



YOUR NEXT 24 HOURS

ONE DAY *of* KINDNESS CAN
CHANGE EVERYTHING

HAL DONALDSON
with KIRK NOONAN



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Dedicated to our children—
may they see a kinder world.

I can look back and see that I've spent much of my life in a cloud of things that have tended to push "being kind" to the periphery. Things like: Anxiety. Fear. Insecurity. Ambition. The mistaken belief that enough accomplishment will rid me of all that anxiety, fear, insecurity and ambition. The belief that if I can only accrue enough—enough accomplishment, money, fame—my neuroses will disappear. I've been in this fog certainly since, at least, my own graduation day. Over the years I've felt: Kindness, sure—but first let me finish this semester, this degree, this book; let me succeed at this job, and afford this house, and raise these kids, and then, finally, when all is accomplished, I'll get started on the kindness. Except it never all gets accomplished. It's a cycle that can go on . . . well, forever.

George Saunders, *Congratulations,
by the way: Some Thoughts on Kindness*

One thing in our favor: some of this "becoming kinder" happens naturally, with age. It might be a simple matter of attrition: as we get older, we come to see how useless it is to be selfish—how illogical, really. . . . Since, according to me, your life is going to be a gradual process of becoming kinder and more loving: Hurry up. Speed it along. Start right now.

Excerpts from Professor George Saunders's
commencement address to the 2013
graduating class at Syracuse University

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Foreword

This world has its hurts and sorrows. And I know it can feel overwhelming to try and find where you belong in order to make a difference. I'm finding where I belong through sharing joy and laughter and song. When I released my first single on iTunes, a rendition of "Heal the World," I decided to donate all the proceeds to Convoy of Hope to support the great work they are doing to accomplish their mission.

I first heard about the organization through my church, which has supported their work for years. Convoy of Hope is truly driven by kindness—they work throughout the world to help the impoverished, hungry, and suffering.

Convoy of Hope does so much to help so many, and they are among the first to respond during times of greatest need. In this book we learn that we too have the opportunity to make the world a better place every single day by being kind and spreading joy.

Your Next 24 Hours: One Day of Kindness Can Change Everything is a must-read for people of all ages who want to be inspired to be kind.

Foreword

Being known for sharing joy with others has both humbled and honored me in ways I could not imagine. As you read this book, you'll find yourself longing to focus on spreading more joy in the world. If we all do our part, we can—through kindness—become the change that is desperately needed to transform countless lives.

Join me, spread kindness, and choose joy.

Candace Payne, “Chewbacca Mom”

Introduction

What Difference Can a Day Make?

It was the worst twenty-four hours of my life. Not the “long line at Starbucks” or “bad hair” variety. No, this was a real-life horror movie—the kind of day that changes your life forever.

August 25, 1969—7:35 p.m. A persuasive knock catapulted my two brothers and me and our babysitter to the door. We were greeted by two uniformed police officers who had come to deliver a message: our parents’ car had been hit head-on by a drunken driver. Dad was dead and Mom was fighting for her life.

Instantly pain and fear converged into a typhoon of tears. My five-year-old sister, Susan, fell into the babysitter’s arms. “I want Mommy and Daddy,” she cried.

Like a flash mob, friends and neighbors gathered in the front yard. One of the officers stepped onto the porch and addressed the crowd. “Are there any family members or friends

here who will take responsibility for the children tonight?” he asked. “Otherwise, we’ll take them downtown to the station.”

A young couple—Bill and Louvada Davis—volunteered. But the one-night sleepover lasted longer than anyone could have imagined. For many months—while Mom recovered from fractures and internal injuries—we lived with the Davises and their children in a single-wide trailer. There weren’t enough beds to accommodate ten people, so we took turns sleeping on the floor.

The Davises sacrificed their privacy and drained their savings account so four children could have a place to live. Without complaint, Louvada spent her days cooking, cleaning, and folding laundry. Bill worked extra hours at the rock quarry to feed his small army.

Slowly, our mother regained her health and learned to walk again. She took a job as a mail clerk, enabling us to eventually move into a place of our own. Our dad didn’t have life insurance. Neither did the man who hit them. So we learned firsthand the shame of poverty. We lived on food stamps, endured dreadful haircuts, and arrived at school with holes in our shoes.

Occasionally bitterness threatened to rear its ugly head. But the Davises were always nearby to offer a helping hand and parental advice: “Don’t allow the tragedy of your childhood to become a lifelong excuse,” Bill said, “because where you start in life doesn’t have to dictate where you end.”

In time, my resentment over empty cupboards and my thirty-seven-year-old father’s senseless death began to subside, and I turned my attention to escaping the clutches of poverty. Eventually I graduated from college and entered the workforce, determined to leave my disadvantaged childhood

behind. Earning money, raising a family, and traveling the world became my priority. I never forgot the Davises' lessons of selflessness and kindness—I was simply preoccupied with a quest for success. *Someday, I told myself, I'll give back and help the less fortunate, but my career has to come first.*

Fortunately I wasn't in complete control of my destiny. In my travels, I came face-to-face with people who were suffering and in need: an orphaned boy without shoes, a homeless mother clutching her lifeless child, a Vietnam War vet who had lost his legs, an unemployed man holding a "work for food" sign, and more. I could no longer ignore their struggles or escape the guilt of sitting on my hands while the world suffered. I knew climbing the socioeconomic ladder wasn't the path to true happiness and a meaningful life anyway. The Davises were right—fulfillment doesn't come from exceeding others; it comes from elevating others.

Something had to change.

One day in 1994, I made a decision that would change the course of my life. It began with a couple of simple questions: *What if a person was led by kindness and took his eyes off himself and focused on the needs of others? What difference could he really make?* I wasn't trying to walk the red carpet to sainthood; I was just grabbing my backpack and setting out to explore whether what the Bible said was true: "Whoever goes hunting for what is right and kind finds life itself" (Prov. 21:21).

The impact of my decision was immediate. Like a magnet, kindness pulled me toward spiritual transformation.

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.....

With each passing day, selfishness became more distasteful and selflessness more satisfying. I was far from perfect, but I found myself searching for ways to serve others and offer hope and encouragement. Along with my two brothers and several friends, we began loading pickup trucks and U-Haul trailers with groceries and supplies and distributing them to poor working families in California. We didn't know it then, but that was the first step toward Convoy of Hope, Inc.—a global humanitarian relief organization that has since served more than eighty million people.*

My decision was inspired by the Davises' decision. They could have said they didn't have enough money or space to rescue four kids. They could have shed a tear and simply walked away. Instead, they moved beyond excuses and pity to action. They made our tragedy their own and hitched their happiness to ours. Their decision changed our lives and, years later, inspired the founding of Convoy of Hope.

One decision can change the course of your life and the lives of others too. Maybe you desire more happiness and purpose, but you feel trapped, helpless, and overwhelmed. You're running on life's treadmill of to-do lists and unrealistic expectations. The speed is escalating and the slope elevating. You've said, "If only I could set a different course." Well, that's

*Convoy of Hope, Inc. was founded by the Donaldson family in 1994. Today its fleet of semitrucks crisscross America to gather donated food and supplies that are distributed to hungry children and hurting families. And each week, large containers of vitamin-enriched food are shipped to schools around the world to feed 160,000 children enrolled in their nutrition programs. Thousands of abandoned and abused mothers receive job training and help in starting businesses, and thousands of farmers in developing nations receive tools, seeds, and training. In addition, the organization responds to disasters by bringing lifesaving aid to survivors, and it conducts community outreaches across the United States and Europe, offering free medical and dental screenings, job fairs, shoes, haircuts, groceries, access to social services, and more.

what *Your Next 24 Hours* is all about. It's your road map to making this *day one* of a more rewarding life.

The decision before you is a door. But only you can decide whether to turn the handle and venture into the life you always wanted. By taking the first step, you're vowing to do the next act of kindness in front of you . . . until it becomes who you are. You're saying you want to leave self-centeredness behind and invest in the lives of others. In other words, you want twenty-four hours of kindness to become a lifestyle.

.....
*Through your
kindness, you can
change your home,
workplace, school,
and community.*
.....

Along the journey, you will discover that each day is filled with new opportunities to make the world a little kinder: opening a door, flashing a smile, saying "Thank you," letting others go first, apologizing for a mistake, paying for a meal, complimenting the waiter, greeting a stranger, giving a kid a high-five, and much more. On the surface, these actions appear insignificant, but collectively they have the power to change everything.

Perhaps you've accepted the lie that one person can't make a difference in a world where hatred seizes the headlines and anger marches through the streets. After all, the enemies of kindness are fierce, and you're only one person. But what if every person was a relentless force for good? Overnight, a revolution of kindness would dethrone a culture of greed and self-centeredness. The world would be a different place.

You have more power and influence than you think. You might not be able to negotiate global peace treaties or single-handedly stem the tide of hunger and disease. But, through your kindness, you can change your home, workplace, school,

and community. You can be part of a growing movement, where kindness offers hope, heals wounds, combats loneliness, and restores what is broken. You *can* change the world by becoming an agent of kindness and compassion.

Your Next 24 Hours is a collection of stories and life principles from people who learned to “love their neighbor as themselves.” May they inspire you to awaken each day more determined than ever to be a force for good. Read on—and make your next twenty-four hours really count.

CHAPTER ONE

Ask the Right Question

Carry out a random act of kindness, with no expectation of reward, safe in the knowledge that one day someone might do the same for you.¹

—Princess Diana

Paul Walker, star of the *Fast and Furious* franchise, earned a reputation in Hollywood for being a nice guy. But even his most ardent fans were oblivious to the extent of his charitable ways. Shortly after Paul's life ended in a tragic auto accident in 2013, stories of his incredible kindness and generosity surfaced.

While visiting a jewelry store in Santa Barbara, California, Paul met a young couple shopping for a wedding ring. During the conversation, Paul learned that the groom had recently returned from his first tour of duty in Iraq.

Deciding the rings were out of their price range, the couple left the store without a purchase. Later that afternoon, they received a phone call from a clerk requesting that they

return to the store. When they did, the clerk presented them with a \$10,000 ring purchased by a patron who had chosen to remain anonymous. Astonishment gave way to tears of gratitude as the soon-to-be bride slipped the ring on her finger. The power of kindness had reached out and touched their lives.

For more than a decade, the name of the donor remained a mystery. But in 2013, the store clerk phoned the couple and revealed the name of the patron: Paul Walker. “He’s the one who wanted you to have that ring,” she announced.²

According to the actor’s business partner, Brandon Birtell, Paul’s kindness to strangers was spontaneous and consistent:

.....
***There [is] nothing
inherently wrong
with wealth and
stardom as long
as you [don’t]
use them to serve
only yourself.***
.....

“Paul was the kind of person that valued and respected others. He would go out of his way to do the simplest things—from stopping to open the door for others, making sure he looked someone in the eye when they were speaking, to helping someone who clearly needed to be helped. Sometimes, I would secretly get annoyed because I would see a situation developing and knew my day was chang-

ing because we were going to help somebody . . . instead of being where we needed to be. His heart had to give that kind of attention everywhere that he could. That was the kind of character he had.”³

What motivated a movie star to be kind to strangers when the cameras weren’t rolling and he had nothing to gain? According to his family and friends, Paul wasn’t enamored with Hollywood or driven by fame and fortune. He saw them as tools, believing there was nothing inherently wrong

with wealth and stardom as long as you didn't use them to serve only yourself. He also rejected the notion that self-centeredness leads to greater happiness and success. He understood that life is always better when everyone in the community is better. That's why Paul used his influence and resources to help others achieve *their* dreams.

Think of your heart as a bank vault that's packed with the currency of love and kindness. When that currency is hoarded—it is wasted. But when it is invested in the lives of others, it pays great dividends. With each disbursement, you give others strength, hope, and value. In addition, with time you begin to find it easier to pick up people who fall and encourage those who suffer loss. You find yourself searching for opportunities to lend a helping hand and to build someone's self-esteem. And, you approach each day asking the right question. Others crawl out of bed asking, "What can I achieve?" You ask, "Who can I invest in?"

According to *Psychology Today*, the more humility you have, the easier it is to invest in others: "Humility is about emotional neutrality. It involves an experience of growth in which you no longer need to put yourself above others, but you don't put yourself below them, either. Everyone is a peer—from the most 'important' person to the least. You're just as valuable as every other human being on the planet, no more and no less."⁴

At Paul's funeral, family and friends shared stories of the actor's humility and compassion. They didn't have to fabricate or exaggerate—he had earned every word. And, like Paul, how *you* live determines the words that will be spoken in your memory. A reputation for humility and kindness is not earned by sporadic goodwill gestures or occasional flattery.

You become famous for kindness by investing your currency and being consistently selfless and caring.

Give to others and expect nothing in return. *Nothing!* That hurts. But it's a model of living that Jesus prescribed thou-

.....
You become famous for kindness by investing your currency and being consistently selfless and caring.
.....

sands of years ago: "If you only give for what you hope to get out of it, do you think that's charity? The stingiest of pawnbrokers does that" (Luke 6:34). On the surface, when you give freely of your time and resources, receiving nothing in return can appear absolutely inequitable. But if you're playing life's long game, then receiving nothing is a noble pursuit filled with lasting divi-

dends. Hall of Fame basketball coach John Wooden put it this way: "You can't live a perfect day without doing something for someone who will never be able to repay you."⁵

Many have adopted this same philosophy, choosing to offer assistance to others without regard for personal gain, publicity, or self-promotion. Actor Jake Gyllenhaal, for example, was shopping in Beverly Hills when he noticed a row of parking meters had expired. Drivers were on the verge of earning citations from a police officer when Jake took action. He hurriedly dug into his pockets for quarters and proceeded to top off the meters.⁶ The episode only became news when an eyewitness reported it to a tabloid.

Amy Adams is another actor who seized an opportunity to do something kind. While boarding a commercial airline, she noticed a soldier in uniform on her flight. Quietly she approached her fellow passenger, saying, "Sir, thank you for your service—I'd like you to take my seat in first class."

Asked about it later by a reporter, Amy said, “I didn’t do it to bring attention to myself—I did it to express appreciation to our troops.”⁷

Actor Keanu Reeves’s spontaneous act of kindness on the New York City subway was captured on video and posted on YouTube. When an exasperated female passenger entered the crowded car hoisting a large duffel bag, Reeves immediately motioned for her to take his seat. The woman smiled and nodded her appreciation without realizing the identity of her benefactor.⁸

Jake, Amy, and Keanu were motivated by what they could give—not by what they could get. But when you follow their example and give to others, you may receive more benefit than you realize. Researchers have discovered that kindness—and investing in others—can influence the quality and longevity of a person’s life. In his TED talk, “Why Leaders Eat Last,” author Simon Sinek said a study of the brain chemical oxytocin showed that doing, seeing, and receiving acts of kindness release oxytocin in the brain, which boosts the immune system and makes humans feel happier. “Remember, our bodies are trying to get us to repeat behaviors that are in our best interest. And it’s making us feel good when we see . . . acts of human generosity so that *we* will [also] do them. In fact, the more Oxytocin you have in your body, the more generous you actually become.”⁹

A study by the National Academy of Sciences revealed that happier people live 35 percent longer.¹⁰ Kindness is your ticket to health and happiness. It’s the price of admission to a new and exciting world filled with greater purpose and contentment. You hold the ticket in your hand—it’s up to you whether you use it. Don’t allow your quest for success to

.....
***Personal
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.....

hold you back. Because, as Paul Walker discovered, true success isn't measured by what you achieve or how much you accumulate. It's largely defined by what you do for others. The daily struggle to accomplish more for yourself won't lead to greater happiness anyway. Personal achievement brings temporary satisfaction; helping others achieve *their* dreams yields lasting fulfillment.

Today you can cash in your ticket to health and happiness by simply asking the right question: "Who can I invest in?"

KIND WAYS

1. Use social media to track people's birthdays and send them emails of appreciation on their special day.
2. Offer to care for someone's pet when the owner is out of town.
3. Sweep the walkway, rake the leaves, or shovel the snow for neighbors while they are at work or away for the weekend.
4. Organize a group of friends to pick up litter in your town.
5. Leave a note of gratitude for your server in a restaurant.