

TAKE BACK YOUR LIFE

A 40-DAY INTERACTIVE JOURNEY TO
THINKING RIGHT SO YOU CAN LIVE RIGHT

LEVI ⚡ LUSKO



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W PUBLISHING GROUP

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Published in Nashville, Tennessee, by W Publishing, an imprint of Thomas Nelson.

Published in association with the literary agency of Wolgemuth & Associates, Inc.

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ISBN 978-0-7852-3276-6 (HC)

ISBN 978-0-7852-3277-3 (eBook)

ISBN 978-0-7852-3570-5 (ITPE)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Library of Congress Control Number: 2020937456

Printed in the United States of America

20 21 22 23 24 LSC 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



Thank you, Jesus, for a
seat at your table and for
giving me the power to win
the war against the version
of me I don't want to be.





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It is difficult to get your head around the immensity of the Panama Canal. I devoured a six-hundred-page book David McCullough wrote about it while on a family vacation last summer. Let me share some of my favorite takeaways. Each lock, if stood on end, would be taller than the Eiffel Tower. The amount of dirt that had to be removed was enough to make a Great Wall of China-style barrier that would stretch from New York City to San Francisco. If you laid all the dirt on an area the size of a city block, it would reach nineteen miles into the air. The canal uses twenty-six million gallons of water to lift a ship the six hundred feet required to pass through the locks.

The importance of this water causeway, which connects the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic so ships can pass through without having to sail around South America, cannot be overstated. It takes eight to ten hours to sail through the canal, compared to the two weeks it took to go the long way. Using the canal saves eight thousand miles on voyages between one coast of North America and ports on the other side of South America. It has been called “one of the supreme human achievements of all time.”

The construction of the canal involved many different nations, including the French who originally undertook it, the Americans who finished it, the Panamanians who revolted from Colombia and declared themselves emancipated and thus an independent country, and, of course, Colombia, who lost the privilege of owning it. At one point, twenty-four thousand people from

ninety-seven countries were simultaneously working on it. In all, the fifty-mile stretch took thirty years to complete.

Then there is the way the Panama Canal connects with major world events. The lock chambers were built to accommodate the *Titanic*, then the biggest ship in the world. But she sank in 1912 and never got the chance to navigate the canal. The first time a sitting United States president ever left the country while in office was when Teddy Roosevelt took a trip to Panama to check on the canal's progress. Amazingly, only three Secret Service agents were sent to protect him. Despite the endless amounts of fascination that had been given to the project throughout its many decades of work, almost no attention was given to its inauguration, because just as the first ship crossed from one ocean to the other through the canal—August 3, 1914—World War I erupted.

The US and France spent almost \$639 million to build the canal, making it the most expensive thing built in American history to that point. In lives, it was much more expensive: a staggering twenty-five thousand people died to create the passageway, ten times the number of people who died in the September 11 attacks. You heard me right. That's five hundred lives for every mile of the canal's fifty miles. The primary causes of those deaths were malaria and yellow fever, which were especially rampant in the hospitals. Nearly everyone who was sent to a hospital died of one of these diseases. It was so well known that being hospitalized was a death sentence that at some points people begged to not be taken to the hospital, regardless of how badly injured or sick they were.

We know today these diseases are blood-borne infections, but that wasn't common knowledge in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In

those days, people thought the illnesses were caused by gasses contained in the ground that were released by digging. It was widely believed that since the diseases originated in the dirt, ants were a primary cause of infection. So ants became public enemy number one. The canal management launched a massive campaign to keep the ants away from people, especially those who were sick or who showed signs of weakened immune systems.

Since ants can't swim, one preventative measure involved placing all four legs of hospital beds into shallow pans of water, creating liquid barriers that kept the ants from climbing up to the patients. Little moats were dug around existing fruit trees as well. The standing water was incredibly effective at keeping ants away—but people kept dying anyway.

The problem, of course, is that ants do not carry yellow fever or malaria. On the other hand, mosquitoes do. And do you know what mosquitoes love? Water, especially stagnant standing water like that found in these Panamanian gardens and hospital rooms. So many mosquitoes lived in the hospitals that a set of doctors or nurses had to fan their working colleagues to keep the insects at bay. Mosquitoes were laying their larva and thriving. The ant moats—the very things people thought were keeping them safe—were costing them their lives.

I can relate. Too many times to count, I've made the mistake of doing the right thing the wrong way. Traded the eternal for the temporary. Fought the ants but fostered the mosquitoes. By telling myself that my iPhone addiction is keeping me connected, I have allowed it to isolate me. By following my feelings, I have become trapped in moods that should have not had a hold on me. By failing to take my thoughts captive, I have allowed anxiety to have a seat at the table reserved only for God and paid for with the blood of his Son. What I have

looked to for joy has pried it from my fingers. I have learned the hard way—and I am still trying to remember—that it's not only possible but also easier than ever to gain the whole world (wide web) and lose your true self.

I have a feeling you can probably relate. Do you ever feel like you are losing control? Losing your peace? Losing your mind? Have you screamed at your kids and then felt terrible? Said something horrible to your spouse that had nothing to do with how you felt about your loved one but everything to do with how you felt about you? Have you turned to spending or drinking to take the edge off a low moment, only to feel worse when the morning found you hungover in your mind and waiting on your credit card bill? That is what happens when we turn to idols that have eyes but cannot see, ears but cannot listen, and arms but cannot save.

Perhaps when you think of idols, you think of a demonic gold statue. But idolatry is very, very sneaky. Idols can be sheets with a high thread count, bucks with a high point count, or a game with a high score count. Idols aren't usually bad things; they are good things that are treated as *ultimate* things. Your idol might be your clean home, your social media standing, your career, or what your friends think about you.

What you look to for hope might just be immersing the legs of your bed in pans of water. There's not an ant around for miles, but the mosquitoes are having a field day. But there is good news: you can take back your life.

When people finally figured out the connection between stagnant water, mosquitoes, and disease, they removed the water and added screens to their windows. The mosquitoes went away, and with them so did the malaria and yellow fever. The drop was so precipitous it was staggering. During the

twenty years the project was under French control, a staggering twenty-two thousand people died. Once the mosquitoes were nailed as the culprit, only three thousand additional people died in the final ten years, and many of these were killed in accidents.

Fighting the battles of life is not enough; you must fight the right way. I want to help you figure out how to do that. That is what this journey is all about.

Jesus instructed his disciples to gather up the excess fish and loaves after he fed the five thousand, and as a result, the disciples had twelve full baskets to take with them on to the Sea of Galilee. In the same way, I've combed through my notes from when I was writing two previous books—*Through the Eyes of a Lion* and *I Declare War*—and gathered up the best of the leftovers for this project. Some are my favorite moments from the books; others are sections that were edited out. Rereading the material God gave me allowed me to identify some mosquito bait I have allowed to creep back into my story; in addition, it helped me with issues that weren't a struggle for me in a previous season. I also came across some ideas I wished had made it into the books, so I included them in this project.

Instead of being collected in twelve baskets, this journey is broken up into forty days. Life supposedly begins at forty. It sure did for Moses, who spent the first forty years of his life thinking he was somebody, the second forty years of his life finding out he was nobody, and the final forty years of his life discovering what God can do with somebody who knows he is a nobody. All across Scripture, the number forty comes up again and again. In Noah's day, rain fell for forty days and forty nights (Genesis 7:4). The spies sent by Moses to explore the promised land did so for forty days (Numbers 13:25). The Israelites after the

generation of the exodus wandered in the wilderness for forty years (Numbers 32:13). Goliath taunted the Israelites for forty days before David cut him down (1 Samuel 17:16). Jesus fasted forty days and forty nights in the desert (Matthew 4:2). Forty days was the period from the resurrection to the ascension (Acts 1:3). And through these forty days I believe God is going to do something significant deep inside your soul that will mark you forever.

A few days ago, my wife pointed out to me that our door hinges were squeaky. Our two-and-a-half-year-old baby boy, Lennox Alexander Lusko (named after his big sister Lenya Avery Lusko, whom he has yet to meet) kept waking up early in the morning when he might have otherwise slept longer, because of the aforementioned squeaky hinges. Out to the garage I went, and I came back with a can of WD-40 in my hand. Problem solved.

As I lubricated the hinges, I thought about how this magic little can earned its name. As the story goes, a chemist, Norm Larsen, was trying to come up with a formula to prevent corrosion—a job done by displacing water. He failed thirty-nine times but then finally figured it out on the fortieth try. The household brand WD-40 stands for “Water Displacement perfected on the 40th try,” a testimony to the power of perseverance.

As you embark on this quest to displace the mosquitoes from your life, don’t be discouraged if you don’t see progress right away, or even if it feels like you take four steps forward and then five steps back. The growth you’re after won’t be easy or come quickly, but it will come if you don’t give up. I believe you will see progress in your life if you stay the course.

Rather than simply read this book, I want you to answer the questions and take the time to allow God to speak to you. I have included Breathe, Think,

and Live sections at the end of each day so that you can do exactly that. Don't blaze through it in a rush. This experience isn't about checking a box; it's about changing your life. Going through the material with a small group would be a powerful experience; the accompanying curriculum and video sessions (available separately) will take this journey to an even deeper level.

But at the end of the day, it won't work if you don't work it. The Mandalorian can do all he can, but Baby Yoda still has to do his part to stay alive. If you give yourself to this process, I really believe things could look a lot different forty days from now.

Leave the ants alone. It's time to swat some mosquitoes.



WEEK 1

LOOK IN THE MIRROR

Day 1

1

HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT



We walk by faith, not by sight.



2 Corinthians 5:7

In 2011, the FBI ended the most extensive manhunt in the bureau's history when James "Whitey" Bulger was caught. The mob boss from Boston had been on the run for sixteen years, but they finally nailed him. Sixteen years is a long time. Get this: he spent a majority of his time on the run at the number-two spot of the FBI's top ten most wanted list. Number one was Osama bin Laden.

He was second only to Osama. That's how badly the Federal Bureau of Investigation wanted to find this man. And when he was finally found, he wasn't in some cave in some far-off country. He was in Santa Monica, California, living three blocks from the beach in an apartment. Hiding, *60 Minutes* reported, in plain sight.

60 Minutes interviewed the apartment manager. They interviewed the next-door neighbors. And these people had *no idea*. They thought Bulger

and his girlfriend were a nice retired couple living on a tight pension. They didn't seem remarkable in any way. But the neighbors had no idea this guy had \$800,000 socked away inside the walls of the apartment. They had no idea he had an arsenal of semiautomatic and automatic weapons and hand grenades. They had no idea Johnny Depp was going to be cast to play him when the movie of this man's life was made. They had no idea he was wanted in connection with more than nineteen murders. That he, at one point in his life, had killed someone with his own hands and had then taken a nap. He was that jacked up.

When the neighbors were asked, "What sticks out to you about him?" they said he was nice to cats.





There's your first tip-off that something's wrong.

But let me say this: these people saw one thing. What was really there was another thing altogether. A very serious thing. I want you to notice that this is constantly happening in our lives too. Looks can be deceiving.





We can look at something but not see what's there. And that means we cannot trust what we see with the naked eye. This is how Paul put it in 2 Corinthians: "So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (4:18 NIV).

We fix our eyes—fix our gaze. I'd say our gaze is broken, but when we focus on the right things it's fixed. We're also choosing to fix it. As in "fixing a stare"—that is, focusing our energy and concentration. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.

What's Paul saying in this verse? He's saying you can't trust your physical vision. You can't trust what you see and the decisions you make based on that. *You need more.*



FOR THE THINGS
WE SEE NOW WILL
SOON BE GONE,
BUT THE THINGS WE
CANNOT SEE WILL
LAST FOREVER.



Truth be told, we walk around oblivious to much of what's going on. We click our pictures, double-click on Instagram. Scroll, scroll, double-click. Scroll, scroll, double-click. Scroll, scroll, double-click. But as we have our sips of latte and watch our movies and read another issue of whatever magazine, we have no idea much of the time who and what is watching us and what is actually happening. There is a whole spiritual realm with very serious things going on. There is a whole eternity ahead of us. There is life after death. There is an actual all-out war going on all around us, a war for our hearts, lives, and souls. But we can't see it because we've got a blind spot. And that blind spot is taking our lives from us.

In this journey, we'll start to open our eyes to what's going on beyond the obvious. We'll start seeing what's really there. And we'll be empowered to change for the better ourselves and the world we live in. We'll search out and know the truth, and the truth will set us free.

Second Corinthians 5:7 says, "We walk by faith, not by sight." If you walk around trusting what your eyes are seeing, your blind spot will continually lie to you. Then you pick up the night-vision telescope called faith. And instead of just trusting what you see, you look through its lens, and it changes everything. You can see in the dark. You can see what's coming against you. And you can see what's right in front of you, what's working *for* you.

When you look at people, what are you going to see? You're going to see potential. You're going to see they're destined for impact. They were made in the image of God. There is amazing potential packed inside of them—and inside you too. You're going to look at people and realize there's no such thing as an ordinary person. You've never met a normal person in your life. Everybody you see is part of a royal priesthood, a chosen generation (1 Peter 2:9). So, to borrow

some words from Loki, brother of Thor, you're going to look by faith at people and see someone who is *burdened with glorious purpose*.

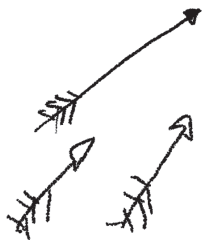
And when you see problems, you'll automatically assume that God's working things together for your good. When you look at them with the naked eye, not so much. But when you look through the lens of faith, you're not going to get discouraged, because you're going to remember that God has a plan.

How about when you experience pain? You're going to look at it and believe that God is going to give you great power because it is a grace to suffer. And along with suffering comes the grace to go through it and to get something out of it. God's going to do great things through the pain, and you're going to know you're not alone in the midst of it.

When you go through what you're going through, the same God who walked with Adam in the cool of the day is going to walk with you through it. Then you can say, *I know that you're with me. I am not alone, and I will fear no evil, even here in the valley of the shadow of death*. Through faith, eternity becomes visible. When you operate in faith, you know that what you see is not the end of the story.

You may not be happy with your story right now. You may be disappointed or grieving or bored, or maybe you've forgotten you're living a story at all. But you are. And together we will uncover what has been hidden in plain sight. With faith as your lens, I guarantee you that what you are going to see is going to blow your mind. It's going to show you that you can reach out and take back your life from whatever is sucking it away behind the scenes. And it's going to show you a whole new way of looking at the world.

When you can see the invisible, you can do the impossible.

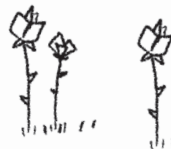


Prayer

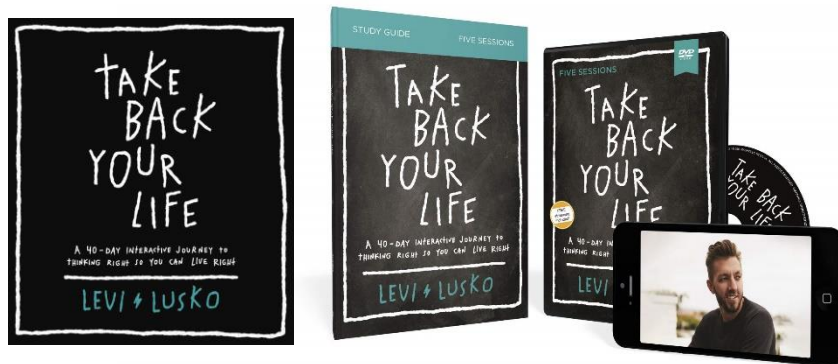
Father, teach me to see what is hidden in plain sight.
Fill me with faith and clear my vision so I can see
my life through your eyes. Please bless me today so I
can bless others. Amen.



BREATHE, THINK, AND LIVE



- ✕ Has anything given you the sense there is more going on around you than meets the eye? Is that hard or easy for you to believe?
- ✕ How would you describe the story of your life right now? Is it a story you like? How do you feel about it?
- ✕ Where would you like your story to go?
- ✕ How would you describe your faith right now? Does anything keep you from accepting that God has plans for you that will involve a shift in your vision?
- ✕ What do you need to take back your life from? What's clouding your vision and making you focus on the here and now?



TAKE BACK YOUR LIFE

by Levi Lusko

A forty-day interactive journey that will help you identify and fight your internal battles—so you can take back your life.

Every person has a mission and a God-given potential to impact the world, whether they recognize it or not. But life presents challenges and traps us in a helpless, hopeless loop of anxiety and fear.

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- find purpose by discovering that God will do great things with your imperfect progress, and
- learn that your pain is not an obstacle to being used by God but an opportunity to be used like never before.

This is more than a study; it's an intimate self-analysis process that will help you recognize what's weighing you down or holding you back, and equip you to embrace it head-on as you become the best version of yourself. Start thinking right, so you can live right.

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