

PRELUDE

When did you wake up?

I think I first started waking up around the age of 41. That's when I realized the secrets of life are hidden for us along the way, like Easter Eggs. But you don't find them unless you keep your eyes open.

I'd just started my dream job. I knew it was a great place because the people were always sure to remind me how great they were. I'd left behind another city and a job that felt like family. But I now had a healthy salary increase and a lovely new office. Its walls were covered by massive wooden bookcases that engulfed my puny little library.

I was a boy trying to wear his father's suit and size-12 shoes.

After arriving, I was invited to a high-level meeting of people in my field from all over the nation. As our meetings began, I looked around the room and saw faces that were well-known and respected. But as they began to share the cutting-edge ideas, I noticed something odd. Nothing they said was new and little was innovative. In fact, most of it was stuff I'd been doing at my old job.

As I sat at that table having finally "made it to the big time", I felt the color drain from my face. It was all I could do to keep from mumbling out loud, "Is that all you got? Did I really leave people I loved and a place where I was valued for this?"

Every once in a while, we wake up. In the middle of our routines and distractions, life offers us the red pill of reality. Though we're tempted by the comfort of our blue-pillled illusions, we're startled by the inescapable truth that much of what we value is really just an illusion.

They call those red pills our "epiphanies" or our "Aha moments". That may sound exciting, but some are tough medicine to swallow. They often come during teachable moments when we're blindsided by hard truths.

It's during surprises like the one around that table where we realize we've been wasting a lot of time. Precious time, because time's the one thing you can never earn back. And with some lessons, you're lucky if you graduate with all your teeth intact.

When we're twenty, we're certain we know exactly what we want and how to get it. My young adult son and I have conversations where he tells me all his plans in elaborate detail. I bite my tongue, resisting the urge to point out the occasional holes in his logic. I know from experience he must choose the red pill himself.

It's dangerous to wake up a sleepwalker. Better just to nudge them away from the edge. Let them wake up on their own and learn the truth. And boy, do we learn.

We learn that we not only don't have all the answers at 20, we don't even know the biggest questions. That's not the 20-year-old's fault, and it's probably ok they don't listen to us. Life's most important epiphanies are better "caught than taught".

And life, my friend, is an efficient, ruthless teacher. Other teachers only leave red marks on papers. Life leaves scars.

One of our greatest surprises is that many things we fought so hard to escape in our youth – *family, home, faith* – are incredibly valuable. Simultaneously, we find much of what we sacrificed those things for, like success, notoriety, and wealth pay very minimal dividends.

You'd be correct to point out that these lessons are clichés, but don't discount them. Things often become clichés because they're universally true. However, they're evidently not common knowledge based on how people actually live. Sadly, most people act more like obsessed cats wasting their lives chasing shiny objects.

If you watch the results, you'll conclude that Satan himself must be operating the laser pointer in that game. While stories of lonely superstars and unsatisfied millionaires are worn-out tropes, people persist in chasing these same mirages of fame and money believing that they will be the exception to the rule.

We persist in chasing the allure life promises us like another cliché, the Prodigal Son story. In the end, he too returns home beaten and bloodied and longing for the warm embrace of family. We know the story too well, yet compulsively reach for the shiny objects.

Sound familiar? That's because we've all chased dumb dreams. We've all wandered way too far into the desert before noticing the oasis isn't real. No, it's not just you. It's every one of us, so don't beat yourself up.

Join the club. But don't get too comfortable there.

I believe someone is conspiring to point us in the right direction. Like the Easter eggs you hide for your kids, God hides the secrets of a great life in plain site for us to find. He's made them all pretty obvious, but some of them are so counterintuitive, we walk right past them...

To find life, give up your own.

Love your enemies.

Prioritize relationships over opinions.

Have courage and take risks.

Show strength through kindness.

When you recognize them, when *everyday epiphanies* reveal the hidden secrets of life, you must stash them in your basket quickly before they're snatched away. Because time will do that – it'll snatch them from right under your eyes. It will distract you with other shinier things that don't matter, while the real treasure lays visible for anyone with the good sense to grab it.

*“He has shown you, O man, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
But to do justly, to love mercy,
And to walk humbly with your God?”
– Micah 6:8*

God has hidden the eggs in obvious places and points us in their direction every day. The path is clear. With each year that passes, the fog of youth has been burned away in the burnished glare of reality.

The only question left unanswered now is, “Will you grab the lesson with both hands and put it in your basket?”

In the pages ahead of you are some of those Easter Eggs I've gathered so far. I'm going to dump my basket on the ground and let you take your pick of what I've collected. Trust me, there's some pretty tasty stuff in there.

But there are also many distractions around us, and the hurried pace of life causes us to run right past the most valuable stuff. These moments of lucid reflection are soon engulfed by the demands of our responsibilities and duties. Too quickly our eyes glaze over and our senses are dulled to the Voice calling us to greater things.

So hurry, while there's still time...before the red pill wears off and your epiphany has passed.