
Put God First

A Pocket Guide to
Quality of Life
in the
Great Age of Excess

Jeff Einstein

PUT GOD FIRST

Copyright © 2007 by Jeff Einstein

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

ISBN 143481680X

EAN-13 9781434816801.

*I thank God and His greatest gift to me,
my little girl Cayla,
for their constant inspiration...*

Preface

I was first introduced to Jeff Einstein about four years ago through his weblog on media and addiction, *Einstein's Corner*. I was immediately hooked on his viewpoint, and found it so intriguing that I sent him an email telling him that his insight was fresh and brilliant.

Jeff emailed me back and expressed his gratitude, and I'm happy to say that our first email exchange has since evolved into a special friendship. I think it's fair to say that we hit it off right away...

So when he told me that he was writing a book titled *Put God First*, I was instantly fascinated, and he indulged me by sending the first draft as soon as it was ready. In my opinion, *Put God First* nails THE PROBLEM of the 21st century: We have taken a flight from faith and are wandering in the proverbial spiritual desert as we feed our media addiction.

In recent years we seem to have moved well beyond the couch potato syndrome that defined our relationship with television and mass media through the mid-1990s. Our media choices have increased exponentially in the past decade, and today we might be better characterized as benumbed, spiritless spuds. Burt Lancaster, in the 1960 award-winning

film *Elmer Gantry*, warned against the compartmentalization of spirituality when he said, “You can’t go to mass on Sunday and cheat in business on Monday.”

In today’s media-saturated environment, what Jeff refers to as the *Great Age of Excess*, we consign God and spirituality to ever-smaller and smaller compartments. Most of us no longer give the Lord a single day a week, or even a few minutes a day. Our faith continues to shrink as our media addiction continues to grow. And as our faith decreases, our fears increase.

Fear is the soul-destroying weapon that the media wield to cleave God from our lives. Thus, watching the news is no longer about information that we can use. It has instead become a high-speed conduit for instilling and fostering fear. Terrorism, bird flu, economic collapse, global warming, illegal immigration, killer storms; the list goes on and on. The main message, however, is always the same: *Be afraid. Be very very afraid.* Fortunately, however, the same media that advise us to fear everything also offer up a ready antidote with each and every warning: more media. “Stay tuned,” they tell us.

In the *Great Age of Excess* fear has replaced faith. So what can we do? Jeff’s call to *Put God First* echoes the gentle and remarkable response of Ann Frank, a little girl whose generous spirit and great heart belied the sheer terror that held her and her world hostage in a terrible time:

“The best remedy for those who are afraid, lonely or unhappy is to go outside, somewhere where they can be quiet, alone with the heavens, na-

ture and God. Because only then does one feel that all is as it should be and that God wishes to see people happy, amidst the simple beauty of nature."

Unlike the fear and tyranny suffered by Ann Frank and millions of others during World War II, however, many of the fears and tyrannies that confront us today are self-induced and manufactured. Thus, in the titanic struggle with our own excess there are few easy villains in the traditional sense, in large part because – as Jeff suggests – we are very much complicit in our own addictions. For instance, while today's media landscape features legitimate global media cartels that function at times not unlike the illegitimate drug cartels of Colombia, it also – with the sudden and relentless onslaught of consumer-generated content – features millions upon millions of small neighborhood dealers, each with their own designer drugs to produce and sell.

Regardless of who produces and supplies the narcotic, however, the demand will continue to increase in proportion to the *promise* of a functionally limitless supply guaranteed by functionally limitless bandwidth. And as the supply and demand for more media escalate, so too do the dangers: Inertia and apathy, two of addiction's primary byproducts, flourish in the *Great Age of Excess*.

Inertia is what makes addiction so difficult to bust, and apathy is what besets us when we repeatedly encounter the depths of our own inertia. Apathy then breeds apathy. As we multitask across a typical universe of HDTVs, laptops, wireless phones, PDAs and MP3 players, we think little and care even less about the people and things that aren't on the screens directly in front of us. We simply haven't the time to

consider whatever isn't on the screen in front of us right now. So we visit less with friends and family, we volunteer less, we pray less and we sleep less, all so we can spend more time consuming media. In the end we find ourselves *connected* to people all over the world but *disconnected* from the people living in the same house and town. And the most notable estrangement, of course, is from God Almighty Himself.

As the amounts of time and money that we devote to our media addiction grow, time and money for all other relationships is compromised. Not only is our relationship with God short-changed in the process, but all of the other important relationships we need for healthy lifestyles and souls are imperiled as well: Our relationships with our children, our spouses, our friends, and our businesses are all offered up on the altar of our addiction to the media. How often have you heard or uttered the words, "I'm sorry, but I've been so busy..." in the past month alone? Of course we're all busy; we always have been, always are, and always will be. But nowadays we seem to have even less time than ever for the important relationships in our lives, especially our relationship with God. We find ourselves falling farther and farther behind in our lives simply because we spend so much of our precious time feeding our addiction to media each and every day. We are compelled to feed the beast, and we find that the beast – like all addictions – is insatiable.

Put God First is an *important* book. It shows us how to reintroduce God into our lives as a critical force for *moderation* in the *Great Age of Excess*. It shows us how a return to *faith* translates into a return to *reason*. Although each chapter begins with a brief prayer, *Put God First* is by no means a

preachy evangelical treatise. Nor is it a convenient and self-serving exercise in media bashing. No matter what your religion or your relationship to media, you'll find something of value – something immediately applicable to *your* life – in these pages. Jeff has written a book that speaks with wisdom and compassion to the 21st-century malady of maladies. Hopefully, by shining a light on the problem we will then be better equipped to develop solutions. Time, however, is of the essence. *Put God First* shows us how and where to get started...

Jaffer Ali
CEO of NextEra Media

Introduction

Dear God,

Thank you for walking with me today. Thank you for the many blessings you bring into my life. Thank you for exposing me to new ideas, and thank you for blessing me with the freedom to receive or reject them. Thank you for the gift of free will. Please teach me to pray, and forgive my many weak moments. Open my heart and mind. Help me put you first in my life. Prepare me always to receive your word and do your will. Amen.

Bless you, dear reader, and welcome to *Put God First*, a smallish book of big ideas conceived in response to an even bigger concern, namely:

We now seem to be passing through a most extraordinary and dangerous time in our nation's history. It's a time when profligate consumption – more media, more food, more sex, more money, more credit, more debt, more licit and illicit drugs of all kinds, more of just about everything except time – all but destroys any sense of propriety and proportion, estranges us from God, and threatens the quality of our lives and communities at every level of society, irrespective of race, gender, or social status.

It's a time I call the *Great Age of Excess*, and I believe that the simple but controversial ideas in this little book represent our best hope to survive our individual and collective journeys through it.

Put God First is all about the choices we make en route. It's about how we react as individuals and as a society to the culture of mass consumption that we invite into our lives in the *Great Age of Excess*, and about God's role – or lack thereof – in the mix. It's about the wholesale Faustian exchange of time for endless false promises, and how that exchange threatens the quality of our lives on all levels – spiritual, physical, emotional, and social. It's about how the *quality* of our lives will improve dramatically when we learn how to put Him first. It's about invoking God as the primary voice of *reason* and *moderation* in the *Great Age of Excess*. It's about

how to do exactly what He instructs us to do in the very first of His Ten Commandments: put Him first. And it's about how everything else quite naturally follows...

In taking you from here to there, *Put God First* adopts a simple thesis, antithesis, synthesis structure as represented by three major sections: *The Quality of Life Defined*, *The Quality of Life Threatened*, and *The Quality of Life Redeemed*. Each chapter herein begins appropriately with a brief prayer to welcome God, thank Him, and always put Him first, and each concludes with a summary of bulleted chapter highlights for quick and easy reference, and a couple of blank pages for your own observations, notes, and prayers.

Let's take a few moments now to preview the three main sections of *Put God First*...

Part I: The Quality of Life Defined

Part I explores and offers a working definition for the quality of life. Of course the quality of life has engaged and inspired the genius and imagination of far greater minds than mine over the centuries, so don't be entirely surprised if my humble contribution seems somewhat simple and feeble-minded in comparison. Nevertheless, I begin *Part I* by suggesting that the quality of life is defined in large part by how and where and with whom we spend our time, God's first and greatest gift to each of us.

I further suggest that the mechanics of how and where and with whom we spend our time are governed by the rituals that we build around our relationships with everything and everyone in our lives, including and especially God. Rituals – both sacred and profane – dictate how, where and

with whom we spend almost every minute of every day; we constantly unfold and consult them like roadmaps to our own lives.

Finally, I suggest that the quality of our lives at any point in time also reflects our proximity to God. During our respective journeys, some of our ritual roadmaps draw us closer to Him while many others lead us farther away...

Part II: The Quality of Life Threatened

Some people are blessed to know from early childhood exactly what they were born to do. My father, for instance, knew from an early age that he wanted to write about baseball. From his lips to God's ear, and so it was. Such, however, was not the case with yours truly, and it took me more than five decades to figure things out for myself. And while I still know abysmally little about what God may have in store for me five minutes from now, I *do* know exactly why He put me here. It turned out to be pretty simple in the end, far simpler in fact than the five decades it took me to figure it out would suggest: He put me here to have faith in Him, and to help Him promote and inspire life-affirming change in others, including *you*. This little book, therefore, is as much His work as it is mine.

So it is with the above disclaimer and license for change that I humbly offer in *Part II* a pair of highly controversial and disquieting assertions: First the claim that obsessive-compulsive behavior and addiction are now *default* conditions in what I call the *Great Age of Excess*, followed next by the no less disturbing observation that an endemic American *addiction to media* now represents the primary threat to the quality of our personal and institutional lives. Statistically,

we now spend *almost all* of our waking time (not to mention a great deal of our money, disposable or otherwise) in fealty to all things media.

Doubtless, many mainstream addiction recovery advocates will take offense to what they read herein, largely because my thoughts refute some of the sacred-cow myths and half-truths that date all the way back to the early days of Alcoholics Anonymous, myths and half-truths that still prevail and dominate today, some seventy years later. I challenge the status quo for a couple of reasons: first, because it is my primary function as a change agent to do so, and second because our reluctance and failure to challenge them prevents us from exploring what may be far more viable alternatives in the *Great Age of Excess*. We avert our gaze only at our own peril.

You should know, however, that I did not set out initially to challenge mainstream addiction theory. In fact, when I first began to explore the relationship between media and addiction, I was a diehard and enthusiastic 12-step acolyte – like so many other recovering addicts. But the more I studied the relationship between the two, the clearer it became to me that how we perceive our own addictions – including and *especially* our addiction to media – is very much influenced and colored by the addictions themselves. So I was compelled to re-examine my own intellectual and emotional investments en route, and discovered – to my considerable dismay – that they were mired at least as much in popular culture folklore and myth as they were in fact.

That said, those of you who might take exception to my views on addiction should also take heart, because I suspect that you're not alone: I suspect that there will be many me-

dia professionals and academicians – especially those who might mistakenly look to the Internet and other digital media as high-tech silver bullets – who join you in your umbrage. Like their counterparts in the addiction recovery industry, media professionals and academicians have their own canon of sacred cows and half-truths to defend, and with almost three decades of senior media industry experience under my belt, I've had plenty of occasion to invoke them all a million times or more.

But *Put God First* is by no one's definition a media industry exposé or critique, nor was that ever my intent. Rather, my primary objective was and remains much more circumscribed: to introduce an alternative explanation for why so many of us find so much deprivation and emptiness amidst such obvious abundance in the *Great Age of Excess*, and what happens to the quality of our lives and our communities when we do. I would therefore reject any criticism of *Put God First* as anti-media; it's simply not. It is, however, decidedly anti-excess...

In a deliberate manner that some will likely find refreshing and others will just as likely find downright appalling, I cite almost no statistics or research in support of my own bold assertions. In the *Great Age of Excess* we tend to use statistics as a form of modern numerology to support all manner of things both savory and unsavory, a disturbingly common practice that almost always compromises and sacrifices the truth along the way. Rather, my arguments about both addiction and media – although researched and refined over many years – are forged largely in common sense tempered by almost three decades of personal and professional

experience as both an addict and a recognized digital media pioneer.

Some critics will no doubt interpret my lack of statistics as evidence of lazy theories predicated on faith rather than fact. So be it. Far better we should all know sooner rather than later that the wisdom we seek is hidden from the wise and learned. Far better we should know that we are all like children in the eyes of God, and that we walk by our faith, not by our sight. Besides, as a gratefully recovered ex-advertising executive, I'm well prepared and trained to accept faith over fact any day; it pays better and is far more accountable in the end. On a related note, I discovered long ago that only faith gets me out of bed in the morning, and that the facts are typically far too subject to whimsical, partisan, and wholly expedient interpretation by patriots and scoundrels alike. With all due respect, today's newspaper headlines are tomorrow's fish wrap.

For what it's worth, however, I think you'll find my arguments about both addiction and media to be not only sensible and well-reasoned, but invigorating and liberating as well. At least I hope so, though I would encourage you nevertheless to research the numbers and facts yourself to corroborate or refute any of my arguments. If you find something worth noting, please pass it along.

In *Part II* you'll encounter the *Media Log*, an abysmally simple yet supremely challenging exercise designed to expose our own complicity in and capacity for excessive media consumption, our dominant behavioral trait in the *Great Age of Excess*. You may find the *Media Log* both unsettling and disturbing; many do. Predicated on the essential understanding that we simply can't begin to deal with something

that we cannot or will not see, the *Media Log* dusts the fingerprints of our unconscious behavior. It renders the invisible visible, and hopefully will motivate a few of us to examine certain behaviors we might otherwise prefer to ignore. The working assumption, however, is that you are reading this book at least in part because you want to explore some new and challenging ideas. You'll find plenty of them in *Part II*.

Finally, you may note far fewer references to God in *Part II* than in *Part I*, no coincidence because *Part II* describes a largely Godless society, one in which we have stationed God dead last in our 21st-century hierarchy of things that matter. In the *Great Age of Excess*, God is missing from our lives by design; in fact, he wasn't even invited to the party...

Part III: The Quality of Life Redeemed

By definition, the *Great Age of Excess* offers little hope and even less time for the successful application of mainstream addiction recovery platitudes like prevention and abstinence. It's simply far too late to prevent what's already ubiquitous from suddenly showing up; that horse left the barn a long time ago. And it's likely a good thing that all comedy is rooted in tragedy, because the very notion of abstinence in the *Great Age of Excess* – the age of trillion-dollar consumer economies powered by billions of microchips – borders on laughably quaint, especially in the near-total absence of champions to praise and model the only viable long-term alternative: *moderation*.

All of which begs the following questions: How fortunate are we that our ways are not God's ways? How fortunate are we that God always offers us a better alternative to

our own vanities? How fortunate are we for the daily opportunity to celebrate the many blessings He brings to our lives in the *Great Age of Excess*?

Part III offers my grateful response to all of the above questions: a proven program to put God first in a gentle daily protocol of conscious intervention predicated on gratitude for the good people and things that contribute to the quality of our lives. *Part III* of *Put God First* teaches us how to interrupt and moderate the extreme influences and harmful thinking – what recovering addicts sometimes refer to as *stinking thinking* – that conspire in the *Great Age of Excess* to promote profligate consumption, inhibit gratitude, and otherwise diminish the quality of our lives and communities.

Herein you'll find the *human centrifuge*, a compelling graphic model for life in the Great Age of Excess; it will doubtless make you smile. You'll also find *My Ritual Inventory*, an elegantly simple yet incredibly powerful tool designed to help you put God first in every facet of your life – spiritual, physical, emotional, and social – every day. *My Ritual Inventory* is nothing less than a sheer gratitude engine; it will show you precisely how to invoke God as your personal quality control agent and the primary force for *moderation* in the *Great Age of Excess*.

Finally, in *Part III* – contrary to the Godless environment of *Part II* – you will find Him almost everywhere you look.

On a personal note...

Put God First is nothing if not proof of the fact that God works in mysterious ways. The mere fact that a devout Muslim pens the preface to a book written by a Born Again Christian with the last name of Einstein is probably proof

enough. But what began with broad brushstrokes more than a dozen years ago as separately ambitious studies on technology, media, and addiction eventually merged over time then re-emerged finally – after many surprise permutations, twists and turns – as this modest little book about God and faith and the critical roles they play in the quality of our lives in the *Great Age of Excess*.

Of course I long ago abandoned any hope or ambition to fathom God's many mysteries (I can't even figure out how to work my universal remote control), and opted more simply in recent years to embrace faith in Him instead. In retrospect, letting go and letting God seems the wiser course; I've since discovered that faith in God has simplified my life and provided an antidote of sorts to the enervating Babel spawned by my own relentless arrogance and self-will run riot over the past few decades. My faith in God has taught me to accept and appreciate the uncertainties and vicissitudes of life as essential components of those things that inspire me most, precisely because those things that now inspire me most never fail to surprise me time and again with the depth and beauty of His reflection in them.

For far too long I've sought control over the people and things around me, only to watch them slip away and elude me, one by one. But I now understand that finding a way to control the events and people in my life was far less important than finding a safe place to let go. *Put God First* is what emerged quite simply when – after many years of struggling with the unmanageable complexities of my own life – I found that place and finally let go.

They say that man makes plans and God laughs. If so, I'm pretty sure that I've kept Him in stitches over the years.

And if so, it seems to me that the very best course of action is to rejoice in Him and with Him, to catch Him when he's in a good mood. Because all things become suddenly possible the very moment we decide to laugh with God. All things become suddenly possible the very moment we put our faith in Him and rejoice, the very moment we realize that He wants only good things for us, only good things for you and for me.

So allow me a brief moment now to express my undying gratitude to Him for the half century and change that it took me to get here. Despite my many character flaws, I remain thoroughly delighted, amused and bemused by the fact that I've circled the block a thousand times only to find myself still very much in love with the promise of redemption.

God is great, and finding Him in my early fifties (what He was doing in my early fifties I'll never know) likely had much to do with my renewed interest in redemption. So too did the birth of my only child, a precious little girl, just a few years earlier. In her I rediscover God's eternal love for me each and every day. I suspect that the confluence of these two wondrous gifts so late in my life combined with the somewhat less wonderful but liberating collapse of my digital marketing career shortly thereafter to set my current course and seal my fate. *Put God First* is just partial testimony to what a long strange trip it's been.

For me, however, redemption has always been and still remains an ongoing process, always long in coming and always hard-earned. I became a Born Again Christian not because – as some religious scholars and critics may argue – it's an easy or convenient conversion (it was neither for me), but because the Holy Spirit entered my soul one day and

because I suddenly found in the Good News a much more *rational* and meaningful approach to life in the *Great Age of Excess*, my old home address. Life simply makes more sense when I put God first.

Put God First reflects much of what I have learned on my personal journey to redemption, and I offer it now to you as a step-by-step guide to a better, richer, more integrated life as we continue on our individual and collective sojourns through the *Great Age of Excess*. I can unconditionally promise and guarantee no shortcuts en route, and would suggest that you hold on to your wallet if and when you encounter someone who promises otherwise. Make no mistake: God moves mountains, but you and I are better advised to bring our own shovels.

I tell my little girl to approach everything always with three priceless treasures in hand: gratitude, enthusiasm, and patience – the exact same qualities that both God and she never fail to inspire and demand in me. Thus am I exceedingly grateful, and *always* ready to rally. As for patience: Let's you and I agree to meet across the river on the other side in the Promised Land.

Until then I'll look for you at one of my *Put God First* workshops or seminars. Or maybe we'll meet online. You can find yours truly and other like-minded folks at...

<http://IPutGodFirst.com>

Meanwhile, thank you so much for buying my book, and please be sure to tell a friend or loved one about it. De-

spite the politically incorrect tarnish accrued by evangelism in recent years, we are all nevertheless obligated to spread the Good News. Meanwhile, travel safe and always put God first...

Jeff Einstein – October, 2007

