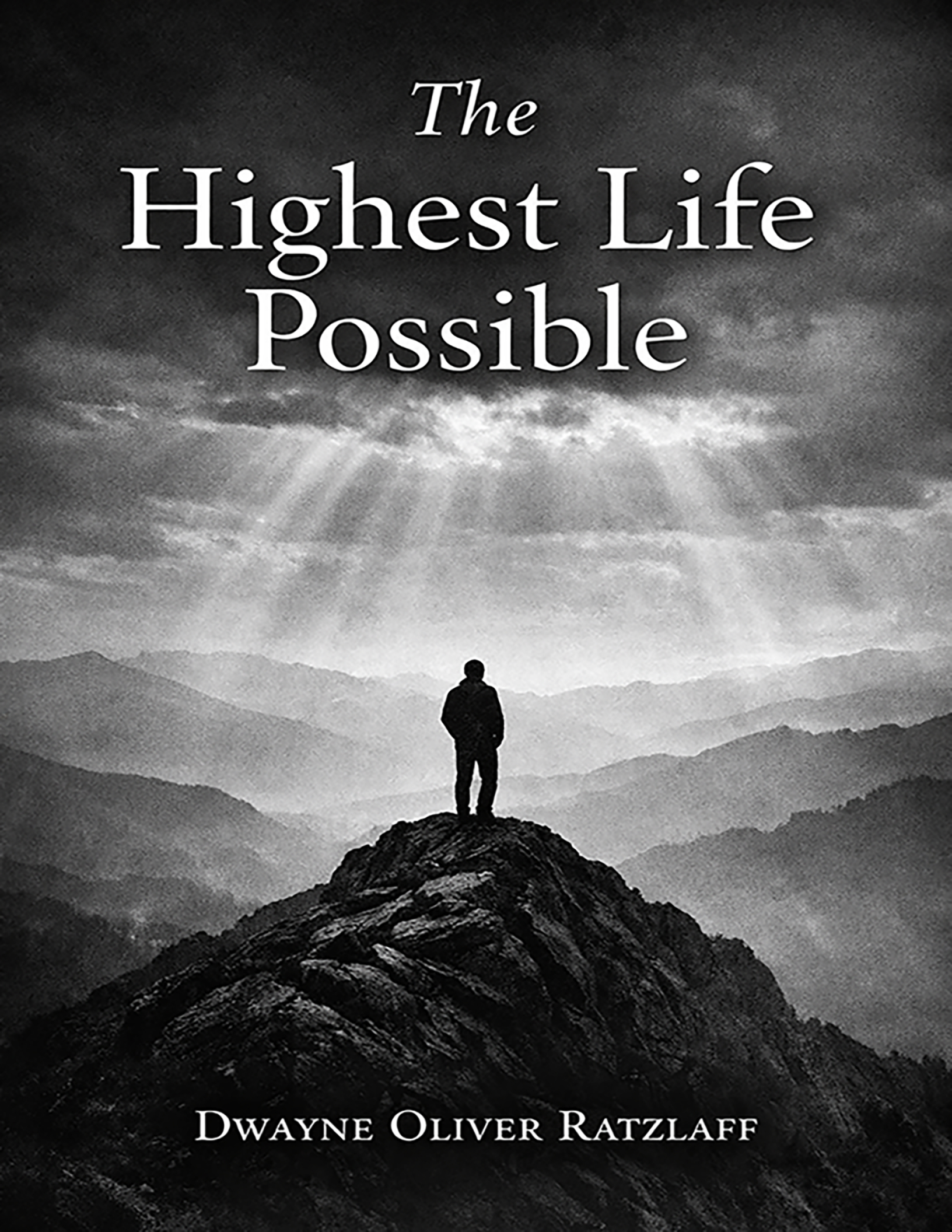
# *The* Highest Life Possible



Dwayne Oliver Ratzlaff

# THE HIGHEST LIFE POSSIBLE:
# A PERSONAL MEMOIR

**A memoir of spiritual discovery and the courage to follow God's call.**

**by**
**Dwayne Oliver Ratzlaff**

**2026**



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## Introduction

I wish I could say that the trajectory of my life has been onward and upward. That would not be true. Even more, I wish I could say that I have lived up to my purpose in life, in its entirety. That, also, would not be true. To be honest, I have had to course-correct more often than I care to admit. Nevertheless, this project is my genuine confession. I believe there is no such thing as failure, only learning. I have learned. I have learned - all to slowly. Yet, I have learned. This is a story of learning while pursuing my life purpose.

As I begin this memoir, here is a simple, genuine expression of my purpose in life. Of course, it took time and experience to craft it with this simplicity.

**To pursue fiercely, to present passionately, and to inspire creatively, "the highest life possible," first, in me, then, in every person, at every opportunity!**

As the reader will witness, I have written several life purpose statements over the years. Not surprisingly, there is a wonderful synchronicity within them, which reflects an important point. Life purpose is at the core of our identity. Yet, it is dynamic, ever evolving, in harmony with a person's talents, experiences and stage of life.

To great advantage, I have in my possession written journals from 1980 to 2025. Forty-five years of journals are my resource for this memoir. These journals record my "raw" experiences over this period. Some entries cause me to "wince," other entries cause me to "rejoice," as I relive the emotions of that moment or event in "real time." The advantage, of course, is that I am able to transcend memory. Therefore, I make abundant use of my journal entries!.

## Chapter 1 - Defining Moments

### Defining Moments

Four experiences riveted me and form the background to my life purpose. I return to the first three defining moments later in the memoir to provide vital context. The fourth is an intensive journal workshop and, fifthly, a watershed year in my life.

1. Conversion Experience
2. Call to Vocational Ministry
3. Filling of the Holy Spirit
4. Ira Progoff Intensive Journal Workshop
5. 1983, a Watershed Year

### Conversion at Sixteen Years of Age

The first is my conversion experience at age sixteen. It was in the summer of 1967. It occurred in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, at University Drive Alliance Church. From my journal:

> I recall vividly the period of my conversion although I do not recall the exact date. It was in the summer of 1967. It was a Sunday evening. My friend … picked me up in his car to go to church. On our way I suggested that because it was such a beautiful evening we should stay outdoors instead of attending church. He consented and started driving away from the church. I didn't feel right about the decision. I suggested that we should attend church after all. He consented again. He turned the car around and we drove to church. We walked in late because the service had commenced. The church was having special evangelistic services…. At the end of the message he (the Evangelist) gave an alter call. I walked forward and was counselled by the Evangelist himself. It was an emotional experience for me. A precipitating factor was the recent death of my grandfather on my mother's side. His death and funeral affected me deeply. The event forced me to think about my own spiritual condition…. I was 16 years of age…. I recall vividly the joy that came into my heart (in response to accepting Jesus), as well as the anticipation for the Lord's return.

That was my conversion experience.

I was baptized by immersion on April 21, 1968, at University Drive Alliance Church, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, by the Rev. Walter Boldt.

**Call to Vocational Ministry**

The second is my call to vocational ministry. Even with so many defining moments in my life, there is no particular event remembered that marks my “call” to vocational ministry. Yet, a growing and powerful realization beginning with my conversion that this is my “calling” - even to this day! It is true, that the influence of my home church, University Drive Alliance Church in Saskatoon, was instrumental in nurturing this deep sense of calling to vocational ministry! (Presently, Circle Drive Alliance Church.)

**Filling of the Spirit**

The third is my experience of the filling of the Spirit. While a senior student in the Master of Divinity program, Canadian Theological Seminary, Regina, Saskatchewan. From my journal, Thursday, March 13, 1974:

> I have become convinced that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is for me. As I read the Book of Acts I became convinced of it. The last few days I have been rejoicing and praising God in anticipation of the Holy Spirit Baptism. At approximately 15 minutes to 12 midnight I was sitting on the couch, listening to the Celebration of Hope tape. I was not in deep meditation but I was just waiting on Jesus. Suddenly, without any warning, the Holy Spirit (a power) entered me and my whole body quaked (as if electricity shot through my body), my heart rate increased greatly, and my mouth began to open. I believe I could have kept it from opening had I wanted to, but I didn’t resist. My mouth opened wide. I did not speak (anything). Just as suddenly my body relaxed.

At various times and places in my life, and in my journal, this record of the filling of the Spirit shows up as a reminder of what is possible when we passionately seek an encounter with God!

**Progoff Intensive Journal Workshop**

The fourth is an intensive journal workshop. I never realized how vital this workshop was to my vocational and spiritual journey until I revisited my journals. The workshop, offered primarily in the United States at the time, was for some inexplicable reason held at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Saskatoon, my home city. It was developed at Drew University in 1966 and popularized by Dr. Ira Progoff (1921-1998). It is offered to this day.

> Ira Progoff's Intensive Journal Process combines one of the oldest methods of self-exploration and expression--keeping a journal--with a structured format that enables you to get to know the inner core of your life on ever-deeper levels and gain a

> fuller perspective on where you are. The Intensive Journal Process also empowers you to take the action necessary to change the course of your life and unlock your hidden creative potential. This rich, insightful work is a treasure for all those involved in self-inquiry, artistic creation, and spiritual renewal. (amazon.ca)

The workshop changed the nature of journal-keeping for me. Journal-keeping became the single most important discipline of my vocational and spiritual life for the next forty-five years.

## 1983, A Watershed Year

The fifth is 1983, a watershed year in my life. 1983 encompassed the second and third intensive workshops of the Doctor of Ministry program at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky, as well as the International Conference for Itinerant Evangelists in Amsterdam, Netherlands, and the Progoff Intensive Journal Workshop (identified above) in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada.

Up to this point, I continue to grapple with the exact nature of my purpose. **More specifically, how to live it out**. My time is spent as an Evangelist for the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada and an Assistant Professor at Canadian Bible College in Regina, Saskatchewan. (CBC has since moved to Calgary, Alberta under the umbrella of Ambrose University.)

From my journal, January 24, 1983, at the end of the second intensive workshop on the campus of Asbury Theological Seminary.

> "I think that one of the great results of the D.Min. Program for me to date is that it has sensitized me to my humanness and the humanness of other persons. I purchased a book today called **The Pain of Being Human** by Eugene C. Kennedy. I feel that I am in touch with this dimension of being human. Kennedy writes, 'This is the suffering of the healthy person, as undramatic as it is inevitable, as common place as it is uncomfortable. It is the pain with a thousand private faces, the **pain that comes from just being human**.' The D.Min. process has put me in touch with life on a deeper level. More specifically, it has put me in touch with **my life on a deeper level**. It has been painful growth for me." (**The Wounded Healer**, by Henri Nouwen, recommended reading assigned to me, became a lifelong friend.)

A prayer from my journal, July 14, 1983,

Lord, you have filled me with spiritual nourishment.
You have confronted me with my sinfulness.
You have challenged me to deeper commitment.
Now lead me in the way you want me to go.
What is my calling?
Is it the work of itinerant evangelist?
Is it the work of a professor?
Is it both?
Is it something else?
What is my calling?
Lord, lead me in the way you want me to go.
Amen.

From my journal, July 15, 1983, at the Billy Graham Conference in Amsterdam.

> "Since God called me into ministry I have had a deep sense of what He (God) wanted me to do. **But now, though the call is as strong as ever, I seem to be floundering over the out-working of that call of God upon my life.** I am without deep conviction about the specific ministry God has for me. I am disturbed by it. I have an opportunity to develop itinerant evangelism with …… but the desire to work with him is almost non-existent. I want my ministry to develop freely. I think that I will be restricted to his style of evangelism if I join him on a full time basis. But that leaves me with teaching and a National Evangelist with the C&MA which has not developed. Have I placed my gift (the Lord's gift) on the shelf? Lord, I want to preach. I need clear direction."

Still at the B.G. Conference, Dr. Cho from Korea preached on the necessity of vision in ministry. In response, I reflected.

> Vision has been an integral part of my development. Vision has shaped my pastoral decisions. Vision has led me to reach beyond the visible. But, where is it now? What is my vision? Dear Lord, I don't know what you want me to do. The vision I once had is presently filled with doubts. Was it really your vision for me? Why has its strength dissipated? Why do I not know what you want me to do? **Am I now resisting a vision that you have imparted to me? Or was it simply my own? Lord, grant me understanding. I want your vision for my life!** (Journal: Sunday, July 17, 1983)

As I approach the end of the D.Min. Program, the process is reaching me at the deepest level. On September 14, 1983, I write in my journal:

> **"Lord, I desire a ministry of spiritual direction. But I need to be a pacesetter in the spiritual journey. I cannot take people where I**

**have not travelled. Lead me, Lord, into the deep treasures of the spiritual life. Be my guide. May I take others along."**

Also, the next day, I led the CBC Chapel service in Regina in the morning and in the evening the first class of **Maps of the Spiritual Life**. **Irresistibly, I am moving to the core of what is most important to me - not location, or exercise of preaching or teaching, but guiding people into the highest life possible, that is, through the ministry of spiritual direction.**

On October 14, 1983, I wrote a heart-felt assessment of my life purpose to date. I remember, this is toward the end of 1983, the year I described as a watershed year. This is what I reflected.

> I feel both sadness and joy in reflection upon this period. I feel the sadness of opportunities lost. I feel the sadness of relationships not fully developed. I feel the sadness of ministries prematurely cut short. I feel the sadness of people feeling let down by my departure(s).
>
> I feel the joy of participation in three unique ministries. I feel the joy of getting to know some very special people in Dartmouth and the investment these people made in my life. I feel the joy of the special relationships developed in Niagara Falls. I feel the joy of seeing old buildings taking on new shape and life. I feel the joy of seeing growth and vitality. I feel the joy of ministering and being ministered unto by the very special people at Canadian Bible College. It is a joy to be a part of their lives.
>
> But throughout these three unique and special experiences there is this **call**, this sense of conviction, this deep inner voice, for a ministry I do not as yet possess. From wherever this sense of call has come, it has had also a rich impact upon my life. It has led me to a deep sense of inner preparation for ministry. It has inspired me to cultivate, improve, build up my life. It has led me to be in preparation for this "future" ministry that hasn't materialized. The effects have been both positive and negative. Positively, this "sense of call" has developed my life. Negatively, it has hindered the deepening of relationships with significant persons. The result has been a rich, and yet, a conflicting experience.
>
> I feel that the time for decision has come. I must either give myself fully to what God has given me now as my "call" or give myself to this "call" that has been with me for eight years now, the call to a full time evangelistic ministry.
>
> There are two streams in me. One stream is to preach salvation in Christ. The other stream is to lead those already in Christ to deeper experiences

> of Him. I have a deep need for the streams to be one. I feel this deeply. I feel a need for an integration point. Wholeness and effectiveness are at stake.

At the conclusion of the **Maps** class the students surprised me with a "Companions in Growth 1983/1984" booklet in which each student shared the impact of the class on their spiritual journey. One student wrote,

> Dwayne:
>
> You don't know how important it has been for me to be involved in this group. It's important to be around people who are seeking to grow in the Lord. I used to think it was a bit strange to sit around candles and say the Jesus Prayer, yet the things that happened during those prayers revealed to me the areas of my life that needed to be changed. If I hadn't been involved in the group, I would not have been learning to center on Christ and hearing him to speak to me through our quiet times. Listening to God took on a totally different dimension for me and although what I heard wasn't always easy to accept and handle I had to because I also learned to obey. How can I tell you how exciting it's been to experience the joy of the Lord and to know that he, is there at our very being - a steady inward flowing. Don't ever think it is easy though. There are times when what you experience has to be shared because God has laid it strongly on your heart. You really have to learn God's trust and his love, because sometimes it can get pretty scary revealing yourself to strangers. But you know, Dwayne, as the group got to know each other better and began to experience God it didn't really matter anymore. I consider myself fortunate to have been included in the group and to have gotten to know you. I appreciate your desire to seek after the Lord, your open and sensitive spirit and your desire to see us all develop in the Lord. May the Lord continue to bless you and thanks for being a true servant of God. In Christ, …

**It is worth repeating - 1983 was a watershed year!**

It is the beginning of January, 1984. In a journal reflection, I look back on 1983, with real excitement!

> Lord, this past year has been so rewarding. The growth in my life has been significant. My ministry I think is expanding. Above all, I feel that you are developing a life message within me. I know that you have always been at work in this but I sense a dream beginning to unfold. The dream has taken unexpected turns but I am anticipating 1984 with a high degree of expectation. The journey is indeed an adventure. I praise you, Lord.

Also, in January of 1984, having completed a year so rewarding, I engaged in a dialogue with the Lord. The dialogue captured the depth of my love and gratitude to God.

Dwayne to the Lord:
I feel such deep love for you at this moment. I am at a loss for words to express the height, depth and breadth of this love. Surely you have placed this love within my heart. You have drawn me to yourself. You have filled me with love for you. Draw me more, Lord, draw me more. Cause me to come to you, dear Lord Jesus. You are my heart's desire. Everything else diminishes in significance in your presence. The exciting thing Lord is that the more I feel satisfied in you the more I long for you. I am both satisfied and hungering at the same time. I have you and yet I want more of you. Continue to draw me until I can take no more and when I can take no more increase my capacity to experience more of you. I love you, Lord.

The Lord to Me:
**You are very special to me. I am pleased with you. What you are experiencing is only the beginning. There are new stages to enter, new spiritual adventures to travel, and I will be within you, leading you into all of the inner riches of my life. Continue to seek me and I will be found by you.**