

STOP LIVING ON AUTO PILOT

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So, how many people have ever felt stuck in a rut? Anybody? And how many people ever had your life or some part of your life turn out differently than you thought it would?

You know, today we're going to look at a book called "Stop Living on Auto Pilot" by Antonio Neves. And he says that many of us are stuck, or that we are drifting or just getting nowhere because we're not living our lives intentionally and purposefully. That we are just moving through the days, moving through the routines, the habits, the expectations of life without consciously choosing our direction. And that we end up not living the life we want, but living the life we settle for. And years later, sometimes we wonder how we ended up in these jobs; how we ended up in these relationships and lifestyles that we never really intentionally chose.

It wasn't a matter of a bunch of bad decisions. It's just that simply we stopped making decisions and just went along. How many people ever not make a decision and just went along? Anybody ever went along? And so, sometimes we end up in places we don't want to be because we just went along.

There's a fabulous song by Talking Heads called "Once in a Lifetime." And the song is actually about living life on autopilot. Here are a few of the lyrics:

**You may find yourself behind the wheel of a large automobile
You may find yourself in a beautiful house with a beautiful wife
And you may ask yourself, "Well, how did I get here?"**

And the lead singer, David Byrne, says that the song is really about exploring how people unconsciously follow societal routines -- like getting a job and a house and a family -- until they suddenly wake up and have an existential crisis, asking themselves, "*How did I get here?*"

And so, sometimes we need to pause and ask ourselves that question: Am I living on autopilot? Or am I living my life intentionally? Am I living with awareness, purpose and desire? Or am I just going along?

So, this morning, we're going to look at this book and the lessons it has to teach us of how to stop living on auto pilot. First, we're going to look at four things that help us stay stuck or on auto pilot. And then we'll look at four ways of how to get out of ruts and how to choose to live intentionally.

So, the first thing that sometimes helps us -- or not really helps us, but draws us into being in a rut -- is **COMFORT ZONES**. Sometimes we get very comfortable with certain situations in our lives and we really don't want to change them. We don't feel any cause or need or reason, because we just feel safe and we don't really question them.

So, let's say we have a person who was working at a job for 10 years because it was stable. And even though they dreaded Mondays and they didn't feel particularly fulfilled by the work, the paycheck was dependable. And so, they never explored any other options. They just stayed right where they were.

How many people prefer paychecks that are dependable and consistent? [Congregants laugh] But how many people prefer commission and being an entrepreneur and owning your own business? How many? Wow.

And so, it's always interesting to find out: Where is your comfort zone? What is the thing that you feel safe in? And where is that line of where will you allow yourself to take a risk or step out of that area?

In the Book of Matthew, Chapter 6, Verse 21, it says, "*For where your treasure is, there will be your heart also.*" I mean, often treasure comes in the form of comfort for us more than growth. That we will feel safer, and we'd rather feel safe than take a risk.

And so, the thing that can sometimes put us in a rut is when we have a comfort zone to feel safe, and we don't want to take a chance. We don't want to risk. We don't want things to be different.

And so, the second one that can make us get into ruts is actually going to sound strange, but it's **SUCCESS**. You ever hear that statement, *"Good is the enemy of great?"* It's because when you've done really good, like why change? Because it's good!

And so, sometimes winning and succeeding can give you a false sense of security. It can sometimes reduce the drive that we have to get ahead and to learn. It can sometimes take away that push that we sometimes like to give ourselves and challenge ourselves with. And we're just not as hungry as we typically are when things aren't going as well.

And so, Neves says that successful people that often will use the external successes to mask their internal dissatisfaction. That the outside success is looking so good, that even though they're not happy, they just stay riding that train.

I read a business article, and it said, after 30 years of research, it has shown that, despite being better prepared to take bold action, companies with high levels of achievement tend to feel content with the status quo. They sit tight. They focus on themselves. And they ignore the rapidly-changing world around them, even in the face of cold, hard facts that clearly show they should move in a new direction. And this article was by the chief innovation officer of Cutter International, a firm that helps leaders accelerate strategy implementation in their organizations.

And here are some organizations that did not listen and did not change; they just rested on their previous success: Kodak, Toys R Us, Blockbuster and Xerox, to name a few. They are not in business anymore because they rested on success. They got into a rut and were happy to stay there until it was gone.

Another one ... So it's comfort zones, success, and this one is **FEAR OF UNCERTAINTY**. When things are uncertain, it can sometimes create anxiety. It can create fear. It can create all kinds of negative things -- being apprehensive about reaching out and trying something. Wondering if we're going to fail, if we're going to look bad, or if things are not going to work. The fear of discomfort sometimes outweighs the pain of staying stuck. That we'd rather stay stuck -- because we know it! -- than to make greater changes in our world.

You know, even in the Bible, the Israelites repeatedly wanted to go back to Egypt, despite the fact that slavery was in Egypt! that every time things look scary, they'd say, *"Hey, let's go back, because we at least know that."* They would rather go back to hardships they know than to the unknown that's freedom.

And so sometimes we do that in our own lives. We would rather stay with something we know -- even though it's painful and not good for us and not the best -- than go ahead to step into the possibility of something great because we don't know it.

And then the last one is **TO PLEASE OTHERS**. Sometimes we will get into careers and jobs and situations because the people we love want us to do that. And sometimes we can do all the things -- school, jobs, house -- do all those things, and they all look really great, but we don't feel good inside, because it's really not who we are.

You know that line in the Book of Romans, Chapter 12, Verse 2, it says, *"Do not conform to the patterns of this world."* Do not conform to the patterns of this world. And what it's saying: don't get stuck in somebody else's desire, someone's idea for you. That we're not living authentically; we're not living and being true to ourselves. We've come here as unique beings to do unique work. And to just try and fit in where someone else thinks we should, and stay happy with that to please them, is really not an effective way to live intentionally; to live fully; to live freely.

So, the four things, again, that hold us back and keep us in ruts are: comfort zones, success, uncertainty, and pleasing people.

And so, now let's look at the four steps to stop living in auto pilot; four steps to not get stuck in a rut and how to live more intentionally.

And the first one is to **WAKE UP**. I mean, sometimes we are not aware of what's even going on in ourselves. We're not clear what we're feeling. We're not clear what we're wanting. You know, we're not clear of what's really going on; what's hurting inside of ourselves. And so, a really big step and an important step is to get to know what's really going on in us and wake up to the truth of what's really happening.

Walter Anderson said, *"Our lives improve only when we take chances. And the first and most difficult risk we can take is to be honest with ourselves."* I mean, that sounds so simple, doesn't it? To be honest with ourselves? But it is amazing how many judgments and how much fear we have in ourselves to even admit what we're feeling to ourselves. To even admit what it is we really want and who it is we really are.

Being honest with ourselves means that we ask the hard questions and go deep, tune in, and listen. And to allow ourselves to be honest and to utilize that information.

You know, when Socrates said, *"The unexamined life is not worth living,"* what he is saying is that life is such a precious gift; such an incredible opportunity. So, it behooves us to take some time to look at how we're living it. And to ask ourselves the question: Is this really how I want to live my life? Is this who I really came here to be? Is this the difference I am here to make? Are these the people I am meant to be with and share this journey with?

And so, a question for all of us is: Do you like how you're living your life? And, if not, what is it you'd like to be different? What is it that you'd like to change? What is it that you'd like to stop? What is it that you'd like to start?

And even other questions like: Am I excited about my life? Am I growing? What areas of my life feel stagnant? What areas feel like it needs healing or to let go? And here's an interesting one: If nothing changed for five years, would I be satisfied?

You know, sometimes the soul needs to give us a little wake-up call -- to shake us up and to have us shift our perspectives and our mindset to find out what's really going on with us. Sometimes it's in the form of a health scare.

I remember I was in the foyer years ago and somebody came through the line and she said to me, *"I fell in a hotel and I broke my leg in three places and it needed some surgery. And I'm going to have to be on bed rest and then rehab stuff for like three to six months"* or something like that. And then she turned and said, *"But this was a really good thing because it made me realize I need to slow down. It made me realize that I was not taking good care of myself and listening to my body."* And she rambled off all these positive things that she needed that wake-up call for.

Maybe it's in the form of a job loss; maybe a divorce; maybe death of a loved one; maybe a major disappointment. But sometimes these moments that are difficult -- that look like they're ruining our life or making our lives horrible -- are actually there to wake us up and force us to reevaluate ourselves, our priorities, and what it is that we're actually looking for and what it is we're here for.

Neves encourages readers to not wait for a crisis, but to pay attention and ask those questions right here and now. Because if we want a better life and want to get out of a rut, the first thing we need to do is to wake up and to recognize the areas that we're in autopilot; that we are stuck.

The second one is to **OWN YOUR LIFE**. You know, once we awaken -- once we wake up -- we need to stop blaming circumstances, other people and past decisions for where we are in our lives. Ownership means accepting responsibility for your future regardless of what has happened in the past. Ownership means

that you have the power, the discipline, the resources to take charge of your life. To take charge of yourself. To take charge of your circumstances. We might dislike the fact that our parents pressured us into getting this particular job. But after that, it's our deal. We need to own what we choose to do with it and what direction we take from that situation.

Responsibility sounds like some burdensome thing and onerous thing, and it's really not. It's hugely liberating and incredibly empowering. It's saying: no matter what's going on in your life, you have the power and the ability to change, to make new decisions, to take a different direction and create something new and better.

And the fact is: we are incredibly powerful. We have the power of our minds; the power of prayer; the power of vision; the power of intention; the power of our words, thoughts, attitudes and actions. You know, we can't control everything that happens, but we can control our response. Someone said, the moment you take ownership, you regain your power.

And the Book of Joshua, Chapter 24, Verse 15 says, *"Choose this day whom you will serve."* You know, one of the interesting themes in the Bible is that it keeps coming back, in so many ways, to saying, choose. Choose, choose, choose.

We all have the power and the ability to choose something new, choose something different, choose something better ... including and especially choosing a better attitude. Choosing a better mindset. But it's all -- it's choosing our decisions, our actions, our direction.

And the third one is to GET IN MOTION. You know, clarity actually comes through actions. Progress comes through actions and not endless thinking. Many people want to wait till the plan is perfect before taking a step. We want to wait until all our ducks are in a row; until everything is just right. But the fact is: nothing happens until something moves.

And one of the beautiful things about movement: it builds momentum. So, instead of spending six months wondering whether to start a business, we could interview entrepreneurs, take a class, build a small side project, talk to consumers. I mean, action reveals information that thought alone cannot.

You know, as a journalist, one of the things Antonio Neves says is that repeatedly he saw with all the successful people, most of them did not have an ideal plan. But they took some action and they made their adjustments as they went along.

In the Book of James, Chapter 2, Verse 17, it says, *"Faith by itself, if not accompanied by action, is dead."*

So, in my early 20s, I wanted to own real estate rentals. I lived in a town, grew up in a university town. And so, there were lots of student rentals in that west end of town where we lived. So, I wanted to buy. And so, I got a book: "Buy, Rent, Sell." I got a couple of books.

And then I knew three people that were really successful in this. So, I started doing some planning, doing some reading. I would interview them. And so I'd interview them. And I interviewed them once. And then I interviewed them twice. And on my third interview with this gentleman -- his name is Bob -- he said, *"You know, you need to stop interviewing and start doing something."* [Congregants laugh] He said, *"You could read all you want, be the greatest expert, and know every detail, and you will not be far unless you buy something and actually rent something."*

And so, it was a little bit of a slap in my face, but exactly ... You know when you know someone says something that you know is true for you and was even meant for you? And I'll tell you ... So, my dad was fabulous; co-signed with me. And I ended up buying, and I ended up having a few. And it was really exciting. It was really wonderful. Even the mistakes I made in the first year were fun mistakes and wonderful to see myself in action and working and enjoying it.

But it was getting it in motion that made the huge difference. All the reading, all the thinking, all the planning just does not compare to taking action and to getting that energy of life moving.

And then the fourth one is to **BUILD A BETTER FUTURE**. One of the things is: we've got to create a system, because it's easy to drift. It's easy to get distracted. So, we need to build a system that will support us in staying consistent and continuing, particularly when things don't always go as smooth.

You know, change isn't a one-time event. It's an ongoing situation. And so, it requires a system that gives us ongoing support, particularly from ourselves. You know, the first thing that we need is to have an intentional vision: so what is this better life that we want to have? What does your living intentionally look like and mean? And what does it feel?

Habakkuk – in the book of Habakkuk -- Chapter 2, Verse 2 says, *"Write the vision and make it plain."* And so, **a clear vision** prevents us from unconsciously drifting.

Someone who wants a goal of a stronger, better family, a closer family, could develop a plan like to schedule family dinner once a week. To set boundaries of when to work; which work hours. And then to review priorities every month. Because intentional habits creates an intentional life.

And so, what is the vision that you have for your life? What is even just one thing you would like to see change or improve and be better that would have an impact throughout all areas of your life? Is it your well-being? Is it your finances? Is it your relationship? Whatever it is, pick one and be intentional about it, and create systems and habits around it that will support the manifestation and the fulfillment of that desire, of that vision, of that intention.

And then the second one is that you've got to **build your inner foundation**. Here are these lines in Scriptures. Luke 21:17 says, *"The kingdom of God is within you."* Colossians says, *"Christ in you, your hope of glory."* In the Old Testament, it says, *"You are the temple of the living God, and God's Spirit dwells in you."*

All those three references all have "in you." In you. In you! God is in you. Your spiritual power is in you. The greatest resource you have in life is in you. And to take time to build our inner foundation -- our inner resource of unlimited good and unlimited possibility: our wisdom, our guidance -- it's all in you.

And the question is: Are we tapping into it? Are we making time to be still, to listen, and to tune in to that Higher Power within us?

And then the third one, which is a huge theme in his book, is to **stop postponing life**.

You know, we say things like, *"I'll be happy when I get promoted"* or, *"I'll start living after I retire"* or, *"I'll pursue my dreams at some other time."* And it's important for us to realize life is now. It's right now. We've got to live now. We've got to love now. We've got to forgive now. We've got to enjoy now and laugh now.

You know, we always think we've got to get "there" because here is not enough. But when we get "there," it's going to be great; it's going to be special. But like here is special. Here is great. There's nothing wrong with enjoying your life now while you build the life and dream that you want. We don't have to wait for that to be finished. It's like every step of the way we can celebrate, we can enjoy, we can appreciate, we can heal. We can do all of those things together.

You know, in the Bible, it emphasizes a lot today. And living today -- and living today fully -- is fully in alignment of living our lives more intentionally, more joyously, more prosperously and positively.

Because there were some cuts in the parish, the minister took a salary cut and decided to take a job delivering pizza to meet his needs. On the first day on the job, he was delivering a pizza to a very large construction site. And he got out of the car and he was carrying the pizza, and he heard some of the construction people and their language they were using. He couldn't believe how vulgar and horrible it was. He turned to one of the workers that was closest to him and said, *"Do you know Jesus Christ?"*

The worker bellowed to his colleagues, *"Hey, does anybody know Jesus Christ?"* And after a pause, he added, *"His pizza is here!"* [Congregants laugh] Okay. Okay.

So, Will Rogers once said, *"If you find yourself in a hole, stop digging."* And so, what he is saying is that sometimes we get in a rut ... and stop doing the things that are keeping us in the rut. That we need to wake up. That we need to own our lives. We need to get in motion. And we need to build a better future so that we can live our lives with more intention, more joy, more possibility and positivity.

And that is how we stop living on auto pilot.

God bless you all.

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