

WOMEN OF WITNESS

TIPS TO BETTER YOURSELF



A Different Kind of Life

By Julia Ubbenga

A few weeks ago, an unexpected phone conversation served as an intentional living wake-up call.

The text from my mom came early in the day.

“Can you call when you have time?”

That’s unlike her, I thought. She usually just calls. Why the appointment-like tone today?

Assuming she wanted my full attention, I took our five kids to the park that evening for an uninterrupted call. Pink hues began to fill the late summer sky as I picked up the phone to dial. The moment was peaceful. A few words into the conversation, I felt anything but that.

“Your dad has throat cancer,” my mom managed. “Likely stage three, maybe higher.”

I listened. Her voice wavered. She spoke of oncologist appointments, radiation, and possible surgery.

And then an interesting inner shift happened:

So many things that, minutes before felt urgent, now felt trivial.

Previously important things — various goals, projects, to-do’s — no longer really seemed to matter.

Driving home from the park that evening, I pondered the news and my profound inner shift.

An Instagram reel I’d seen recently came to mind. In the video, a man in his upper 80s was interviewed. He had lived a lifetime of success (fighter pilot, CEO of Gillette) and now, in the last chapter of his life, faced great physical limitations.

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When asked what someone once so capable does when these capabilities are gone, he answered, “When you can’t do what you’ve always done, then you only do what matters most.”

“You don’t have to wait until you’re 80 to learn that,” he continued. “There are a lot of folks, I think, here today that if they would really think about that, they’re consumed in some things that really don’t matter. And they haven’t looked up long enough to realize these things don’t matter. You don’t have to be old and infirmed to learn that lesson. And when you do learn that lesson, you’ll live a different kind of life.”

In today’s consumer-driven, fast-paced, digitally-distracted world, it’s easy to be consumed by things that don’t really matter. It takes intention to switch off autopilot, look up, and live a different kind of life.

I first felt the call to a different kind of life in 2018, when I let go of 75 percent of our family’s possessions and began living on purpose.

And if you’re feeling that call too — if you’re ready to live with more focus on the things that truly matter in life — read on.

Here are 5 ways to live a different kind of life:

1. Get rid of clutter in every area of your life. Clutter steals your time, energy, and attention and distracts you from what matters. Get rid of it in all areas of your life. Physical clutter, mental clutter, calendar clutter — let it go.

Declutter your home for 15 minutes a day, starting in the area that’s causing you the most stress. Let go of half-hearted calendar commitments or anything you’ve agreed to out of obligation. Begin clearing your mind through journaling (*Holy Work Journaling* is my personal favorite), writing down self-talk thoughts, and praying.

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Relinquishing old habits, thought patterns, and possessions is vital as we grow and change. We need to make room for the new things and ways of being that truly reflect who we are. Clutter is heavy; it weighs us down. If we're still surrounded by old stuff, it's more difficult to live life on purpose and to grow into the person we're called to become.

2. Determine what you value most in your life. People who live a different kind of life have identified what matters most. Here are my two favorite questions to help you do that. (The first is inspired by Joshua Becker's book, *Things that Matter*, and the second by Brooke McAlary's book, *Slow*.)

First, ask yourself, "If I died tomorrow, what would I be most disappointed that I didn't get to do?"

My answer is: Grow old with my husband and raise our kids into adulthood. Your answer will show you what matters most.

Next, pretend that you've passed away and someone was going to write your eulogy in only three sentences. What would you want it to say? Write it down. What do you most want to be remembered for?

Notice that things like your possessions, social media statistics, and job successes don't make the list.

Once you've identified what's most important, ask yourself if you're spending your time, energy, and attention on these things. If not, start now.

3. Reduce distractions. Living a different kind of life means putting your phone in its place. If you respond to texts and emails on autopilot, firing off replies as soon as possible, then your phone determines what's most important. If you reach for your device every time you see it, then it's become a distraction. Spending less time tethered to your device leaves more time for the things that truly matter.

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Action step: Your first and last thoughts of the day are powerful. They can significantly influence your focus. Take back your first and last thoughts of the day from your phone by putting your phone “to bed” in another room. Write down what you value most in life on a notecard and place it next to your bed. Read it (instead of your screen) each morning and evening. This will help you focus on what matters and live your days with increased intention.

4. Practice mindfulness. Once we identify the things that matter, it’s vital to train our minds to enjoy them. In my experience, practicing mindfulness allows us to live moments with more presence and peace.

Begin paying attention to the moment. Engage the senses: describe the colors you see, breathe in scents, feel textures and temperatures.

Practice mindfulness in life’s ordinary moments: watching your child play, cooking dinner, watching a sunrise, walking through your neighborhood. Choose something you do daily and commit to truly experiencing it.

Moments are fleeting, including the ones that matter. Use the weight of your full attention to anchor them into your memory.

Stepping out of autopilot and into the moment leads to a different kind of life.

5. Develop an acute awareness that life is a gift. To live a “different kind of life” means your life motto becomes “thank you.”

In my experience, when our lives are fast-paced and busy, it’s difficult to truly get inside our days. Instead, our minds are constantly focused on what’s next. We sit down (or stand) to eat lunch, but instead of being grateful for our meal, we are thinking about what projects can be done at naptime. We read bedtime stories, but instead of being grateful for time with our child, we are thinking about tomorrow’s to-do list.

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We are becoming wired to move onto the next thing, and in doing so, miss the gift of the present moment. It takes awareness and gratitude to become present to the goodness of now.

Begin recording three things you're grateful for at the end of the day and you'll train your mind to slow down and look for more gifts. The moments you record are the moments that matter — be intentional about continuing to fully experience those gifts.

In conclusion

These days after that phone call and inner shift have been life-giving. They've been slower and filled with clarity. I'm saying no to the less important things and yes to more of what matters.

This week, for example, I postponed a podcast, put on a blue tutu and walked to the park with my three-year-old. She wore a princess dress. We painted nails and pretended we were on a beach in Hawaii. I was fully present. And it was soul-filling because it aligned with what, to me, matters most.

You don't have to wait for the diagnosis or wake-up call to live a different kind of life.

If you're ready to live with more focus on the things that truly matter, choose one of the five suggestions above and begin.

Mary Oliver said, "Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?"

Here's to living it differently. Off autopilot — looking up and focused on what truly matters.

<https://richinwhatmatters.com/2025/09/27/different-kind-of-life/>