

**START
HERE**



VALORIE BURTON



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Contents

Introduction	7
Part 1: Inner Resilience, Emotional and Spiritual Well-being . . .	11
What is the most important question you need to answer in your life today?	16
What are you putting off?	19
Instead of being happy <i>when</i> , will you be happy <i>while</i> ?	21
What if it <i>does</i> work out?	24
Are you in it to win it?	27
In what way is it time to stretch yourself?	30
What is your procrastination telling you?	33
Who are you <i>really</i> ?	37
What lesson is life offering you right now?	40
Is it time to stop trying to figure it out?	44
Will you give yourself permission to make a change?	47
Is God trying to tell you something?	50
What's your mission?	53
What was the best thing that happened to you today?	55
Is it time for a fresh start?	58
Is it time for a break?	61
Is impatience sabotaging your potential?	64
Are you overwhelmed with too many goals?	67
Do you know the five keys to negotiation?	70
What would help you push through to your breakthrough? . . .	73
What bold decision is it time to make?	76
What one change would make you more productive today? . . .	78

What's your holding pattern protecting you from?	82
Is your busyness based in fear?	84
In what way do you need to speak up?	87
Part 2: Business, Career, and Personal Finance	93
Are you equipped to handle change at work?	97
How strong is your professional network?	101
If you'd known then what you know now, what would you have done differently?	104
What is it time for you to learn?	107
Could your layoff be an opportunity in disguise?	109
Is working from home stressing you out?	112
Are you a communication leader at work?	115
Are you really ready for a career change?	119
What's your personal PR strategy?	122
In what way do you need to be unconventional?	126
What would it take for you to get ahead at work?	130
What's your personal brand?	133
How will you know it's worth going back to school?	136
Are opportunities chasing you down?	140
How would it feel to work less?	143
How resilient are you?	146
How are your social media habits influencing your career goals?	149
Could you turn your passion into profit?	152
What have you learned from your money mistakes?	155
Are you an emotional spender?	159
What would financial freedom look like for you?	162
Are you financially on track to retire?	165

Part 3: Relationships	171
Are you an effective communicator?	174
What is your most difficult relationship?	177
Are you sure you're ready to say "I do"?	180
Are you building authentic friendships?	183
How well do you take a compliment?	188
Do you know how to give a great compliment?	191
Are you easy to love?	194
Do you know the key to boosting your kids' confidence?	198
Do you pass this love test?	201
How good are you at making new friends?	204
Is it time for a get-together?	207
Is it time to stop complaining and solve the problem?	210
 Part 4: Hope and Inspiration	 217
What would Jesus ask?	220
What dream do you need to resurrect?	224
Are you ready to move into your new season?	227
Should you give up or get up?	230
What could it mean that your answer hasn't come yet?	233
Do you have the five key resilience traits?	237
How bright is your light?	240
Will you let go of the old to make room for the new?	243
Can you just wait till morning?	246
This isn't the way you planned it, is it?	250
What could you do to feel happier right now?	254
 Conclusion	 259

Introduction

Over the years, I have had the wonderful privilege of writing to thousands of people each week, sharing what's on my heart and hoping it might inspire them with ideas and action steps to find greater fulfillment, joy, and resilience. My weekly e-newsletter, *The Coaching Session*, is my most basic way of expressing my purpose in life: inspiring others to live more fulfilling lives and using writing and speaking as a vehicle to do that.

The most thrilling part of this weekly journey is always the e-mails I receive in return: "How did you know I was dealing with that issue this week? These are just the words I needed!" Such comments always bring a smile to my face. They let me know that I've had the privilege of being used as a vessel, and that the seemingly random ideas that come to me to write about are not really so random at all. God's hand is always in it, even on a not-so-great writing day. My job is to get out of the way and let the words flow, trusting that they'll hold special meaning for you.

After more than a decade of this sort of writing, I've been asked to commit these weekly messages to book form. *Start Here, Start Now* is the result! I've also packed this book with tools such as assessments, "Did You Know?" facts that you can apply to your life, and powerful coaching questions that will help you break through the barriers that hold you back from your true potential.

As a personal and executive coach and as the founder of an organization that trains professional coaches, it is my job to ask powerful questions. Over and over again, I have been amazed at the ability of the right question to unearth the answers that lay within us all along.

When you ask the right questions, you get the right answers.

But with the fast pace of life, we don't sit still long enough to ponder. We believe we are saving time by charging ahead with our plans, never pausing for a moment to be intentional about our next steps. I believe in the power of coaching to absolutely transform your life. In fact, it is part of my mission to help you learn to coach yourself. Coaching will, I hope, become a way of life for you. When faced with a dilemma, I want you to learn to pause and ask yourself the right question. Rather than panicking or worrying or soliciting everyone else's opinion (especially the opinions of those who are not wise or experienced enough to shed the light you need), I invite you instead to have a coaching moment. And this book is full of coaching moments.

I've packed each section with a coaching toolbox of 25 questions. Use these questions to get the powerful next steps that will propel your life forward. And use them with others! If you manage people or are a coach, parent, teacher, or lead people in any capacity, these questions can have a powerful impact.

Some coaching moments will be quick. As soon as you ask the question the answer will be so obvious that you won't need to journal about it or ponder it very long. In fact, you may find yourself saying, "Why didn't I ask myself that question in the first place?" For example, when you find yourself being unproductive or procrastinating, the simple question, "Is this how I really want to spend my time right now?" will likely yield a pointed answer: No. This will lead to the more important question: "So what am I going to shift my attention to right now?" It may sound elementary, but research actually confirms that the most successful, resilient people in life and in business are masters at coaching moments. These people are self-aware enough to notice their thoughts and intentionally change them to the ones that are the most productive and effective for achieving their goals—whether those goals are in relationships, work, finances, health, or your emotional or spiritual life.

Carry this book with you and pull it out when you have a spare moment. Put it next to the bed and read one of its messages first thing in the morning or in the evening before bedtime.

The messages within are tools to help you become more resilient and effective in every area of your life. You may choose to go through it one page at a time, applying the coaching questions to whichever dilemma or opportunity seems appropriate, or you may choose to skip ahead to the section of questions you think will be most helpful to you at the present time.

As you read through these pages, I hope you'll sense that I am writing to you as a friend, not an expert—as someone who wants to support you in moving your life to the next level, whatever that looks like for you. Over the years, I've received e-mails and notes from readers just like you who've read my coaching questions and had major breakthroughs—many of them begrudgingly. One woman wrote, "I'm so mad at you right now for asking those hard questions. I didn't want to answer them! But for some reason, I did anyway. I hate to admit it, but those tough questions were just what I needed."

Honesty isn't easy, and it takes courage to tell the truth. But the truth is the only answer that will move you forward authentically. If you don't tell yourself the truth, you can't possibly find real solutions that work. So as you read these pages, I want to encourage you to muster the courage to be honest. Give yourself permission not to know all the answers. Sometimes, the fact that you don't know the answer is all the answer you need for now. It is at those times that your job is to be patient and trust that the answer will come in God's divine timing. Simply admitting that you don't know allows you to take a breath and rest in that place of uncertainty. Perhaps that is the lesson for now.

I suggest you answer these questions either out loud or on paper. I've found that answering completely in your head is usually less effective. Because our thoughts tend to run on—one leads to another—you can make clearer connections and peel back the layers more easily if you articulate your thoughts either on paper or verbally. Having a trusted person to discuss your answers with or even talking out loud to yourself (hearing yourself say something aloud is a powerful tool!) are both effective ways to articulate your thoughts verbally. Using a journal or even typing your responses can be an effective way to articulate

your thoughts in written form. Choose the method that works best for you. You might try different approaches and take note of which flows best. Of course, you don't always have someone available to talk to, so try at least one method that allows you to truly self-coach. In moments when you need to redirect your thoughts, perform on the spot, or get clear about your next step when no one else is around, you will have the skills and confidence to take the best course of action.

I'm excited to join you on this journey!

Warmest wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Valorie". The script is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "V" and a trailing flourish.

Valorie Burton

Part 1

Inner Resilience, Emotional and Spiritual Well-being

*If you falter in a time of trouble,
how small is your strength!*

PROVERBS 24:10

Did You Know?

Resilient people think differently. They have a level of psychological capital and mental toughness that enables better performance and leadership under stress.

Think back to the achievement in your life you are most proud of. Whether it is the success of your marriage, your parenting skills, a career triumph, or the personal character you've developed through your own perseverance, your success could not have come about without one key trait: *Resilience*. Resilience is your ability to bounce back from setbacks, thrive, and grow in the face of adversity and change.

No matter what the goal, it is almost guaranteed there will be

obstacles along the path to your vision. And the most successful people in the world are masters at bouncing back from setbacks. Whether the setback is small (such as an argument with your spouse or an unexpected expense that threw off your spending plan this month) or large (such as a layoff at work, cancer, or a divorce), your focus in life must continually be to recover from the unwanted detours so that you can stay on your path and enjoy victory.

Resilience is a skill, and we can all learn it and improve upon it. Sure, some people appear to bounce back effortlessly. There is a reason for that. They often have a certain combination of personal traits, resources, and skills that help them get back on their feet after suffering a disappointment. Researchers point out three elements that can empower an individual to be more resilient:

- **Genetics**

Some people are born with a more positive attitude that helps them deal with stress and adversity. Others have underlying mental health conditions that can be triggered under stress and undermine resilience. So whether for better or worse, your genes play a role in your resilience. However, the two other elements that contribute to your inner resilience are more within your control.

- **Personal Resources**

Personal resources include your friends, family, work environment, education, money, health, spiritual fortitude, previous experiences, and overall support system. When you encounter obstacles, your network of personal resources helps you surmount them.

- **Thought Processes**

Most important of all is how you *think* in the face of an obstacle. What you say to yourself in the face of adversity is the most significant predictor of how you will fare the storm. “For as he

thinks in his heart, so is he,” Proverbs 23:7 (NKJV) famously proclaims. It is absolutely true. What you think, you will become. Becoming more aware of your thoughts and being intentional about making them productive, positive, and truthful is essential to your success and well-being.

Your Resilience, Emotional, and Spiritual Health Checklist

Before you dive into this first section of the book, read these statements and check only the ones that are true for you *today*.

- I know my purpose and live it every day.
- I am not withholding forgiveness from anyone.
- Fear is not stopping me from moving forward on my most meaningful goals.
- I maintain a positive outlook most of the time.
- I have a strong support system of friends and family.
- I am spiritually mature and aware of God working in my life.
- I am in a good place emotionally. I am whole and well.
- My life is fulfilling and meaningful.
- I have a deep sense of joy and experience inner peace daily.
- In the last major challenge I faced, I was able to bounce back and move forward quickly.
- In a crisis, I usually remain calm and take action that is helpful to the situation.
- I can tolerate uncertainty without a high level of anxiety.
- Those who know me best would describe me as “adaptable to change.”

- I am lighthearted and try to find humor even in difficult circumstances.
- I enjoy discovering new ways to do things.
- I am a good problem-solver.
- I always learn and find ways to apply the lessons from my past experiences.
- I am comfortable being myself.
- I am an empathetic listener.
- I have found purpose in my painful situations and believe all things work together for good.

___ Total

Rather than judging yourself if you cannot check off many of the statements, use this assessment as a tool to get clear about the items you want to be sure to check off in the future. You'll be working on making all of these statements a reality as you work through the coming pages. Make that your goal!

What is the most important question you need to answer in your life today?

*Go confidently in the direction of your dreams.
Live the life you have imagined.*

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

Point to Ponder:

You can learn to coach yourself by taking moments to pause and ask simple, thought-provoking questions that move you in the right direction.

One of the reasons so many people can't find the answers they need for the challenges they face is that they ask themselves the wrong questions—or never bother to ask questions at all. As a professional life coach, my primary job is to ask the right questions. I ask the kinds of questions that shift your perspective or help you see that the answer is obvious, even if the situation is complicated. One of the smartest things you can learn to do is coach yourself in the midst of a dilemma. And there are three simple steps you can follow to do just that:

1. Get clear about the problem.

In order to get the answer you need, you need to understand the problem you're trying to solve. Often, the problem that needs to be addressed in this moment is not about the big picture. It's about a detail you have control over in the big

picture. Let's say that fear is overwhelming you because you've been laid off and need a job, like, yesterday. You may not be able to snap your fingers and land that new job tomorrow, but you can identify a list of personal contacts to start reaching out to *before* tomorrow with a specific request, such as making an introduction to a decision-maker who can help you reach your bigger goal. Pinpoint the issue. Then address it with very specific, focused action.

2. Ask action questions, probing questions, and expansive questions.

In my book *Listen to Your Life* I identify three types of self-coaching questions. Probing questions help you delve deeper to uncover hidden fears that may be holding you back, such as, "What are you afraid will happen if you move forward?" Expansive questions help you think bigger and start envisioning your dreams: "What would it feel like to double your income in the next 12 months?" Action questions get you moving: "So what's the next step to move you toward that goal, and when will you take it?"

3. Tell the truth.

Lastly, but most importantly, you've got to tell the truth! Coaching is only as effective as you are truthful. Be honest about your fears and your desires, even (especially!) if they scare you. It's the only way to get to the authentic answers that will guide you on the right path—the one that is uniquely meant for you.

My Challenge to You

Start coaching yourself. Ask the right questions and you'll get the right answers.

What are you putting off?

*Even if you're on the right track,
you'll get run over if you just sit there!*

ROY ROGERS

Point to Ponder:

The instant gratification of conveniences such as e-mail and text messages stimulate the brain. Break your procrastination-prone projects into bite-sized goals that allow you to feel you are making progress.

What have you been putting off? Almost all of us delay necessary actions from time to time. I'm convinced that procrastination is one of the biggest causes of stress in our lives. There is something in your life that you know needs to get done. Often, it's not even something difficult. But you've made it difficult in your mind, and as a result you never get started. Instead, you do everything else you can think of—wash dishes, organize your files, surf the Internet, check e-mail—rather than the thing you actually need to do. Perhaps you're even procrastinating right now. It drains your energy and wastes precious time. "Procrastination is the bad habit of putting off until the day after tomorrow what should have been done the day before yesterday," Napoleon Hill once said.

I challenge you to focus your energy and just do what needs to be done. There are two antidotes to procrastination:

- 1. Drop the goal or project, and don't do it.**
- 2. Exercise some discipline, and just go ahead and do it.**

Sometimes procrastination is a sign that you don't want or need to do the thing you're dreading, in which case Option 1 is a good choice (this does not apply to filing taxes, paying bills, or picking kids up from school, of course!). At other times, procrastination is a sign of perfectionism, stubbornness, or lack of self-discipline, all of which you have the power to change. If this is the category you relate to, Option 2 is your best choice. Don't make the task or project a big deal. Break it into smaller pieces and just get started.

So what is it that you need to do? Don't wait for inspiration—just start! You don't have to *feel* like doing something to do it. Often, in the process of starting, your mood develops. And even if it doesn't, the feeling of relief after completing a project you've been dreading is well worth it.

My Challenge to You

Stop procrastinating. Get it done!

Coach Yourself

What have you been putting off? How could you break the task into manageable pieces? What step will you take today? By which date will you cross this item off your to-do list?
