

THE BURDEN IS LIGHT

Liberating Your Life
from the Tyranny
of Performance
and Success

SNEAK
PEEK



SAMPLE
ONLY

JON
TYSON

Praise for *The Burden Is Light*

“Reading *The Burden Is Light* felt like laying down a heavy, crippling weight and slowly breathing out a deep sigh of relief. It exposed the untrue narratives of our culture around success, the lies that, if we live into them over a lifetime, tragically become all too true. I can’t think of a more important task for our cultural moment than redefining success around the easy yoke of Jesus. This book does exactly that. Jon Tyson, one of the most important voices of our time, does some of his best work yet. From the moment I read the subtitle, I was hooked. I can’t wait for you to have the same experience.”

—JOHN MARK COMER, pastor for vision and teaching at
Bridgetown Church and author of *God Has a Name*

“At some point we all must decide how we will invest this one life we’ve been given. Some will pursue self-exalting ends, such as power, riches, recognition, and control. Others will pursue God- and other-centered ends, such as the sharing of power, giving generously, pouring ourselves out in lives of service, and trusting God to direct our affairs. In this simultaneously convicting and liberating book, Jon gives us fresh eyes to see the folly of the former and the wisdom of the latter. I pray that *The Burden Is Light* will have an impact on you in the way that it did me, as it presses us to revisit the wise words penned by C. S. Lewis: ‘Aim at Heaven and you will get Earth “thrown in”: Aim at Earth and you will get neither.’”

—SCOTT SAULS, senior pastor of Christ Presbyterian Church
in Nashville and author of *Jesus Outside the Lines* and *From Weakness to Strength*

“We live in a world that esteems and promotes values counter to the kingdom of God. Unknowingly, many believers have embraced the world’s values and are therefore not experiencing the fullness of God made available to those who embrace the ways of the kingdom. I am so grateful that God has raised up Jon Tyson as a voice to the church,

calling us to a better way of living. His latest book, *The Burden Is Light*, has a brilliant and profound message that will free you from the pressure of performance-based living, which is ultimately fueled by a wrong definition of success. There is no one better to write on this issue than Jon, who has lived out this message in a city that relentlessly pursues endeavors that will never satisfy the deep longing of the heart. This book is a necessary manifesto on choosing to live a different way and experiencing the freedom and deep satisfaction only found in God.”

—BANNING LIEBSCHER, founder and pastor of Jesus Culture,
author of *Rooted: The Hidden Places Where God Develops You*

“I have always appreciated Jon’s thoughtful approach to faith, culture, and spiritual formation. I am excited that he is willing to share some of the most important insights he has learned pastoring in New York over the last decade.”

—GABE LYONS, founder of Q and author of *unChristian*,
The Next Christians, and *Good Faith*

“Despite living in such comfortable times with historically unparalleled levels of freedom, many of us live with a stifling blanket of anxiety, comparison, and failure weighing us down. With candor, curiosity, and Christlikeness, Jon Tyson shows us a better way, pointing us toward the abundant life Jesus promised us.”

—MARK SAYERS, senior leader of Red Church, Melbourne,
Australia, and author of *Disappearing Church* and *Strange Days*

“Jon Tyson is the real deal. He has worked out his understanding of discipleship, mission, and spirituality in the rough and tumble of New York, a city infamous for its sheer busyness and drivenness. The result of his personal integrity in wrestling with the issues is that he has bequeathed to us a book that is as profound as it is practical. A worthy read!”

—ALAN HIRSCH, author and activist

THE BURDEN IS LIGHT

**Liberating Your Life from the Tyranny
of Performance and Success**

JON TYSON



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THE BURDEN IS LIGHT

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Details in some anecdotes and stories have been changed to protect the identities of the persons involved.

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For Nathan
S.C.M.H.
V.P.D.R.

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Introduction

THE DASH

In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

John 1:4-5

On August 20 and September 5, 1977, two spacecraft named *Voyager* were launched. Eventually leaving the solar system and heading into deep space, they represented a revolutionary and promising breakthrough in scientific discovery about our universe. They also carried another hope, the hope not only of scientific discovery but also of communication. Each craft carried a golden phonograph record (like a time capsule), carefully constructed by Carl Sagan and a team of experts, to communicate what life on earth is like to possible life forms beyond our planet. Sagan was given the task of overseeing a committee that determined the content of this record. Can you imagine that responsibility? Their job was to comb through all recorded human history and identify what best defines our collective life. What does it mean to be human? What does it mean to live—not just surviving but also thriving? How would we communicate to the

universe that this is what life on earth is all about? Sagan and his team eventually settled on 115 photographs of our planet, including a woman in a supermarket; page 6 from Isaac Newton's *System of the World*; a father and daughter; gymnast Cathy Rigby on a balance beam; and a series of photos of nature, geography, and science.

The golden record also included almost ninety minutes of recordings of the world's greatest music, including Bach's "Prelude and Fugue in C" from book 2 of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* and Chuck Berry's "Johnny B. Goode." Other sounds included an infant's cries and its mother's soothing words, nearly sixty human languages, whale song, and greetings from the secretary general of the United Nations and the president of the United States.

If you were given the task, along with Sagan, to illustrate human civilization in a limited collection, the definitive account of what life is, what would you have included in the golden record? From your perspective, what is this thing called life, and what does it look like when it flourishes?

THE DASH

On a warm summer night, I drove my son to a local cemetery. It was a Moravian cemetery that sits nestled on a hill overlooking a flowing creek. My son, a typical teenager in many ways—Xbox, iPhone, hormones, and hungry—lives in the culture of the immediate. We don't go to cemeteries regularly, but I had a growing desperation in my heart to impart to him a larger sense of the urgency and opportunities of life. He would be heading off to col-

lege soon, and opportunities to indelibly mark his soul were growing increasingly rare. The sun was just setting, and an air of soberness seemed to wash over the place. As we got out of the car, I instructed him to walk around the plots in silence, then share with me what stood out to him. After some time he came back and we sat on a large rock, overlooking the headstones, taking it all in.

“What did you see?” I asked.

“Some of these people died really young, younger than me,” he replied.

“What else?”

“Some husbands and wives were buried next to each other, but one died before the other. I wonder if they got lonely.”

“What else?” I asked, pleased at his growing awareness.

“Some of them were from the eighteen hundreds, which was an eternity ago. I wonder what life was like for them.”

I wasn’t working toward some sort of *Dead Poets Society* moment, and I wasn’t trying to get him to understand the fact that, in what seemed like an eternity for him but was a breath of air in light of true eternity, he would be dead. I was working for something simpler yet infinitely more challenging.

“The thing you will notice about all these people,” I said, “is that their tombstones contain two dates. There is the date of their birth, the date of their death, and a tiny dash between them. The whole of your life on earth is going to come down to that tiny little dash.”

Then I pressed in a bit further. “Nate,” I said. “What will your dash be?”

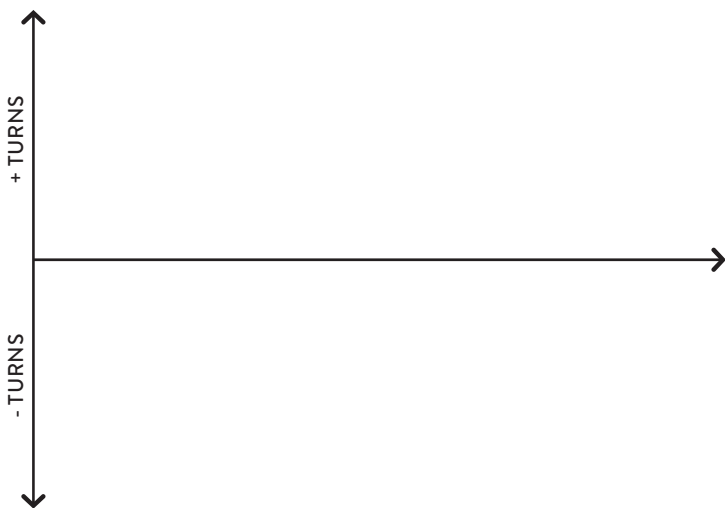
“I don’t know,” he said. “I guess I’m still trying to figure it out.” After a moment of reflection, he said, “What do you think makes a great dash, Dad?”

“That, my son, is the greatest question a person can ask.”

THE LINE

I recently did a life-planning exercise with my wife, designed to help us make sense of our dash. We each drew a horizontal line across the middle of a sheet of paper that represented our lives, then drew a vertical line from top to bottom at the left end of the horizontal line, forming an axis. We numbered the upper half of the horizontal line, forming an axis. We numbered the upper half of the vertical axis from 1 to 10 and the lower half from -1 to -10.

MY TIMELINE

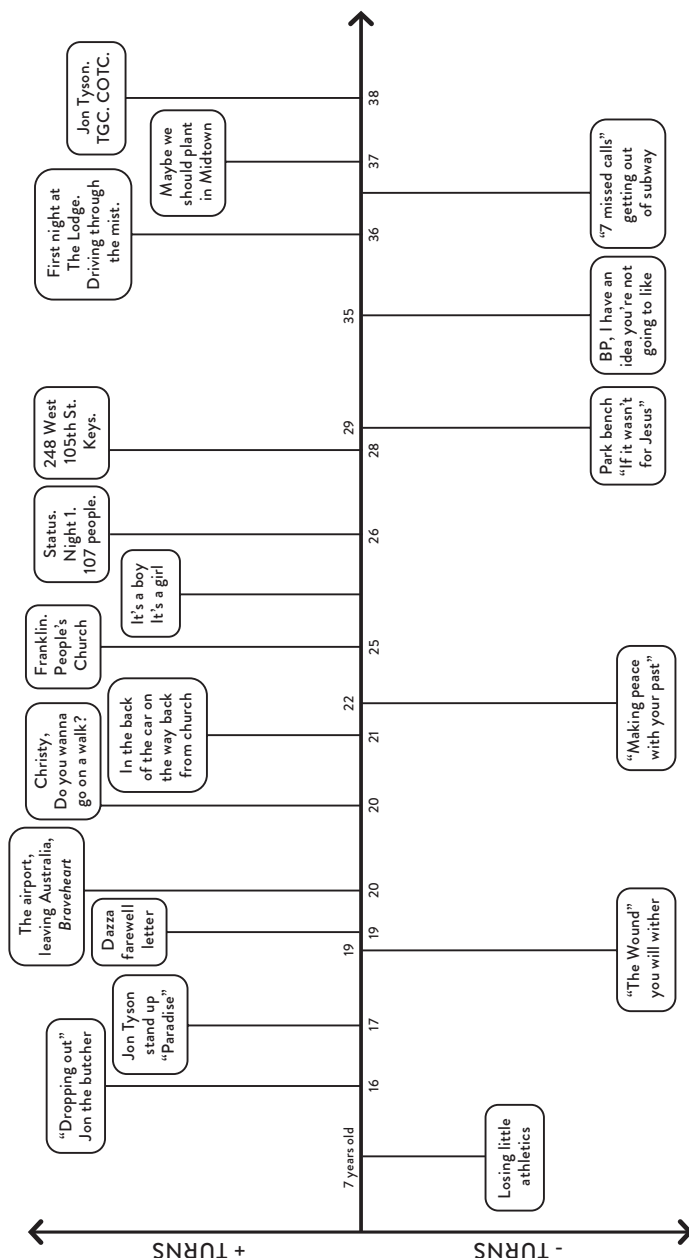


Then we walked through the seasons of our lives and plotted the key moments—positive and negative—that have proven to be turning points we could not go back from. As we settled into the exercise, I became painfully aware of the depth and possibility of the human experience. I was born, and soon I will die. Scattered above and below the “life” line, as shown on the graph on the next page, are the things that define me. This is my golden record, put into a document of what I personally believe a life of flourishing is about.

When I reflected on these defining moments, it was hard to admit the true nature of the things that have shaped me. I wanted to record only those that sounded biblical and holy, things that would impress my wife as to what had made me the man I am. But to be honest, I found that darker and sinful things made their way onto the page, such as pride, anger, envy, jealousy, unholy ambition, and broken relationships. Yes, there were places of beauty and awe, and for those I am pleased and grateful, but it was the darker elements, the shame and the sorrow, that struck me. I am a pastor and spiritual leader, yet my story has been marred by sin and failure. As I held my own dash in my hands, I was shocked to realize how much I still needed to learn about what makes a great life.

I also noted a contrast. The high moments and the low moments usually represented opposites. My low moments of pride were mirrored by the beauty unleashed through humility. The lows of selfish ambition were followed by the heights of love, and the pain of sin was redeemed by lavish grace. There on the page that recorded my life story, I began to see the truth of what Jesus

MY TIMELINE



said in John's gospel: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."* My story is not a neutral one but a contested one. It reveals the conflict between the tyranny of the world and the wonder of God's grace.

THE DANGER OF MISLIVING

Like me, you may struggle deeply with what it means to live well. We are all seeking to take these scattered moments of meaning and weave them together into a beautiful whole. If you were to draw the dash that is your life so far and plot the moments that have shaped your story, how would that story be told? To our shock, most of us would find forces at work that have bent our lives outside of the plan and purpose we feel called to. From this objective perspective, we would see that we are in real danger of what William Irvine calls "misliving." He explains this idea in his book *A Guide to the Good Life*:

There is a danger that you will mislive—that despite all your activity, despite all the pleasant diversions you might have enjoyed while alive, you will end up living a bad life. There is, in other words, a danger that when you are on your deathbed, you will look back and realize that you wasted your one chance at living. Instead of spending your life pursuing something genuinely valuable, you

* John 10:10.

squandered it because you allowed yourself to be distracted by the various baubles life has to offer.²

The older we get, the more likely we are to be surprised at how the lives of those around us turn out. Divorce, abuse, heartache, greed, materialism, and other forms of misliving are easy for us to recognize in others, but we are often unable to see the ways we mislive our own stories. The things that derail us seem to come out of nowhere, or they come with such subtle deceptiveness that we don't think they will shape us in the long run. The call of Jesus is not just about morality or doctrine, religious performance or outreach. It's about living well. It's about learning to live in his way in the world, the way that produces the fruit of the Spirit in our lives and the fruit of the kingdom as a preview of the life to come.

THE LIFE JESUS OFFERS

It is hard to discern right from wrong, truth from error, and depth from hype. We seem perpetually inundated with messages that demand our attention and call for our devotion. The culture seduces us to fill our lives with things that are immediate, alluring, and entertaining but rarely with things that give our lives meaning. When we follow this call, we find our narrow path broadening to the way of the world. Though it seems right, this path is nothing more than a cycle of frustration. In his profoundly insightful book *The Road to Character*, David Brooks looks at how one should reflect on this thing called life. He paints a picture of

how we should fill our dash. Contrasting the tyranny of the popular with the freedom of relationships, he writes,

You follow your desires wherever they take you, and you approve of yourself so long as you are not obviously hurting anyone else. You figure that if the people around you seem to like you, you must be good enough. In the process you end up slowly turning yourself into something a little less impressive than you had originally hoped. A humiliating gap opens up between your actual self and your desired self.³

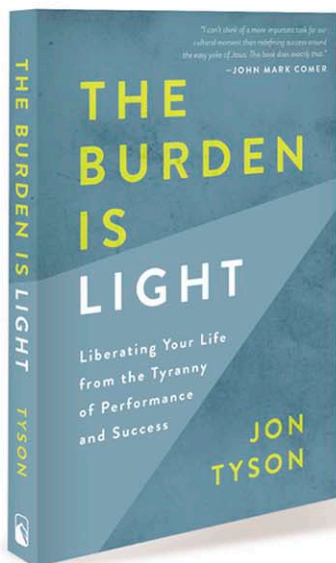
To some degree, we all feel the tension created by this gap. We realize that how we live reveals what we truly believe; everything else is just talk. Yet we struggle to figure out how to close this gap. Despite our involvement in church, accumulation of biblical knowledge, and sincere love for God, we can't seem to decipher the forces that make us who we are. Rather than offering us freedom, our culture of hurry, responsibility, performance, and success distorts things in such a way that we are left worrying and wondering if this life is the one God has in mind. The days and moments tick by, and we edge closer to eternity without the clarity and conviction that we are running our race well.

I have written this book because I have a passion to help you live your story well. I want to help you close this gap between your actual self and the self God desires for you. I want to contrast the forces that work for brokenness and disillusionment and pain with the things that bring glory and wonder and joy. Together we will

explore the tyranny of comparison, competition, control, cursing, complacency, judgment, pride, and distraction with the freedom of calling, compassion, surrender, blessing, passion, mercy, humility, and presence. You may be starting out in life and seeking to live it well, in midlife and wondering if you can course correct, or toward the end of your life and wondering if there is still hope. Wherever you are, I want to see your dash filled with truth and goodness, beauty and gladness, depth and meaning—so that when you look back over the moments that make up this thing you call your life, rather than experiencing misgiving and feeling the weight of regret, you will realize that you have indeed learned to live in the way of Jesus and will find that his burden is light.

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