

YOUR
 ONE
LIFE



Own It. Live It. Love It.

L A N C E W I T T

“I am increasingly concerned about the pace and demands of life and how they crush the souls of people. I have been so fortunate to get to know Lance Witt over the last few years, and with *Your ONE Life*, Lance gets to the heart of how to care for your one and only life. This is a critically important read for every person.”

Carey Nieuwhof, author, speaker, podcaster

“You are going to love this book! Not because it will help you become a better teammate, leader, spouse, parent, or friend (though it will), but instead because it will help you become a better *you*! Lance doesn’t just present the principles—he gives us the practices for living a better, healthier life. I’ve said it out loud several times to my teammates, ‘When I grow up, I want to be just like Lance Witt.’ Lance has now written the manual with all his most important life hacks to help me do just that.”

Tony Morgan, founder and lead strategist of The Unstuck Group; author of *The Unstuck Church*

“My good friend Lance Witt has given us a road map for living a healthy and rich life. In this book, he poignantly reminds us that we get only one shot at this gift called life. He not only reminds us that the clock is ticking, but he also provides us biblical, helpful, and practical instruction for navigating life’s journeys. This book is a compelling call to self-leadership—to make sure you steward well *Your ONE Life*.”

Chip Ingram, founder and CEO of Living on the Edge; author of *Yes, You Really Can Change*

“Lance Witt has done it again! His book *Your ONE Life* will challenge and inspire you to live your best life every day. Lance reminds us what matters most in life and then carefully guides us to the place where each of us can take hold of the life God has waiting for us. As personal friends, we have witnessed Lance’s life up close. He not only writes about making the most of everyday but also lives it. He is an expert guide for anyone wanting to claim the full life Jesus came to give.”

Todd and Julie Mullins, senior pastors
at Christ Fellowship Church

“Far too often we read books from people who are great practitioners but not great practicers. I’ve seen up close with Lance and his wife, Connie, that he can write and speak with authority on what it means to live a *full, good, and godly* life—*Your ONE Life!* This book reminded me of some things I knew and needed to revisit, taught me some things I want to start and to stop, and showed me what it means to put flesh to what I like to call ‘the good life.’ If there is someone we should be listening to about what it means to really flourish spiritually, relationally, and emotionally in this one life, it’s Lance Witt. Thank you for this gift, Lance!”

Brian Carpenter, founder of the Refuge Foundation

“If you feel like you are meandering through life without a clear sense of meaning, if you suspect that the speed of your life is eclipsing real significance, if you need a personal life manifesto for more intentional influence, then my friend Lance Witt has written this book for you. Lance’s wisdom has added rich value to my soul. *Your ONE Life* will do the same for you.”

Daniel Henderson, founder and president of Strategic Renewal;
author of *Transforming Prayer*

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LANCE WITT



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Lance Witt, *Your One Life*

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In dedication to
Jonathan, Ryanne,
Macy, Piper,
Meagan, Mychal John,
Emery, Willow

Just typing your names fills me with profound gratitude. Each of you, in your own unique way, has been an incredible joy and blessing to us. I love you . . . I am proud of you . . . I believe in you . . . I pray for you . . . I love spending time with you. My life is richer because of you.

Two of the titles that I wear most proudly are Dad and Pops. I am beyond grateful that we get to do life together. I treasure the moments and memories that we share as a family.

I wanted to dedicate this book to you because it contains much of what I have learned about life and want to pass on to you. My hope is that what you see in me really puts flesh on the words of these chapters. One of the deepest longings of my one and only life is to help you live a life that honors God and is deeply fulfilling.

Solomon was spot-on when he wrote,

The father of godly children has cause for joy.
What a pleasure to have children who are wise.

Proverbs 23:24

One of the great joys of my life is to have a life-giving friendship with my adult kids and their spouses. You have been an incredible cause for joy. And it's such a pleasure to have children who are wise and godly.

Solomon also nailed it when he said,

Grandchildren are the crowning glory of the aged.

Proverbs 17:6

As a friend once told me, grandparenting is one of the few things in life that isn't overrated. He was right. The four little girls who call me Pops mean more to me than I could ever begin to express. I hope that in the years to come this book will be a source of hope and encouragement and wisdom and LIFE for you.

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Foreword

“DO YOU NEED a ride home again?”

In the life of a pastor’s kid, that question is a special rite of passage—something we look back on with an odd sense of pride. As kids, we spent a fair amount of our childhood at the church. This meant a couple things: we knew where the good snacks were hidden, we knew the baptismal was a rookie hiding spot, and we knew that on occasion the Sunday school teacher, or maybe the cool co-pastor (love you, Tim!), might have to bring us home because we slipped through the cracks of Mom and Dad’s communication that day.

It never bothered or concerned us. In fact, we barely even noticed. We were church kids. We felt our own sense of ownership in that place. We just understood that church work was hard . . . and there was a lot of it.

Mom never thought it was that funny, but it’s easy for all of us to laugh at it now. We might have been left behind, but we always knew we weren’t forgotten. And as we look back at those moments now, such situations were clearly a symptom of the hectic and hurried lives of a young, ambitious couple trying to navigate life. They lost track of us because they were distracted by the noble and worthy goal of building God’s church. But in the midst

of any worthwhile pursuit, it's easy to lose track of things that really matter.

Today, things are very different.

As we've grown older, it's been incredibly special to see our parents, and especially our dad, not just acknowledge that hurry and ambition are areas to pay attention to in his life but also commit himself to living the solutions and helping others do the same.

Our dad has always lived with intent—with purpose and determination. But those things are now properly focused on and correctly aimed at what is truly important.

In the last fifteen years, we've had front-row seats to his incredible and inspiring transformation. The drive and ambition are still there, but what's getting his attention and his intention are the things that matter most. His calendar is filled with family-oriented activities. He's always wanting to brainstorm how we can do more life together, make more memories. He walks slower (oh man, he used to be the fastest walker in any parking lot). He's more patient. He asks better questions . . . and listens carefully to the answers. He's more generous. He laughs more. He cries more. He plays more golf—not better golf, but more of it. He FaceTimes more. Overall, he's learned to slow down, to savor the moment.

Our dad talks openly and honestly in this book about the shortcomings of being an overly ambitious and hurried person. And because of that, one of the greatest joys in our lives has been to see him become a grandfather to his four granddaughters. He's embraced that role with a tenacity and passion that are emotional to write about. He's persistent in his pursuit of relationship with each of them and plays an active and significant role in their lives. He speaks encouragement, godly truth, wisdom, and life into them—always without hurry or a rush to get to the next thing. Whether it's one-on-one date nights with Pops or the yearly cousin camp adventures, he's creating intentional moments and memories with each of them. And to our knowledge, he hasn't left them anywhere yet.

We understand it can be difficult to trust an invisible author and give credibility to a life that is only described on the page. Our

hope is that our words and our experiences can provide sufficient testimony to the incredible wisdom and insight in this book, as well as to the rich life and legacy our dad is crafting now. He has given the latter part of his professional life to helping people realize how to live their one life with intention, and we believe there are practical and applicable truths available for you as well. His desire is for you to learn from his story so you don't have to come face-to-face with the hard truths. That's the kind of person our dad is. The kind who doesn't waste his story.

We encourage you to lean into the godly wisdom present in the pages in front of you. This is the story of a life well-lived, and we believe it can provide insight and a road map to living a more rewarding, God-honoring, and fruitful life. We hope you'll take the time to apply the practical next steps and wrestle with the questions inside, as they will provide clarity and direction.

If this book had been written fifteen years ago, it would have been great, but it mostly would have been a tactical guide on how to optimize your personal performance. So read this not as a manual for personal improvement but as a letter of instruction on how to steward well the only life you will ever have. A letter filled with timely lessons from someone who genuinely understands the struggle but realized there's a better way.

We believe this book serves as a great reminder that regardless of where you find yourself today, regardless of your position in life, regardless of whether you understand your purpose, it's never too late to take the reins and change the story—to make your one life a great life.

Jonathan Witt and Meagan Maltbie

How to Get the Most Out of This Book

PEOPLE APPROACH BOOKS in a variety of ways. Some scan the pages trying to get through as much content as quickly as possible. Others highlight key sentences or sections. Some people I know always have five or six books going at one time. I have one friend who takes all the key learnings and writes them on the inside of the back cover. There is not one right way to read a book.

But I want to share with you what I believe will help you maximize your reading of this book. It is a gift that you would choose to spend your time reading *Your ONE Life*, so I wanted to give you a couple ideas that might help as you engage the content.

1. *Read slowly.* The chapters have intentionally been written so that you could read a chapter in a short amount of time. Since this is a book about the meaning and quality of your one and only life, it will be helpful to slow down a bit. At the pace of one chapter per day, you can complete the book in a month. As you read, take time to ponder and reflect. You'll be glad you did.
2. *Read with a friend.* The friend might be a co-worker, a golfing buddy, your spouse, or your small group at church.

At the end of each chapter is a set of reflection/discussion questions. You could certainly work through these questions all by yourself. But it will be more meaningful and fun to read the book and discuss the questions with a friend. I believe it will produce some rich conversations.

3. *Complete the two assignments.* Embedded in the book are two life-shaping assignments. The first is to complete a Life Purpose Statement. That can sound daunting, but I will walk you through the steps to craft your statement. Second, at the end of the book, I will encourage you to write a Life Manifesto. This is a set of core values that will guide how you “do” life.

However you approach the book, it’s my prayer that the chapters that follow will enrich your one life.

Introduction

YOUR. ONE. LIFE. When you string those three words together and slow down long enough to truly ponder them, they are quite sobering. In the entire history of humanity, no one has had or ever will have a life exactly like yours. And you get only one shot at your one and only life. Unlike your DVR, your life doesn't come with a Rewind button. There is no reincarnation, no do-over, no mulligan, and no second go-round.

Life is filled with moments and episodes that you will never live through again.

- ▶ Your senior year in high school
- ▶ Your wedding day
- ▶ Your thirteenth anniversary
- ▶ Your vacation last year
- ▶ Your lunch with a friend last week
- ▶ Your thirties
- ▶ Your child's first day of school
- ▶ Your forty-sixth birthday
- ▶ YESTERDAY

No matter what your age, you've already passed many life moments. You've lived through days, events, decisions, vacations,

problems, special occasions, years, and seasons that you will never get back. They're done! You might carry the memory of them, but you can't turn back time and relive them. They are done . . . complete . . . past . . . over . . . closed . . . finito. And yet, time just keeps marching on.

Actually, when you think about it, life is a string of moments. But make no mistake, there is coming a moment that is the mother of all moments. You will take a final breath, your heart will beat for the last time, and *your one life* will be over. Yes, your life has an expiration date.

In that moment, you won't be done as a person, because you have a soul that will continue to live on past your earthly death. But your moment of death will close the book on the one and only life you'll ever have on this planet.

You see, the truth is, we're all "terminal." Emery, my eight-year-old granddaughter, recently reminded me of this sobering reality. We do cousin camp with our granddaughters each year, and I kiddingly asked them, "Do you guys think we will still be doing cousin camp when you're thirty?" Without any hesitation, Emery fired back, "Yes, if you and Nana aren't dead." In case you're wondering, she gets her brutally honest personality from her nana.

It's easy for us to think and act and live as though we're going to be here forever. But let me gently remind you, the death rate in your town or city is 100 percent. How is that for a warm, fuzzy thought to begin a book? None of us is exempt, and none of us will escape. In Ecclesiastes 8:8, Solomon gives us a sober reminder: "None of us can hold back our spirit from departing. None of us has the power to prevent the day of our death."

So the question is not "if" but "when." The Bible says that the Lord has numbered our days, but He has never revealed His spreadsheet. I don't know the number of my days, and you don't know the number of your days. Your departure flight from this life will not be delayed. Your one and only life on this planet had a beginning, and it will have an ending. Your death certificate is as certain as your birth certificate.

There's a lot we don't know about the number of our days. When will my number be up? Where will it happen? How will it happen? But this much I know for sure: your number is one less today than it was yesterday.

You didn't ask to be born, and you can't get out of dying. What you do in between, you have a lot of say over. What you do in between is called your *life*.

Life . . . let that word sink in for a moment. What an incredible gift. If you're a Christ follower, you believe and know that your life is not a random accident or cosmic coincidence. The Bible clearly declares God as the author of life. I love Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of Psalm 139:15.

You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit,
how I was sculpted from nothing into something. (MSG)

Think about that. God sculpted you from nothing into something. And He breathed life into your body and stamped you with the *imago Dei*. God custom-designed a life just for you. It is *your* life. He planned for you to be born at a certain time in history. He intricately designed your body and personality and intelligence and gifts with divine purpose. He gave you relationships and an ethnic culture so that you could belong.

But you aren't passive when it comes to your life. You are responsible for your life; you're the steward of your life. You will someday give an account to God for your one and only life. You have limitless options for what you could do with your life—what you think about, what you spend your time doing, what you spend your money on, what you choose to love, what matters to you, and what decisions you make. It's easy for us to get distracted and swept along in the current of everyday life. We can click through our days without really taking the time to ask where we're going and how we're living.

You have been given this incredible gift called *life*. You have amazing options and opportunities, but the truth is, sometimes that can be stressful and confusing. How are you supposed to live?

How do you make good choices? How do you not squander this gift? How do you not suck at life?

Maybe you're starting to get stressed out right now as you read those questions. Can I encourage you to relax and take a deep breath? I've got great news for you.

The Bible says that everything you need for life and godliness, you already have (2 Pet. 1:3).

The Bible is not a book that just tells us how to know God and love God. It's also a book about life. And God says to you and to me, "I have provided everything you need to live a rich and amazing life."

Before you turn the page, I want you to put down this book and head out to your garage. Next, I want you to grab a shovel. Now, get in your car and drive to your local cemetery. You'll need about six hours and exactly 1,405 shovelfuls of dirt . . . to dig a grave. By the way, don't forget to get permission from those in charge at the cemetery.

What I just described to you is what Michael Yankoski did one day. He literally dug a grave by hand and then lay down in the grave. With the cold dirt against the back of his head, Michael crossed his arms across his chest and closed his eyes.

When asked by the cemetery workers why he would do such a crazy thing, Michael said, "It's hard to explain. I'm trying to come to grips with my own mortality, I guess."¹

Maybe you don't need to literally dig a grave, but every single one of us needs to come to grips with our mortality . . . with our one and only life on this planet.

Staring our own mortality in the face is good for us. But it isn't enough. We must also learn how to master the art of living. So, let's get started.

Part 1



CRAFTING
the LIFE
YOU LONG
to LIVE

CHAPTER

1

It's Later Than It's Ever Been

It is not the length of life, but the depth.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

CAN YOU HEAR IT? You might have to turn off your TV. You will definitely have to put down your smartphone. If you get still and quiet, you can hear it right now. The sound is faint, but it is real. Because of the speed and noise of life, we rarely hear it or acknowledge it. The truth is, we don't like to hear it. We don't want to hear it. When we stop long enough to hear it, it makes us uncomfortable and forces us to ponder things we would rather not think about.

What I'm talking about is the ticking clock of your life. In quiet moments, you can hear the subtle sweep of the second hand relentlessly counting down the minutes of your life.

Psalm 90:12 says it like this:

Teach us to realize the brevity of life,
so that we may grow in wisdom.

Another translation of that verse says, “Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (NIV).

One translation of that verse is a sober reminder about the brevity of life, and the other is a challenge to be intentional about our days. Both are important for living well.

Psalm 90 became especially real to me on a cold March night in Vail, Colorado. Some friends of ours were out of town but were gracious enough to let my wife, Connie, and me stay in their beautiful home while I worked with a church in the area. About 10:30 p.m., I crawled into bed. Normally, I can fall asleep within minutes. But that night something was different. I’m not quite sure how to explain it, but I just wasn’t feeling like myself. After a few minutes of tossing and turning in bed, I decided to get up and see if moving around would help me feel better. Once I was out of bed, I knew something was wrong. I felt like I couldn’t keep my balance, my hands were tingling, and my heart was racing and felt like it was about to burst out of my chest. Also, I felt like I couldn’t think straight. My thoughts felt disconnected. I turned to my wife, who was already in bed, and said, “I think you should probably call an ambulance.” Apparently my words were a bit slurred. I vaguely remember stumbling down the stairs and sitting on an ottoman in the living room.

Within just a few minutes, the EMTs arrived. In those minutes that they were working on me, I knew something was wrong but had no idea how serious it was. And even though there were people and medical equipment swirling all around me, I began to have very lucid thoughts about my life and the uncertainty of whether I would live to see another day. Also, in those moments, God provided a supernatural peace that dissipated any anxiety and fear. It was surreal. If it was God’s plan that the second hand of my life stopped ticking that night, I was at peace and ready.

Connie had called a good friend who pastored a church in the area. He rushed right over and was with us as the ambulance took me to the Vail hospital.

I remember lying on the gurney in a holding area at the hospital. My pastor friend said, “Well, the good news is that they brought you here to the Vail hospital. If it was serious, they would take you

to Denver.” Within five seconds of him uttering those words, a nurse walked up and said, “We aren’t really equipped to deal with neurological issues, so we’re sending you to Denver.” I remember looking up at my pastor friend and saying, “Your pastoral care skills suck.”

So, they loaded me back into an ambulance, and we followed a snowplow down the mountain to Denver. As you’ve probably figured out, I survived and it ended up not being a heart attack or a life-altering stroke. It was determined that I had suffered a TIA, commonly referred to as a ministroke. There was no permanent brain damage (although some people might disagree), and within a couple days I was out of the hospital.

All Time Is Not Created Equal

When you live through episodes like the one I just described, the sweep of the second hand isn’t faint and subtle. It screams at you and grabs you by the throat.

It reminds me of another verse in the Bible about time. In some of the modern translations, Ephesians 5:16 says to “make the most of every opportunity.” But I memorized this verse many years ago in the King James Version, which translates the verse this way: “Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”

The idea behind the word *redeem* is to “purchase” or “buy up.” When I make a purchase, it’s a deliberate, intentional transaction. I’m exchanging some of my money for a product. In the same way, when it comes to my life, I’m regularly exchanging my time for something. The question is, Am I exchanging my time for that which is most valuable?

Interestingly, the Greeks had two different words for time: *chronos* and *kairos*. We get our word *chronological* from *chronos*. This is how we normally think of time. It’s the actual seconds and minutes. It’s a quantitative word. But that is not the word used in Ephesians 5:16. Paul very deliberately uses the root word *kairos*. *Kairos* is more qualitative and speaks more to the “right” moment or opportunity. Let me explain it like this. Every hour is the same when it comes to *chronos*. It’s an exact measurement of

sixty minutes, or 3,600 seconds. But not every hour is the same when it comes to *kairos*. Not every hour (*chronos*) provides equal opportunity (*kairos*) for using our time well.

Paul is challenging us to be intentional to buy up as many *kairos* opportunities as possible. Why? Because we have only one shot at this life, and because, as Paul says, “the days are evil.” Living in the twenty-first century, we have unlimited options for how we spend our time.

When I think about moving from simply marking time (*chronos*) to maximizing time (*kairos*), the word that comes to mind is *clarity*. Clarity comes from understanding God’s purposes and also through the process of self-discovery. God’s eternal purposes and truth are universal and apply to all of us. But within the guardrails of God’s timeless purposes, I need to discern my unique gifts, passions, values, and calling. That kind of clarity will point me toward a *kairos* kind of life.

None of us ever sets out to squander our life. No one ever plans to live a regret-filled life. As we begin this journey, I want to challenge you to put a stake in the ground declaring that you are going to tenaciously chase after a *kairos* kind of life. None of us will do it perfectly, and we’re going to need to extend ourselves some grace along the way.

Maybe the most dangerous word in the English language is *someday*. Many of us suffer from the “someday syndrome.” Someday I’ll make things right with my mom. Someday I’ll take that trip. Someday I’ll have more time for the kids. Someday I’ll get in shape. Someday I’ll slow down. Someday I’ll talk to my friend about Jesus. Someday I’ll go back to school. In fact, why don’t you fill in the blank. Someday, I’ll _____.

What “someday” represents is a longing for more *kairos* moments. But the problem with “someday” is that it can rob us of “this day.”

Obstacles to a Great Life

This book is my attempt to try to share how to live a *kairos* life of great purpose and deep satisfaction. As I honestly observe my

own life and the lives of others, I believe there are two primary obstacles that get in the way. The first obstacle is what I would call passivity or drift. We just get caught in the current of culture and everyday life and are swept along without really asking, “Is this the way I want to live?” We don’t take the time to really evaluate what we believe and then chart a clear course for the kind of life we deeply long to live. And I am unapologetically asking you to step back and take a more macro look at your life. Where is it headed? What trajectory are you on? What are your values? If you play the movie of your life forward, what kind of final scene does it have? I hope these chapters can help you take greater ownership of and responsibility for the only life you get.

The second obstacle has to do with the issue of courage. When I look in the rearview mirror at more than sixty years of life, one of my deepest regrets has to do with the issue of courage. That sentence was way harder for me to write than I thought it would be. In fact, it took a little while to muster the courage to admit my lack of courage.

They don’t give medals for chickening out, backing down, getting cold feet, not taking a stand, backpedaling, or wimping out. The honest truth is, I am not a naturally courageous person. When I think of the word *courage*, there are a couple other words that aren’t lagging far behind: *risk* and *pain*. And generally speaking, I am not a fan of either. I seek to mitigate risk and minimize pain. Regretfully, there have been many moments when I have let fear triumph over courage.

When I examine the Bible, I see that the life of absolute devotion to Christ always involves some demonstration of courage. Just mark it down. Somewhere along your journey Jesus will call you to take the risk of being courageous. Living for God’s purposes will most certainly put you at odds with the world system. And staying true to your unique purpose will put you in the place of disappointing people you care about. There are many voices in your life that are more than happy to tell you how you should live and what you should give your time and energy to. But it’s not their life . . . it is *your* life. And it takes courage to steward well your one life.

We usually think of courage in heroic, death-defying terms. But courage is usually much less dramatic. In fact, I'm convinced that several times a week your path and my path intersect opportunities to display courage, to actually act upon our values and priorities. Some courageous acts aren't public; they're just between us and God.

Before we go any further, I wanted to get the C word (courage) out on the table. To craft the life you want, you must get clarity about God's ultimate purposes in the world and also your unique purpose in this life. But clarity alone is not enough. Let that sink in. Acquiring more knowledge is not enough to achieve the life you deeply long for. Most of us are educated way beyond the level of our courage. It's going to take clarity *and* courage to stay the course and be true to yourself and God's purposes.

Courage is what fills the gap between clarity and action.

Courage is what fills the gap between knowing and doing.

Courage is not an issue of wiring but of willingness. It's not an issue of DNA but of heart. I have always found comfort and hope in a definition of courage frequently attributed to Ambrose Redmoon: "Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear."¹

My hope is that this week you will live with a greater awareness that the clock is ticking. And as you hear the faint sweep of the second hand, you'll be reminded that you get only one shot at this life. I don't know how many days are left in your account, but I do know that it's later than it's ever been.

REFLECTION/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. On a scale of 1–10 (with 1 being low and 10 being high), how would you rate your current level of satisfaction with your life? Why did you give yourself that number?

2. Complete the following statement. Someday I hope to . . .

3. Take a few moments to do an honest reality check right now. Answer honestly the following three questions about your life:

What's healthy?

What's broken or stuck?

What's confused?

4. If your life ended this month, what would you regret?