

## Turn Life's Challenges into Successes: Introduction

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Dear Friends,

Lately I seem to be spending time with people who are struggling with issues like an adult child who is an alcoholic or a baby born with birth defects.

The questions that arise are: Why me? Why do these “defects” exist? Why do suffering, drug abuse, disease, poverty and intolerance exist?

Somehow, one or another of life's problems seem to affect most families in every nation over every generation since the beginning of time. Why would a loving God permit it? Could this loving God be causing it?

I sometimes find it helpful to start with the question: Why am I given the “gift” of this (problem)? Then I can look at how I've grown and changed because of it.

It all seems to get back to why we exist, the purpose of our lives.

If the reason for human existence is to create the beautiful life, amass possessions, one-up our neighbor, and be able to indulge in our amusement, wealth, selfishness and power, then these trials or difficulties have no meaning.

If, however, the purpose of my life is to create within myself a person of compassion, kindness, character, and love, then these difficulties seem to have purpose.

Without problems in my life, would I have more time and money to indulge myself? Would I be more self-centered, more focused on my entertainment and my glorification? Would I be as understanding, tolerant and loving?

In looking back over my own life, it seems that personal growth occurred most often when my self esteem was lowest. When I felt vulnerable, hurt, or in need, I was most likely to grow in my sensitivity to others. In the sorrows and struggles of life we find our compassion and humanity.

In the next 4 newsletters, I'll list some ways that we can cope with our difficulties. I'll talk about how to deal with a world that's unpredictable, scary, or even threatening.

Our lives have meaning. There is a reason for each of us to be here. We are gifts to one another.

Love,

## Turn Life's Challenges into Successes: Part One

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Dear Friends,

In the last newsletter, I promised that I'd list ways to deal with the burdens and trials of life. How can we best cope with the worries, the craziness, and the suffering that life gives us? What do we have to do to be happy? This is the first of a four-part piece on turning life's challenges into successes.

1) Be a gift to others. Bring them joy. Share with them the love and beauty within you. Consider helping people who are less fortunate. Start with those at work who may be struggling with language or life issues. Consider volunteering. We never seem to find happiness when we focus exclusively on ourselves.

2) Make yourself your best friend. Forgive yourself for your past failures, embarrassments, and regrets. Pamper yourself. Love yourself. Spend time with people and activities that make you happy and feel alive. Celebrate yourself! (But not with alcohol, drugs, or excessive food.) Smile and laugh more.

3) Eliminate the meaningless clutter and distractions in life. If you feel overwhelmed, identify and eliminate pointless activities. Get rid of messiness. Delete from life the stuff you don't need to read or do. Bring order and focus to your life. Separate what's really important from what seems urgent.

4) Seek the divine, however you may see him (or her). Consider joining a religion or spiritual group where you will be welcomed. Happy, content people generally have God in their lives.

5) Don't "enable" alcoholics or drug users in your life. Let them "take the hit" and face their shortcomings. Don't cover or make excuses for them. Join Al-Anon if it's helpful. Give up alcohol completely if it's causing problems for you.

6) Figure out what you'd really like to be when you grow up and start making appropriate changes. I'm 67 and still trying to figure out where my life's adventure might be heading.

7) Find activities and people that give your life meaning and happiness. Bring life and love and vitality to your world. Make happiness one of your goals. It's found within us, not beyond some distant horizon.

8) Live the life you intend to live. Become the person you intend to become. Intend happiness, love, virtue, and service to others. Intend to be someone special. Don't let your life just happen by accident. Live your life with intention. A book I find inspirational here is "Intentions" by Dianne Martin.

The list will be continued in our next newsletter.

Love,

## Turn Life's Challenges into Successes: Part Two

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Dear Friends,

In the last newsletter, I promised to continue my list of strategies to help you survive and thrive when faced with the uncertainties and disappointments of life. This is part two of four parts.

9) If your family or friends tell you that you are subject to bursts of anger over trivial things, deal with it. It's probably ancient stuff you haven't let go of. Forgive abundantly every old memory of pain and every incident, every past hurt that comes to mind. Heal yourself of that old pain and anger by forgiving yourself. In moments of pain or feelings of unworthiness, forgive yourself with the words "I forgive you." And mean it! LET GO!!

10) Do you spend your time and money in ways that match your values? Is your lifestyle consistent with the person you strive to be? Name your values! Make changes where appropriate.

11) If you still blame your parents or past events for what you've become, STOP. Take ownership of creating your present and future. What you are today and what you will be tomorrow is now your choice.

12) Be conscious of your attitudes and acknowledge them: attitudes about a "loving" God, about men, about women, about alcohol, money, death, foul language, aging, TV, work, minorities, the meaning of life and a thousand other things. Decide to change any attitudes that are no longer valid or helpful. Too often our unconscious attitudes keep us locked into the "selves" that we chose to be in our teen years. I sometimes meet people in their 50's who seem to think and speak like 18 year olds. They haven't achieved the wisdom, maturity, patience, or tolerance which usually comes with age. I suspect they refuse to re-examine old attitudes and learn from their life experiences. As we change our attitudes, we change our responses to people and to life. By updating our attitudes, we find that we change the person who we are.

13) Seek to be alive each moment. Live in the present! When life is over, be able to look back knowing that you have lived well, achieved success in whatever arena you have chosen, and became a man or woman of love, of happiness, of service, and generosity.

The list will be continued in our next newsletter.

Love,

*Jim*

## Turn Life's Challenges into Successes: Part Three

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Dear Friends,

The last time I wrote I promised to continue my list of ways to deal with a world that's sometimes uncertain, sometimes scary, and sometimes out of control. Here's part three of my four-part series. May it offer you hope, consolation, and perhaps answers.

14) Be open to new ideas and to our ever changing lives. Embrace change. It's part of life's pattern. Be open to changing what needs to be changed in yourself and your world. Technology is forcing change to come faster and faster. Ignoring or resisting change is futile and causes feelings of frustration and helplessness.

15) But in this changing world, know what you'll never change! Keep your values rock solid. Be a person that you yourself respect — a person of high ideals, of grandness. Be a man or woman of honor. Create in yourself a person of values, of kindness, and of honesty.

16) Be grateful. Focus on the abundance in your life. Overlook the fact that some people may have more "things" at this point in their lives. Be grateful each day for the richness that life gives us. Be thankful even for the burdens and difficulties that life gives us; these bring about growth in us.

17) Meditate daily. I don't think it matters what you do, when you do it, or how you do it. It provides an island of peace in the daily shouting for your attention. I'm currently finding guidance in a daily meditation book that my wife gave me: "Pocketful of Miracles," by Joan Borysenko.

18) Avoid people who are hurtful, mean-spirited, or lack values. They are poisonous to our peace and happiness. But be less judgmental and critical of others who are simply different. We all have our quirks; tolerate others.

19) Seek peace in your life. Be the calm in the center of the storm. In our youth, noise and frantic activity makes us "feel alive." As we mature, peace and calm in life are more appropriate. As you grow, accept the aging process and the stages that our lives pass through.

20) Be generous with your gratitude and admiration of others. Tell your family, your friends, and your co-workers "thank you," "I truly appreciate what you did," "I'm proud of you." Be specific, try to name what they did and why it was important.

The list will be continued in our next newsletter.

Love,

## Turn Life's Challenges into Successes: Part Four

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Dear Friends,

My last three newsletters have listed 20 ways of coping with life's difficulties and rising above them. Each of us is born with a unique set of capabilities to help overcome adversity. This is my final list of techniques we can use to become the noble person we were created to become.

21) Be true to yourself. Respect your good name. Go into the world as a person of love, of patience, of respect and of kindness. Practice loving-kindness every day.

22) Be grateful for the gift of your job. Make the most of it. Give it your best effort. Value it, not just for the money and the lifestyle it provides you, but also for the skills it teaches you, the experience it gives you, and the people that you meet because of it. Value it for the person that you're becoming because of it. See it as a chance to learn, to love, and to serve others.

23) Look after your health. We each get one body, one set of teeth, one pair of eyes, a heart and a set of lungs. Care for them. Get adequate sleep.

24) Turn off the television. It can fill our lives with idle distractions. Replace it with meaningful activities and conversation. Be fully alive to each moment!

25) Set goals in your life, not just for what you'll do, but for what you'll become. And aim high!

26) When someone lashes out at you in anger, realize that their anger is THEIRS. They own it! You don't have to take on their anger, their bad day. Don't let others choose your feelings for you. Don't let others "make you angry" or "make you hurt." Our emotion can be our choice, choose happiness.

27) Don't be a perfectionist. Do your best, but don't get down on yourself when life and events don't turn out as you planned. Be flexible. Life has its own schedule. Perfectionists are tense, never satisfied with themselves, never quite good enough. Sometimes life just happens. Celebrate it!

28) As I look out on the world, I can see hope, opportunity, and welcome. Or I can choose to see threat, rejection, and scarcity. Neither is completely "correct." Life is full of opportunity and threat. But I respond to my own view of it and discover that my own response is what makes it true. Let's look out there and find a world of abundance, opportunity, hope, and love!

Who we are today is the result of choices we've made throughout our lives. Now choose to be the person you'll be for the future.

Love,

*Jim*