



How to live a more meaningful life

A series about living the life you want based on your values.

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How to live a more meaningful life: An open invitation

I invite you on a journey.

I am on a path to make my life more rich and meaningful, and I encourage you to come along with me.

Because I'm approaching my 50th year, I find myself wondering about my place in the world.

What is my purpose here? What will my friends and family say about me and my life when my life is over? Will I have an impact?

This musing leads me back to one question: What am I *doing*? When I answer this question, I feel a bit unsettled.

I'm starting to understand where my discomfort is coming from.



The treadmill

Like many people, I sometimes think, "When _____ happens, I'll feel better, or my life will be good, or I'll have 'arrived,' or I'll be happy." I set goals I want to accomplish so that any or all of those results will occur. And when I reach those goals, I do feel better!

But after a while, the luster fades, and I'm back to thinking, "When _____ happens . . ."

It's a kind of treadmill. Researchers call it the *hedonic treadmill* (also known as *hedonic adaptation*). This is the process most of us experience when we adapt quickly to a new element in our lives. If my goal is to get a new bicycle and I achieve my goal, I'm thrilled with my new bike! But after a few weeks, I adapt to the new bike that has entered my life, and I return to my pre-bike-acquisition emotional state.

I am back on the treadmill, aiming for my next goal. The familiar question looms in front of me: What am I *doing*? And *why*?

The missing piece

I've been studying a type of therapy known as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). I'm beginning to answer those questions in a way that eases my discomfort and leads me forward on the path to that richer, more meaningful life.

ACT is about accepting what we can't control and committing to taking action. It encourages us to reflect on what we're doing and why we're doing it: this process helps me to understand what I've been overlooking in my life.

The component that I've been missing recently is **values**. Not that I don't have any; I have numerous honorable values. But, I do not always allow them to be what my life is about. When I think about it, the most treasured times in my life have been centered on my values.

Many years ago, my partner at the time, Ruth, had metastatic breast cancer. You might think this was the worst time in my life. But it wasn't. It was one of the **best** times in my life. When I look back, I see that those years were extraordinarily rich and filled with meaning. Ruth said in all sincerity that she would not have traded away her experience with cancer. And I felt the same way.

Why? Because we chose to live according to our **values**. We had a goal for Ruth to live as long as possible with her terminal illness, but the key was *how* we lived our life together during that time. We learned the art of nonresistance along the way, and so we valued acceptance. We accepted Ruth's cancer along with the other ups and downs that come along in life.

We valued honesty and intimacy. We had many long, fruitful, cherished discussions about death, dying, and how to live our best lives. No topic was off limits. Our conversations wove a deep emotional tapestry of our relationship.

Because we knew our time together was limited, we valued being as present as possible with each other and in the world. People who experience life-limiting illnesses often say, "Colors seem more vivid, aromas smell better, and chirping birds sound like music." I can testify that is true! Living fully in the moment does, indeed, bring more texture and brilliance to life.

I understand now that living according to my **values** was the essential factor that made my experience during that time so rich and meaningful. It wasn't about goals or any thought that started with, "When _____ happens . . ."

Come with me?

I am on this path toward living a richer, more meaningful life. I'm not saying I want to live a stress-free always-happy life. I want my life to be purposeful, even when I'm struggling with sadness and depression. I want to keep meaning and intention in my awareness when things are going well and when life sucks. I want my answers to the questions, "What am I *doing*? And *why*?" to be aligned with my values.

Will you come with me?

Many of you have written to me telling me about your struggles in life, and in your stories I hear echoes of my own experiences. "If only I didn't have depression/worries about my child/a broken heart/anxiety/lack of confidence/financial problems—I'd feel better."

But what if you could lead a life full of purpose and meaning with those challenges? What if you could say, "I may be struggling right now, but I still know who I am and what I stand for, and I will act accordingly?"

I invite you to travel this path with me.

Will you come?

Naming your values: The compass for a rich, meaningful life

We're on a journey, you and I.

We accomplished our first step during my last post when we took an unwavering look at this formula:

"When _____ happens, then I'll feel better/be happier/consider myself successful.

We realized that this isn't the best way to live our lives, because it keeps us waiting for the **next thing** to happen rather than living a rich, meaningful life **right now**. We decided to begin our journey by answering the questions, "What am I *doing*? And *why*?"

In order to answer those questions, we need to look at our **goals** and **values**.



In our American culture, it's easy to get caught up in goals-based living as represented by the **when-then formula** above. Goals are useful. They help us stay on track and move forward in a positive direction. But goals alone don't answer the questions, "What am I *doing*? And *why*?" We must examine the relationship between our goals and our values.

Goals and Values

A **goal** is something we accomplish or achieve. I had a goal to save money for a road bicycle. Two weeks ago, I achieved my goal and acquired my new bicycle. (Hooray!)

A **value** is a principle that leads and guides us through life. Two of my values are **being healthy** and **enjoying nature**. Riding my new bicycle is one way I can manifest my values of being healthy and enjoying nature.

Goals are future-oriented and finite. We strive toward a goal, and when we accomplish it, we're done with it. A **value** is something that exists indefinitely unless we change it or eliminate it. We can choose to act on a value at any time—including this very moment.

I like the idea of values being like a compass, as Russ Harris writes in *ACT Made Simple*:

Values are like a compass. A compass gives you direction and keeps you on track when you're traveling. And our values do the same for the journey of life. We use them to choose the direction in which we want to move and to keep us on track as we go. So when you act on a value, it's like heading west. No matter how far west you travel, you never get there; there's always further to go. But goals are like the things you try to achieve on your journey: they're like the sights you want to see or the mountains you want to climb while you keep on traveling west. (p.192)

What are my values?

Pertinent questions that may be entering your mind right now are, "What are my values? How do I define them for myself?"

One way is to ask yourself, "What do I stand for in life? What is important to me?" Allow these questions to percolate for awhile before answering them.

Another way, which I find to be a bit easier, is to mimic an [old commercial](#) and ask yourself, “What do I want on my tombstone?”

At times, my clients will tell me about the stressors in their lives—the deadlines to be met, the pressure to be perfect, or the closet that needs to be organized. With gentle humor, I sometimes ask, “Is that what you want on your tombstone? ‘Here lies Mary. Her closets were organized?’”

Let’s broaden the exercise from your tombstone. Imagine that you are able to attend your own funeral. What do you want the speakers at your funeral to say about you? Do you hear them saying, “She really wanted that raise at work, and she got it!” Or would you rather they say, “She was a hard worker and she treated others with respect. You always knew that she really cared about you.”

If imagining your funeral is uncomfortable for you, then visualize people speaking about your life at your 90th birthday party. What will they say that illustrates what you stand for in life? Will they easily be able to say *why* you live your life the way you do?

To help you with this process, I created a worksheet (found at the end of this book) that lists many values. Follow the instructions to name and clarify your values.

Take action. No, really—I mean now!

Utilize one or all of these methods to make a list of *at least* 10 of your values. You may generate a list that has more than 10, which is perfectly okay. Now put a check mark by the values that are *most* important for you. I hope that seeing your values in writing begins to create some clarity.

We’re not done yet! Once we have identified our values, we have to ask ourselves one final question.

Am I living my values?

Now that we are **aware of our values**, the next step is to see how closely we’re **living by our values**. Remember that we want our values to guide us in the actions that we take. In part, values act like an anchor in a storm: No matter how much life tosses us around on waves of adversity, our values hold us steady, and steadiness is a key component of resilience.

To determine how closely you are living your values, apply a little bit of honest thought to the values that you listed. Using the worksheet, review your list of values. In one column, put a number between 1 and 10 that indicates how important this value is to you where 1 is *not important at all* and 10 is *extremely important*. In the second column, place a number between 1 and 10 that indicates how well you are living that value right now where 1 is *not at all* and 10 is *living that value fully*.

For example, being kind is a value that is *extremely important* to me, so I entered 10 in the first column. How well am I living that value daily? When I ponder this for a bit, I conclude that I am kind to people I work with and interact with in public. But, I can be more irritable with my partner than I care to be. So, I put a 6 in the second column.

Creativity is also one of my values, but it’s not *extremely important* to me, so I entered a 7 in the first column. After a bit of consideration, I decide that I am fairly happy with the way I incorporate creativity into my life, so I also entered a 7 in the second column.

In the first instance, I notice a fairly wide gap between how important my value of kindness is to me versus how I am integrating kindness into my actions. This is a flag for me: my value and my actions are misaligned.

However, I seem to be living my value of creativity in line with how important it is to me. No flags here; it is gratifying to note the congruence between my value and my actions.

So, you have a bit of work to do! Use the worksheet or whatever method is effective for you to name your values and determine how well you are living each one.

Then, take action to close that gap between how you **want** to live your values and how you **are** living them.

How to unhook from negative thoughts

Which of the following sounds better to you?

- A. "I go to this job because there's no way anyone would hire me somewhere else."
- B. "I go to this job so I don't have to put up with my husband hassling me about money all the time."
- C. "I go to this job because it helps me contribute to society, enjoy connections, and create community."

Option C is obviously the most appealing choice. That's because it's based on *values*: contributing to society, enjoying connections, and creating community.



Much like a compass gives direction to travelers, values are the principles that we use to guide our lives.

Or do we? In my last post, I shared how easily I slipped back into old habits, and despite how much I value connection and community—which I find through interacting with you—I let a month go by before continuing our conversation about experiencing a richer, more meaningful life through aligning our behavior more closely with our values.

Slipping back into old habits is one way that we sometimes get away from value-based living. There are two more ways that we're going to look at in this post and the next: getting hooked by our negative thoughts and getting hooked by our painful feelings. First up: negative thoughts.

A metaphor

Do this exercise with me. Imagine that your hands are your negative thoughts. Put your hands together on your lap, palms up, as though they were an open book. Now bring your hands up toward your face until they're almost touching your nose and your eyes are covered.

With your hands in front of you like that, how well would you be able to relate to someone who is sitting in front of you? You could hear them, but would you be able to see their body language and gestures? What kind of relationship would that be?

Keeping your hands in front of you, notice what you see of the world around you. You might see a little bit between the cracks in your fingers and a little bit on the periphery, but it's probably hard to see much more.

How about being able to function well? With your hands stuck in front of your face like that, can you give someone a hug? Type at your computer? Drive a car?

This is what happens to us when we get hooked into our negative thoughts. It can be hard to see anything else, and this may affect our relationships, narrow our view of the world, and make it difficult to act effectively.

And, how easy is it to live our most cherished values when we are impaired in this way?

Slowly move your hands away from your face down toward your lap. Notice how much more of the world you can see and how much more open and direct your relationship would be with someone sitting in front of you. As your hands finally rest in your lap and separate from each other, note that you can now hug someone, drive a car, and type at your computer.

Living the life we want now

I want you to notice something else, something very important. Where are your hands? Did you get rid of them—are they gone? No, they're still there at the ends of your arms and resting on your lap. And look: even though your negative thoughts (your hands) are still there, you can do so many of the things you value in life.

This metaphor helps us see a couple of important things:

1. Getting hooked into our thoughts blocks us from being present in our lives in an effective and satisfying way.

2. Once we unhook from our thoughts—get some space from them—we can continue to go about living our lives in the way we want, *even with the presence of negative thoughts.*

This second point is a big one; unhooking is the antidote to the old pattern we often get into of “When _____ happens, then I’ll be happy/successful/can move on with my life.” Instead of waiting for fill-in-the-blank to happen, we can live the life we want now!

Defusing from unhelpful thoughts

Have you ever seen two pieces of metal fused together? It’s a tight fit and it’s difficult to separate the pieces. Sometimes, that happens with our thoughts: we get *fused* to them. Our thought is so close to us and so stuck that we might not notice how hard we’re hanging on to it or how it’s affecting us.

Fusion with our thoughts keeps us stuck in our thinking rather than our experience, and often prevents us from taking meaningful action toward value-based living.

One way of unhooking from our thoughts is known as *defusion*. It’s a process of getting some space between us and our thinking. Russ Harris, author of *ACT Made Simple*, says the hands metaphor we did above “demonstrates the purposes of defusion: to engage fully in our experience and facilitate effective action.” (p.20)

But some thoughts are healthy and positive. How do we know which thoughts are healthy and which ones get in our way?

Ask yourself these two simple questions:

1. Is this thought helpful for me?

2. If I hold on tightly to this thought, will it help me move in the direction of a rich and meaningful life?

If the answers to one or both of those questions is no, it’s time to defuse. There are many ways to get space from your thoughts, illustrated earlier by letting your hands fall slowly away from your face.

Let’s start with one idea:

Defusion means to look *at* thoughts rather than *from* thoughts.

Our minds are amazing things that have evolved over millennia. One main purpose of our minds has always been to keep us safe. There are many ways our minds have done this, but I want to focus on just one way that is pertinent to the discussion here.

Negative thinking can make sense if you look at it from an evolutionary standpoint. One of the ways our ancestors remained safe was to be a part of a group. There was safety in numbers and so being thrown out of a group was dangerous and undesirable. The mind probably started thinking, "Am I fitting in? Do I measure up? Am I doing things well enough so I don't get kicked out to face the saber-toothed tigers alone?"

It helped our ancestors to believe these thoughts and take action on them. The problem is that often our minds still work along those same lines, prompting us to ask ourselves, "Do I fit in? How do I compare to her or to him? What if something bad happens?" And on and on.

We can see that negative thinking is likely a natural part of being human, but that doesn't mean we have to get hooked; we don't have to look at our lives *from* our thoughts. When we're holding tightly to a thought, it's probable that we're looking from our thoughts.

We can look instead *at* our thoughts as separate from ourselves and—newsflash! we don't have to *believe* all of them.

Now on to some techniques of how to look *at* thoughts instead of *from* them.

I'm having the thought that . . .

Take a pen and paper and write down a negative thought you struggle with. I'll start. I often struggle with the thought, "I'm not good enough." Do you have your thought written down? Go ahead and get fused with it. Really get into it.

Now, write this phrase in front of it: "I'm having the thought that . . ." My sentence would now look like this: "I'm having the thought that I'm not good enough." Play with your revised sentence in your mind for a few seconds. Do you feel your thought and you starting to separate from each other?

Finally, write this phrase in front of your new sentence: "I notice . . ." Thus, my sentence becomes: "I notice I'm having the thought that I'm not good enough."

See how we're starting to look *at* our thoughts instead of *from* our thoughts? For me, instead of thinking, "I'm not good enough" and living my life based on that thought, I can look *at* my thought and say to myself, "Oh, I notice I'm having the thought that I'm not good enough."

Wait! What's that noise? Is it the sound of two things defusing from each other?

They're just words

Let's go back to our original unhelpful sentences. If it isn't already, rewrite your original thought in the form of: "I am X." My original thought is: "I'm not good enough." I could rewrite it as: "I am a slacker."

Now, think this thought: "I am a banana!"

Return to your "I am X" thought. Did you notice how the thought about being a banana makes us laugh, but we believe our original thoughts about being a slacker or whatever your X is? Why is that? It's because we don't take the thought that we're bananas seriously. But, somehow, I take the thought that I'm a slacker as the gospel truth.

And yet, all our thoughts are just words. To help us understand and practice this idea of our thoughts being just words, try these two approaches.

Thanking your mind

The next time you become aware of an unhelpful thought, notice it and tell yourself, “Ah, there’s that thought again. Thanks, mind!” Or, “Mind, how fascinating that you brought that up. Thanks!” Or, “Thanks for sharing!” Just notice your thought and thank your mind for contributing to the conversation.

It’s hard to take your thoughts as seriously when you merely thank your mind for bringing it up and then move on your way.

Silly voices

No matter how bad I feel, this one always brings a smile to my face. When you notice a negative thought, repeat it in a silly voice such as a cartoon character. My favorite is Looney Tunes cat, Sylvester, especially when I’m having the thought, “You really suck.” I repeat it in Sylvester’s voice and hear, “Thufferin’ thucotash! You really thuck!”

Never fails to crack me up.

Letting thoughts go

This technique is a practice, so you’ll need a few minutes by yourself. Sit comfortably and quietly and allow your thoughts to arise as they will. Imagine you’re sitting by a gently flowing stream and there are leaves floating downstream with the current. As your thoughts come up, imagine placing them on a leaf as it floats away on the stream. Even if it’s a wonderful thought, place it on a leaf and allow it to drift away.

Inevitably, you’ll lose track of what you’re doing. That’s natural and okay. Just bring your attention back to noticing your thoughts and placing them on the floating leaves.

If it’s hard for you to visualize leaves on a stream, you can use whatever works for you: cars passing by, clouds in the sky, thought bubbles floating away, people walking by on the street, etc.

Defusing from our thoughts is one important step toward learning to live a richer, more meaningful life. If you go back to the beginning of this post, you can now see that comment A: “I go to this job because there’s no way anyone would hire me somewhere else,” is a thought that—if believed—can get in the way of living a meaningful, values-driven life.

But if we were having this thought, and we were to *just notice it*, or *see it as just words*, or *let the thought go*, perhaps some space could be gained between ourselves and the thought so that we can take some effective action toward a better work experience.

Managing your emotional demons

Imagine you're on a boat out at sea.

You're alone, except for a pack of scary demons hiding below the deck. As long as you keep floating around on the open sea, they stay below deck and you feel okay—for the most part. Except for that nagging feeling that there are frightening creatures just out of sight.

When you decide you've had enough of floating around and turn the tiller to head toward shore, the demons come rushing up from below, gnashing their teeth and waving their razor-sharp claws at you.



“You have to stay out on the open sea!” they roar at you. “We’re going to slice you up with our razor-sharp claws if you don’t turn away from the shore!”

Frightened and intimidated, you turn your boat around and head back out to open sea. Slowly, the demons shuffle back under the deck.

For a while, floating aimlessly again on the open sea is okay. At least you have some peace and don't need to worry much about the demons lurking close by.

But then you begin to notice other boats heading toward shore. **You remember that you have plans to go ashore to see things you want to see and do things you want to do.** As your hand moves toward the tiller to change course, you hear the muffled sounds of roaring and growling below.

Your hand trembles above the tiller. How can you reach shore with those threatening demons ready to pounce at the least movement of the rudder?

Letting the demons decide our course

This scenario is a metaphor for the struggle many of us have with the painful emotions that get in the way of the life we want to lead. When we try to take control of the helm in our lives, we can be intimidated by our emotional demons and continue instead to float aimlessly through life.

Suppose you value being in a loving relationship, but every time you begin pursuing ways to meet a potential partner, you become overwhelmed by the demons of *Anxiety* and *Doubt*. You might try arguing with your demons, telling them that they're irrational or wrong or stupid.

But this only feeds the demons and causes them to grow.

You might decide the demons are just too powerful and give up on your path of finding a partner. Your anxiety and doubt may diminish, only to be replaced by loneliness and restlessness as you float away from your cherished value.

Or, perhaps you value creating community and helping society. You feel a strong sense of purpose and meaning when you take action to steer in that direction. Yet thoughts of volunteering or taking a

leadership position in your community are met with monstrous demons of *Grief* and *Anger* over the death of your adult child several years ago.

"I can't help anyone when I'm so mixed up myself," you might think, turning your ship around to head back out to open sea and leaving your important values behind you on the shore.

The *Anger* and *Grief* demons trundle to the stern of the ship, not even bothering to go below deck.

The truth about demons

There is something important you need to know about these demons.

They can't hurt you.

They appear nasty and can be loud and aggressive, gesturing with their sharp claws and growling with their deep voices. But the truth is, they can't touch you. They can get right next to you and scream threats in your ear, but they can't harm you.

As long as you believe their threats, they are in charge of the boat and you are left floating in an open, dreary sea. But when you see them for what they are, you can take back control of the tiller and sail anywhere you like.

The demons are real. It's important to acknowledge that fact. But once you recognize that you can steer your boat despite their unwelcome presence, you will start to see the demons for what they are.

With your hands firmly on the helm, you'll start to notice that the demons aren't as big and ugly as you thought. And, even though they gather around to intimidate you into changing your course, it will become apparent that **all they can do is hiss and roar and growl**. They can't hurt you with their claws that once seemed huge and razor-sharp but now appear to be merely overgrown fingernails.

So with the now-normal-sized demons around you, you set sail for developing a loving relationship or creating community or being kind to others or making a difference in the world or being tolerant or practicing any of the other values you hold close. After a while, your demons realize you're not paying much attention to them, so they grumble their way to the back of the boat as you sail on in the direction you want to go.

Making room for your emotional demons

Realizing that your painful emotions can't tear you to shreds and keep you from going where you want to go is an important first step. Learning how to allow them to *just be*, rather than fighting them or letting them push you in a non-valued direction, is a productive second step. Here are some ideas about how to do that.

1. Soften, expand, allow.

Sitting in a quiet place, close your eyes or gaze softly at an area on the floor in front of you. Take a few gentle, deep breaths and allow your mind to settle. Become aware of the painful emotion(s) that you're struggling with. Try to locate this feeling in your body. Is it in your neck? Your stomach? Your back?

When you get a sense of where the feeling is located, take a breath in, and as you breathe out, imagine softening around the feeling. You may be accustomed to resisting the feeling, so softening may be new to you. Just imagine the outer edges of the feeling relaxing and growing soft.

Now as you inhale, see the area around the feeling expanding, giving room and space to the feeling. Allow the feeling to *just be*.

Your mind will want to take over during this exercise. That's natural. Just let the thoughts go by like leaves floating down a stream and return to allowing your feeling to *just be* within you.

Remember that this exercise isn't about feeling better or getting the feeling to go away. It's about learning to allow the emotion so that you can continue on your path toward a richer and more meaningful life.

2. Be compassionate.

In your quiet place, visualize your feeling. Realize that, in a way, it is trying to help, perhaps to protect you or keep you safe. Create some compassion for your feeling. Imagine holding it close and soothing it, letting it know that it is okay and all will be well.

3. Remember that your feeling is normal.

Feelings—even feelings we don't like—remind us that we are human and that we really care about something. Our painful feelings result from what author [Russ Harris](#) calls "the reality gap:" the space between what we want and what we have.

4. Healing hand.

Place your hand over the area in your body where you feel this emotion strongly. Imagine that your hand is sending warm, healing energy to the feeling. You're not trying to get rid of the feeling. You're just holding it gently and sending it healing warmth.

Remember that this is a practice and that the demons on your boat have been threatening and intimidating you for a long time. It may take awhile for you to accept them and create more space for them rather than trying to make them be quiet or go away. **Be patient and compassionate with yourself as you set your course for the shore.**

Getting on with life despite devastating emotions

When I receive emails from people who are in crisis, most of the time they want to know how they can get rid of the painful emotions they are experiencing.

“My son has been arrested for dealing drugs, and I had no idea he even knew about drugs! I’m embarrassed, shocked, ashamed, and angry. **How do I stop feeling this way so I can get on with my life again?**”

“My wife died two months ago and I’m still overwhelmed by sadness. I feel like I’ve lost my way in the world. **How do I move through grief faster so I can have a life again?**”

The assumption implicit in these questions is, “**Painful feelings are bad and I need to get rid of them as soon as possible** in order to get on with life.”

Because of this assumption, we may try to get rid of our feelings in a variety of ways: avoiding them, suppressing them, resisting them, or wishing they would hurry up and be over. This effort is a natural thing to do, since nobody likes pain.

The problem is that all of those resistance activities, while they might work in the short run, may magnify the feelings overall. There are two parts to this magnification mechanism:

- 1) The more we try **not** to think about something (“I’m not going to think about my grief,”) the **more** we think about it; and,
- 2) Because we are **thinking more** about the painful feelings, we may start to **add to them** with thoughts such as, “This is the worst pain ever. I can’t stand this.”

Dropping the rope

Russ Harris, author of [The Happiness Trap](#), likens this process to being in a tug-o-war with a monster who is trying to pull you into a pit. You pull as hard as you can against the monster of your painful feelings, only to find that the monster grows stronger each time you pull. What should you do? Pull even harder?

How about if you drop the rope?

This does **not** mean you give up and don’t take action when it is necessary. This is about **letting go of the resistance** to your painful feelings so they don’t pull you further into a pit.

Finding out your son is a drug dealer and losing your wife to cancer are life-shattering events. Painful feelings are sure to arise. Allow them to do so.

And, **take action** when it is needed.

Perhaps you’ll want to learn more about drugs and addiction so you’ll know how to best help your son. Maybe you’ll want to join a grief group or see a therapist for support during your time of mourning.



Drop the rope

The bottom line with life-altering traumatic events, as well as merely stressful everyday events, is that we may get too caught up in our minds with the negative thoughts and in our hearts where the painful feelings roil and stew.

With both severe and moderate crises, we can “drop the rope” by acknowledging that our thoughts aren’t particularly helpful right now and letting them go by, like leaves floating on a stream, and by allowing our feelings to *just be* rather than trying to get them to stop or leave.

By not resisting our experience, we may have access to more inner resources to creatively approach the problem facing us and take an active approach to solving it or figuring out a way to make it through a particularly difficult time.

Valued Living Worksheet

Step 1

Step 1: Look at the list below and put a check mark by the values that resonate for you.

Accountability	Courtesy	Faith	Kindness	Self-reliance
Accuracy	Creativity	Family-orientation	Leadership	Sensitivity
Achievement	Curiosity	Fidelity	Legacy	Serenity
Adventurousness	Decisiveness	Fitness	Love	Service
Altruism	Democracy	Fluency	Loyalty	Shrewdness
Ambition	Dependability	Focus	Making a difference	Simplicity
Assertiveness	Determination	Freedom	Mastery	Soundness
Balance	Devoutness	Generosity	Obedience	Spontaneity
Being the best	Diligence	Goodness	Openness	Stability
Belonging	Discipline	Grace	Order	Strategic
Boldness	Discretion	Growth	Originality	Strength
Calmness	Diversity	Health	Patriotism	Support
Carefulness	Dynamism	Helping Society	Piety	Teamwork
Challenge	Economy	Holiness	Positivity	Thankfulness
Cheerfulness	Effectiveness	Honesty	Practicality	Thoroughness
Clear-mindedness	Efficiency	Honor	Professionalism	Thoughtfulness
Commitment	Elegance	Humility	Prudence	Timeliness
Community	Empathy	Independence	Quality-orientation	Tolerance
Compassion	Enjoyment	Ingenuity	Reliability	Traditionalism
Competitiveness	Enthusiasm	Inner Harmony	Resourcefulness	Trustworthiness
Consistency	Equality	Inquisitiveness	Restraint	Truth-seeking
Contentment	Excellence	Insightfulness	Results-oriented	Understanding
Continuous Improvement	Excitement	Intelligence	Rigor	Uniqueness
Contribution	Expertise	Intuition	Security	Unity
Control	Exploration	Irreverence	Self-actualization	Usefulness
Cooperation	Expressiveness	Joy	Self-control	Vision
Correctness	Fairness	Justice	Selflessness	Vitality

Continue to Step 2 on the next page.

Valued Living Worksheet

Steps 2-5

Step 2: List your top 10 values in the **Value** column below.

Step 3: In the **Importance** column, rank how important this value is to you on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being *not important at all* and 10 being *extremely important*.

Step 4: In the **Living It?** column, rank how much you think you're currently living this value on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being *not living it at all* and 10 being *living it fully*.

Step 5: In the **Difference** column, write the difference between the number in the **Importance** column and the number in the **Living It?** column.

Value	Importance <i>1=not important at all 10=extremely important</i>	Living it? <i>1=not living it at all 10=living it fully</i>	Difference
Example: Kindness	10	6	-4
Example: Creativity	7	7	0