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**I DARE
YOU
TO
CHANGE!**

**Discover the Difference Between
Dreaming of a
Better Life and Living It**

Bil Cornelius

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I Dare You to Change!

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FOREWORD

This is just the way I am,” I confidently told my counselor.

At the tender age of twenty-six, I was a candidate to become an ordained minister. Several church leaders who were overseeing my journey toward ordination were convinced I was a workaholic and needed help to change. I was convinced they were wrong. *They just don't know how much I care about God and His church*, I rationalized.

This wise and caring panel of ministers asked me to take a week off to contemplate my priorities and consider what changes I could make that would give me the endurance to go the distance. Knowing this was a battle I couldn't win, I agreed, although, honestly, I never planned to slow my frenzied pace.

When they later discovered that I didn't take the week off but instead continued working feverishly, they assigned me to mandatory counseling to address my workaholic tendencies. I found myself sitting quietly in a little chair, facing a well-intentioned counselor. He reviewed his notes, mumbled a little to himself, looked up at me, and said, “You really don't think you can change, huh?” Convinced this was just the way I was, I explained how I couldn't lessen my drive to work.

I'll never forget what happened next. He leaned in and lovingly, not much above a whisper, said, “So what you're telling me is, even our God isn't big enough to help you change.”

He got me.

Maybe you can relate. *This is just the way I am. I'm always going to be like this. Nothing is ever going to change for me.* If you've ever felt like you're in a rut, you're not alone. But God has directed you to the perfect book: *I Dare You to Change!* by Bil Cornelius is a spiritually charged, inspiring, and very practical book that will empower you to walk toward the life you've always hoped for.

Maybe you feel like you're stuck in a dead-end job or you'll never have a happy marriage. Bil will show you that you are not who you *think* you are, but who *God* says you are! You can change. You can do all things through Christ who gives you strength. You can live a life that matters.

Turn the page, buckle your seat belt, and let the journey begin.

—Craig Groeschel
Pastor, LifeChurch.tv

INTRODUCTION

FROM WANTING MORE TO ACHIEVING MORE

I once counseled a young couple who were newlyweds and really committed to each other and to the Lord. The husband—I'll call him Dave—was working hard to get ahead in his job, but every time we met, he spoke to me about his dream of starting his own business. Every time we met, I heard the same story: "I feel like there's more I could be doing. I want to get into real estate, build a business."

I could tell Dave needed a push, so one day I said to him, "Dave, you're talking it, you're dreaming it, but you're not doing anything about it. You and I are not going to meet again until you've done something to start making this dream a reality. Don't make another appointment with me until you've purchased your first rental property."

At first Dave was shocked that I'd say such a thing. But within six months, he had bought not one but two rental properties. Now he's well on his way to building a nice real-estate portfolio and has even started another business on the side with income about to surpass that of his regular job. Dave is not unusual. He started out with the same desire for a better life that most people have, but he didn't know how to get started and achieve what he wanted. He had to find out that it's not just a matter of hoping; it's about stepping out and becoming

comfortable with the risk involved. It's about going from dreaming of a better life to putting down goals and giving them a deadline.

For as long as I've been working with people, the basic questions they ask never seem to change:

"How can I make my life better for myself and my family?"

"Why do I face so many challenges?"

"Why do I never seem to get ahead?"

"How do I get my act together?"

"How can I make my life meaningful?"

"Does everyone else have trouble feeling fulfilled?"

"Why does it seem I always have to settle for less?"

Maybe you're asking these questions too. Don't you wish you could find some practical answers?

I've spent my adult life helping people respond to the challenges we all face. I'm constantly confronted by the stress, burnout, poor health, lack of direction, inefficiency, indecision, and stagnation that plague Americans today. But things like this don't discourage me because I know we can find our way out of these problems. I know that because *I* changed.

"To take the leaps?
A provocative question
is the only way that
I've found."

— JAMES F. BANDROWSKI

Years ago, when I was pastoring a small church in Irving, Texas, I was restless. I kept feeling that I wasn't supposed to stay there, but I wasn't sure what God wanted me to do. It was a good church, but the prospects for reaching people were limited. At times, I even began to wonder if I was going to sell used cars for the rest of my life.

I was attending seminary at the time, and there was one particular tree I would sit under, pondering my future and asking God what I was supposed to do. As I sat there one day, the idea came to me that I could start a new church. I believe God's dreams for us are so much bigger than we usually imagine. So I envisioned a place where people could be encouraged to dream big rather than stay limited. I thought

about it for a while and then started putting my dream on paper. I dreamed of a place where I could bring my unchurched friends. I had a lot of high school and college buddies who wouldn't be caught dead in church. Even though church had changed my life, it wasn't working for them. It wasn't speaking their language. I knew I'd have to start something from scratch because I didn't want to try and change an existing church.

Twelve years later, I'm the pastor of Bay Area Fellowship in Corpus Christi, Texas, a church of thousands of people, most of whom had never attended a church. One of the ways we knew we'd hit our target, that we'd reached groups the church had completely neglected, was when crack pipes and drug paraphernalia, along with knives and condom wrappers, started showing up in the offering basket as tokens of a commitment to change. People who weren't comfortable with Christianity or religion as they had known it were starting to make room for God in their lives. They were being inspired to change. As I think back to those moments sitting under that tree, talking with God about His plans for my future, I'm so glad He gave me the courage to step out and realize His dreams for me.

Are you frustrated, feeling like life has more to offer than you're currently experiencing? Could it be that you have settled for less than God's best in your life? The fact that you've picked up this book says that you're looking for a change. You desire more in life, and that's a *good* thing. You have that divine discontent, and you're ready to make some important changes.

■ Why Do We Fail to Experience God's Best?

I firmly believe that most people *want* to do better, get better, and live better. We don't want to settle for less; we just *don't know how* to achieve more.

We make New Year's resolutions. We read books, attend seminars, and listen to self-help podcasts. We spend time dreaming about how

things could be. We keep to-do lists. We make commitments and remain hopeful for the future.

The problem is that we don't really know *how* to accomplish these things. We don't know how to reach and sustain a high level of success, happiness, and health.

We don't know how to experience God's best.

Why is that?

There are many answers to this question, of course. However, the main answer is simple, and I'll spend the rest of this book unpacking it: *Most of us don't understand that success is a process of day-to-day accomplishment.*

Success involves putting one foot in front of the other every day, concentrating on reaching small goals that will eventually add up to help you reach your biggest goals. Why don't we understand this?

Maybe it's because we live in a day of instant gratification.

Success is a process of
day-to-day
accomplishment.

The world is literally at our fingertips. With the click of a computer mouse, we can order dinner, plan a vacation, run a business, or gamble our lives away. We don't just have fast-food restaurants; we have entire companies devoted to bringing dinner directly to our door. Hundreds of TV channels are available to us at the touch of a button, not to mention thousands of movies that we can watch instantly.

We've been sold a bill of goods. We've been led to believe that we can gain knowledge without studying, achieve fitness by taking a pill, and raise well-adjusted children without prudent parenting. We believe we can experience real life by popping in a DVD, develop top-flight organizations through well-articulated mission statements, and build successful businesses with slick advertising campaigns.

This reminds me of a story about a forty-year-old woman who gets hit by a bus, is rushed to the hospital, and dies on the operating table. She meets God and He tells her, "Don't worry, you're not going to die right now. I still have a purpose for you, and I'm giving you forty more years." Next thing you know, she wakes up in the recovery

room, thrilled to be alive. Later she thinks, “If I have forty more years, I want to make sure I look GREAT.” So after she’s healed from the bus accident, she immediately talks to a plastic surgeon and signs up for all kinds of work—a nip here, a tuck there. Soon, she’s reworked from head to toe. After the surgery, she continues her makeover with a dark tan, a new hairstyle, and a whole new wardrobe. Her makeover complete, she’s walking across the street and—*bam!*—she gets hit by a bus again, but this time she really dies. Now she’s standing before God, angry, and she says, “God, what happened? You told me I had forty more years!” And God looks at her and says, “I’m sorry . . . I didn’t recognize you.”

Real change is an
inside job.

It’s so easy for us to think we’re changing our lives when we change things on the *outside*. We believe we can get results without putting forth effort, and without the basic ingredients of perseverance, fortitude, and courage. We think that a new job, a new city, a new haircut will make everything better. *But real change is an inside job.* It starts with our attitude, our efforts, and our energy. It takes *intention* and *action* on a daily basis.

But we’re not a society that understands this. It’s not that people don’t have talents and innate abilities; they do. Our problem is that we have lost sight of the basic hands-on how-tos of high achievement. We’ve forgotten that it takes *actual work* every single day to attain our goals and live the life we dream of. The key to any kind of success is day-to-day accomplishment.

Everyone has inconsistencies. We all have chasms between our ability and our actual performance. This gap keeps us from a life of achievement and makes us struggle with failure much of the time.

We take our gifts for granted, rather than intentionally developing them each and every day. We might have talents, skills, and intelligence, but we are not actively involved in the process that leads to achievement. We could perform at a high level every day, but we don’t. We choose to settle for less, rather than more.

■ Solutions

For decades Sears, Roebuck and Company was a leader in retail and catalog sales. The Sears catalog was so popular that it became an icon in American culture and history. But in the 1990s, when people began shopping on the Internet, Sears was reluctant to let go of this time-tested approach and enter the world of online marketing. Why mess with success? The problem was, nobody was buying from catalogs anymore. Because of its slowness to adapt and respond to challenges in the new retail environment, Sears lost considerable market share. To this day Sears has not been able to regain the ground it lost. How simple it would have been for Sears to be on the cutting edge of technology and transfer its entire catalog to the Internet way back when we all first started shopping online.

While some people and organizations respond to challenges and grow beyond them, most utterly fail. They're still alive, but they are just getting by.

They fall short of God's blessing time after time, yet they were created to be alive, changing, and not settling for less than God's best!

Based on my experience working with people from all backgrounds, I believe anyone can break past barriers and become successful. Fulfillment is not the exclusive domain of a gifted few but a process of self-development that everyone can use to bring forth the best from themselves and others. It's a matter of managing every area of life on a daily basis. Success, as they say, is hard by the yard—but a cinch by the inch!

■ I Dare You to Change

It's time for you to begin living the life that God has always had for you. It's time to achieve your full potential.

But what is your definition of success? I'm not going to define it for you because it's different for every person. What are the areas in

your life where you have been settling for less than you know God has for you?

I know a woman who is always busy. She's working two jobs, raising a family, and trying to be an active member of her church. But over the last few years she has felt a growing desire to serve her community. Her heart burns to do charity work, to work at the homeless shelter, to take part in overseas mission trips. Yet she can't seem to figure out how she will ever get from "here" to "there."

There are two lives that we have right now. The first is the life we live. The second is the life that we *really* desire to live.

I know a man who has been a building contractor for two decades and hates it. He really wants to be a firefighter but he's paralyzed by inertia and hopelessness. How can a man of forty change careers when he has a family to support, and especially when the career he wants is usually reserved for people twenty years younger? His goal seems unreachable, so he continues in his same job, always wishing he were somewhere else.

Are you like these people? Tired of being less, doing less, having less?

Today you can make a decision. By the end of this introduction, I pray that you will make an important choice, a life choice. My prayer is that you will choose to never settle for anything less than God's best for you in every area of your life. But my prayer is that God will motivate you and fire you up! It's not me who's daring you to change. It's God.

God *does* have a better life for you, a better life than you ever dreamed possible. We all live two lives. The first is the life we live. The second is the life that we really desire to live. We want to have that life, but most of the time we live a completely different life than the one we dream about. That second life is within us, dying to get out.

In the movie *Falling Down*, Michael Douglas plays a character named William who has reached the end of his rope. He's

completely frustrated with life and people and the hopelessness of it all. If you've seen this movie, you might remember the scene where William enters a fast-food restaurant and begins to order breakfast. "I'm sorry, we've stopped serving breakfast," the cashier tells him.

"Decide that you want it more than you are afraid of it."

— BILL COSBY

"But I want breakfast," William says.

William talks to the manager but grows more frustrated. All the time he keeps repeating, "I just want some breakfast."

Finally he pulls an automatic weapon out of his bag. All the customers scream and panic. William tells everyone to calm down, because he *just wants some breakfast*.

William has reached the end of his rope, the point where the status quo just won't do anymore. He is now willing to do anything to change his reality.

Maybe for you the phrase is "I just want to be happy" or "I just want a better job" or "I just want to be able to pay all my bills this month." Are you fed up with where you are? Do you have the passion and the drive to make a change? You obviously don't need to scare others like William in the fast-food restaurant, but you do need to do something unexpected, bold, and, at times, risky.

Let's go on a journey together. Let's learn to take courage and seek God's best for our lives. Let's discover how we can live that *second* life, the "unlived" life that we so desire to bring into reality. In the rest of this book we will explore the biblical story of Gideon, a man who starts out in a place where many of us are today—living in fear—but ends up leading a nation out of slavery and into freedom. As we walk with Gideon, we'll learn ten principles—ten *steps*—that will help us dare to change, find God's best, and begin living it.

How to Read This Book

I Dare You to Change! is a hands-on, how-to action plan for life. While it is possible to simply read through this book and glean principles

for successful living, you will gain the most benefit if you actively put the principles into practice. Use this book to stop, think, and evaluate your own life, where you are and where you want to go.

With that in mind, I've included a section at the end of each chapter titled "Looking Back, Looking Forward," a quick recap of key principles covered thus far and some practical exercises to help you start experiencing change right away. At the very end of this section you'll find an "action plan" with a list of questions that will help you put this book's key principles into practice.

I suggest that you write your answers in a notebook and that you take the time necessary to work through every exercise carefully. If you do this, I believe you will—piece by piece, step by step—find the courage you need and make great strides in experiencing God's best for your life.

Making use of these exercises is more than a suggestion. On behalf of a God who is a God of action, I'm daring you. I'm daring you to get to work right now and start on your plan. Take these God-given principles and apply them to your life. Find the strength to change and to understand that there's a difference between dreaming of a better life and living it.