



Reclaiming the Life We Lost Along the Way

John Paterson

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This practical self-help primer encourages correct perceptions and self-love.

“There are more sleepwalkers in the world than there are people willing to live a fully awakened life,” longtime life coach John Paterson laments. In *Reclaiming the Life We Lost Along the Way*, a concise, helpful guide for jaded seekers, Paterson proposes strategies for waking up to real life, overcoming fear, and reconnecting with a higher power.

Paterson became an alcoholic at a young age, but went on to be a director at a Canadian rehabilitation center. It’s little surprise, then, that he employs the vocabulary and tactics of Alcoholics Anonymous. Presenting his belief in a benevolent universe and a higher power (also called “Unconditional Love”) with whom one can relate, he argues that through self-scrutiny we can question our emotions, distinguish reasonable fears from false ones, and return control to that higher power. Anecdotes, analogies, and a set of questions and thought-exercises at the end of each chapter ensure that the book has a practical function.

The book sets up a causal chain between mental models, behavior, and consequences. For instance, a belief that money equals happiness can lead to pursuit of wealth to the detriment of all else. We always seek to validate our assumptions, often through the media, which can confirm racism or reinforce a tendency to imagine worst-case scenarios. Paterson counsels that instead, we should combat the ego’s unhelpful messages, and replace irrational fears with self-confidence. The striking story of two paraplegics illustrates how crucial attitude is to outcomes: one sank into depression and died a few months after being injured, while the other took his wheelchair around the world to raise money for spinal-cord research.

The author brings profound psychological wisdom to bear on his subject. He traces the course of child development and explains how identity is all-too-often based on the fragile ego. His metaphors are unusual, offering a fresh perspective: “Imagine your ego as a deer you suddenly come upon in the woods. The moment you startle it, it runs away.” Moreover, his personal history allows him to overlay tips for meaning and genuine happiness onto the common human “backdrop of self-loathing and hopelessness.”

Paterson uses the terms “God,” “Higher Power,” and “Unconditional Love” interchangeably. This occasionally leads to pronoun confusion, as in “Him/Her/It.” For the most part, though, inclusive terminology paves the way for universal application. With references to Buddha, Kierkegaard, and Martin Luther King, Jr., the book is wide-ranging enough to resonate with people of any faith.

Recommended for fans of self-help writers including Deepak Chopra, Gretchen Rubin, and Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Reclaiming the Life We Lost Along the Way* is equally readable and practical. It exhorts readers to believe “We are more than we imagined.”

REBECCA FOSTER (February 25, 2015)

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