

# introduction

I am so glad you have selected this book to read. It's a book about change, a book that will help you make the kind of changes that are necessary if you want to enjoy a life that's peaceful. It's a book that will keep the process for making the changes simple, doable, and at the end of the day, successful. I can promise you that.

It's the third book in the Change Your Mind and Your Life Will Follow series. In this workbook, I lead you very carefully through key ideas from the original book in case you haven't read it. Worry not; you will be brought up to speed. And if you did already read *Change Your Mind and your Life Will Follow* and its companion, *It's Up to You*, you might discover that this one is the most helpful of all. I say that because it leads you gently through the many ideas from the first book while directing you, in a detailed way, to dig into your own patterns of behavior and write about those areas that keep you stuck, discerning what caused the "stuckness" and developing strategies for getting unstuck.

Being stuck is common to caring people, and indeed, those of us who are trying to grow and change are, more often than not, caring people. Helping each other get unstuck is the next important agenda item. I see that as one of my "assignments" on this journey we are sharing.

The intent of this book, then, is not to eliminate the gift we have for caring about others but to help us see where we should draw boundaries between ourselves and the many others who are intentionally traveling this path with us. It's very easy to turn caring into control, and we must strive to avoid that. Therefore, this book specifically addresses how to care about but not control others. It helps you discover how to discern

what is your business and what is not your business. It guides you to let your loved ones find their own Higher Power, teaching you, in the process, how to strengthen your relationship with yours. Accepting that outcomes are God's purview is another tool that this book highlights. Powerlessness, and the power of embracing this in our lives, is a key component of this book as well. And there are many more.

You receive good, orderly direction as we proceed. You can change. You can change any behavior that is hindering your peace of mind. I can promise you this based on personal experience. Gratefully, I have been a practitioner of these principles for change for many years now. Peace is the by-product of living this way, and healthy, interdependent partners in the home, on the job, and in the wider circle of friendships know that these principles work. Now you can join their ranks.

We are beginning an exciting undertaking here. There is no timeline for completion, but I think that once you have begun, you will want to keep moving forward. Change is exhilarating though formidable at times. With the help of this book, you do not attempt huge changes all at once. We will slowly, deliberately, and very carefully move together through the suggested areas for exploration. In the process, we discover who we really are and what changes we should make so we can grow into the people we'd rather be.

In the chapters that follow, there are writing exercises that I have divided into separate questions and journaling prompts. It's not necessary to write every day, but some will see the wisdom of that. Take one question a day if that makes it more manageable, or spend a whole week. But this is only a suggestion, so don't let my proposed pace deter your enthusiasm for forward movement if you'd like to move through the workbook faster. This is your book, your growth. I'm simply the teacher guiding your process. You are the student who will determine your readiness and your pace.

To help you get started each and every day, meditate a few moments first. Perhaps it will help to ask the God of your understanding to walk with you on this part of your journey. Then, and only then, begin to write.

And remember, this is your journal. It's only for others if you want to share it.

Take all the time and space you need. Use an extra journal if you run out of room in the spaces provided or if you find an idea that resonates very deeply with you. Some of you may even want to create a "picture board" that reflects the changes you hope to experience as you progress in this process of growth.

Remember, time is not of the essence. The point of this is for you to gain some objectivity on your interactions, thoughts, and behaviors. The speed of change is not the focus. Throughout this investigation and rumination process, be honest, be specific, and be thorough. Thoroughness leads to growth and change, and is absolutely necessary if we really want to change our state of mind and the tenor of our relationships.

Have fun, however, as you proceed. That's the real gift of a book such as this. It will be like watching a seedling becoming an ear of corn or a butterfly emerging from a cocoon. Your changes will probably be noted by others before you can see them yourself. That's normal. And you will feel blessed by the ease with which you will learn to live "in" the changes. It's about the attainment of peace, after all. That's the purpose I am intent on clarifying for you. That's now become my life's purpose, in fact.

Ready? Let's begin.



# let go

**Tending your own garden  
is a soul-searching commitment.**

I have found that it's very easy to deny how "attached" we are to the presence of the others who are journeying with us. It's surely never wrong to be attentive to the presence of the many others around us. In fact, being attentive, witnessing the lives of others, is the highest compliment we can pay them, and one we should make. But letting anyone else take center stage in the drama of our life is the very thing that prevents us from actually living our own life. Letting any one of the many others journeying with us have the central role on our stage means we live in the wings of their life. Remaining central on our own stage is the goal of a life well lived.

Accepting that other people are instrumental to our growth and our personal discoveries as well as our joy is far different from dancing around them and thinking that's the purpose for which we, and they, were born. But if dancing too close to others has been your primary focus in life up until now, get ready for a great ride. There is another way to live, and with the help of this book and the guidelines it offers, you are about to begin the practice of that new way. I think you will be thrilled by the changes in perception you will begin to experience. Remember, it's not about leaving any particular person behind, or any relationship

behind. Rather, it's about daily discovering and then maintaining the right balance of anyone else's presence.

## Changing Old Behaviors

The cultivation of new behaviors can only make sense if we have a clear picture of our old behaviors. So that's where we must begin. We will look closely at ourselves to see and appreciate all of whom we currently are. Just because we are intent on making changes doesn't mean we should disgustedly discard the person we were before we committed to change. We can only be where we are. Where we go next is the purpose of this undertaking. As the saying goes, "Wherever we go, there we are," but we "are" who we want to be in the next moment if we are intent on becoming the corn or the butterfly rather than remaining the seedling or the cocoon.

I want to reiterate, the intent of this workbook is not to make us feel ashamed about who we were last year or even yesterday. We were the best we could be at that time. But that was then. We are in a new space, a new moment, now. This book drew your attention, so the time is right to make some changes in how you think and act.

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***Look at  
Your Old  
Behaviors***

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Let's begin our investigation.

Who do you think you need to "watch over" right now? Your spouse? Your son or daughter? Maybe a good friend who has always clung to you? And why?

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What do you think would happen if you walked away from those people and gave up your suggestions about how they might live (which, to be honest, is a subterfuge anyway)?

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Expecting them to do your will—in other words, do exactly as you have planned—is actually your agenda, isn't it? What would happen if you let them sort out their own plans or goals, or solve their own challenges?

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Are you afraid they would be lost to you if you turned them loose? How would that look?

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Are you concerned that without your attention to their life, they'd discover they don't need you?

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Are you afraid they would seek a new "caretaker"?

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What are your most common behaviors with them?

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Do you make unwanted or unnecessary suggestions?

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Do you try to subtly manipulate what they might be thinking or planning to do?

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How do you feel when confronted about your actions?

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## Fostering New Behaviors

Envision how your life could or would look if you paid more attention to it, rather than to the life of someone else. Might you change careers, go back to school, downsize your home, pick up a hobby that you have always secretly longed to do but for which you felt you had too little time? Dream big. Be daring with your thoughts. Dreaming doesn't commit you to fulfilling the desired change yet, but it is the hook that can pull you into forward motion.

I have a friend who decided to take up ballroom dancing a few years ago. Her spouse wasn't interested, but she decided to live out her dream anyway. Her shifting her focus to her own life actually improved their marriage. Another friend joined a fiction-writing group. She doubts she will ever publish one of her short stories, but she has gone on to take many classes and loves the connections she has made with the men and women who, like her, write for the love of it and then read to one another in weekly groups. It has given her life a structure that had been missing ever since she became an empty-nester. A third friend, a former flight attendant, decided to volunteer in the schools to work with children who were failing in reading. In the process, she discovered a new talent. She could motivate children to learn, so she organized an after-school reading program that has been a great success. I took a watercolor class two years ago and now have three of my paintings hanging in my kitchen.

What we envision can take many forms. There isn't a right one or a wrong one. It can be a solitary pursuit or one that includes others. But if you know in your heart you need to move your focus off of someone else's life, having no vision is the glue that holds you in a waiting pattern. We can't become what we can't clearly see in our mind's eye. Don't be embarrassed by your dreams. They are God given, I believe. I think God can read our hearts even when we don't voice our thoughts. He is ushering to our minds what we have yet to say out loud.



## Staying Out of the Center of Someone Else's Life

Being central to the lives of others has been our self-proclaimed job for far too long. As I pointed out in detail in *Change Your Mind and Your Life Will Follow* and again in *It's Up To You*, being a partner is one thing, but being the main cog in the center of someone else's wheel, or vice versa, is not why we have partnered up. We have joined the lives of others because of the shared experiences we are meant to have, experiences that were decided on even before we actually met one another here in this realm of worldly existence.

The life experiences we selected before arriving here have allowed us to make the very contributions that were intended for us and those who walk with us. Because we more than likely forgot those selections we made (at least according to Caroline Myss, a spiritual intuitive) and their concomitant choices in this worldly realm, resistance to what drew our attention hindered us on many occasions. But the inkling to make the choice lingered until we finally surrendered to it. That's the fortunate aspect to this journey. Our lessons linger within our choices until we succumb to them. They will wait patiently until they get our attention. They won't shame us or haunt us. They will make no demands. They will simply wait in the wings until we are ready for them.

For many of us, one of the selected primary lessons was to give up hostage taking. Simply put, this is minding someone else's business so that they will have no business that is separate from us. Making this our focus means we never have to experience life alone, or so we think. Nor do we want those individuals to live a life separate from us. The irony is that those people we take as hostages will find a way to leave us eventually. This is a certainty. And it's then that the real lesson is learned. We are alive for the purpose of walking *with* one another, not *for* one another.

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## *Hostage Taking*

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Because this is such an important area for most of us, let's carefully inventory our past relationships. Let's look at them in great detail, going back to childhood, if necessary. My own clinging had its roots there. The same might be true for you. Let my words prepare you for this part of the journey into your past.

This is a very important exercise. Don't cheat yourself of the growth it will allow you. You are the one seeking growth and peace, both of which are guaranteed if you do your work. What's important is to recognize the similarities in the hostages you felt compelled to take and the feelings that drove you to this obsession with them.

Read through the questions below and meditate on them before answering. Ask the Holy Spirit to be with you as you look into the window of your past. After you have had a chance to open your heart to the Holy Spirit within, write for a while about the hostages you have taken over the years, those you still hang on to, and those you have released or are ready to release. Give this plenty of time. Take each question that is posed below separately. Delve deep. Include all that you can think of from childhood on.

Envision your earliest friends. How did you relate to them?

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Were you filled with gladness or fear? Give some instances. What prompted the fear, if that was paramount?

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To whom did you turn for comfort or support for your feelings? How did that look?

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As you progressed in years, did your behavior change? If so, in what way, specifically? Did you cling? Do you still cling? To whom? How did or do you feel about this? Did fear rule your feelings? What still needs to change?

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Are you content with your primary relationships now? If one or more of them still mimics some of those in the past, in what ways?

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Can you envision your primary relationships as peaceful? How would they look? How would you feel about them? About the rest of your life? Be specific with an instance that you'd like to change.

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Write a paragraph describing to a potential sponsee, or simply a friend who is troubled, what you have learned about the emotional repercussions of hostage taking.

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Affirmations can be helpful if you find yourself back in this situation again. Here is an example:

**I remember that my companions  
walk beside me, not behind me or in front of me.  
They have been sent by God.**

Now write three affirmations that meet your needs. The affirmations can be as simple as a slogan.

Affirmation 1:

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Affirmation 2:

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Affirmation 3:

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Consider this exercise of paramount importance. Repeat these affirmations to yourself in the early morning and throughout the day, any time you are filled with doubt about where to place your focus. Let them permeate your soul. I have found that carrying affirmations in a pocket is helpful. They stay close to my recall then.

## Life without Hostages

What does life without hostages look like? For many of us, such a life seems unfathomable, initially. Our whole reason for living, we thought, was to be in charge of someone else's life. *A Life of My Own*, a book I wrote a number of years ago, contains 366 daily meditations about this very topic. I wrote that book as a way of trying to help myself, of course—the reason any author writes any self-help book, I think. I'd like to include one here as an example of the point I'm trying to make:

Live and let live is good advice.

The more comfortable we are with the knowledge that each of us has a unique journey to make, a specific purpose to fulfill, the easier it is to let other people live their own lives. When family members are in trouble with alcohol or other drugs, it's terribly difficult to let them have their own journey. Because we love them, we feel compelled to help them get clean and sober. In reality, all we can do is pray for their safety and well-being. Their recovery is up to them and their Higher Power.

For some of us, it's a leap of faith to believe there really is a Divine plan of which we are a part. And perhaps it's not even necessary to believe. But we'll find the hours of every day gentler if we accept that a Higher Power is watching over all of us.

Being able to let others live and learn their own lessons is one of our lessons. The more we master it, the more peaceful we'll be.

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***Daily  
Meditation***

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A daily meditation that focuses on acceptance of others might help your day go in the right, more peaceful direction.

Take a few minutes to respond, in writing, to the following meditation. How does it call to you? If it's helpful, explain how. Are there soothing aspects to it?

**I have enough to do just living my own life today.  
I can let others do what they must.**

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Write a meditation that's specifically for yourself. If there are particular people you are trying to let go, name them. And seek the help of your Higher Power. Use the following title to help you focus your attention.

**Letting go is my opportunity now.**

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