

Life

is What You Make It

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seven steps to moving forward

Carl Mathis

Life Is What You Make It

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Dedication

To my loving wife, Dale Averill Delaney Mathis, who died before I could get an opportunity to put pen to paper. To my three sons: Jaron Mathis, Carl Mathis Jr., and Torrey Mathis.

Acknowledgments

There are a number of wonderful people who gave me motivation and encouragement and contributed in countless ways to my experiences writing this book. My gratitude goes to my mother, Nalina Antoine Mathis, and the rest of my family, who always encourage me to pursue my dreams. I will always appreciate their love and support. Thank you to my Pastor Angela Giles and my church family at Holy Ghost Tabernacle of Deliverance Ministries in Goulds, Florida. You were always there for me in my time of need. I want to acknowledge the compassion and encouragement I consistently received. And last but not least, I thank you, God

Introduction

In 2005, my life took a turn in a direction that I was not expecting. Something occurred that changed the course of my life in a dramatic way; as a result, I had to make some adjustments to put my life back together. Whenever you encountered a dramatic change in your life unexpectedly, your life becomes difficult to deal with. Sometimes you find yourself depending on another to fill that gap the situation has caused to you. There was a time when I was challenged with a situation in my life, which caused my expectation to depend on someone to come to my rescue. I waited for a long time hoping someone will come to assisted me with my needs. I found out that life is what you make it, and that another cannot make your life for you. The life that you inherit is the result of your own action. Although God will sometimes give you the direction and even provide the means to accomplish a certain thing, in the end you are the only one that could make it come into reality. So if you are in a similar situation and find yourself wondering why no one is coming to your rescue, if you want to do something about it, this book is for you.

My Story

After your cup has been emptied how does it get refilled. When the flaming fire on the inside evaporates the liquid before the cup is able to fill up, what do you do? Who do you turn to? I tried and I tried, but I was unable to fill my cup to its max. The burning and the emptiness inside of me made me a total wreck. Whenever my cup reaches about the half-way point, it seems to evaporate, and then I am left with starting all over again. My ability seems to have no effect at all. I felt like I was in a dark pit with no way out. I began to think of how Joseph must have felt when he was thrown into the pit by his brothers. So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe—the richly ornamented robe he was wearing—and they took him and threw him into the cistern. Now the cistern was empty; there was no water in it.

Genesis 37:23–24 (niv)

The wall was crumbling around me. Who do I turn to? Where does my help come from? I tried to encourage myself. Then my cup reached the three-quarter point, but that flaming fire on the inside never fails. It seems to always burn up what was in my cup before the cup gets full. I was like an empty vessel. If you touched me too hard, I would break. If you pushed me, I would fall. I just wanted to be filled. I waited and I waited for someone to put something in my vessel: some conversation, some adviser, some encouragement, some instruction. Oh, how I longed to be filled. I was falling with no strength to pick myself up; it had been a trying time of my life—the separation from my wife when God called her home. After we rejoined together for so long and then were separated, I felt like I'd lost every ounce of strength in my body. Oh how I searched for that curtain thing to fill the blank spot, but I was like a runaway train heading for disaster. I keep asking myself, “Am I the only one who feels like this?” I know many have looked at me on a daily basis as though everything was okay, but they didn't know I was one step away from doing something bad to myself. Countless times when I would drive to work, trying to focus on the good points of my life, evil was present and speaking in my ear about conducting some evil actions. So I find it to be a law (rule of action of my being) that when I want to do what is right and good, evil is ever present with me and I am subject to its insistent demands.

Romans 7:21 (ab)

The things I thought of doing and a few things I did were not so pleasant in the eyes of God. There is a saying that goes like this, “Only God knows.” This saying exemplifies the way I felt for a long time. Only God knew I was an empty vessel and looking for help. Let me take you back to 1984. It was at my sister's friend's wedding; I was a young male who was fresh from the United States Army Basic Training. My sister, Heseland, introduced me to one of her friends named Dale. Dale was attending Boys and Girls Height School in Brooklyn, New York. From that moment on, we were a match made in heaven. We were together ever since. We had our share of ups and downs, but we stuck it out. We had two boys, and then we moved to Miami, Florida, in 1995. Then we had one more boy. We were a family of five, and everything was okay for a while. We were active in the church, and I was striving to be a minister. But in 1994 Dale was diagnosed with lupus. Many doctors visits, hospital attendance, and medical bills begin to take affect. After a while there was no trace of the infirmity in her body. I credit that to the prayers of the righteous, the late Harriet Jones and the members of Holy Ghost Temple Church, and also both our family and friends who labored in prayer. Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.

James 5:16 (nlt)

After some time passed, Dale was then diagnosed with a spinal virus called HTLV1—Tropical Plastic Periphrastric. This virus attacks the spine and the lower part of the body, which sometimes travel to the respiratory system. From that point on, things started to decrease dramatically. One of the first signs was that she started to drag her feet when she walked. In the year 1991, when the former president Bill Clinton came to the University of Miami to campaign, Dale and I, along with our oldest boy, Jaron, went to see the president. When we were leaving the campaign site, because Dale could not left her feet to high, she tripped on a crack on the sidewalk and fell, busting her lips and teeth. From that day on, life was a down motion. Then she began to lose her ability to walk. She had to use a walking cane, and before you knew it, she had to use a wheel chair. When she had no ability to walk at all, she was diagnosed as permanently disabled. She began to lose her ability to write, and then she had difficulty seeing and breathing and eating. But with the love that I had for my wife, there was no doubt that I was going to be by her side to the end. This went on for approximately ten years. There were many hospital visits, surgeries, emergencies, etc. I remember the tubes that were put down her throat and in her side to feed her and help her breathe. Yes, there were times when I was tired and frustrated. Yes, only God knows. It was a long challenging road. I can personally tell you, whether you believe in God or not, a higher power than man must have been looking over me because there is no way I could have handled all that. I know it was God holding me and guiding me through this trial. Imaging trying to take care of a disable person, without much help from insurance for medical bills, raising three growing boys, paying for the regular house hold bills and the needs concerning the necessity of life, trying to hold down two jobs to keep my family above water, and trying to keep up with the boy's school. I was a shy and quite person, but there was many, many times I wished and hoped and prayed that somebody would come by to offer some physical help. No, I am not insinuating that no one helped us, but the burden, and the task and all the things that needed to be done was so much, that we needed much more than basic help. Then on the morning of December 15, 2005, I was getting ready to leave work from doing a graveyard shift when I got a phone call from one of my sons, informing me that Dale had passed away in her sleep. I beg into scream as if piece of my flesh had been ripped from my body. When you get a phone call saying that your wife or your husband is no more, what would be your reaction? I could not handle the fact that I would be without someone to talk to and have funny conversations with at night. From that moment on, I was like an empty vessel. Here I was ordained as an elder in the church, but hurting on the inside like a little baby that lost its first love. I preached and ministered to people yet hurt on the inside. I went to work and supervised people yet hurt on the inside. I still had to do the necessity to provide for my three boys who were growing day by day. I would ask myself, "When will it end? When will I be able to say the hurting is over and my vessel has some substance inside it?" I was searching for anything or anybody to fulfill my hunger for fulfillment. I looked good on the outside, but inside I was like dried up bones. I had no one to talk to. I was so lonely that I would find myself wanting to go to work to keep from thinking of crazy things. I began to pray that God would give me a companionship, someone just to talk to and keep a conversation. But it never happened. So finally I realized that no one was coming, and life is what I make it.