God’s Power to Change Your Life
Books by Rick Warren

*The Purpose Driven® Life*
*The Purpose Driven® Church*
*Rick Warren's Bible Study Methods*
*What on Earth Am I Here For?*

**Living with Purpose Series**
*God's Answers to Life's Difficult Questions*
*God's Power to Change Your Life*
LIVING WITH PURPOSE

RICK WARREN

God’s Power to Change Your Life
To Amy, Joshua, and Matthew.
I am so proud of each of you.
My prayer is that your lives will demonstrate the message of this book.
Contents

Preface 9

1. The Power to Change Your Life 11
2. God's Part and My Part in Changing Me 27
3. Becoming a More Loving Person 47
4. The Choice to Rejoice! 65
5. Peaceful Living in an Uptight World 81
6. Developing Your Patience 99
7. Putting on a Little Kindness 119
8. Living the Good Life 137
9. The One Who Can Be Counted On 157
10. A Gentle Approach 175
11. Developing Self-Control 195
12. A Productive Life 215

Bible Translations 233

Notes 235
What would you like to change about yourself? Would you like to be more confident or more relaxed? Perhaps you would like to be more outgoing, less anxious, or less fearful. Most of us are more than a little interested in changing because we realize there is always room for improvement.

We have probably even read some self-help books and tried to change, only to find ourselves slipping back to the way we don’t want to be. So what are we to do?

This book is mainly about two things: where the power to change comes from, and what we want to be like after we change.
God’s Power to Change Your Life

The bottom line is that Jesus Christ offers us the power we need to become what he wants us to be. This book unveils both of these truths as expressed in the Bible—specifically in the book of Galatians. There we read that the outgrowth of Christ’s power is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5:22–23). This is a challenging list. We probably have some of these qualities by nature; the rest—well, that’s why we want to change.

The change doesn’t come all at once. It may take time. But when we rely on God’s power, we can change. My prayer is that in reading this book and thinking through these qualities, you will embrace the power Christ offers, shed those traits you really don’t want, and become the person he—and you—desires you to be.
In the years I have been a pastor, the number
one question I have been asked is, “Rick, why
can’t I change? I want to change—I really do. But
I don’t know how.” Or sometimes a questioner
will add instead, “But I don’t have the power.”

We go to seminars and conferences looking for
a painless cure by which our lives can be zapped
and changed by instant self-discipline. We go on
diets. (I once went on a diet for an entire after-
noon.) We join health clubs, and our enthusiasm
runs strong for about two weeks. Then we fall
back into the same old rut. We don’t change. We
read self-help books, yet the problem with self-
help books is that they tell us what to do but
can’t give us the power to do it. They say things like, “Get rid of all your bad habits. Be positive; don’t be negative.” But how? Where do we get the power to change? How do we get our lives out of neutral? How do we break out of the mold we’re in? The good news is, Christianity offers the power we need.

We Can Have Resurrection Power
The word power occurs fifty-seven times in the New Testament. It is used to describe the most powerful event that ever happened, an event that separated AD from BC—the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. And that resurrection power is available to change your life!

The most important thing in life is knowing Christ and experiencing the power of his resurrection. Paul writes, “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection” (Phil. 3:10). In another letter he tells his readers, “I pray that you will begin to understand how incredibly great his power is to help those who believe him. It is that same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God’s right hand in heaven” (Eph. 1:19–20 LB).
Paul uses the Greek word for power, *dynamis*, which is the root of our word *dynamite*. So Paul is saying, “God wants to give you dynamite power that can change your life.” Yes, the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead two thousand years ago is available to us right now to transform the weaknesses in our lives into strengths. The Bible describes resurrection power as the power to cancel our past, the power to conquer our problems, and the power to change our personality.

*God’s Power Will Cancel Our Past*

First, resurrection power is *the power to cancel our past*—our failures, mistakes, sins, and regrets. When I say “cancel,” I’m not talking about denying the past as if it never happened. *Cancel* means to eliminate, to neutralize, to offset something.

Have you ever gotten halfway through a project and wished you could start over? Suppose you are painting the living room, and you step back and look at the color that seemed perfect on the sample chart. On the wall, however, it doesn’t look so perfect. You wish you could start over.

A lot of people feel that way about life: “I’ve made so many mistakes. I wish I could just wipe
them out and start over.” Failures, problems, bad decisions—we have all suffered from them. But some people just can’t seem to let go of the past, and as a result, they let their past limit their present opportunities. They live in a constant state of regret, continually lamenting, “If only I hadn’t done that” or “If only I had made these changes.” They repeatedly second-guess themselves. And they are tormented by painful memories. “I blew it, and I’m going to be paying for it the rest of my life.”

God says that it is unnecessary for us to go around with a heavy load of guilt, old hurts, and memories of mistakes. In Colossians 2:13–14 he says he has forgiven all our sins and canceled every record of the debt we had to pay. He did it by allowing Christ to be nailed to the cross.

Jesus Christ knows the things we have done wrong, but he did not come to rub them in. He came to rub them out. He did not come to condemn us; he came to change us. A clean slate is possible! Think in terms of my son’s Etch A Sketch. If he makes a mess of a design or picture, all he has to do is flip it over to wipe the slate clean; then he can start all over again. The Bible says this is what God does with the mistakes we
have made. When we come to him, he wipes the slate clean.

In Jeremiah 31:34 God says to the Israelites that he “will remember their sins no more.” This has to be one of the most amazing statements in the Bible—that the God who made the world “forgets.” When we come to him, admit our sins, and ask him to forgive us, he cancels our past. God chooses to forget our wrongs, our mistakes, our failures. That’s good news! Even if we were to die tonight and stand before God in heaven, we could ask him about some sin we committed yesterday, and he would say, “What sin?” He has canceled our past and set us free to get on with the present.

*Why God Can Cancel Your Past*

What is the basis of this forgiveness?

When Jesus died, one of his last statements from the cross was, “It is finished” (John 19:30). That phrase consists of just one word in Greek, *tetelestai*, literally meaning “paid in full, canceled.” It was the word merchants wrote on bills when they were “paid in full,” and it was the word stamped on a document declaring that a prison sentence had been commuted. Jesus says this is
what he did on the cross. He paid the price in full for every sin we have ever committed. Romans 8:1 tells us, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Jesus was crucified on the cross so that we could stop crucifying ourselves. He was hung up for our hang-ups. That’s good news!

The question is, if God forgets a sin the moment we confess it, don’t you think we ought to forget it too? How long do you remember a bill you have paid? I forget my bills as soon as I have paid them. I don’t worry about last month’s electric bill. Likewise, since Christ has paid our bill in full, we don’t need to think about it anymore.

Someone has said that when we give God all our mistakes and failures, he throws them into the deepest part of the sea. Then he puts up a sign that says No Fishing. He doesn’t want us to keep dredging up our sins.

Paul says, “Forgetting what is behind … I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13–14). However, we can short-circuit God’s power in our lives by not believing that God has truly forgiven us or by choosing not
to forgive ourselves. God’s power is the power to cancel our past.

God’s Power Will Conquer Our Problems

God’s power is also the power to conquer our problems. Everyone has problems. They come with living in a fallen world. If you don’t think you have any problems, check your pulse. The only people who don’t have problems are in cemeteries.

The real problem is what we do with our problems. Inevitably, we try to solve them with our own power. How do we know when we are trying to solve all our problems with our own strength? We are tired all the time! A man who was frustrated with his lack of power to conquer his problems summed it up when he said, “I’m sick and tired of being sick and tired.” We get this way when we try to solve our problems on our own. God wants us to stop trying and start trusting him with our problems.

I have met hundreds of people who feel as if their lives are out of control. They tell me, “My life is out of control; I’m a victim of my circumstances. What can I do? I’m powerless. Just about the time I make ends meet, somebody moves the ends.” When I ask them, “How are you doing?”
they respond, “I’m doing okay, under the circumstances.” Well, what are they doing under them? Someone has said that circumstances are like a mattress: if you’re on top, you rest easy, but if you get underneath, you suffocate! A lot of us are under our circumstances. Although we cannot always control them, we can control how we respond to them.

You might be saying, “But, Rick, you don’t know all the problems I’m going through. I’m having a tough time.” If so, I encourage you to take your focus off your problems and focus instead on God’s promises.

Paul asks in Romans 8:35, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?” He answers his question in verse 37: “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” Do you know what a conqueror is? A conqueror is “one who overcomes by gaining control.” And Paul says that we are “more than” conquerors. The Greek word declares that we are superconquerors and that we can have overwhelming victory. If we put our lives in God’s hands and rely on the power
of Christ’s resurrection, nothing can devastate us. Nothing can swallow us up or destroy us. That’s the message of the resurrection and the heart of the Good News.

No matter how dark a situation may be, God can turn it around. No matter how hopeless life seems, God brings hope. The same power that enabled Jesus Christ to rise from the dead allows us to rise above our problems.

Acts 4 records the first serious opposition to the apostles’ preaching of the gospel in Jerusalem. When the authorities threatened them, the apostles banded together and prayed. Notice what they prayed for. They didn’t ask God to stop the opposition but rather to give them supernatural boldness in the face of the opposition (v. 29). He did (v. 31).

**God’s Power Will Change Our Personality**

Resurrection power enables us to cancel our past and conquer our problems, but that’s not all it does. Resurrection power also helps us change our personality. What would you like to change about yourself, and how would you go about doing it? Or to put it another way: how would your spouse like you to change? Maybe that would be more
revealing. One wife said her husband is “too temperamental” — 90 percent temper and 10 percent mental!

How would you complete this sentence: “It’s just like me to —”? It’s just like me to be late all the time? It’s just like me to be unable to stay on a diet? It’s just like me to put my foot in my mouth? It’s just like me to blow up, to be depressed, to get angry? I’m sure you are well aware of the parts of your personality you would change if you could.

**God Uses a Process**

God uses a two-step process to change us. The first step is explained in 2 Corinthians 5:17: “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” The initial turning point is when we commit our lives to Christ. We are not the same anymore; a new life has begun. This is why the Bible calls that step being “born again.” Being born again doesn’t mean we are reincarnated; it simply means we get a chance to start over. It is not turning over a new leaf, but getting a new life, a fresh start. It is a new beginning with a big difference. We now have a new nature and the indwelling Holy Spirit. A set of “spiritual
batteries” is included to provide the power! That makes all the difference in the world.

Being born again, like being born the first time, is only the beginning. It is followed by a lifelong process described in Romans 12:2. J. B. Phillips paraphrases the verse this way: “Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity.”

In the next chapter, we will examine more specifically how God helps us change and the tools he uses. Then we will take a close look at how he changes us by producing in us the fruit of the Spirit as listed in Galatians 5:22–23. Each chapter will be devoted to one of these character qualities. When the Holy Spirit controls your life, he will produce in you nine positive characteristics: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

How many of the people you work with or live with exhibit these qualities? How many of the people you work with or live with would say these qualities describe you? The sad fact is that rather than loving others, we often are unloving. Rather
than living joyously, we feel defeated, depressed, and discouraged. Rather than experiencing peace, we feel uptight and pressured. Rather than being patient, we are frustrated and irritated. Instead of showing kindness, it’s every man for himself. Instead of modeling goodness, we often feel there is nothing good about ourselves. Instead of being faithful, we neglect our commitments. We are more likely to respond to others in anger or resentment than in gentleness. And instead of practicing self-control, we watch our lives falling apart.

These are the contrasts between letting the power of God work in our lives and relying on our own power. We must remember, however, that the fruit of the Spirit isn’t something we work up. It’s something that God produces in us when we fully trust him with our lives.

**Don’t Put It Off**

Only one thing will keep you from changing and becoming the person you and God want you to be. It’s not the devil. It’s not other people. It’s not circumstances. It’s procrastination.

I meet many people who are getting ready to live but never do. “I’m aiming to change,” they
tell me. And I want to reply, “That’s good, but when are you going to pull the trigger?”

Procrastination is fatal. One of these days I’m going to go to the dentist. One of these days I’m going to have that surgery I need. One of these days I’m going to spend more time with the family . . . get serious about being a Christian . . . become active in church . . . go after that dream. One of these days I’m going to get into shape. One of these days! More often than not, that day never comes.

**Why Spend One More Night with the Frogs?**

One of my favorite movies is *The Ten Commandments*. I love the scene where Charlton Heston, as Moses, extends his arms and the Red Sea parts so the Israelites can walk through. My family gets a kick out of my behavior every time I see *The Ten Commandments* because, for the next couple of weeks, I go around walking and talking like Yul Brynner, who portrays Pharaoh in the movie. When my kids ask me something, I reply, “So let it be written; so let it be done!”

A humorous fact about the events surrounding the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt concerns the ten
plagues God sent on the Egyptians. Each plague mocked a different Egyptian god. For instance, the Egyptians worshiped lice, so God sent them a lot of lice to worship. Then there was the plague of frogs. The Bible says there were frogs everywhere. I’m sure Mrs. Pharaoh put pressure on her husband to give in and get rid of the frogs.

Finally, Pharaoh summoned Moses and said, “All right, Moses, I give up.” So Moses asked, “When do you want me to get rid of the frogs?” Now Pharaoh’s answer was classic. He said, “Tomorrow.” He must have been crazy! Why would anyone wait any longer to have the frogs removed?

There is a famous sermon based on this text called “One More Night with the Frogs.” How would you like to spend one more night with the frogs? Why in the world would anyone put off a change that was going to be positive? We would have expected Pharaoh to say, “Get rid of the frogs right now!” But, no, he said, “Tomorrow.”

You and I do this all the time. We procrastinate by putting off changes that we know will be good for us. Why? Maybe we are complacent. Maybe we are too lazy to change. Maybe we are afraid because we don’t know what the changes
will involve. Maybe we are too proud or just stubborn. Whatever the reason, we procrastinate.

The NASA space engineers tell us that most of the fuel used in a rocket launch is burned up in the first few seconds of lift-off. It takes tremendous energy and thrust to get the rocket off the launching pad. Once it’s moving and headed for orbit, it requires much less fuel and is easier to control and direct. It has overcome inertia.

It is one thing for me to tell you that Jesus Christ can cancel your past, help you conquer the problems you are facing right now, and change your personality. But it is quite another matter for you to overcome inertia and actually let him begin to do it now! Although you may agree with everything I say, you may still wait and let Jesus help you “one of these days.”

Jesus Christ has the power to make changes in your life now. He will give you the power to get started and the power to keep going. He will give you the power to break the chains of procrastination.

If you have been unable to let go of your past, Jesus Christ offers complete forgiveness. He can put your life back together again. You may feel like Humpty Dumpty, so fragmented that noth-
ing can put you back together. But it is never too late to start over! You are never a failure until you give up.

Maybe you are overwhelmed by your problems. Jesus’ resurrection reminds us that no situation is hopeless. Relax. Trust God. You don’t have to be controlled by your circumstances. No problem is too big for God. He is still in the resurrection business. What are you waiting for? Right now you can say, “Jesus Christ, take my life. Take the good, the bad, and the ugly. Take every part of me.” Open your heart to his love right now and let his transforming resurrection power become a reality in your life.

**PUTTING THOUGHTS INTO ACTION**

1. Think about what it means not only to forgive, but also to forget.
2. Identify a problem you have been procrastinating about and what your first step should be in dealing with it.