

The
WAY
to
WIN

Coaching & Developing MEN
IN MATTERS OF *Life & Faith*

JEFF LITTLE

The Way to Win

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CONTENTS

<i>Foreword</i>	6
<i>Introduction</i>	9
Section 1: The Winning Lifestyle—Personal Development	17
1 I Want More for You Than from You	19
2 Everyone Needs a Coach	27
3 Rhythm vs. Balance	35
4 The Value of Rest	43
5 How Do We Live a Significant Life/Leave a Legacy?	53
Section 2: The Winning Fundamentals—Spiritual Foundations	61
6 How Can I Have a Relationship with God?	63
7 How Do I Change and Begin My New Life in Christ?	73
8 What Does God Want from Me?	81
9 How Do I Hear from God?	89
10 How Can I Experience God’s Presence Every Day?	97
11 Where Has God Placed Me?	105
12 What Is the Goal of the Christian Life?	117
Section 3: The Winning Playbook—Character Development	125
13 The Hardest Person to Lead	127
14 The Character Test	135
15 Shattered Dreams, Broken Lives	147
16 The Power of Sex	155
17 Unrighteous Appetites	163
18 The Spiritual Head of the Home	173

19	How to Lead in Your Marriage	181
20	How to Lead Your Kids When They're Small	189
21	How to Lead Your Teenagers/Young Adults	197
22	The God of Your Money	209
23	What's Up with the Tithe?	217
24	A Generous Spirit	229
Section 4: The Winning Culture—Values		237
25	Building a Winning Culture	239
26	The Two Types of Values	247
27	The Historic Christian Faith	255
28	Jesus	265
29	The Bible	275
30	The Holy Spirit	283
31	The Church	293
32	Spiritual Family	303
33	God's Mission	315
Section 5: The Winning Strategy—Discipleship		323
34	Did Jesus Have a Strategy?	325
35	How Does Discipleship Work? Part One	333
36	How Does Discipleship Work? Part Two	341
37	Lasting Legacy	349
38	What Do We Do Now?	357
<i>Notes</i>		363
<i>Answer Key</i>		365

FOREWORD

Perspective is one of the great advantages of getting older. Evaluated experiences lead to valuable insights, which allow you to form a greater understanding of the world. This is how we grow.

A new mentoring relationship helps us to see something we couldn't discover on our own. A challenging problem forces us to reconsider our standard approach. A great book inspires us to look at our lives and make meaningful changes.

These moments are a gift—especially in today's world, where we're surrounded by ever-increasing noise.

Life has always been filled with change, but it's never happened as often or as quickly as it does now. Marketing content and loud opinions have always clamored for our attention but never at this rate or through so many different mediums.

When a leader finds something truly valuable, it makes its way to the front of the line. It goes on the top of their stack of books. They can't stop talking about it with the people in their lives. They want others to experience the benefit they've received.

The gap between this kind of excitement and genuine life change is a clear plan. There have to be executable steps. It's not enough to get the information—you must know what to do with it. This requires both internal drive and a strong support system.

This is what transforms a brilliant game plan into a winning outcome. This is what I admire about this book you're holding in your hands. I've given my life to leadership—I know the excitement that results from inspiring principles and compelling ideas. I've seen it firsthand in boardrooms, auditoriums, classrooms, and churches all over the world.

Closing the gap between information and action is challenging in every setting, but this is especially difficult for men in the church. They know they're supposed to participate, but they don't know what to do.

They know what to do at work; they know what to do in the gym; they know what to do when they're spending the weekend on their hobbies—but they desperately need practical help in matters of life and faith.

As coaches, our job is to prepare and inspire people to succeed in whatever they set their hands to.

I first met Jeff Little when he was a young leader at a pastors' event. He was eager to learn and grow in his leadership. Through serving his church and working practically to develop leaders, he's developed insights and proven practical steps that have had a lasting effect on the lives of many men.

Now, he's taking this next step by providing us with clear and practical insights that can make a significant impact on those you influence.

Life is not a game, but I do believe it's possible to win in life.

Not because you're making someone else lose but because you're competing with yourself to become the best version of who you are. You're reaching your maximum potential and experiencing the life God created you to live.

John Maxwell

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Introduction

**THE GREATEST THING ABOUT SPORTS IS YOU PLAY TO WIN
THE GAME . . . WHEN YOU START TELLIN' ME IT DOESN'T
MATTER, THEN RETIRE. GET OUT!
— HERM EDWARDS**

*Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs,
but only one person gets the prize? So run to win!*
1 Corinthians 9:24 NLT

I love to compete.

I love to work hard and give my absolute best effort toward a worthy cause. I believe competition is always more meaningful in the context of a team. Independent of the final score, there's incredible value in the process.

It reveals your ability to respond to pressure and adversity.
It forces you to confront your weaknesses.
It provides opportunities for growth.
It can forge strong bonds of team chemistry.

But Herm Edwards and the apostle Paul were both right—it's not just about the journey. In the end, you play to win.

But what happens when you don't know the rules?
How can you win if you can't see the scoreboard?
What if your teammates understand even less than you do?

All of these scenarios are incredibly frustrating. I know this because I've experienced them firsthand.

THE WAY TO WIN

When my oldest daughter was five years old, she joined a youth soccer league. They were looking for a coach. I knew “futbol” was the most popular sport in the world, but I didn’t know the rules. It wasn’t part of my East Texas upbringing. But I wanted to help the girls, so I agreed to jump in and coach.

They knew even less than I did.

It quickly became apparent they were far more interested in taking pictures, eating halftime snacks, and chasing butterflies than they were about soccer.

I started to lose it. The message was not registering. It wasn’t getting through. So, I talked slower. I tried to make it as simple as possible:

This is a ball. The goal is to prevent the other team from kicking the ball in our goal and to kick the ball into their goal.

Now repeat it back to me. What’s the goal?

What? No. It’s not time to go to the bathroom.

Let’s get in a line and each take a turn kicking the ball in the goal.

Got it? Good.

Come back—you don’t have a ball.

You get the idea. It was more than a little frustrating.

Eventually, the lightbulb went on, and the girls understood what they were trying to do. By the end of the year, each of them had scored a goal. They were proud of what they accomplished. They knew the objective, they grew in their ability, and they made clear progress in their development.

At this point, you’re probably wondering, *What does this have to do with me?*

Great question.

INTRODUCTION

I'm not just a former soccer coach; I'm also a pastor. I've worked with men for decades. And let's just say, little girls aren't the only ones who get distracted by things that don't matter.

Here's why this is so important: There may not be a lot of scoring in soccer, but at least the rules are clearly defined. We can all see the scoreboard. We know what has to happen in order to win.

This explains why men often struggle with church. It seems more like chasing butterflies than putting the ball into the net and bringing home the championship trophy.

Over the years, I've tried all kinds of programs designed to reach men, from pancake breakfasts to themed weekend retreats. The lasting impact was often underwhelming because real life didn't create many opportunities for them to apply the things they were talking about.

They were willing to receive coaching and help in the spiritual areas of their lives, but most of them had no idea how to honestly evaluate their progress or to connect the dots between the Bible and what they did every day.

So, we got rid of all of our programs and started from scratch. In order to help them win, men needed to understand what they were trying to do. The goal wasn't the transfer of information. The goal wasn't another program or meeting in their already busy schedule.

The goal was to help them win in the areas of life they cared about the most.

We looked at the kinds of things men needed to be successful:

- What caused them to feel like they weren't winning at home?
- How could we help them honestly assess their level of maturity?
- Could they be developed in their professional careers through a greater understanding of God's Word?
- Was it possible to maintain integrity with their finances, stay faithful in their marriage, and train each of their children to have a genuine relationship with God?

THE WAY TO WIN

- What would it take to make spiritual concepts and principles make sense to them in a tangible way?
- How could we help them measure their progress?
- What areas of their lives were underdeveloped because they'd never been coached?

Most of the men we worked with had considerable success in one area of their lives. Depending on which scoreboard they were looking at, they felt like a winner. The problem was—like most of us—they tended to spend all their time and energy where they were winning at the expense of the more challenging areas.

WE WANTED TO MAKE THEM RICH WHERE THEY WERE POOR.

We wanted to show them the way to win.

When the NFL season is over, only one team has won the Super Bowl. We recognize them because they're given the privilege of lifting the Lombardi Trophy, named after the winning head coach of the first Super Bowl and one of the most influential leaders in the history of sports.

Vince Lombardi said, "Winning is a habit. Unfortunately, so is losing."¹

In other words, winning and losing are not random or arbitrary. There are things winners and losers do that directly contribute to the outcome.

Before we go any further, I want to clarify a few things.

First, life is not a game. However, on multiple occasions, the Bible uses competitive sports metaphors to demonstrate the discipline and training necessary to grow and become everything God created you to be.

We can't work or earn our way into a relationship with God. It can only be received as a gift. But once we've received this gift, we can apply the

INTRODUCTION

same effort and training an athlete uses to make the most out of their God-given ability. This is a critical distinction.

The things we care about most—our identity, our purpose, our relationship with our wife and our kids—are far more important than a game. We have to learn how to win in these areas. The earliest followers of Christ were known as “the Way” because of the distinct way they walked with God. This is *the Way* we’re after.

Second, a relationship with God or a commitment to the Christian life does not mean you’re always going to win. Life is filled with challenges, adversity, loss, grief, and all kinds of pain. Each of these provides the opportunity to develop our character. This is why James 1:2-3 tells us to consider it pure joy whenever we face trials. It’s not the trials—it’s what the trials produce in us.

The Way to Win is not a fail-proof formula to avoid loss. It’s a journey to a deeper relationship with God. And yet, Jesus Himself promised to produce fruit (growth) in our lives as we walk with Him.

Very few of us would choose losing over winning, but there are more opportunities to learn and grow from our failures than from our successes. In other words, there is no losing. There’s only winning or learning.

Third, our competition is not with our neighbors, our co-workers, our friends, our siblings, our parents, or anyone else. Our competition is with our own selfish nature, our fear, our pride, the ungodly influences of cultural narratives that don’t agree with God’s Word, and anything else that contributes to our unwillingness to become the person God created us to be.

And finally, we’re not looking to make anyone else lose in order to make ourselves win. In fact, it’s not even about us. As we’ll soon discover, the way to win comes through putting the goals and the needs of the team above your own.

THE WAY TO WIN

In fact, the highest level of winning isn't about you; it's about helping someone else win. You don't have to hit the game-winning shot to be a champion. These moments are only possible because of the unseen contribution of teammates who worked hard and did their part at practice, in the film room, developing a game plan, and from the bench.

I have three daughters and a son, so I didn't just coach soccer. I coached my son in American football—the kind I grew up with, that gives men the opportunity to exert their will every play along the line of scrimmage.

One day, a young man came out to join the team. He'd never played before. His mom brought him out to the field and kindly informed the coaches he was going to be the quarterback. We told her we were willing to coach her son, but like everyone else on the team, he did not have the right to choose his own position.

If every member of the team gives maximum effort and takes responsibility to offer their gifts and abilities for the sake of the team, the outcomes are extraordinary. This holds true in both football and life.

Ephesians 4:16 says that when God's people are connected to Jesus, they grow and become more loving as each person does their part.

This book has been designed for the context of a team. It's not a class or a program. It's not about the transfer of information. It's not a life hack, a TED talk, or a how-to video on YouTube. It's less about knowing and more about becoming.

It's designed to be experienced in the context of relationships. There are 38 chapters broken down into five unique sections. The chapters build on one another.

Some of you may be reading this on your own—don't hear what I'm not saying. I believe you will still benefit greatly from this process.

INTRODUCTION

Even if you're studying this on your own, don't keep it to yourself. Along the way, talk about the things that stand out to you with the people closest to you (a friend, your spouse, or a roommate). This is how we change—not just what we think but how we actually live.

Think of it like a playbook, or a manual for scaling a mountain. The information is valuable, but having someone to walk you through it and apply it to your life is transformational.

I've seen it happen over and over. A group of guys start as strangers and end up as a team. Lifelong friendships are formed. Families are transformed. Businesses are revitalized. Churches are strengthened. Cultures are changed.

My prayer for you is that you'll experience this same development in the areas of life you care about the most. I'm praying for you, standing with you, and cheering you on.

SAMPLE

SECTION 1

The
Winning
Lifestyle

Personal Development

SAMPLE

1

I Want More for You Than from You SAMPLE

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when someone asks, “How have you been?”

Most of us respond with some form of “busy,” “crazy,” or we say nothing because we’re stuck trying to find a place to begin describing all the things we’re juggling. It also makes us feel important. And most guys compete at nearly everything, so we like the idea that we’re doing more than most.

We tell people we’re busy because we *are* busy.

I can’t think of one responsible, mature man who is sitting around waiting for something to do. Maybe they’re out there, but I’ve never met them.

I know hundreds of men who are working hard, being responsible, building their career/business, while trying to lead their family, invest

THE WAY TO WIN

in their children, eat well and exercise regularly, grow spiritually, and check off the items on their bucket list.

These guys can't seem to find the time to do everything they're passionate about. I know these kinds of men because I am one.

There have been times at the end of a frantic day when I've thought, *I'll sleep when I'm dead*. You probably don't say it out loud, but you've at least thought it.

The last thing we need is another unproductive distraction on the schedule. Between career demands, family calendars, and the time left to chase our dreams, no one wants another vague meeting invite popping up on their phone.

From the time we wake up in the morning until we go to sleep at night, somebody wants something from us. Every day we're inundated with thousands of requests for attention, and marketers are getting bolder and more intrusive as this battle intensifies.

Time is a limited resource—and we all get the same amount every day. If we're really honest, some of us do more with it than others. But every one of us can learn to be more productive and intentional with the time we have.

Your time is one of the most valuable resources you've been given, and I want to both honor and respect your time. Life is too short to waste time, kill time, or spend time on things that don't matter.

What we all want is to invest our time—to intentionally direct it toward experiences that produce dividends and compound interest in our lives.

This sounds obvious, but it amazes me how easy it is to miss.

Without careful consideration, even the most committed among us can live at the mercy of deadlines and meeting notifications while missing out on the very things capable of producing the results we're truly longing for.

I WANT MORE FOR YOU THAN FROM YOU

But once you begin to experience the benefits of consistent obedience and prioritizing wise decisions, you won't give it up. You'll move other things out of the way.

When we find something valuable that helps us accomplish the things that matter most, we don't let go of it.

This is the idea behind the approach of this book.

Our culture perpetuates the idea of the self-made man—the strong, silent loner who overcomes every obstacle to change the world, from John Wayne in the Wild West to John McClane taking down Hans Gruber in *Die Hard*.

Heroes don't need help—a real man is strong enough to take on the whole world by himself. Maybe this works in action movies, but real life doesn't usually work this way.

You don't have to do this alone.

By the second chapter of the Bible, God tells the first man that it's not good for him to be alone. This applies to more than finding a wife. We're made for relationships, a band of brothers, a team where we can accomplish far more together than we could on our own.

SUPERSTARS BREAK RECORDS, BUT TEAMS WIN CHAMPIONSHIPS.

Barry Sanders was the greatest running back I've ever seen, but he never won a championship.

Charles Barkley was a superstar in three different cities, but his greatest joy was the summer he spent winning Olympic gold with the Dream Team.

It's true in business. Steve Jobs was a genius, but he needed Steve Wozniak to build Apple. Bill Gates would not have achieved his success

THE WAY TO WIN

without the teamwork of Paul Allen and others. The idea of a single genius may sell books, but, with very few exceptions, it's simply not true.

This kind of greatness isn't built in a day. Anything worth doing takes time. Research and science show that the single greatest determining factor of personal development is whether the person believes they can and will grow.

Experts call this the growth mindset.² This is a great starting place, but I don't think we have to stop there.

You can manage your weaknesses. You can develop your strengths. And most important of all, you can become the person God created you to be. But you can't do it alone.

I've been around long enough to observe, experience, and attempt most of the ways that churches have tried to engage men.

Programs and strategies change—pancake breakfasts, themed retreats, sports leagues, service projects, Bible studies, book clubs, etc. Let me be clear: I'm deeply grateful and respect anyone who tries to serve others, make disciples, and add value to men.

I created this book to be a give, not a take. This is not another box to check on your to-do list. I'm not trying to get something from you—I want to add value to you.

This isn't about trying harder to be spiritual. It's not about giving back. It's not about philanthropy or trying to be a good person.

I know if men will become who God created them to be, in the long run they'll experience fulfillment in their souls, their families will benefit, their companies will be more successful, their neighborhoods will improve, and the world will be different.

God is supremely generous. When He asks us to do something, He always has our greatest good in mind—even when we can't see it.

I WANT MORE FOR YOU THAN FROM YOU

This is the reason you were created. This is winning in life. This is what you're going to care about when you come to the end of your life and wonder, *Did my life matter?*

I believe many men are frustrated with their spiritual lives because they've lost sight of Jesus' original goal. They've confused the pursuit of historical, cultural, or traditional information with the simple day-to-day life with Jesus. It goes beyond Sunday morning to impact who we are every day.

One approach prepares you to take a test on doctrine and historical facts about our faith; the other shows you how to practically love and serve your family, develop your character, influence those around you, and make disciples.

They're not the same thing.

We understand development when it comes to sports, our careers, our hobbies, and even our personal lives. There are tangible goals we can shoot for. And yet, when it comes to our spiritual lives, it often feels more elusive.

The biblical word for development is "discipleship." And in the mind of Jesus, it wasn't nebulous or esoteric. It was clear. Disciples pick up their cross, lay down their lives, love God, serve others, and build the Kingdom. It's more than a class and the collection of information. It's an invitation to a different way of living.

We're not just going to read about it, think about it, and talk about it—we're actually going to do it.

Jesus is really smart. The incredible thing about this approach is that the benefits aren't confined to one area of your life. Becoming a better follower of Jesus is so much bigger than understanding what the preacher is talking about during a church service.

THE WAY TO WIN

Spiritual development strengthens your soul. It forms you into the kind of man your wife is looking for, equips you as a father, strengthens the relationships with the other men in your life, and even produces servant leadership, which often results in promotion and career advancement.

You can do this—not because you're perfect, come from the right background, or have all the answers. All you need to be is willing. If you'll commit and agree to follow even when it gets difficult, you can experience it for yourself.

SAMPLE

Discussion Questions

1. What has been the greatest obstacle to development in your life?
2. Name one area you want to develop either in your professional life, as a husband, or as a father.
3. Would having trusted friends help make an impact in your development? How?

Leadership Challenge

- Make the group meetings a priority.
- Do the reading and participate in the discussion.
- Get to know the guys in the group.