

"The spark of inspiration you need!" – Craig Groeschel

RELENTLESS

FUEL YOUR PASSION AND FULFILL YOUR MISSION

PURSUIT 

BEN COOLEY

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transforming lives together

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FRUSTRATION IS MY MOTIVATION

Someone came into my office last week and said, “Ben, I can tell you are frustrated.”

Most of the time, we use the word *frustrated* in a negative sense. Certainly the frustration I was feeling was negative at that moment. You might be frustrated with your business, your organization, your marriage, or your children. Frustration can dominate your thinking. Everything is aggravating when seen through the lens of frustration.

Nobody really wants a frustrating life. We all naturally want to have easy relationships. We all want to have ease in our businesses, homes, and careers.

But I want to introduce you to a new perspective on frustration because I believe it is one of the greatest gifts in your life.

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Frustration is the precursor to innovation. Frustration can birth vision. Sometimes it is frustration—not necessity—that is the mother of invention. Frustration is a gift.

Here's a word from entrepreneur Jordan Schrandt about the frustration that led to what became a hugely successful business: "When I started realizing the truth about natural living, most of which is covered up or marginalized in American culture, I was blown away by the lack of truth that existed. I was tired of the lack of a prevailing voice in our culture that proclaimed truth about health ... and I decided to show up and be a part of that voice. Educating, inspiring, and empowering our generation with how to care for their bodies and their families is my passion."

Frustration is the precursor to innovation.

But frustration needs to be asked certain questions. The people who learn the ability to linger when frustrations arise—to pause, to look frustration in the face and ask these questions—those people start something that matters.

Think about it. There are frustrations littered throughout humanity. Some are more recent, like the frustration we had that our car phone had a cable connected to the car, which meant you couldn't take the phone with you when you got out. Also, the phone was way too big.

Someone sat with frustration and asked it some questions. Isn't there a way to detach the car phone from the cable? Can't we miniaturize these things so I can slip one into my pocket? What stands in the way of making this situation better, and what can we do about these challenges?

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I admire the late Josephine Cochrane. In the late 1800s Josephine was frustrated every night when her servants washed her china dishes. It took such a long time, and inevitably breakages would happen.

She had to cope with the frustration, the irritation, the “pain,” of broken dishes. Josephine sat and listened to that frustration, sat opposite it at her well-worn table, and asked questions of her frustration. And thankfully frustration coughed up its secrets, and Josephine Cochrane came up with the concept of the dishwasher.¹

Many of us never think about how someone had to encounter frustration in order for us to enjoy something we now thank the Lord Jesus for every day: our children loading and emptying the dishwasher for us. (Hey, I do it. I know you do too!) We take for granted the work, the pioneer, and even the frustration behind it all, but that frustration led to something amazing.

Thomas Edison also sat across the table from frustration. He, like everyone else around the world at that time, had to sit in the dark every night, dealing with open flames in his home. It frustrated him, but as he interrogated his frustration, what came back was an incredible idea. One might say he had a “light bulb moment.” His illumination came because he deliberately sought a response from frustration.²

Frustration is the precursor to innovation. So it was with my friend Erin Rodgers, who is one of the greatest communicators I have ever met. I’ve known Erin for many years. Her husband serves on the board of Hope for Justice, and Erin is a world-class team builder in a wellness company. Her use of social media in building a team is unprecedented. When I interviewed Erin, she had some

wonderful insights into how frustration can lead to innovation. Here's what Erin shared.



The start of my career journey was fairly ordinary. While my husband was in law school, I was working in the pharmaceutical industry. I kind of hated my job, but it allowed us to avoid taking on debt for his education. We determined early on that, except for our house, we would stay out of debt as a family. My job wasn't a great fit for me, but it was a great fit for our lives at that time.

After I turned twenty-eight, I went through a season of intense Bible study. During that time I very clearly heard God call me out of pharmaceutical sales and into an inner-city high school to teach math. Suddenly I had to choose between a job I hated that was fantastic in terms of income and flexibility and a job I thought I would love that offered a fraction of the salary and no flexibility whatsoever.

My heart broke for those inner-city kids. The thought that I might be the only adult who spoke kindly to a child that entire week compelled me to take the plunge. My years in that school were a precious time in my life. It was before we had our own kids, so I had a lot of love to give in the classroom.

I went from visiting physicians' offices to sell them on products to teaching in a classroom to sell students on algebra.

After four years we had our first child, and I began to transition out of teaching full time. Then we had another child. I ended up being able to stay home with our two children.

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Now, that would be an ideal situation for some people. But I found out very quickly that I am not wired to be a stay-at-home mom. It was definitely not my sweet spot. I'm way more of an achiever, in that I need other things and other people to encourage me, and babies don't do that at all.

I guess I was unknowingly searching for a new way to achieve while also taking care of our family's needs. There came a time when our kids were not healthy, so I set my mind to solving small problems in my house and dove into the world of essential oils. I first got excited about what they could do for our family—solving “mom problems” for the small people in our home, supporting things like better sleep, stronger immune systems, and happier attitudes.

I quickly created a community around essential oils. It was mostly online, but I was so glad to connect people with common concerns. So many people had the same small problems I'd been able to overcome for my kids with these oils.

I started talking about the solutions and products I'd found, and it snowballed from there. Now it's a huge network where we get to help solve some problems of tens of thousands of people every day.

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You could say that my entire story involves frustration. Originally I was frustrated that my kids weren't well. Then my frustration grew because of some people wanting answers to come to them instead of looking for solutions themselves.

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The crazy thing is that frustration in one area of our lives has caused us to grow in ways that actually helped us get through difficult times in other areas of our lives. Funny how that has worked out.

The chief frustration in my life has been when people want me to solve their problems for them. Hey, I'm happy if something I've said solves someone's health dilemma. But I don't want to be everybody's answer guru. I'd much rather equip people to go find the answers for themselves. I'd prefer to show people that they had the ability to solve their own problems all along.

When I'm talking with people who are considering joining my team, I like to say, "You don't need me. Not really. I'm not going to be your problem solver. That's not my job. But I will give you tools. I will show you how you can do it and point you in some directions. And then you can decide if you really want to solve your own problems or not."

I'm interested in having self-solvers on my team. I get frustrated with people who just want to be handed everything. It turned out, years later, that a decision to look for self-solvers is what led our team to be more successful than I imagined.

I have found that leadership is not what people expect it to be. Some people think a leader is the one who goes around directing the way others do their work. I don't agree with this. I'd much rather equip people to be independent thinkers and come up with their own creative solutions.

When someone asks me a question, I could answer them outright. But that's not truly serving the other person. I prefer to say, "You have a question about this? Awesome. Let me talk

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that out with you. Let's unpack it so you can see that you didn't need me to give you the answer. You had the answer already."

I think really good leaders equip other people to realize that they have it within themselves to figure it out. Practically speaking, it's a whole lot easier and safer to say "I don't know, but let's see if we can find the answer" than it is to try to know all the answers. There's a huge freedom in saying "I don't know." I don't want to feel as if I have to be everything for everybody all the time. That's just being bossy. And I don't want to be bossy.

I want people to be frustrated that they don't know the answer, and I want that frustration to be their motivation to go find out.

One question that has guided my leadership style is this: "Do you want to be an employee or an entrepreneur?" Whether I ask them outright or I observe the way they're behaving, the contrast between these two dispositions will help me understand people's true ability to reach their goals. What I've found is that a lot of people really do want to be an employee. They want the boss to say, "Go do this. Sign up for this. Take these notes. This is how you write this. This is what you say." Employees are great, and the world needs lots of them.

But that's not me, and that's not whom I find achieving the most success on my team. The people I want to work with are those who will watch me do something and then say, "OK, I got it. I'm good. Let me run with it and do it my way."

My strategy is to be like the Wizard of Oz. I like to peel back the curtain a little and show people what's happening. Sometimes

they run off and do something totally differently than how I would do it. That used to bother me a lot. But then I realized it was what I'd been wanting the whole time. I had to say, "Oh, wait. That's actually good. No, you're fine. Go do your thing."

It's possible that their own way will fail—but that's fine too. They'll learn from that failure if they're really going to succeed. And maybe they'll invent a new way that's even better than how I'm doing it, and I'll start doing it their way!

Let Leaders Arise on Their Own

No matter how many people you have on your team, only a fraction of them will ever rise up as leaders who really succeed. And you don't know who it will be.

I am hopeful for everyone who joins our organization, and I desire success for each person—both in their health choices and in the industry. I firmly believe everyone can be successful. Over the years I've had many friends link arms with us. Some have caught the vision and run with it. Others didn't have the same goals for themselves that I saw for them, and that is hard.

I concentrate now on loving my people well and keeping an eye out for those on my team who love the product. Those are the ones who will become leaders. I have learned to quit pushing people into a role of leadership or into business. I had to quit dreaming for them. If they're not yet willing to dream and they're not yet able to see an opportunity, I cannot open their eyes for them. There is far more success when I let leaders emerge on their own.

When Things Get Difficult

I talked earlier about how my frustration led to a practice of looking for team builders who didn't sit around waiting on me to give them the answers and how that led to them increasing our team's success. Here's what I meant.

I'd have to say that 2018 was the hardest year for me. I was dealing with a number of personal issues that had me feeling up and down already, but then in July my husband and I found out I was pregnant. This was a shock, as we already had two active children, ages five and seven, and we had considered ourselves done having kids. However, the surprise finally wore off, and right as I was starting to feel like myself again, I miscarried.

It was a really hard time for our family. And while that year strengthened us in a lot of ways, I'm thrilled it is behind us.

During that time I was overwhelmed. I was neck deep in running a successful business with tens of thousands of people on my team. You should've seen my inbox, and don't get me started about the social marketing work I was doing. I was loving life, being that busy and involved. But when all this fell down on us, I couldn't keep up with it all. I had to step back.

I was concerned that if I did pull away, the whole thing would come to a screeching halt. That was kind of unrealistic, now that I think about it, but I had the fear that any drop in my own involvement would mean a catastrophic collapse of my whole organization. I had to find out whether I had done a good job as leader and had put systems and people in place that would keep us successful if I was not 100 percent on my game.

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I found that I had already entrusted people on my team with leadership. I hadn't intentionally done this as a way of taking care of the organization in case I wasn't present—though I probably should have! But through my style of leading, I had cared for my team well, so in a moment when I had to step back, I was able to say, “Hey, guys, I gotta deal with some stuff. I'm going to go quiet for a while. Can you guys step in and do what needs to be done?” And they did. Beautifully.

Sometimes I didn't even have the energy to tell my team I was having to duck away. I was just suddenly gone, and they knew what was going on and were able to step in.

If you empower the people around you and gather to yourself people who don't need you sitting over them telling them what to do, you will build a robust leadership structure that can carry on quite nicely without you.

Now, if people want to have everything fall apart if they're not there holding the reins, they should definitely not empower their people. But strong organizations that can endure the hard times are those that can function well if the primary leadership is not there—even for an extended time, as in my case.

I also realized that my absence was good on so many levels. For one thing, it showed my team leaders that they were every bit as good at doing these things as I was, which encouraged them even more.

It was also good for me to start modeling more of what I had been teaching others. I came to see that if I'm teaching how to thrive with family, then sometimes I needed to step away from the business to go thrive with my family. If I was teaching them

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to find a passion outside their business, then at times I really needed to be off pursuing other passions besides growing the business. It wasn't my intention to start modeling that in 2018, but events forced me to do so, and it was a powerful message to my team.

My original motivation years ago was a frustration with my kids' health. That led to me creating a business selling essential oils, and my frustration with the "employee" attitude led me to gather a team of people who were, basically, already leaders. That intentional direction had a quite unlooked-for outcome for me: those people stepped even further into their leadership roles just when I needed them to have my back. If I had surrounded myself with people who needed to be told what to do, they never could've taken up the slack for me when I had to be away. Frustration was my motivation, but it also became my salvation in that season.

To Those Tempted to Quit

If you're thinking of quitting and you confess this to a business leader, the most likely response will be something along the lines of finding endurance or pressing through to the other side. Perhaps even something like "You should never quit."

But I'm not sure that's the right answer. It's definitely not the answer I would give. I mean, I've quit several things in my life. I quit my job as a pharmaceutical sales rep, after all. A few years later, I quit my job teaching math in an inner-city school. I quit being a full-time stay-at-home mom. I never really thought

of those as quitting, though, at least not in the sense of running away from something when it got difficult.

There are seasons when we have to *readjust*, and I think that's really healthy. Some things I've done were a good fit for a time but then were not. Why keep doing something that isn't working if there's no compelling reason to keep doing it? If there is a compelling reason, then maybe you need to sit down and evaluate what is making you want to quit. Maybe you need to adjust to your situation and pursue the same goal in a different way. Maybe it's time to shift to a new goal.

I once read a book about the walls we run into in our lives. Some walls are made of things we need to keep pounding against until we find a way to break through them. Other walls are going to break our bones, so we ought to change our paths. No one can tell you which kind of wall you're up against. You have to determine that for yourself.

Many times the thing you want to quit doing is actually a very good and noble thing, but it's simply not the right time for you to be doing it. That can make the decision tough. Yes, this is a good thing, but is it going to get us to our dreams?

If you're facing a wall right now, ask yourself how badly you want what's on the other side of it. That answer may be different at different times in your life, even for the same goal. Something you wanted badly ten years ago may not matter as much now. Your priorities may have shifted, and that's OK. It's good to let go of goals that don't need to be at the top of your list any longer. You don't have infinite energy or time, so make sure you're spending what you do have on the goals you most treasure.

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If that means quitting on one or more goals to pursue your highest one, give yourself permission to do that.

But if you find that the goal on the other side of the wall is in fact what you most want to reach, then keep working to get there. Bring in new people; get new ideas; surrender all your old approaches; be willing to change tactics entirely. The goal, after all, is the goal. If you have to change strategies or paths in order to get there, that's OK.

You may decide that the thing on the other side of this wall is what you want, but your heart is tired, your head is weary, and you just need a nap. But after that nap you're going to power through that wall.

Reevaluating is important, though. Some paths are just not right for you. Not for now or not forever. I was not meant to be a pharmaceutical rep for twenty years. That was not my calling. But we needed the money at that time in our lives, and I could have stuck with it if I'd had to. I'm so glad I didn't. I'm so glad I listened to the voices that were saying, *Hey, you'd be a great teacher. You'd be really great at helping people understand things, and you also have a gift for mathematics.*

Where are your dreams? Where are you trying to go? Don't quit just because it's hard or because you've hit a wall or you need a nap. But definitely take the time to stop and reevaluate the direction you're headed. It's never a bad time to ask yourself whether you're still pointed in the right direction. If you determine that you are going the right way but there is a wall in the way, focus on how you're going to get through (or around or under or over) that wall.

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When you reevaluate, you may find that your life is coming together like a puzzle. I mean, I can look at the medical science I learned from the pharmaceutical job and see how that enabled me to perceive how essential oils were working inside the body. That made me a great proponent of the product and a great teacher and educator. The science also told me what I never wanted to put in my body or in my children.

The science and math helped me as a teacher, and the teaching in turn gave me the confidence to stand in front of a group and present something. Now I regularly stand before thousands of people and talk to them about health and wellness.

Every step in my life got me to where I am today—even the things I “quit” and the hard times I had to walk through. Every one of those played a role in where I am.

Look at your own life. Can you see how the major events and experiences—even the hardships—have sculpted you into the person you are now? Can you see how they have given you certain passions and made you rise up to defend certain causes? The good you’re doing in the world now is a result of what you’ve been through, good and bad, and even the things you’ve stopped doing.

Friends in Other Places

I have learned that you have to have some really close friends you don’t work with.

For one thing, if you’re really successful in your business, it’s great to have people in your life who don’t know you that

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way. They just know you as Erin who drives the car pool and is sometimes late. It really keeps you grounded, especially if you spend a lot of your time in circles where you're seen as the boss.

For another, having friends you don't work with can really help when you're not being terribly successful in business. They don't know you as that person who is crashing emotionally because she didn't hit her goal this month. They just know you as their favorite movie-loving friend.

If all your friends are your employees or your bosses or they are your trainers or team members, you may find yourself very lonely.

That was my experience a few years ago. I intentionally found friends who weren't in the business with me. I needed people I could be raw and real and silly with. Creating some space for that sort of friendship really helped me. It's with those people that I can go so much deeper.

As I look back over my career—my many careers—I see that frustration really has been my motivation. I still get frustrated, but in good ways. If I don't know how to do something, I love learning how to do it. I think adjusting to new technology has been one of my secrets not only of success but also of staying fresh and growing.

What are you frustrated about? Can it become something that motivates you to get up and do something about it? If you're an entrepreneur, your frustration probably has already spurred you upward and outward. Necessity is the mother of invention, but frustration is the mother of change.

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May frustration always propel you to create good in the world, and may you find peace in whom you have been made to be.



Frustration is not a quick fix. As we saw in Erin's story, it takes time. It takes energy. But instead of ignoring the problem or passing the buck, Erin and the others featured in this book considered their frustration a precursor to innovation. They lingered in the conversation. They committed. And many are the beneficiaries of their choices.

Frustration is a constant in your world. Accept it. You will encounter frustration at every stage of the journey. Consider it a gift that is trying to tell you exactly what innovation it has for you.

Momentum is fueled by both an acceptance of and an engagement with frustration. Don't get frustrated with frustration. Let the frustration be a helpful bit of coaching, letting you know to keep looking for the best way to do what you are trying to do. Sit down with frustration. Write the questions you want frustration to answer.

As I've said, the best leaders ask the best questions. But here's the corollary: the best entrepreneurs—the world changers—ask questions of *frustration*. They sit at that well-worn table until the job is done.

Kevin Kim understands the connection between pain and triumph. Kevin is an embodiment of a line in a poem: "The [lesson] you deliver may be very wise and true, / But I'd rather get my lessons by observing what you do."³ I'm so grateful he's spoken into this book:

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Think about the lives of some of the most beautiful and inspirational people you know and ask yourself whether a tree of that height and magnificence can dispense with seasons of harsh winters and storms. They didn't achieve their greatness by avoiding pain and suffering or even despite it—they achieved because of it.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., in his book *Strength to Love*, quoted a biographer of George Frideric Handel: “His health and his fortunes had reached the lowest ebb. His right side had become paralyzed, and his money was all gone. His creditors seized him and threatened him with imprisonment. For a brief time he was tempted to give up the fight—but then he rebounded again to compose the greatest of his inspirations, the epic *Messiah*.” Then Dr. King wrote, “The ‘Hallelujah Chorus’ was born, not in a sequestered villa in Spain, but in a narrow, undesirable cell.”⁴

King reminded us that our greatest achievements are inextricably linked to our greatest pains. Put another way, the cliché that nothing great is easy and nothing easy becomes great is actually true. Ask any leader, any artist, any person who has achieved, and that person will tell you that in the interval between initial failure and subsequent success, in the gap between who someone is and who he or she could be, is pain and suffering.

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As you read this, you may be staring frustration in the eyes. Like many others, you may be tackling the biggest frustrations and asking the really big questions: Why are children being exploited? What can we do to end poverty? How do we solve world hunger? How do we eradicate corruption? How do we mend a broken economy? How do we bring compassion back into capitalism? How do we address immorality in complex supply chains? How do we make financial markets fair? How do we solve the world's environmental crisis?

Maybe your biggest frustration is closer to home. Maybe it's something to do with your primary relationships or your living situation or your health.

What are you sitting around that table asking? What is your frustration?

All those years ago, when I walked out of that building in Manchester, something was different inside me. Oh, I'd heard many other people talking about legitimate and important causes around the world, but I'd never been moved to do something personally. That night I dared to ask, *What can I do about modern slavery?*

As I asked that question, I found answers beginning to come. Because I lingered.

The answers will come for you as well. I have learned to see frustration not only as a motivation to find solutions, not only as a precursor to innovation, but also as my friend.

I still have frustrations. I'm frustrated that there are still people trapped in slavery. I'm frustrated that our team is not yet large enough. I'm frustrated that we're not operating in as many countries as I would like. I'm frustrated that our income is not at the levels I want it to be.

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See how many “friends” are helping us to our goal?

The moment I lose my frustration is the moment I do the thing I should never do: settle. Settle for what I have. Settle for the impact we have made in the past. Settle for the status quo. Settle for the fact that some people remain enslaved.

Innovation cannot arise from settling. Nothing is created by just setting up camp where you are. You need momentum.

Start thinking about how your frustration can start bringing solutions.

Frustration is your greatest gift. It can be the precursor to innovation and the genesis of your life’s vision.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What frustration are you currently facing? What have you not fixed yet? Write down those frustrations.
2. What are you going to do about those frustrations?
3. Who in your world can help?