



Born to Win

Making Life Work #1

by Ronald L. Dart

Eternity is a *very* long time. They tell us the universe is 15 *billion* years old (give or take 3 or 4 *billion* years), but 15 billion years is not eternity. You know, they say that light traveling at 186,000 miles per second has taken (depending on the astronomer you talk to) somewhere between 10 and 15 *billion* years to reach the earth. What they don't mention when they establish that as kind of the age of the universe is how did all that get out there. I mean, how long was it getting out there? And how long had it been there?

And the implications of some of this is that the universe is a lot older than even that. But eternity is longer than that. Because 15 billion years, or even 30 billion years, implies that there was a point where it all *started*. And the astronomers tell us there was a point where it all started. But eternity started.... Well, no, eternity didn't start. Eternity *was* before that. You know, I can get my mind a little bit around the idea of time not ending—of there never having been an end to things, or there never going to be an end to things. God will last forever and ever and ever. But I have a hard time getting my mind around the fact that there was no start, no beginning—that he always has been.

In one small corner of eternity, God is running a little project called "Earth". As eternity goes, it hasn't been running very long. In fact, on the scale of about 15 billion years, a few thousand years of human history doesn't even show up. I mean, you can't even discern it as a niche, or a cut, or a slash, or a line—a pencil-thin line—in 15 billion years. And apparently this little project doesn't have awfully long to go. It's not going to go on forever—because the resources are running down; and the sun has an end to it, they tell us. It's a little ways out. It isn't going to happen in our lifetime, so you can relax. But the fact of the matter is it doesn't have all that long to go as a project.

What do you suppose it's all about?. Surely God didn't just start all this and walk away and leave it to run down. What are we, some sort of cosmic *ant farm*? You know, you go and get your ants. You've got a glass side on it. You watch them build their little tunnels and everything all through there, and children can learn a great deal from an ant farm. But is that what we are? Or maybe we're God's version of a soap opera. He created it all; he set it in motion; then he sits back to watch all the pain, the misery, the war, the suffering, the heartache. Perhaps he has something like a television channel-changer—a clicker. He can watch a man cheat on his wife on this channel, see a man beat to death on another, and watch starving children on a third? On the other hand, maybe God has a purpose in this project. Maybe he's doing something with an end to it.

Now, speaking as a member of this earthly ant farm, I have a vested interest in knowing what's going on here; and I think you do, too. Now, you may have noticed that I'm not even allowing the alternative in here: that there is no God, and we're just here by accident—the product of blind evolution. No, the hand of God, the power of God, even the mind of God is evident *everywhere*. It's the *purpose* of God that poses the real mystery. The argument between creation and evolution is a mere distraction from the main event. It isn't worth your time. What's worth your time is knowing what he's *doing*. Because if we can discern the purpose of God

—if we can discern that there *is a purpose*—then there is one who has purposed, and we have answered the question of his existence, and gone on to something *a lot* more important than that.

So here we are, fellow ants, living out our lives on this planet. Are we winning or losing? Is our life working? Are we going anywhere? Are we succeeding? Are we failing? Well, to know that, we would have to know what success *is*. When we have won, what have we won? When we have lost, what did we lose? And if we are winners, where is the trophy? What's the prize? You know, on a long trip, the kids and the dogs in the car have a persistent question: Every time the car slows down to stop, they want to know, "Are we there yet?" In life, the answer always seems to be, "No, we're not there yet." But how do we know? Where is "there"?

Now, I know this is going to sound simple, but most great ideas are simple. How can you get to where you want to be if you don't *know* where you want to be? I get in my car; I drive out to the end of the driveway; and I can turn left, I can turn right. And when I get to the next corner, I have a left and a right or a straight ahead. And so on it goes. The choices are *infinite*, if I just drive where it feels good. But theoretically, when I come out of my driveway, I've loaded my bags in the car, I've got the kids and the dog in the car, and we're on vacation, and we know where we're going. Now, all winners have this one thing in common: They have *a goal*. They know what they want.

Now, it's a funny rule of life that when you know what you *really* want, the way to achieve it becomes relatively simple. I didn't say easy, now. I said *simple*. And this also should be evident: When you don't know what you want, you don't have a chance.

Now, as simple as this may sound to you, it's not simple at all. Whenever you, let's say, get into an argument with your wife about something (or your husband). You're sitting around talking about this, and you've been going back and forth on it for about half an hour. There's a question hanging in the background that we are usually afraid to ask; and when it is asked, we are afraid to answer. The question? "Well dear, *what do you want?*" We're afraid to ask because when they tell us what they want, we may have to give it to them. And if somebody asks us what we want, and we tell them, and they say, "Okay, you can have it"... well, then we may have to measure up some other way. We may have to respond to what *they* want. We may have to give them what *they're* asking for.

So owning up to what you really want is a big problem in a marital argument, a family problem. And it's just as big a problem in business sometimes. When you sit down with your operating plan, and your balance sheet, and all the other information you've got out there, and your product, and you say, "Okay. What do I want to do? Where do I want to go with this? What do I want to produce? Do I want to make *this* product? Do I want to make *that* product? Do I want to make it expensive? Do I want to make it cheap? Do I want to make it high quality? Do I want to make it ordinary?" What is it you want to do? Because if you don't know, you don't have a chance. And when what you want changes every time you change your clothes... well, you're *always* going to run around in circles, and you're never going to be where you want to be.

Now, simple, right? You have to have a goal that is great enough to keep you focused—a goal that is *so important* you don't get sidetracked on every whim that comes along. And I'm afraid that a lot of us go through life from one end to the other changing goals (maybe not quite as often as we change our clothes) but when something else comes along that we want—maybe a little more than what we thought we wanted—we change. It makes sense, I guess. If I wanted *this*, and now I want *that*—and I want it more—why pursue something I want less?

Now, consider this little thing in addition to that. If God is working on his *own* goals down here, what happens to *you* if your goals don't fit his? Well, if having a goal is the number one rule of success, that ought to be reflected somewhere in the Bible, shouldn't it? The Bible is God's instruction book for Man. God made Man;

and he gave us a book to tell us how Man works; and to give us an idea of what's good and what's bad, and what will make life better for us, and what will make life work. So if we're going to argue that the number one rule of success is having a goal, it ought to be reflected in there. Well, *it is*. It's not only *in* there, it's in what probably is the most basic Christian document: the Sermon on the Mount.

In Matthew 6, there is this little section that...well, it's sometimes misinterpreted. Let me walk through it with you and show you what I mean. Beginning in verse 19, Jesus said this:

Matthew 6

AKJV

¹⁹ Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust does corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

²⁰ But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust does corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

²¹ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Now, I have heard a few people suggest from time to time that what you ought to do with that then—instead of putting your money in a bank where it can be stolen, or lost, or badly invested—give it to the church. Well, I suppose there's a certain amount of sense in that. But the thing about it is, when you go to church and you put your money in the offering plate, it doesn't go to heaven from there. It actually goes to the back room where the people count it up, and they total it, and they put it on a slip of paper, and they take the slip of paper and the money down to the bank, and they put the money in the bank where you might have put it yourself. Now, I'm not arguing that you shouldn't give money to your church. That's a good thing to do. But don't get confused over laying up treasures in heaven as opposed to on earth by thinking you've moved money somehow from earth to heaven when you've given it to your church. In fact, you really ought to know this: You *can't* lay up money in heaven. You can't get it from here to there. Money is earthly. Money has to do with things on this planet. Money has to do with the here and now. It's just something you can use. You can burn it, you can spend it, you can do what you want to do with it; but it *strictly* has to do with the here and the now.

Well now, if it's not money we lay up in heaven, then it has got to be something else that Jesus is talking about. What might that be? Well, he didn't call it money. He called it "treasure". He's talking about the things that are of *real value* to you. There are things that you can do, there are things that you can accomplish, that do have lasting benefit. And you can, if you can begin to understand what *really* is valuable...such as the development of character, such as being the kind of person that you ought to be, a person who patterns his life after the instruction book God gave to man, and who lives a life that is admirable in all respects. *That* type of thing—that record of yourself, of who you are and what you've done—that, in a way, is laid up in heaven. That treasure is there, and it can't be taken away. And in fact, during this life, the character that we develop—the character that causes us to be straight in our lives, the character that keeps us focused on what we ought to be doing—they can't take that away either. They can steal your money, but the character doesn't go with it.

Jesus went on to say something rather...well, it's kind of *obscure*. He said:

Matthew 6

AKJV

²² The light of the body is the eye: if therefore your eye be single, your whole body shall be full of light.

²³ But if your eye be evil, your whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you be darkness, how great is that darkness!

Now, this is an awkward construction, but the key to it is in this expression: “if your eye be single”. Now, you can read this basically as *focused, uncomplicated*. In fact, the Greek word [*haplous, ἀπλοῦς*, Strong's G573] literally means “untwined”, if you can visualize cords of thread that are twined together. Basically, I would have thought that what Jesus would have said is that the light of the body is the eye, and if your eye is open, then the body can be filled with light. (In other words, the information begins to come into it.) But he didn't say that. He used an expression that really means “focused and uncomplicated”. “If your eye is *focused*, if you are *sharp*, if you are *single-minded*, if you can focus on your goal and brush all the other stuff aside”, he said, “your whole body will be *full of light*.” “But if your eye is evil”, the translator said, or “bad”, as other translators said... that's a funny way of putting it. I think it's better understood, though, that he is contrasting whatever he means here with the *singleness of purpose*. If your eye is *not* single, if you are *not* focused, if you *don't* stay sharp, then frankly you might as well walk in the dark. He went on to say:

Matthew 6

AKJV

²⁴ No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

Now, all the religious implications of this are fairly clear as you go through here. Mammon is the world and the world's goods, and money, and all the stuff we work on down here. And he says, frankly, you can't serve God and serve this world and the world's goods, and chase money. It's not going to work for you. You're going to serve one, or you're going to serve the other. It's a continuation of the same idea developed before—that if your eye is single, if you have a single purpose, if you're single-minded, if you know what you want and you go after what you want. He then comes down and says, “I'm sorry, you can't serve two masters. You're going to love the one and hate the other, or *vice versa*. You can't serve God and mammon.”

And by the same token, you can't chase down two different goals in your own life. You can't chase off after several things at the same time. You need to know *what is the thing* that carries you above and beyond. What is the one thing in your life that dominates everything else? Even those people who don't know God have often had a... what shall we say? They've *had* a god—in their business, in their career, in their art, in their music—and it has consumed their life. But they have been successful as far as their goals were concerned. And it's right here where most of us go astray. We try to pursue multiple goals, and a lot of times our goals are not compatible. A goal is not at all unlike a master. A lot of the people who succeed in life can often be described as obsessed. They have a goal, and nothing else matters.

But then there is the matter of the *big* goal—*God's* goal. If your goals take you in one direction while God has decided he is going to take you in another, you are headed for *big* trouble. Jesus continued in verse 25 of Matthew 6 to say this:

Matthew 6

KJ2000

²⁵ Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought [*Don't worry*] for your life, what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor yet for your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body than clothing?

You know, if there's one mistake we consistently make in the pursuit of our goals, our life, our pursuit of happiness; it's defining our goals in terms of food, and drink, and clothing, and money, and houses, and cars, and so forth. These things aren't goals. These aren't the things that really are objectives in life. These are the things that kind of come to us when we *achieve* our goals—when we head off to do those things that are

important, and valuable, and do good to our fellow man. If we have a product that's really worthwhile, these things follow on the heels of that. They're the *fruits* of our work. They're the fruits of pursuing the goal that we set for ourselves. But if you make these *things* the goals, you'll chase after everything that comes along that *looks like* it's going to put money in the bank, or clothes on your back, or food on the table—instead of pursuing single-mindedly the *goal* that will *really* make a difference to you, to your family, and to your children. Jesus continued to say in verse 26:

Matthew 6

AKJV

²⁶ Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much better than they?

²⁷ Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature?

So you think you're a short person, all right? Find yourself a comfortable chair. Sit down in it—sit *very, very* straight—and see if you can think *one inch* onto your height. You know, he keeps warning us here about taking *anxious* thought. He's not talking about *thinking* about things. He's talking about *worry*.

Now, worry is a fruitless endeavor *any time*. But consider the foolishness of worrying about things you can't change. So you're short. What are you going to do about it? Apart from buying elevator shoes, there's just not very much you can do about it at all. Okay, I'm overweight. Well, maybe I can do something about that. But I'll tell you this: I will not accomplish it by sitting around *thinking* about it. That makes about as much sense as me sitting and watching the exercise program on television while I'm sitting in my easy chair, drinking milk and cookies at bedtime. I can *think* I'm exercising, I guess; but so far, I haven't seen any result.

So here we are worrying about things we can't do anything about—worrying about how tall we are, worrying about... well, to some extent, worrying about how heavy we are; because sometimes we can do something about that, and sometimes we can't. And when you can't? Well, it's time to go out to the big & tall shop and buy something that fits for a change. My advice to people who are struggling with that type of thing is: Yeah, go buy yourself something that looks good on you. And if you ever do really lose the weight somewhere downstream, just give it to Goodwill. But Jesus was saying:

Matthew 6

KJ2000

²⁸ And why take you thought [*worry*] for clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:

²⁹ And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

³⁰ Therefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

³¹ Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, How shall we be clothed?

³² (For after all these things do the Gentiles [*the nations*] seek:) for your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things.

“I mean, he is aware of what you need.” Now, when you take this from a Christian perspective, you've got to know that God in heaven looks down; he understands your needs. You pray to him, he's going to fulfill those needs. But yet at the same time, we also know that we have to work, don't we—that we can't just quite be

like a lily, and just stand out there in the field in the nude and think that sooner or later God is going to put some clothes on us? No, what Jesus is talking about is the *worry*. And then he says in verse 33 of Matthew 6:

Matthew 6

AKJV

³³ But seek you first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.

³⁴ Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient to the day is the evil thereof.

Now, when you look at this, this is some of the best advice ever handed down from anybody to anyone, anywhere, anytime. “Seek you first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and these things shall be added unto you.”

Let me draw you back for a moment into the business metaphor. You’re in business to make money. *Really?* Is that all you’re after? Is that all you wanted? Is that good enough for you? The truth is that if that’s what you’re doing, you’re probably going to fail. But if you have a goal that transcends the money—if you have a goal of excellence, if you have a goal of service... If you’re a real estate agent in a community, if your objective is not merely to make a lot of money; but your objective is to help people find homes, to help them solve their problems, to help them sell their homes when they need to sell them and transfer to another town; and your objective is to provide these people who have problems and needs with the best possible real estate service they can have, then the money will follow. The car will follow. The clothes will follow. But if you start out after the car and the clothes, you’re going to start making bad decisions. Someone is going to list their house with you, and you’re going to try to sell that house because you’re going to make more money off that house than you will off of another one that you have not had listed. And you actually put the person in the wrong house, or missed the sale altogether, because the one they wanted was the other one. You’ve hurt *yourself*. You hurt your reputation. You lost the sale. It didn’t work.

So, you actually achieve the clothes, the food, the car, the shelter, the money in the bank, the security—you actually achieve that by providing a service or a product that people need and can use, and by doing things that are good for other people. That’s where your goal is, and the other stuff falls out of that. And so, when it comes to the Kingdom of God, if you can understand what *God* is after, if you can grasp what *God’s* goals are, and you can *seek* that goal, then these other things will follow.

He also said something here that I think is important for you to understand. He said, “Seek you first the Kingdom of God *and his righteousness*.” Let’s drop back to the business metaphor if we could just for a moment. If you’re going to go out there and seek your goals, if you’re going to pursue your goal of being the top real estate agent in this town—you’re going to sell more houses than anyone else sells along the way—you know, the one thing you’ve got to have going into all this is *character*—righteousness, shall we call it? You’ve got to be the kind of person with high ethical standards—who is not going to take advantage of people, not going to lie to people, not going to mislead people. Character. And so it is with the Kingdom of God and his righteousness. You’ve got to be a person who has character. There’s a *right* way to live, a *wrong* way to live. There are *right* things to do. There are *wrong* things to do. Give yourself to the right things. Seek his Kingdom and his righteousness, and these other things you’re looking for will follow.

This passage is usually taught in purely religious terms. The assumption is that if you just live for God, he’ll give you a new suit of clothes, and you won’t have to worry about it. But somehow that idea seems badly flawed. Think of it this way again: If all your personal and business goals are laid out in terms of money and things, how’s this going to contribute to your planning? The fact is, as I said earlier, all these things are the *fallout* of

success, and *not* the success itself. And you can achieve a level of success by setting goals and going after them, you know. The question though is: Will it last? Will it hold? Will it be worth anything when you get it?

The burning question though for you is: What is God *doing here*, and how do your goals fit with that? You know, Jesus is not very explicit about all this in this passage. He speaks in the most general terms. “Seek you first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness”, he says. And the rest? Well, the rest will follow. It’s not a magic bullet. It is *practical, down-to-earth* advice. If you have no goal, you have no chance of success. If you have a goal that does not take God and his game into account...well, you may succeed for a while; but when God’s game-plan takes over, everything you’ve done is going to be swept away. And so all you’ve had is a temporary gain, a little run for your money—a little fun, shall we say, in this world—and you’ve done better than the people around you.

But, you know, if you can just *grasp what he is doing*, if you can just figure out somehow: Why did he put this ant farm down here? Why are we down here going through all this? If you can begin to deal with it...And I want to tell you right up front: It’s not going to be easy to grapple with that. It’s going to reach a little higher than you may have ever thought before. It’s going to involve concepts that you may not have dealt with before. But the fact is, if you can find a goal that fits with *God’s plan*, *the sky* is the limit. He has in mind for you not merely working your way through some struggle down here on this planet. He has in mind for you *the stars*.

Until next time, this is Ronald Dart saying, “Reach for the stars.”

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