jack had that was creating anxiety for him.

As Jack spoke, George gained insight into his personality type. Relating to people did not come easily to Jack, much less managing them. But even if it did, they still had a responsibility to give him the training.

“Jack, this is what I want you to do. Take next week off. I’ll get it covered. Work on things at home. Consider seeing a marriage or family counselor. I’ll talk with HR and when you come back, we’ll do an assessment of your staff needs. We’ll also look at staff management training for you.” George signaled that the meeting was over.

Jack hesitated at the door. “Will I have a job to come back to?”

George extended his hand. “Shake on it,” he said.

As Friday ended, George found himself looking forward to playing a few rounds of golf with Bill and Suzie the next day on their favorite course. Boy, was he ready for the weekend!

Christine did not like golf. She didn’t mind the business talk that often went with it, but golf was just not her thing. But it would be good to talk about business and other things without

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the formality of the office, even if Christine did not go with them.

The next day, after the pleasantries, Bill said, “Let’s get going.” As they started out, Bill remarked, “I see you have made the news again. Front page no less. I could not believe what they said, though. Anyway, it’s called, ‘being on the frontline.’”

“Oh. I’ve been on the frontline! It’s not just on the front page, but everywhere. It seems as if new fronts keep opening up. But you know what? I have rekindled my love-relationship with God, and thanks to that connection, I have peace.”

“I’m so happy to hear that. And congratulations on completing that major project!” Suzie said. “What’s next?”

“Doggone it. Missed that shot. We’ve got another major project in the works. I need to figure out a couple things though. Things like, who am I really doing this for — me or others? And if it is in keeping with our vision and mission, always keeping my purpose in view. I don’t want to be on an ego trip, and, from recent conversations, this may be the case.

“As I keep getting wins, I seem to have become disconnected from the people around me, including those I have been called to serve. Do I need to bring in more staff, scale back, scale up? And the big one, do I get some perverse pleasure or validation when the success hits come? So, I’m praying about it. Praying for wisdom. Hyacinth . . . you remember Hyacinth?”

“Your unflappable, indomitable executive assistant. Of course, we remember Hyacinth,” Suzie responded.

“Oh good. She said my success has become like a drug. And you know, I have to think about the impact everything has on Christine, the kids, and my team. It is a lot and these connections matter way beyond what some shill presents in the newspapers.

Man, I just pray for those people. They have to live with themselves.”

Bill interjected. “I go between anger and humor. But it is the dishonesty that gets me. Too often, they simply make things up. That is not acceptable. You know? Sometimes it is the journalist, sometimes it’s the editor, other times they take what one of our competitors gives them and run with it without checking. But you know, have to get those clicks and sales, and the negative sells.

“The hard part is that if you try to correct it, you draw more attention to it. Plus, if it is ‘pick-on-you-season,’ we’d waste a lot of time dealing with this stuff. We and our staff have better things to do. Don’t know what the solution is. Yes! Got that in the hole.”

“I say to Bill, ‘Just do the right thing. After you have put out your press releases, tune out the noise. Only do interviews with honest brokers. And even if you can’t find any, your integrity and work will speak for themselves,’” Suzie said.

“Wise words,” George replied.

Chapter Five: Connected, But . . .



“Love divine all loves excelling . . . Jesus, Thou are all compassion, Pure unbounded love thou art . . . Pray and praise thee without ceasing, Glory in thy perfect love.” George sang the words lustily .
<http://hymntime.com/tch/pdf/en/h/y/f/r/Hyfriedol.pdf>

George was in church and today it did not feel like a chore or an unwelcome duty. He was there with his family to worship God out of love. They were there with other believers who were also seeking to love and serve God out of and despite their imperfections. They were trusting God to renew and change them into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

Cindy’s words came to him, “We’re a team again!”

Connected

George had left God's team and it felt good to be back – connected. Once more, George felt connected with God, his family, friends, and even his colleagues and employees. He also felt as if he had found himself.

Connected, and it feels so good. Indeed.

It was the God difference.

God had used different people in George's life, starting with Christine, to signal to him that something was wrong. God had used them to shake him out of his complacent smugness. This shock had created the opening for him to take out the devotional that memorable morning. What a difference it had made!

George had now identified that nagging feeling he had – he had been running on spiritual and relational empty. He had come close to bankruptcy in those areas. His new commitment was to take a day off each week for prayer, reflection, worship, and family time. He had to replenish his love well beginning in that place of deep connection with God. He had started this and it was already making a difference.

"Yes! I will be true to my purpose without leaving God, others, and myself behind," George resolved within himself. He would do so by standing firm in this weekly commitment. The connection makes the difference. Prioritize quality relationships, as he had written that day in his office.

George returned home with a warm feeling. In keeping with his commitment, he spent time with the family, just relaxing and doing some fun things together. He played games with the kids and Christine. He enjoyed not feeling rushed as he savored this time.

As the new work week started, George carried that warm feeling within him as he returned to the office. He was also

excited about the opportunities at work. These meant helping more people. He never wanted to lose sight of that.

The big opportunity which excited George the most was a mutually beneficial partnership with another company. This company offered a critical area of service that George's did not. Similarly, George's company offered another area of service that would benefit the other company. Rather than adding something new with a steep learning curve for his employees, it was better to work together, utilizing each other's strengths.

On paper, this partnership was straightforward. However, the reality was more complex. There were details to be worked out. Yes, some were included in the preliminary document, but the complexity came in fleshing them out. How would they mesh the pertinent systems? What would they need to share? How would they deal with confidentiality? What about personnel?

They also had to consider the differing work cultures, as well as personalities and egos. There was so much more to this partnership than the document showed.

George was thankful that he had a strong team. Nevertheless, he found himself increasingly immersed in bringing this partnership to fruition, especially as they neared the end. Then, they hit a major bump. The other company was getting cold feet.

"Calm down," George told himself. He wanted to tear his hair out. Not now, when everybody was ready to go, when so many of their clients were now depending on getting this service through his company, beginning in the new month.

They already had all-hands-on-deck, full throttle ahead.

George was so engrossed in this process of developing the partnership, it did not even occur to him to step back and assess what was really going on. Instead, he pressed on. He was

Connected

determined that regardless of how many further hours it cost, this partnership would come to fruition when they had said it would.

After going flat out for what seemed like an eternity, George finally had to admit that it was not going to happen at the beginning of the month. He needed to pull back, give it space, and ensure that all the i's were dotted and the t's crossed. Importantly, the people involved had to be ready practically, mentally, and emotionally.

George let out a big sigh. "Love divine, all loves excelling" As those words came back to him, he breathed deeply.

Chapter Six: Resetting Connections — The Slippage



“You’re slipping,” Christine said.

“Deep breaths, deep breaths,” George told himself. He felt his stomach tightening as he looked up from his meal. He looked around the room. “Dear God,” he said to himself.

Bringing his gaze back to Christine George asked, “Can we just enjoy the meal and then talk about it later?”

“Sure,” she said with a big sigh.

After a while Christine said, “I’m enjoying this. Very flavorful.”

“Yes,” George replied.

Connected

“You’re really trying, aren’t you?” Then before George could reply, Christine continued. “I know. Just enjoy the moment.”

This was something they were both working on — enjoying the moment. George would get so caught up in his work that he found it hard to switch off, even when he was with his family. Christine, on the other hand, was so busy looking out for the family that she forgot to switch that off.

“Yes. Enjoy the moment,” George replied. They both laughed then gave their full attention to the meal and each other. It was a memorable evening.

A few days later, George took a good look at himself in the mirror as he shaved. He could see the tiredness etched on his face. At the same time, he felt the excitement rising in him. They were sorting out the issues with the proposed partnership and were close to the finish line.

“You’re slipping.” In the midst of his excitement George remembered Christine’s words. He was yet to have the conversation with her, but he knew what it was about. Despite his best intentions and the recommitment, he had articulated to himself in church not so long ago, he was slipping back into his old ways. Truth be told, he was getting in late these days and was missing time with the children and quality time with Christine. He had not forgotten, but . . .

The more he thought about it, the more pressured George felt. He knew that Christine’s words were more than an observation. They had carried a warning. He remembered a previous conversation: “I’m ready to walk,” Christine had said. But he had gotten it together. He had made his commitment and had been sticking with it until. . . George wasn’t sure when he

had fallen off, but it was related to the soon-to-be-announced partnership.

One thing George did know was that he could always count on Christine to hold him accountable. He did not want to lose that. But it was not only that. He did not want to lose her. He loved her too much to let her go. He had to get it together.

Soon it was time for his meeting with Richard. They met at a nearby restaurant. This was another opportunity. This time for a shorter-term collaboration.

As they exchanged pleasantries, George said, “Do you know what I love about this place? It gives you privacy. Of course, its elegant decor doesn’t hurt.”

After the preliminaries were over and they had put in their order, Richard commented, “You’re working on a big project, aren’t you?”

“Oh, yes!” George excitedly brought him up to date. Then he asked Richard what he was working on. Richard told him. Next, the discussion turned to the purpose of the meeting — future collaboration.

Then, to his surprise, Richard asked George a question he had not been expecting.

“What safeguards do you have in place to ensure that you are not over-extending yourself?” Richard continued, “What about your family? How are they doing? How is your relationship with them?” Richard seemed genuinely interested.

George was confused. What was happening? He was sitting across from one of the most powerful businessmen who had a reputation for getting things done, pushing his way to the top, and here he was asking George about his family. Was this some

Connected

ploy to disarm him, to leave him at a disadvantage, giving Richard the upper hand?

“They’re fine,” George replied, amidst his disquiet.

“How much time do you spend with them?” Richard continued on the personal track.

George felt anger rising in him. It was none of Richard’s business. But, George knew he would answer, because of who Richard was. He was also honest with himself and realized that part of the anger stemmed from the guilt he was feeling because he knew that he had not been keeping up with his commitment to God, his family, and himself. This was having a ripple effect on how he showed up.

“Business is important but family beats all. They are God’s gift to us.” Having said that, Richard leaned back in his seat.

“No doubt about that.” George gave a wry smile as he said it. Then his smile faded. “You really believe that, don’t you?”

“I learned that the hard way,” Richard replied. “It was such a dark time in my life.” He sighed before he continued.

“My wife divorced me years ago. For a L-O-N-G time, I was angry and bitter. I felt she was ungrateful — her and the kids. I had given them everything. I had worked my soul out and I had been a good provider. Then it seemed as if she turned the kids against me.” Richard had a faraway look in his eyes, as if he was reliving those days.

“Oh, you have kids,” George said, breaking the silence after a while.

“Yes. A boy and a girl. The girl is older by a few years.”

“That’s like Christine and I. We have a boy and a girl as well. The girl is older.”

Richard gave George a piercing look. “Cherish them,” he said. He repeated with an intensity that conveyed urgency: “Cherish them now.” Then he resumed his story.

“At the time of the divorce, my daughter, Genevieve, took her mother’s side. My son, Paul, did not seem bothered one way or another. Loraine, my ex-wife, got custody. I did not fight it.

“My daughter said some words to me, which I will not repeat, but were seared on my soul. ‘Ungrateful brat, just like your mother,’ was my response. Nothing was my fault.

“When I look back, I realize that during the marriage I had neglected them in all the ways that mattered. I was giving them things, but not myself. I was absent emotionally and often physically. I was also emotionally immature. This immaturity continued for a long time.

“I would not let go of my anger and bitterness. I blamed them, I blamed God . . . everyone but myself.

Loraine got generous alimony and child support. I did not care. I threw myself even more into my work and increased my success. My business became the place where I was successful, smothering my sense of failure in my personal life. I rarely saw my kids. My attitude was, ‘You wanted to be with your mother? So be it.’”

Their server arrived with their meal, but Richard barely seemed to notice.

“The sense of failure, shame, the pain . . . they were always present, lurking below the surface. I worked hard to suppress them. Then, one day, a day I will never forget, a card arrived at my office. This was the first in a couple of painfully memorable days that closely followed each other,”

Connected

Richard paused as his voice broke. He gathered himself together and regained his composure.

“The card contained an announcement. My daughter was getting married. That was it. Her mother’s name was on the announcement. Mine was not.

“I called her mother in a fit of rage. It was not a prize-winning conversation. I accused her of many things. Then I ended with, ‘And I suppose you will want me to pay for it.’

“To my shock Loraine replied, ‘Not if you don’t want to.’ That was it. They were ready to cut me out of their lives after all I had done for them.

“I instructed my assistant to liaise with them to pay for it. I did not want her to have a shabby wedding. She was my only daughter, though estranged. Was it about her or was it about my pride?

Richard paused then said, “I’ve never been able to fully resolve what my motivation was — care or pride? Perhaps I do not want to admit my lack of care and that my ego was bigger than how I felt about my daughter.

“My assistant was very familiar with them. She had dealt with their matters for years.

“One day, I suddenly realized that I had heard nothing further about the wedding. This time I got Genevieve’s number and called her to ask what was happening. It was a soul-shattering conversation.

“‘I’m busy,’ Genevieve said. ‘I don’t have time to talk with you.’ ‘Wait,’ I responded. ‘Who is walking you down the aisle?’ ‘Paul,’ she replied and hung up. I called her back. ‘Paul, your brother?’ ‘Yes. Don’t call me again. I’m busy.’

“Something broke in me. I checked with my assistant. Sure enough, they were using my money to pay for the wedding, but evidently, my presence was neither wanted nor needed.

“I thought of calling her mother but decided that would be a waste of time. I called my mother instead. Now I had not spoken with her in a long time, but any port in a storm, right?”

George nodded.

“My mother and I had a strong disagreement shortly after the divorce. It affected our relationship going forward. I still cared about her. Growing up, she had made a lot of sacrifices for me, and I’d always promised myself that I would do everything I could to ensure that she was always comfortable. Even before the disagreement, I had set up monthly automatic payments to her bank account and nothing changed on that front, though our relationship did. At the time of the divorce, it seemed to me that she had taken Loraine’s side. I felt betrayed.

“I communicated with Mom around birthdays, Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving. She would reach out at other times, but I was busy. Yet, in that moment when I felt hurt and let down, it was my mom to whom I turned. I called her.

“My mom got the full brunt of my anger. I was not angry with her, but I poured it all out to and on her. When I was finished venting, she calmly said, ‘But that’s who you are to her. That’s how she remembers you — the dad who gives her things but is never there for her.’

“Unspoken words hung in the air such as, ‘I warned you about this.’ Then my mom continued after giving a pause to let her initial words sink in: ‘Can you forget about your sense of importance and be happy for her for a change?’

“How is the food? Sorry. I got carried away.” Richard brought himself back to the present.

“It’s good,” George responded. “I don’t mind listening at all. I believe I am hearing this for a reason. Did you go to the wedding?”

Richard nibbled at his food for a bit, then he said, “I did. I had not been invited. I was hurt and embarrassed. I had always imagined myself walking my daughter down the aisle. For her to choose her brother who was still in school, was a slap in the face.

“But, for a change, I took my mother’s advice. She said that I would regret it if I did not go to the ceremony at the church. Technically, you do not need an invitation to attend a ceremony at a church.

“Of course, my mother had been invited. At the time of the divorce, she had said her bit and then continued to have a great relationship with Loraine and the kids.

“Anyway, I cancelled a business trip and went to the ceremony. It was beautiful.

“Little did I know that this would be the turning point in my life and in my relationship with my children.”

Chapter Seven: Second Chances?



“Even though I was seated at the back of the church at the wedding ceremony, Loraine noticed me. After the recessional, she came over and spoke with me briefly. Very graciously, she said they would make room for me at the reception. I told her not to bother. It was enough that I had seen Genevieve get married.

“‘I’ll tell her that you came. She’ll be happy to hear.’

“That shocked me. ‘Tell her that she looked radiant.’

“‘I will.’ With that, Loraine left.

“It is interesting how one selfless act can open the door to something richer.”

George stared at Richard as a light bulb went off in his head. He said reflectively, "It is the little things that are so big for our

Connected

kids. If I tell mine that I have an appointment or something like that and can't make it to one of their activities, especially if I had already promised to be there, they will put on a brave face and say, 'I understand.' When I change my schedule and show up, they will be over the moon. And when I make it home before their bedtime routines, they will be all over me, sometimes literally. They fill my ears with all their doings."

Richard had used this moment of George's reflection to get a few bites in. He nodded and continued. "These connections matter in ways we cannot begin to understand. It is about nurturing them and making ourselves and others fulfilled now. But it is also about how we live in the future. Connections matter to us and the people in our lives.

"I went home after the wedding ceremony. That night, I got drunk. I fell into a depression. Like I said, it was a dark time. While I was in the depths of this depression, I got a call from my daughter asking me to meet her at a restaurant we used to frequent before I got too busy. She wanted to introduce me to her husband.

"At the restaurant, Genevieve got straight to the point. 'Why did you come to my wedding? I did not invite you.'

"That was not the opening I had expected. I looked at her and saw mirrored in her eyes the pain I had felt at being excluded.

"As I saw my pain reflected, I understood for the first time why my mother said that Genevieve was very much my daughter. It was not only her pain that I saw reflected, but I realized that her reaction to me and how she dealt with things were a mirror of me in my less than stellar moments. I was getting what I had put out.

Second Chances?

“But it was also in that moment that I realized that I had never considered the feelings of my family. It was surreal and real at the same time; painfully so.

“I answered: ‘Because you are my daughter and this was an important day in your life. I did not want to miss it.’ That was all I could think of to say.

“‘I thought you didn’t care. That is why I did not invite you or ask you to walk me down the aisle. You have been absent. I nearly did not use your money for the wedding, but then I thought, ‘Why not. It is not that he would miss it. He doesn’t miss anything. Not us. Not the money.’

“‘I’m sorry.’

“She nodded. ‘This is Jeremy.’ Finally, she introduced her husband.

“‘Pleased to meet you.’

“We chit chatted for a while and then the meal was over and they were gone

“‘Keep in touch,’ Genevieve said as they left.’

“I was puzzled. I discussed it with my mom.

“‘The next move is yours,’ she said.

“One month later, I took them out to dinner. This time, I made an effort to get to know them better.

“Shortly after that dinner, Loraine asked to meet with me. She wanted to discuss something about Paul. I told her that I had a major acquisition coming up, but we could talk after that. Just that interaction was a major step for both of us.

“As we were on the verge of closing the deal, my assistant give me an urgent message that my son was in hospital. I needed to call Loraine urgently. I was irritated but called because I was trying to be a better person for my kids. What she said shook me

Connected

to the core. Paul had attempted to commit suicide. She was hysterical.

“In that moment I knew what I had to do. The acquisition faded. This was my son who was hovering between life and death. I had to go.

“Yet, when I went to my bathroom in preparation for leaving, a wave of anger took over. The ugly, selfish person reared its head, and I shouted, ‘Not now!’ I had put in too many hours to get to this point that would solidify my position at the top to walk away. The team had also worked hard. We had earned this.

“Then, the better person, the one that knew instinctively that he needed to be at the hospital with his son, took over. I realized that my anger was my cover for my sense of shame, failure, guilt, and fear of losing Paul and the helplessness that went with that. I will not fool you. I struggled.

“Suddenly, I heard, ‘Stop thinking about yourself. Go and be there for your son and his mother.’ The voice was so clear that I looked around. Of course, there was no one there. This was my private bathroom. I heard that voice again: ‘You have one shot. Don’t blow it.’

“I firmly believe that was God speaking to me. There is no other way to account for it. Because the selfishness was so ingrained in me, and the struggle was so intense, I do not know if I would have gone without that voice.

“I called the team together in the conference room. ‘Look guys, I am so sorry, but I have to leave now. Family emergency. I need you guys to take over and wrap this thing up.’

“‘What happened?’ They were concerned and wanted to know what was happening. They knew I never left before a deal was completed, much less an acquisition.

“‘My son is in hospital, and it seems to be serious.’

“‘His son?’ I overheard someone say. The way they said it showed that they did not know I had a son.

“‘What happened?’ they asked again. I really did not want to talk about it but I knew that seeing that I was leaving them to wrap things up, I owed them that much.

“‘Attempted suicide. That’s all I know. And, please, let’s keep that between us.’

“‘Oh Richard, I am so sorry. Yes. You go. You’ve put everything in place. We will wrap this up and make you proud.’ And you know what, they did, though that is jumping ahead.

“‘After I left the team, I called Loraine. ‘Where are you?’ she asked frantically.

“‘I’m about to leave and come over.’

“‘What’s taking you so long?’

“‘I had to hand over. But I’m coming now. Where are you? How is he?’

“‘She gave me the name of the hospital, then said, ‘It’s touch and go.’ As she hung up, I could hear her sobbing.

“‘Something inside me broke — really broke this time. I went back to my bathroom and this time I wept. For the first time it hit me. And in that moment, I realized that if I lost my son, all the success in the world would mean nothing.’

Just then, Richard looked at his watch. “Oh! I’ve got to go, and we haven’t gotten to down to business. Tell you what. I’ll get my assistant to check with yours to schedule a time for us to

Connected

meet again as soon as possible. And I promise, we'll focus on business."

"In some ways, this is more important," George replied. I would like to, I need to hear the rest of that story."

"Tell you what, how about meeting next Saturday? We could meet at the clubhouse. I don't normally conduct business on Saturdays, but I feel I owe you that much and my calendar is pretty full right now."

"What about 2.00 pm on Saturday? I'm working really hard to reserve Saturday mornings for my family. I've been missing a few, but after this conversation, I can't . . ."

"Good I'll see you then. We'll start with the business and then I'll continue my story."

Back in the office, George got immersed in his work. When he got home, he told Christine about his meeting with Richard, noting that they would meet again on Saturday, but in the afternoon.

Christine was all for it. "Why don't we all go? The kids and I can entertain ourselves while you talk with Richard. There are lots of interesting things to do near the clubhouse."

"Great idea!" George responded. Inwardly, he groaned. He knew what that meant — more shopping.

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Chapter Eight: Rebuilding



“Hey, Richard. I’d like you to meet my family.” Saturday had quickly come.

Richard looked taken aback before he recovered quickly and was very gracious during the introductions.

“Don’t worry,” George laughed. “They are just saying hello and then they are off.”

“Adventures await us!” Georgie exclaimed excitedly. He could hardly contain himself during the brief conversation among the adults. Then Christine and the kids were off.

Connected

Richard and George talked business for a while. They established a framework for collaboration and set a time to finalize the details with their respective teams.

“If you don’t mind, I’d like to hear the rest of your story. To be honest, I’m finding it very helpful. If I recall correctly, you were about to go to the hospital when you stopped.” Having said that, George relaxed as he waited for Richard to continue.

Richard was still for a moment. Then he said, “Is that so? I am glad that you are finding it helpful. This is part of the reason I share it. But I am always afraid that I would be boring people.”

“Not at all,” George assured him. “You are a good storyteller. Plus, it is relevant to me and the stage at which I am.”

“Good. Thank you for saying that.”

Richard peered into the distance. Then he brought his gaze back to George and leaned forward. “You know, life does not give us guarantees. You can be the best parent and your child still have a crisis, even commit suicide. So for me, it comes down to this: When I look at myself in the mirror, I must see a person who treasures the gift of the children that God has given him and who does everything he can to put them before his business and to be fully present in their lives as they grow and navigate the vicissitudes of life, especially in this current environment.”

“Wow!” George said. “Wow!” That is so insightful.”

A comfortable silence settled as George absorbed what Richard had just shared.

Then Richard continued. “I believe I was at the point where I broke down.”

“Sounds about right,” George affirmed.

“I pulled myself together and called a cab. I was too torn up to drive.

“At the hospital, I looked at my son who did not look like my son . . . all the hospital equipment around him: drips, monitors, the whole works. I touched him and said in his ear, ‘Paul, it’s dad. I love you.’ His eyelids fluttered. I stroked what I could see of his hand. Suddenly, a nurse entered the room and said, ‘Whatever you’re doing, keep doing it.’ I continued stroking his hand and whispered in his ear, ‘We’re going to get through this together.’

“As I sat there, I had the strangest feeling that I held his life in my hands. Weird, isn’t it? So I sat there, and I waited. As I waited, the nurses and doctors were monitoring and doing their thing. I know Christine was there somewhere in it, but a lot of it is a blur now. But, he pulled through. He pulled through and I pulled through.

“It was a crossroad moment. I could not continue as if nothing had happened. It changed me.

“As I sat beside that hospital bed, I realized the emptiness of my life, my selfishness. If I had lost Paul . . . I probably would have thrown myself back into . . . I don’t know. I can only say, ‘Thank God I did not lose him!’ I knew I had to change.”

“How is he now? How did you change?” George asked.

“He is a great kid, finishing up college. He has not quite decided what he wants to do, but he works with me part time. I want him to have a work ethic; not to be a workaholic, but to understand the value of work. So, I’ve changed my role in his life.”

“And what’s your relationship with him like now?”

Connected

“It’s great, but it took work to get it to this point. Same with my daughter.”

“When you say, ‘work,’ what do you mean?” George was really trying to understand the connection dynamic in Richard’s situation.

“Time. Facing myself. Counseling. Coaching. I had to learn new skills.

“You know, when we are successful in our business life and people look up to us, we can think that we know everything and will automatically be successful in areas. That is a lie. Knowing a lot in one area can work against us in other issues. So, I had to get the relationship aspect together and learn the skills that make those work.

“I had to start with myself — facing who I am, what has shaped me, why I do things and why I do them in particular ways, and importantly, who I want and need to be in all areas of my life. These are the things that money can’t buy. Money may help you with the tools to get there, but at the end of the day, when you strip away everything, you only have you.

“Relationships, deep connections take time and effort. Once broken, they are hard to repair. And that’s because trust is involved. It’s like business in some ways. If you’re going to try and do a deal with another company, or a collaboration as we have been exploring, there must be some level of trust. Once it is broken, how do you rebuild it?

“Rebuilding happens over time. In my family situation, it started when I was willing to face myself and then be true to myself. I had to respect my children, even my ex-wife. I had to start keeping the promises I made and trying not to promise what I could not or was not willing to fulfill.

“When we make promises to our children and don’t keep them, those are wounds. The more we do it, the deeper the wounds go.

“So, I had to heal and rebuild. But you know, that group thing, ‘I forgive you,’ and then everything is rosy? That’s for the movies. Real life is different, at least for many of us. You try to fix your wrongs, you give space for healing to take place, and you learn how to communicate. And through it all, you are learning about each other and who the person truly is.

“It was hard. I was out of my comfort zone.” Richard gave a big sigh. “That’s part of the reason that I share my story. You do not have to get to this point.”

George nodded.

“Not long after his suicide attempt, Paul came to live with me. This is what Lorraine had wanted to discuss with me when I told her that we’d talk after the acquisition had been completed. There had been some issues with Paul. They had not been getting along and he had told her he wanted to live with me. I was too busy to know that.

“I won’t fool you. It was very challenging. We had to learn how to be around each other. And I had to learn how to be a parent, to be a dad. I made so many mistakes.

“There is a God, right? There had to be, for me to get through this.

“I had to reorganize my life, but you know what? It was worth it. Sure, I had to step back from some of my business and civic responsibilities. But . . .

“Then there was a time I almost swerved. I remember as if it was yesterday.

Connected

“Right after Paul came to live with me, a big business opportunity came up. It was the type of thing you dream about. I was ready to jump on it. I could taste the outcome. The only hitch was that it would mean long days and nights of work. I would also have to travel a lot.

“I called Loraine and asked her if Paul could stay with her for a few days. Mind you, this was soon after he had come to stay with me, and we were just getting to know each other and figuring out what living together would look like.

“‘Are you f-ing kidding me?’ she screamed. ‘You are so selfish. He is not some rag to cast aside when you feel like it.’

“I hung up. I felt this small. She was not the type to curse so I knew I had really stepped in it.” Richard paused.

“What did you do?” George asked.

“I stepped away from the deal. Another company went in.

“Later, Loraine called and asked me for the dates when I wanted her to have Paul stay with her. I told her it was fine. I had dropped the deal. And you, know, George, I have no regrets. There were other deals down the road. And after Paul went to college, I could pick back up the pace, though not to the same extent.

“There was a time when I thought I would have the fairy tale ending — ask for forgiveness, get back with my wife and kids, and live happily ever after.” Richard gave a self-deprecating laugh.

“But Loraine had moved on. She had a new guy. And the truth is, we had never grown together so compatibility would have been an issue. The good thing is that we have a healthy relationship now.

Chapter Nine: On Your Guard



“You know, as you spoke, I realized how lucky I am. I have my wife, Christine. She keeps me in check.”

Richard gave George a hard look after George said that. “Is that fair to Christine?” he asked George. “It must be frustrating for her. And let me ask you this: Do you want a life partner or a guardian? Then, what does she want? Why should she have to expend time and energy keeping you in check? You have two kids. She is keeping up with them also. What about her work? And going even further, how is keeping you in check affecting her dreams?”

It was George’s turn to gaze into the distance.

“I, I don’t know what to say,” was his response. “I had not thought about it that way. I guess I am being selfish, not considering it from her perspective. In this season of success, I had not even registered that she had needs and dreams beyond

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myself and the kids. I had stopped seeing her in her own right and was seeing her only as an extension of myself. I am wrong. Wow!”

“Yes. It is hard enough to see ourselves, much less see things from other people’s perspectives,” Richard replied. “When we are successful and doing great things that make a difference for others, it is challenging to maintain healthy boundaries. After all we’re doing good and impacting lives. And leaving it to a spouse or other significant person in your life doesn’t cut it. It is unhealthy. This is why I still see my personal coach.”

“You do?” George was surprised to hear that.

“Yes. I have two sets of people in my life who give me feedback and provide accountability: one for business and one for the personal aspects of my life. They know how to ask the right questions to help me get clarity and know my next steps. Our interactions also let me know when I am veering off-course — support, accountability, and direction. They help me to keep growing in all areas of my life.”

“I’ll have to look into that,” George said. Then he looked at his watch.

“My family will be back soon. But I do have a question. What advice would you give to leaders who want to make a difference, who want to be successful in their chosen fields and not lose those vital connections, even when they are going through life changes?”

“I’m reminded of a verse in the Bible that goes something like this, ‘for what will it profit a man/person if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?’ I lost myself. I lost my connection with God, and others, especially my loved ones. I

even lost sight of who I was and became disconnected from that person. You could say that I lost my soul.

“When you lose yourself and stop being true to who you are in your innermost being, you are empty. The things with which you fill the space become a poison for you and it poisons your relationships, infecting those with whom you come into close contact. So what can you do?

“Hold on to your purpose-fueled dreams, but drop your ego. If you don’t, it will become so large that you are left with your ego but no soul.

Build a team and work together. In this way, it is not all on you. Thus, you do not have to go full throttle all the time. And should you need to step back, they will be well equipped to step in for you. This will help you to manage your time better. It will also help you to manage expectations — yours and others.

“God and family first. Build your life and your business around this principle.

“The Great Commandments,” George interjected.

“Mm-hmm. This is why you should not be afraid to ‘lose’ a business opportunity. These come and go, but losing your connection with God and people . . . that’s a soul killer.

“Value the people in your life, both personally and professionally. This means knowing and doing what will benefit them. It also means making sacrifices. Connections, relationships take work. But they are worth it.

“Yes. Relationships will vary from person to person, from context to context, but value them all.

“What is the glory in building something big and magnificent that leaves behind a trail of broken hearts and

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crushed spirits? That is encased in a hard shell that damages and does not heal?

“And, get outside feedback and perspectives from people who are not a part of your business, familial, or friendship circles. This will help you to stay on track.”

“Connections matter, eh?” George noted.

“Indeed, connections matter for you as much as for the others. They help to keep you grounded, human. Yet, so often, our business takes over. But that is sterile. What happens when it is gone? What happens when we can no longer do it? To whom will we turn if we do not stay connected with God, others, and ourselves?

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Dr. Claire Annelise Smith, PhD, is a resilient and purpose-driven spiritual executive coach, mentor, author, and speaker. With extensive experience as an educator, minister, and international leader, she empowers leaders to navigate life and career transitions with clarity, faith, and confidence. Founder of Strategic Lifestyle Connection, Dr. Claire helps clients integrate faith, values, and leadership to achieve personal and professional alignment and resilience.

