

*Leaders Rave About...*

## **Grow Through It & Lead**

“A breath of fresh air! That’s exactly what I felt when I read this book. Everyone needs to be reminded that they can prevail in any situation because they already have what it takes.”

—**Tiffany Cochran**  
Reporter/News Anchor for WXIA-TV

“Since life is so full of hurdles, I’d like to commend ‘The Spark Plug’ for writing a book of inspiration that can help you leap over them!”

—**Jimmy Carnes**  
Head U.S. Olympic Track and Field Coach 1980,  
Ex. Dir. U.S. Track Coaches Association

“A sound and solid book that is both easy and enjoyable to read. It is filled with memorable anecdotes that help you reflect on the things that are really important in life. It also reminds people that no matter how tough things may seem, there’s always a way out.”

—**Billy “White Shoes” Johnson**  
Director of Programs, Atlanta Falcons, All-Time NFL Team

“Thank you ‘Spark Plug’ for writing a heartfelt and priceless book that speaks to the reader’s potential! I’m sure it will help make a difference in the lives of the people who are privileged to read it.”

—**Fred Gibson**  
Asst. Dean of Instruction, DeKalb Technical College

“This book is entertaining, but most of all, inspirational! And if you haven’t heard ‘The Spark Plug’ speak, you are missing out on an unforgettable and motivational happening!”

—**Carol Hacker**  
Author of *The High Cost of Low Morale—and What to Do About It*



# **GROW THROUGH IT & LEAD**

**Tap into and Develop  
Your Potential and Open the  
Gateway to Your Future**

**THE SPARK PLUG**

**with Jacqueline Benjamin Thomas**

***A Possibility Press Book***

# GROW THROUGH IT & LEAD

## THE SPARK PLUG

with Jacqueline Benjamin Thomas

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# Dedication

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “The glory of friendship is not the outstretched hand, nor the kindly smile, nor the joy of companionship; it is the spiritual inspiration that comes to one when he discovers that someone else believes in him and is willing to trust him.”

To Bryce, a fourth grader, who is so full of potential; he’s an inspiration to me.

My community has an outreach program that encourages its citizens to become in-school mentors. Since becoming Bryce’s mentor, I have painfully discovered that he has already experienced situations that seem too overwhelming even for adults to bear. Hopefully, one day, he will read this book and be reminded that not only can he dream impossible dreams, but he can also achieve them.

# Acknowledgment

It would be ludicrous for us to suggest that we have written this book solely from the depths of our own souls. Therefore, we would like to thank many of the people who have crossed our path. Without your influence, these pages would have remained unwritten.

Whether it was through a book, over the phone, or face-to-face, you have given us experiences that have inspired us in some way or another. The space in this book is not large enough to hold the names of each and every one of you. Nevertheless, please know that your contribution is appreciated, and we sincerely thank you again from the bottom of our hearts!

## Webster's Dictionary Says...

(spärk · plug´) 2. Informal. a person who leads, inspires, or animates a group.

\* \* \*

At this very moment, some people are giving up hope, losing confidence. They don't believe they can make it just one more day.

In order to be the best we can be and do the best we can do, we all need a little encouragement on a *daily* basis. We need someone to cheer us on when we face the most difficult times. Our deepest desire is that you receive some inspiration from this book to help you make it over the next hurdle on this adventure called "*life*." As Johann G. Von Herder reminded us, "Without inspiration, the best powers of the mind remain dormant; there is a fuel in us that needs to be ignited by sparks."

\* \* \*

*“Deep in the recesses of every human soul, a mighty power is always at work. It serves as a constant reminder to press onward, achieve more, be more, give more. Until we take the first step toward rearranging our lifestyle in a more positive way, this mighty power will cause us to become as restless as a pregnant woman, held hostage by the piercing pain of intense labor. Giving birth to positive change will not come without shedding old habits, some old friends, old fears, and old ways of thinking. It will not come without tossing and turning, sometimes even crying a river of tears, or perhaps lying awake in the still of the night, staring at the ceiling, praying for answers. Answers will come and positive changes will too. Though often wrapped in struggles and disappointments, torment and rejection, heartaches and pain, sickness and suffering, weeping and wailing...still, they come.”*

—Jacqueline Benjamin Thomas

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## Instilling Hope in Others

*“Compared to what we ought to be, we are only half awake. Our fires are dampened, our drafts are checked, we are making use of only a small part of our mental and physical resources.”*

—William James—

**A**fter I published my first book, *125 Ways to Add a Spark to Your Day*, I started getting calls from corporations and organizations whose leaders all seemed to be faced with the same dilemma. “Can you come in and *inspire* the troops?” they so often requested. Some of them asked, “While you’re at it, can you say something about leadership?”

These requests heightened my interest in leadership, leading me to Mercer University where I obtained a degree in Organization Leadership. I learned that most companies and organizations struggled with the same issues: practicing effective leadership and getting team members excited about what they’re doing.

An effective leader knows there is nothing more powerful than instilling hope in others. They know that inspiration helps people tap into the 90 percent of their ability that lies dormant within. As William James wrote: “Compared to what we ought to be, we are only half awake. Our fires are dampened, our drafts are checked, we are making use of only a small part of our mental and physical resources.” Tapping into unused physical, mental, and spiritual resources helps people become more confident. It increases their self-esteem and gives them the strength and courage to persevere during tough times.

More than ever before, organizations need people to lead, coach, and inspire others to tap into their potential—and stay in the race for the long haul. Organizations also need leaders who understand that leadership is *all about the people*. Without good people doing good things, organizations perish.

The purpose of this book is to ignite a spark within you. Hopefully, you'll be *inspired* to become all that you were meant to be—in your work and personal life—when times are good and when times are tough.

To your bright future,

*The Spark Plug*

## Being There for Others

*“I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything;  
but I will not let what I cannot do interfere with what I can do.”*  
—Edward Everett Hale—

**A**s I travel, speaking to various groups and organizations, the number one question I am constantly asked is: “Can you say something to our people to help them deal with the tough times we are facing as a nation, as well as an organization?”

No matter where we are in our lives right now, we all need motivation and inspiration. They are as essential as the air we breathe; therefore, always strive to *encourage* others.

In my travels around the world, meeting thousands of people, I have found that everyone wants praise, encouragement, and to be part of something worthwhile. Therefore, my primary goal in writing this book is to give you hope and encouragement.

When it comes to encouragement, we need all we can get. All great leaders encourage and inspire their troops to victory. Encouragement is the mother of all achievement. If the encouraging words in this book spark you to do great things, then I’ve done what I’ve set out to do.

As long as I can remember, even as a little boy growing up in Columbia, South Carolina, I knew I had to do something to make a difference. I didn’t know what it was going to be. I just

knew I had to do *something*. I literally began to look for ways in which I could make a difference. As poet Joann Oswald wrote, “I started to think about the person in me and what I could do and what I could be.” I discovered that I had a desire to lead and take charge of things, even when I didn’t want the responsibility.

When I was about fourteen, I had an experience that changed my life forever. It involved a sad story of a little six-year-old boy named Jay. He was a cute little kid with curly red hair, freckles, and an easy smile. He was also very outgoing and well-mannered. What was amazing about Jay, though, was that he already knew how to cook full-course meals! Unfortunately, Jay was often a victim of child abuse at the hands of his own mother.

One day, I saw him as he was on his way to the local convenience store, walking at a quick pace in my direction. I was on my way to the neighborhood tennis courts to practice my game. Calling out to him, as I always did, I shouted, “How’s it going, Jay?”

He yelled back, “Fine, but I can’t talk right now. I have to go to the store for my mom.”

After we got to within a few feet of each other, I noticed that something in his hair made it look all matted together.

I inquired, “Jay, what’s that in your hair?”

He retorted, “Nothing, I can’t talk right now or I’ll get into trouble. I have to go to the store for my mom.”

He started to cry.

I asked, “Jay, what’s wrong?”

Once again, his reply was the same.

“Nothing!”

As I got even closer to him, I saw blood running down his ear from a gash he had in the top of his head. I was frightened for him because he was losing blood. I told him to come with me *immediately* to the management office of the apartment complex where we lived, so he could, at least, get some bandages.

Jay emphatically said, “No, I can’t. I’ll get into trouble.”

After pleading with him, to no avail, to come with me, I decided to run to the management office as fast as I could, so they could call an ambulance or the police. I knew I *had* to do something. When I arrived at the office, I told the manager what I had witnessed. She quickly called an ambulance. We got into her car and she speedily drove up the hill to the nearby convenience store.

When we walked into the store, we saw little Jay at the counter purchasing a pack of cigarettes for his mother. It was one of the most disturbing sights I had ever seen in my life. This little innocent human being standing there with matted hair, a gash in the top of his head with blood running down his ear, still determined to obey his abusive mother at any cost.

I’ll never forget what little Jay told us that day.

He bravely said, “You know, when my mom hit me on top of my head with that belt buckle, I didn’t even cry.”

At that point, all the adults who were looking on broke down in tears.

A few weeks later, on the evening before it was time to go to court to testify on little Jay’s behalf, I remember walking around the apartment complex. I was asking the kids who knew he had been beaten by his mother if *they* were going to court.

They all replied, “No, we can’t go. Our parents won’t let us.” I remember being extremely disappointed with both my friends *and* their parents. Albert Einstein was right when he said, “The world is not dangerous because of those who do harm, but because of those who look at it without doing anything.”

None of the other kids in the neighborhood made it to court to save little Jay from his abusive mother. I was the only person who testified on his behalf. Amazingly, his mother was still granted custody of him after this horrible episode. A few days later, they moved away and I never saw or heard from little Jay again. I often think about him and talk about him every now and then in my presentations. My prayer is that somehow things

have turned around for him. He’s one of the reasons I endeavor to inspire others as much as I can. That early experience made a huge impact on my life.

Just as I was there for little Jay, I want to be here for you, too, via this book. I hope it inspires you to do more for others.

—1—

## **Change Your Attitude, Young Man!**

*“Life will never be fair all by itself. We need to look for the good, take charge of the challenges, and grow through them.”*

—“The Spark Plug”—

**T**he year was 1977. I turned thirteen and began to realize I had developed somewhat of an attitude problem. No one could tell me anything! I had all the answers, or so I thought. But one day, the intensity of my mother’s often-repeated words suddenly began to make sense. Almost weekly, she told me, “Change your attitude, young man!” It got to the point where I could no longer ignore these five simple, yet powerful words. It was time for a positive change.

One sunny spring day, I decided to let an afternoon of tennis rescue me from the weekend routine at home. My thinking was always clearer when I was battling it out on the courts—I was focused. I thought that if I worked at it hard enough, finding a solution to my attitude problem would be a cinch. While quickly gathering my tennis gear, I caught a glimpse of my mother in the kitchen giving me the eye as she washed dishes. She was giving me the serious look—the look that always speaks louder than words. I knew it was my cue to disappear. Hurriedly, I made a mad dash for the front door.

“See you later, Mom,” I quickly shouted. “I’ll make sure I’m back before dinner.” Out the door I went, heading out into the gentle warmth of the sun.

On my way to the courts, I stopped by the tennis shop at the mall and picked up my three freshly strung Wilson Jack Kramer tennis rackets. A feeling of exhilaration was rapidly growing inside of me. I couldn’t wait to get to the courts. It was a great day for tennis!

I tried to dismiss my mother’s words, but they continued to painfully echo in my mind. “You need to change your attitude, young man!” The ache in my heart was unbearable. I began to wonder...now, what will it actually take to change my attitude? What’s the big deal, anyway? Why is my mother always on my back about it? Why is this *attitude* business making my mother fume? More specifically, how can I take control of something that seems so uncontrollable? I had no idea I could control my attitude the same way I controlled my backhand.

### **Excuse Me, *Your Attitude Is Showing!***

We all live complex lives. Not long ago, I was on the phone with Hilda Smith, a good friend of mine. We were sharing information about interesting books we had read. She talked about the book, *The Road Less Traveled*. Scott Peck, the author, wrote, “Life is difficult...” I told her that those three words were some of the truest words ever written. One of the lessons children need to learn early on is that life isn’t fair, but that’s okay. The sooner they learn to accept this, the better off they’ll be. Unfortunately, too many adults are still expecting life to be fair. But life will *never* be fair all by itself. We need to look for the good, take charge of the challenges, and grow through them.

We’re all going to face circumstances that test everything we believe to be true. Sometimes, we’re going to experience situations that come without warning and may seem totally unfair. But no matter how bleak things may appear, we need to deal with them head on, being as fair as we can through the process. This is

the only way we can accomplish what we originally set out to do. Resist any temptation to use the challenge as an excuse and you will prevail.

To triumph over tough times doesn't mean we must wear a pasted-on smile, operate in a panic mode, or walk around in denial—oblivious to what's really happening in our lives. During these times, it would be unrealistic to expect anyone to be jovial at every tick tock of the clock. No one needs to feel obligated to dance through every disappointment or stand up and cheer about the stress and strain of every heavy burden. There are times when our unexpected temporary setbacks will totally knock us off our feet, rip our hearts out, and turn our whole world upside down. Believe me, I've never felt like leading a cheering section at these times in my life, and you probably haven't either.

To triumph means having *faith* and *confidence* that our life is unfolding as it needs to. It means standing our ground and fighting for our dreams, despite rejections and fears. It means standing up for those who can't stand up for themselves. It's about being determined to find a pearl of goodness in every situation, even when it seems as if there is none to be found. When times are tough, our attitude will largely determine whether we win or lose.

Whether it's good, bad, or indifferent, wherever you are right now, your attitude is showing. When you treat someone differently based on appearance, race, physical disability, financial worth, or educational level, your attitude is showing. When you pick a certain style of clothing over another, your attitude is showing. Whether you choose to surround yourself with a cloud of dismay or wrap yourself in a blanket of hope, your attitude is always showing.

## **The Power to Choose**

Our attitude and the decisions we make often share a common thread. More often than not, it's our attitude that governs the choices we make and how they affect our future. Where we are at this particular moment in life has been primarily determined by the

choices we’ve made along the way. Whether we’re aware of it or not, our actions and decisions really do shape our destiny. My wife came across a Japanese proverb that stresses this point even further. It warns us that “The reputation of a thousand years may be determined by the conduct of one hour.” How true.

The power to choose is awesome. When we fail to make decisions that will richly fertilize our lives, we’ve automatically made a choice to stay where we are. Until we accept the fact that we are, at times, our own stumbling block, we may never move forward, see beyond our circumstances, or prosper. Many times, the walls of disappointment, defeat, and regret that overshadow us are crafted by the choices we have made.

Some of you may be saying, “I’m stuck in a rut and disgusted with my life and this economy. I’ll never find a job that will give me the life I want.” Or you may be saying to yourself, “Because of this sluggish economy, now is not a good time to start a new business....” In his thought-provoking book, *The Achievement Factors*, Gene Griessman reveals to us that we grow into our own expectations. If you’re not expecting much of yourself, you probably won’t receive or accomplish very much. The reason is as simple as this: The less you expect of yourself, the less you will *do* to meet your *already* lowered expectations.

Successful people know there’s not a lack of money in the world; there’s only a lack of ambition. So don’t give up, sit down, or manufacture a sour outlook on life. It won’t get you anywhere. “Keep your face to the sunshine and you cannot see the shadows,” wrote Helen Keller. Take action—get into motion—and watch how things begin to fall into place.

I once met a homeless man who told me that his wife had been unfaithful to him. On top of that, she had literally emptied his pockets and ruined his life.

“It’s all her fault,” he complained. “On top of that, she divorced me and took everything,” he added.

“How long have you been divorced?” I asked.

“Twenty years,” he snarled, with a faraway look in his eyes.

This poor man was still holding his wife responsible for his “homeless” condition. Steeped in his own self-pity, he had frittered away twenty years of his life and was in grave danger of wasting many more.

If you think your dreadful past is holding you back, you are denying the present and disrespecting your future. If you claim someone, a certain situation, or an experience is holding you back, then you don’t understand how creative, intelligent, talented, and gifted you really are. You’re not taking responsibility for who you really are. Without a doubt, there’s a purpose for your life, and the only person who can keep it from you is reading this book. If you’re afraid of looking foolish, stumbling, or falling in your quest for a better quality of life, just remember that uncomfortable, character-building experiences are necessary for growth.

Speaking of a better quality of life...a few years ago, I discovered that my mother went back to finish high school when she was twenty-one. A series of heartbreaking events had interrupted her education. While suffering spousal abuse and having the responsibility of raising three small children on her own, she set out to construct a better future for us as well as herself. She was called stupid and dumb for being in the tenth grade at twenty-one, when the average age for a tenth grader is fifteen or sixteen. Determined to succeed, she refused to give in to the constant public humiliation from her fellow classmates. She didn’t allow it to break her stride.

Eventually, my mother graduated from high school. Many years later, she graduated from college and has since earned two masters degrees! Diligently, she planted seeds of sacrifice and overcame the obstacles that she had once allowed to hold her hostage. She expanded her boundaries, strengthened her confidence, and chose to believe that she could accomplish *much* more for her family and herself.

### **To Degree, or Not to Degree—*That Is the Question***

Some of you may contend that your lack of education or degree is holding you back. “If only I had finished college, or even gone

to college, I would have a better chance of reaching my goals,” some may grumble. This statement may or may not be true for you. It all depends on what your goals are. The names on the list of successful business professionals, entrepreneurs, and entertainers who didn’t attend or finish college are too numerous to mention.

I know that becoming knowledgeable in an area where we intend to excel is as essential to us as oxygen. Expanding our knowledge can open the door to unlimited possibilities. However, the best education does not always come with a formal degree attached to it. Just study the lives of people like Vivien Thomas, the celebrated Johns Hopkins University surgical teacher. With only a high school diploma, he trained many of the world’s leading surgeons in the 1950s and ‘60s. Later on, he received an Honorary Doctorate from Johns Hopkins for his groundbreaking work with the renowned heart surgeon, Dr. Alfred Blalock, with whom he *developed* the field of cardiac surgery.

Then consider the late Dave Thomas, founder of the Wendy’s restaurant chain. He didn’t receive his high school diploma until he had already achieved international success in the restaurant business.

There’s a gold mine of inexpensive books, CDs, and DVDs filled with valuable and helpful information right at our fingertips. Our experiences are also exceptional teachers, and training is available on almost any topic imaginable. Having a degree doesn’t always mean we’re educated. It’s basically a license to work in the real world.

The point is many people have fabricated a horde of excuses for not moving forward. They use excuses in a futile attempt to help pardon themselves from feeling guilty about their lack of progress. They find comfort in blaming others for the life they’ve created. The trouble is blame only weakens their power to make positive changes. It gives them an excuse for not taking responsibility for their own actions. Yet, blame can never erase the years that have been carelessly traded for a life of advanceless inertia.

## No Time to Whine

For some of us, being sincerely grateful for the things we already have is as rare as seeing a shooting star. It's so easy to forget or overlook the little things that mean so much. My wife and I have an 85-year-old friend named Miriam Manning, who resides in a nursing home in Griffin, Georgia. We have known her for eight years. When we first met her, she had already lost one leg because of diabetes. Now, she has lost both of her legs to that disease. But in spite of that horrific loss, she has not turned bitter. Not once have we heard her whine or complain about her situation. Each time we have visited her, she has always had a good attitude and a positive outlook on life. Miriam has to patiently *wait* for someone to bathe her. She has to *wait* for someone to physically pick her up and put her in a wheelchair when she wants to leave her room. She has to *wait* for someone to bring her meals. She has to *wait* for someone to dress her. She has to *wait* for someone to visit her. She can never leave her bed on her own!

It was E.E. Cummings who said, “The most wasted of all days is one without laughter.” Miriam is a shining example of someone who makes the best of what most of us would consider a very dismal situation. She has retained the spirit of love and laughter.

The World Bank has reported that of the six billion people on the planet, two billion get by on less than two dollars a day, while one billion gets by on less than one dollar a day. Can you even imagine getting by on such a small amount of money? Some of you may be saying, “It's different in other parts of the world, you don't need that much to survive.” Well, after traveling around the world, I know first-hand that it is difficult to survive on less than one or two dollars a day no matter where you live. I think it comes down to what Mahatma Gandhi cautioned us about many decades ago: “We have enough for every man's need, but not enough for every man's greed.”

We take too much for granted. Many of us constantly sob, whimper, and whine about not being able to satisfy our ego. Many of us are involved in a tremendous opportunity, but, nonetheless,

we still make excuses and continue to place blame. As Jay Rifenburg, bestselling author of *No Excuse!* says, “When the going gets tough, the weak blame.”

Stop right now and get a pen and a sheet of paper.

Take a few moments to identify the obstacles in your life that are keeping you from moving forward. Think about it, but don't take too long. Jot down what and who they are then write in full detail how they are hindering you from making progress. Be honest, there's no reason for you to hold back or be ashamed. We're talking about your future. This brief, yet important exercise is for your eyes only. Look closely at what you've written. Analyze every single excuse.

Does that sheet of paper have any power to keep you from your purpose? Do you hear voices yelling from it demanding that you stay where you are and not move forward? Does it have powerful hands tightly locked together like a steel chain, forming a barricade to hold you back?

I don't think so!

If you still think other people or circumstances can keep you from your purpose, you're deluding yourself. If you believe you cannot rise up from where you are and move on, you're misleading yourself. You're already gifted with each and every attribute necessary to reach your goals. It's your responsibility to develop them by getting wrapped up in the art of doing. In other words, take action.

## **What's Your Problem?**

In 1992, I decided I wanted to be a professional speaker. I yearned to inspire people to dream big dreams and reach for the impossible. Unfortunately, I had a small problem. Some people may call it a monumental one. “What was the problem?” you ask? I was afraid to stand up and give a speech in public. Deep down in my heart, I knew nothing could stop me from doing what I believed I was put on this planet to do. Nevertheless, my fear of failing was keeping me from taking the first step.

So, to overcome my fear of public speaking, I started reading books about it. To test the waters, I started speaking to little kids first; they are less judgmental. They just want to know you care. Eventually, I joined a speaking organization that helped me build a firm foundation in the fundamentals of public speaking. After that, I joined my state speakers association, as well as the National Speakers Association, which is part of an international organization of professional speakers.

### **You May Not Be the First Choice**

I now travel around the country and abroad, speaking for many leading Fortune 500 companies and governmental agencies on leadership, diversity, and motivation.

The highlight of my speaking career came when I received a phone call from a gentleman who represented a group that wanted me to speak.

He said, “Spark Plug, we really enjoyed you at our State Conference, and if you are available, we would really love to have you in Greensboro, North Carolina at our Southeastern Conference.”

He continued, “I want you to know, however, that you weren’t our first choice as the keynote speaker.” I was a little taken aback by his brutal honesty.

Nevertheless, I summoned up the courage to timidly ask him, “By the way, who was your first choice?”

He replied quite enthusiastically, “Oh, President Jimmy Carter.” At this point, I simultaneously felt stunned and elated.

I’ve always been quick witted so I interjected, “Let me get this straight, if you can’t get a former President, (now Nobel Peace Prize Winner) call ‘The Spark Plug.’”

He responded, “That’s pretty much it.”

### **The Door Is Already Open—*Walk Through It***

In the free world, no one has to live a stagnant, unproductive life that lacks growth and creativity. Just seize the opportunity at hand and make it happen. History has recorded the lives of count-

less heroes who have been positive examples of succeeding against all odds, making a way out of no way. Many have made extreme sacrifices so that we have the freedom and opportunity to pursue our goals. And much blood has been shed so that we can live an abundant life. Edward Judson wrote, “If you succeed without suffering, it is because someone suffered for you; if you suffer without succeeding, it is in order that someone else may succeed after you.”

Success has been engraved in your past, present, and future. You are an important piece to life’s puzzle. Your contribution is vital. Your children, grandchildren, cousins, brothers, sisters, nephews, and nieces are counting on you to complete your mission because they need to stand on your shoulders. The entire world is cheering you on in this race with monumental banners that read, “You can make it. Don’t give up! Keep going!” It may not be as easy as 1–2–3 for us to find out where we fit in this great big world, but it is certainly our responsibility to stay alert for clues. In the meantime, do your best and give it your all every day in whatever you’re doing. No work is ever in vain!

There is a grand design and a purpose for your life that will greatly impact the lives of others in ways you could never imagine. It just doesn’t matter what is thrown in your path; you can overcome it. You were born to overcome every single obstacle that comes your way. As the ambitious ant completes its mission of gathering food for the icy cold winter, you, too, can complete your mission. The tiny ant takes one faithful step at a time, one morsel of delicate food at a time, and slowly builds a warehouse of nourishment.

Yes, timing is crucial. I have painfully discovered and accepted the fact that the world has its own built-in timetable. There is nothing we can do to *force* it to operate. Scientists can’t make summer come immediately after a cold winter. We must first experience the rebirth of nature in spring. Before grapes can become vintage wine, they must first be squeezed and crushed. After preparation is completed, the critical *timing* element is set in motion.

There are times when you just have to wait, but you need to *work* while you wait. Philip Simmons is a master wrought iron craftsman who is known for his contribution to the beautification of Charleston, South Carolina. His commissioned public sculptures are featured at the National Museum and the Smithsonian Institution. My wife and I had the pleasure of meeting this great American treasure at his home while we were in Charleston on one of our weekend getaways. The following quote became Mr. Simmons’ motto: “If you want your prayers answered, get off your knees and hustle.”

Prepare yourself to take full advantage of your opportunity. Every incident that occurs in your life is preparation for the next event. A wise person wrote, “It is better to be prepared and not have an opportunity than to have an opportunity and not be prepared.” Every single circumstance that is allowed to come your way has *opportunity* written all over it. Your breakthrough may be wrapped in something you absolutely abhor. Sammy Davis, Jr. initially hated the song, “Candy Man.” When he first heard it, he refused to sing it because he believed it sounded too much like a kiddie song. After its release, it became his biggest hit as well as his signature song.

Unfortunately, I didn’t find any answers on that sunny spring day when I decided to flee to the tennis courts. Nevertheless, it was the beginning of a journey of seeking, growing, stumbling, and falling that brought me to where I am today. The bottom line is this: When times are tough, the key to our success or failure depends on our attitude.