

EPISODE 124

“JF: If you can write in a way where the writing is so exquisite and beautiful and vivid and then it moves him deeply, and they’re not even aware of the writing, that’s the place that I think aspired to go as a writer.”

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:26.6] AT: Welcome to the Portfolio Life Podcast with Jeff Goins. I’m your host Andy Traub. Jeff believes that every creative should live a portfolio life. A life full of pursuing work that matters, making a difference with your art, and discovering your true voice. Jeff’s committed to helping you find, develop and live out your unique world view so that you too can live a portfolio life.

But what does it take for you to live a good life and to live up to your potential? Well self-described maker and helper Jonathan Fields set out to find the answers to that question and after years of research, he’s figured it out.

Here is Jonathan Fields and Jeff Goins.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:01:11.7] JG: Well, how are things?

[0:01:13.6] JF: Things are good, things are good. You know the deal, ramping up like the last three weeks or whatever before the break, but it’s teeing up nicely so I’m pretty psyched.

[0:01:22.3] JG: Cool. Man thanks for having me at camp, what a blast.

[0:01:24.9] JF: Yeah, it’s great to have you there, it was fun.

[0:01:27.2] JG: It was really cool.

[0:01:28.5] JF: It was fun. Yeah, it sounds like a nice attendance at the workshops.

[0:01:31.7] JG: It was great, yeah.

[0:01:33.2] JF: Totally jamming with it.

[0:01:34.6] JG: Yeah, I was worried because it was technically in Delaware, I think, across on the other side of the camp. You had to kind of go through the woods and that was a great turn out, I loved it, it was awesome. Thank you. Well I did the thing to you that you did to me where we're just rolling because it's just a conversation. So yeah, at camp, you actually ran into a couple of people, and I bunked next to this guy who was an artist and we were talking about my next book and I was like, "Give me some," — because I was finishing the draft in bed that night while I was prepping my slides and I was like, "Tell me, what do you think about this?" And you know, it was really cool. You've got a neat tribe there.

[0:02:21.0] JF: Yeah, it's an amazing group of people and what kind of blows us away every year also, is how international it is. We're always amazed that people get on planes from like Australia and Japan and all over Europe. We're kind of like, "You realize it's just us?" But they're coming to see each other is what it comes down to. We have a lot of people who come back every year. Yeah, it's fun. Hey wait, aren't you just like on the tail end of yours right now?

[0:02:48.6] JG: Oh yeah, it happened last weekend.

[0:02:51.8] JF: It's like, "Yeah, head's still spinning. Something happened last weekend."

[0:02:57.1] JG: Yeah, it's been good. I think next year I'm just going to take the week off but I am basically been taking ever morning off because I've been putting off a bunch of stuff because I've been working on the book for the past few months. Man it was great. There's nothing quite as rewarding as that and yeah, this year was better than last year, which is always a nice feeling.

[0:03:15.9] JF: Yeah, no it's super cool when it happens. But yeah, every year we try and set aside a little bit time to recover afterwards and every year we realize it's not enough.

[0:03:25.7] JG: Yeah, I'm taking off the mornings this week and I'm making the team take off all of Friday. So yeah, that would be good. This segue's nicely because when I was there, I really got a feel for your community and it was really interesting because I literally went around because actually I was kind of like, I was trying to see what I could steal for my own event and I was really curious about — because there was something like what? 350, almost 400 people there?

[0:03:55.1] JF: Yeah, it was somewhere right in between there.

[0:03:57.8] JG: Which is, I mean, that's a big ask where folks are getting on a plane, traveling cross country or overseas, as you mentioned, and like when you said it was like summer camp for adults, I thought that was like a euphemism.

[0:04:15.0] JF: And then you get there and you're like, "Wait a minute, this is actually summer camp."

[0:04:18.8] JG: I was like, "I kind of felt like WDS," and they tap into their child like nature. But I was still thinking it's a conference and an offsite retreat center or something and then I get there and go, "No it's summer camp and adults are attending the summer camp, that's what it is." It was fun. But I asked everybody, "Why are you here?" They all said, "We're here because of this," and talking about the other people that were around like community hands down, everybody said that.

I remember, it's been fun to know you and get to know you better through this sort of Good Life era. I mean, what do you call this season of your career? Because I think it was when we met at WDS, whatever, almost three, four years ago. You interviewed me very early on when I was just getting started and you hadn't started Good Life Project and then the next year I saw you and you're like, "Man, I'm just digging this," and I was like, "What are you doing? What is this?" You're just going around and interviewing people.

And here we are and it's turned into this community and it's been fun to kind of see that progress and go, "Okay, this is a thing. This isn't just like a crazy nonprofit idea or whatever that

it's going to bankrupt Jonathan." Because I was like, "You're flying around the world with a video team interviewing people. There's no business model."

[0:05:45.4] JF: Yeah, as the guy who is now like folding into video yourself, you know that that's not a cheap way to roll. It's not a cheap way to produce.

[0:05:53.8] JG: It's really expensive, yeah.

[0:05:55.1] JF: Yeah, we were doing, I don't know with — we were shooting with like a three camera crew.

[0:06:01.1] JG: Gosh.

[0:06:01.6] JF: It definitely takes an investment. But no, the goal, which is kind of interesting is that I think a lot of people don't realize, we actually started the education side of the company first and the reason we did that was because I wanted to actually have a revenue source in place to fund the media at the level that I wanted to actually create media beforehand.

Because I didn't want to do it, I didn't want to sort of do it on the most basic level. I wanted to raise the bar to the extent I could. We had the revenue generating side of the business in place before we shot the first frame of video. That's always been what's supported like the bigger venture.

[0:06:45.0] JG: Yeah, that's kind of cool. Because normally, in the online marketing world or whatever, you hear people say like, "Start giving away content for free and then get a list of 10,000 or 20,000 or 100,000 people and then sell them something," and I mean, you had already had a business.

[0:07:03.4] JF: Yeah, right. You and I are both similar in that way and that we can, you know, we've spent years before that building a tribe and building a list and building communities so we can turn around and as long as it's someone aligned with the fundamental ethos, even if we're shifting gears or creating a different project, enough people are likely going to be interested that

you can kind of port a certain amount of attention over to that new thing. So it's not like we're starting from a cold start.

[0:07:32.1] JG: Right. What I love about you is, you're thinking, "Okay, the business gets to fund this really fun, creative projects that I want to do and like I'm not going to go broke making these things." But you and I talked a lot, and correct me if I'm wrong, but what really kind of lights you up is to just go make something. To tell a story, interview somebody, create something that has not been created before.

[0:07:57.0] JF: Yeah, that's definitely a huge thing for me. I mean, I am a maker at heart and I make stuff because it's — it's kind of interesting because I've learned a lot about myself for the last couple of years. One thing is I'm absolutely a maker. I love the blank canvas. The thing that terrifies so many people, I love. A blank white page, when I'm starting a book or when I'm painting whatever it is, that's my playground.

So I like that. I like stepping into that space and at the same time, I also, whenever I take any sort of strength assessment, love of learning, always comes up at the top. So I love the process of learning. So for me, it's kind of like, starting a business or starting an adventure, whatever this thing is that we're growing that also funds my ability to travel around, find these embodies teachers and sit down with them and learn and then just turn around and share what I'm learning. It's sort of like the optimal blend of everything.

[0:08:57.4] JG: So if somebody's listening to this, I hope somebody's listening to this.

[0:09:03.4] JF: It's like, "Hello? Hello?"

[0:09:05.4] JG: Just let us know. Because I feel like that's not necessarily like the easiest thing for everybody in the world to go, "Oh all you have to do is start a business to fund all these other cool things that you want to do." How do you practically do that? Because you've had several career transitions and I'm just wondering like, because you're a maker but you are savvy at some of the business and marketing stuff, quite savvy I think like can you just talk about how that works? Maybe let's begin by talking about your previous lives.

[0:09:37.3] JF: Yeah, I mean, I have, I mean it depends how far you want to go back. But as a kid, I was the lemonade stand kid. I've been an entrepreneur and an artist my whole life. I was on the one hand literally selling lemonade and then in high school, painting just hiding away in my basement and then bring them together where I started realizing that I could paint album covers on the back of Jean jackets back in the day when there was just stunning album art and you actually had albums. I made all my walking around money doing that and then I hit college and I also loved music and began to be a DJ and then I built a sound and lighting company. That was the first business that actually sold when graduating from college.

From there, took a little time off, traveled around, spent three months scuba diving in Australia with the small amount of change I made selling the company and then came back and eventually found my way into law school, which was in no small part, just because I wanted to see what I was actually intellectually capable of. Because I had spent most of my undergraduate years building business and not really attending class a whole lot. So I was really fortunate, I did very well. I was focused when I hit law school, I did very well. I had opportunity and I went into practice. But ended up hospitalized from the stress and realized that wasn't my path.

After about four, five years, I guess it was, found my way back into entrepreneurship and this time, at the intersection, really living a good life and building businesses in the health and wellness world. So I built a high private fitness facility, grew that, sold that after a couple of years. Got really interested in the yoga world in the yoga space and have been developing my own practice and ended up launching a yoga center in hell's kitchen, New York and grew that into this beautiful community and, thankfully, flourishing business at the same time.

After about seven years about company and really started focusing at that point on writing books and speaking and consulting and in the online space and building businesses there. But, you know, two common themes that really run through everything is creating something from nothing and expressing something that was inside of me that had to get out. But the third one, and which I think is sort of part of what you eluded too also, is that I couldn't do any of this as my living unless I also figured out how they were all of service to other people.

So I'm constantly asking the question, first, what is it that I want to create? And two, how can I do it in a way that other people will value and will serve them so that they actually will end up

paying me for it and I can support myself and my family in the world? So that's the constant intersection, the sweet spot that I'm always looking for.

[0:12:29.2] JG: At camp, and I'm talking about camp GLP where we hung out a little while ago. This conference camp, I don't know what to call it? An event. I know what to call it, it's summer camp for adults. I just thought that meant something other than explicitly that thing.

[0:12:45.0] JF: Yup.

[0:12:46.9] JG: You described this in the best way I've actually ever heard it described. I don't know if this is your thing or somebody else's thing? But you talked about the spectrum and one side is the maker, what's the other side?

[0:12:56.4] JF: Helper.

[0:12:56.9] JG: Yeah, maker and helper. Can you describe that and where people fall and how that works?

[0:13:01.7] JF: Yeah, so I think we're — here's my theory and I've seen it proven out many times over and I'm curious what your thoughts are on this too. That we all have, we're kind of wired to serve in different ways or wired to contribute in the world in different ways and on one extreme side of the spectrum is the pure maker, which is kind of driven to create. Your jazz, you wake up in the morning because you just want to make stuff. The fact that it's of service to somebody is awesome because it lets you do more of it. But that's not the thing that motivates you.

On the far other side of the spectrum is the pure helper. You're motivated purely to serve others, you wake up in the morning and you're literally looking around and saying to yourself, "Who can I be of service to? Who can I help?" You almost don't care who it is, it could be an animal, it could be the woods, it could be the planet, it could be seniors living in a retirement home. You just, you feel amazing, you're lit up, you're driven because you want to serve, you want to help. And then there's a whole spectrum that kind of runs from one end to the other and I think most of us tend to be fairly strongly oriented towards one side or the other.

The interesting thing is that, if you want to earn a living, if you're strongly wired as a maker, but you also want to make stuff as a living, you have to find a way to make sure that it's of service, that you're helping somebody with what you're making or else you'll be doing it on the side. Which isn't necessarily a bad thing by the way. It just means it's not going to be the thing that you're compensated for on a level that will let you earn your living.

[0:14:34.2] JG: I love that. I love that for two reasons. One is it assumes that you need both if you want to make a living doing it, as you said, and I think a lot of people are just thinking, "I'm just going to make stuff and eventually somebody will pick me and it will work out." And if that ever happens, it's extremely rare. And I also like it because it describes a process that people tend to sort of define as only happening one way. You find your niche and you find out what they want and you make it. And you go, "But like, what if I don't want to make that thing?"

I was speaking in Chicago at this little meet up and I was talking about the art of work and somebody asked a question, this woman woman who was in her 60's said that, she said, "What do I do if the thing that people want from me and I don't want to do anymore?" I was like, "Oh my gosh, this is hard." She wanted to make something and then see who she could help versus going and finding people that she could help and going and making something. So I love that. When you said that at your event, I was standing there and I come up from the city with Pam Slim and it was really fun to just watch her operate.

And it was sort of an epiphany for me because Pam was speaking and then like while she was speaking, she was helping people and after she was speaking, she was helping people and before she was speaking she's like, "Here's my phone number, here's my email address and I'll connect you with so and so and I'll do this." She's like the best community builder I've ever seen and she's doing it at somebody else's event and she's got these groups of people that she's helping that she just met and it's obvious to me that pam is a helper and she's just finding things for — she even told me this about writing books.

She was like, "I like going and helping people and figuring out what they need and then I go, "Oh this is a thing, now I got to go write a book about it because I'm already helping people with this. I just got to go like codify it." So I'm watching Pam do this and like I'm going, I like people, I

was pretty tired. I was like, “I like people but all I could think about is getting back to my room and working on my book.” I like making stuff and then going, “Okay, I know this is valuable, I want this to go help people.” But I kind of have to go sit in a cave for a little while and make the thing and then figure out how to connect to the audience.

[0:16:53.5] JF: Yeah, and yet you totally nailed it. Pam is on the extreme end of the spectrum. She’s just wired to help, she’s wired to serve and she makes stuff because she knows it allows her to serve on the high level and to serve more people. Whereas, you know it’s interesting, I know so much of your community as writers and a lot of — I’m curious what you think about this. My experience has been that a lot of people who come to writing, they’re actually not coming to it because they’re wired more towards the helper. They’re wired more towards the maker side of things.

There’s a story or an idea, there’s something in their head that has to get out and it’s going to get out whether it’s of service or not because they just want to make it, they wanted to happen. So they’re the ones who then have to, like their work is to bridge the gap, to figure out, “Okay, how can I actually create, how can I deliver this? How can I take it from my head and put it into the world in a way that either solves a problem or delivers a delight so that in some way it’s of service to others?” Because that’s how you’re going to get paid for doing it.

And again, sometimes, if you’ve got a full time gig and you’re totally cool with that and you just want to do this on the five to nine in the weekends because it’s a thing you can’t not do, whether you make money at it, it doesn’t matter, that’s awesome. Then go and do that and just stay in the side of the orientation that lights you up. But the moment that you want to get paid for it, you know you have to consider the opposite end, whichever way you’re wired.

[0:18:23.5] JG: Yeah, I love that because I was watching Pam before you said that, I was watching her, feeling shame. Going, “Man, I should be doing that. I should be connecting with people. I’m a speaker here and this is what people want, they want to connect with speakers and okay, I need to be doing more of that,” and even the thought of it was exhausting and it wasn’t so much like introvert, extrovert. It was just like, I want to go work on my speech and have everybody come to my speech and like use that time to help as many people as possible. It’s not like I just want to disappear but you know, this idea that I’ve got to go do it this way or

that way, for me, it was all sort of self-imposed, it was kind of oppressive. And I meet so many people that I think, especially if they're makers, they're going, "Oh god, I got to go do that? I don't even know how to do that."

[0:19:12.4] JF: Yeah.

[0:19:12.7] JG: I love it, maker, helper, really powerful sort of spectrum. You can you know, you don't have to be in the spectrum if you just want to do it on the side, but if you're going to make a living off of it, you're going to live somewhere in those two sort of poles.

All right, so you did this video series for a while and found out that people weren't watching the videos as much as you thought they were watching them as much as they were listening to them and had transitioned to a podcast, which is cheaper. It can be cheaper than doing the video work. So that's fun.

[0:19:47.3] JF: Although the way we produce is not as inexpensive as could have made it. But yeah, that was a wakeup call actually. When we realized that most people were listening in and not watching.

[0:19:59.3] JG: So The Good Life Project is this wonderful podcast and show, just asking a question, "What does it take to live a good life?" And you've now written a book about this, *How to Live a Good Life*. What did you learn from this journey? By the way, I love this. I love when like you've got somebody who just has a question and they're curious and go, "I'm just going to ask all this smart people, all these experts," and you talked to such a broad array of people in different industries and walks of life and professions, what did you learn? And obviously, you know, I just kind of want you to open your book and just read it to us for the next six hours.

[0:20:37.9] JF: Yeah, a couple of probably big things. One is that everybody defines a good life differently. While there are certainly some major patterns that dropped and I'm happy to touch on a couple of those, the nuances and the details are always completely unique to somebody's journey up until that point and what they hold dear. What's important to them? I mean, if you've got somebody who grew up in really trying financial circumstances, living on the street, they're

going to value financial security and education differently than somebody who grew up in a profoundly different scenario and what they really just want is freedom and expression.

So it was interesting because when I started, shortly after we started a couple of episodes in, I started asking this one question to everybody, to end every conversation, which is, "What does it mean to you to live a good life?" And I pretty much expected the interest to start repeating themselves after maybe 10, 15 times through that and while there were big themes that kept coming up, the details are always different and it was really interesting to see how unique people answered that question.

Brené Brown, when I asked her, you would think that she would have focused on vulnerability or removing shame, living wholeheartedly. What she said to me was, and I'm not going to get it exactly. You know, she's like, "It's the little moments that we tend to steamroll over in the name of trying to make the big moments happen. It's being present when you pick up your kids from soccer, it's running errands, it's these little things." It just kind of woke me up to the fact that everybody's got something different.

But fundamentally, the big thing that started to drop for me was this sort of really simple model, it's almost deceptively simple. Which I call that, I don't know if I talked to you about before, I call it the good life buckets and it's really, it's the idea that a life well lived is about sort of perpetually filling three buckets. One is I call vitality, connection, and contribution. Vitality is very simply, it's optimizing the state of mind and body and talk about them as one because they are one. They are a seamless feedback mechanism.

The connection bucket is about really cultivating beautiful and deep relationships on every level. Loving relationships, belonging to a community. That's a lot of why we do what we do with Good Life Project is actually create that for people when they don't have it. Intimate people, friends, and if it's something that's meaning full to you, a sense of source or a god or that something that may not be definable but that sense that you're participating in something bigger than you and, you know, benefiting from and responsible to.

Then on the contribution bucket, it's really about how you're bringing your gifts, your strength, your beliefs and values to the work that you do in the world and again, that may be the worth

that you get paid for but it also may well not be the worth that you get paid for and that's okay too. So it's interesting, I didn't start this journey looking to create a model or a framework or distill it. I just was asking questions. When you get enough data points, and I'm sure you've seen this in so many of the interviews you've done.

Eventually you start to get so many data points that you start to see patterns. You start to see connection or relationships that wouldn't have existed and these patterns kind of fell into this three distinct areas and then the quest for me became, "Well how do you tell the story in a way that it's so simple that people hear it, want to remember it for life, and then it can guide their behavior?" That really became my quest because, we don't need more information in the world, we don't need more complexity. I don't need to create something that's all complicated and nuanced and multi-tier because to try and prove how smart I am or intellectually agile I am. People are done with that.

What we want is life is busy, we want answers, we don't want to have to work to get them. Even though we may be willing to work to act on them, we don't want to have to work to understand and receive them. I think the real big thing that I learned is really that there are these sort of three areas that almost everybody needs to focus on and when you let anyone of those buckets run dry, man, your life is going to be in a world of hurt and it's going to stay in a world of hurt until you hit pause and start to fill them.

[0:25:13.5] JG: Can you speak to that wonderful world of hurt that you just mentioned? Have you seen there and if so, when?

[0:25:19.8] JF: Oh man, of course. Yeah, I mean, if there's a weak link in my bucket or if there is one that I tend to let alone dry and I think this is a pretty common pattern that I've seen especially with entrepreneurs, it's the vitality bucket. I've developed a pretty strong daily practice at this point. So I wake up every day, I roll out of bed and I meditate first thing in the morning and I go out and I walk a lot in the afternoon.

What I found is whenever, as an entrepreneur, as a maker, there are always this windows where your intensive, you're like in this really fierce intensive creative thing and as you're hitting, you know, moving towards a deadline, whether it's turning in a manuscript for a book or launching a

company or producing something on film. It's sort of like all hands on deck and you find yourself just working more and more and my challenge has always been to be exalted, my personal practices to exalt self-care, to make sure that I'm constantly filling my vitality bucket.

And I have had a history in the past of not doing enough to actually keep that bucket full and it ends up literally potentially killing you. If not, causing a world of hurt. So I, back in my loft days when I was practicing, I was on a deal where we were, our entire team was working, pretty maniacally with almost no sleep and almost not time off. After about three weeks, I ended up in the hospital because my immune system effectively shut down and a softball size abscess, a huge infection just kind of mushroomed into the center of my body and ate a hole through my intestines from the outside in.

[0:26:59.2] JG: Oh my god.

[0:27:00.5] JF: Yeah, that was an example of me just trying to work as hard as humanly possible to prove my worth, to try and fill out contribution bucket and go for the big goal and utterly abandoning my vitality bucket. And what will always happen is the vitality bucket hits empty, it's going to grind everything to a halt. The big awakening is that your ability to build relationships and your ability to contribute to the world, you know, will be always capped. There will be a ceiling that's in place, not because you've stepped into your potential but because you've let that other bucket run dry and until you fill it up, you'll never hit your potential and any of the other ones.

[0:27:42.5] JG: Yeah. When you were not only doing these Good Life interviews but as you said, sort of sitting down and looking at the data points, which you know I've done for the past couple of books now and told other peoples' stories and it's fun to start seeing some of those patterns emerge. I'm wondering what, if anything about those lessons illuminated your own journey? Were there blind spots or epiphanies or things that you're like, "Oh, that's how this works, and I'm a part of this." Or was it mostly stuff that you felt like you already knew?

[0:28:21.3] JF: No, it's definitely not stuff that I felt like I already knew. I've been calling myself probably a seeker for the better part of my adult life. I've always been curious, I want to know. I'm fascinated by human potential and what it takes for us to actually live in that place like we feel

like we've closed the gap between what we're capable of doing in the world and the way that we're moving through each day. What was interesting to me, probably a couple of things. One is that on any given day, the most luminous people in the world are also a mess.

[0:28:59.5] JG: That's good.

[0:29:00.7] JF: Yeah, we took to hold all these people up. It's like visionaries and they've written this amazing books and that this incredible careers and it's like, "You know what? They're human." I've interviewed and I've worked with people who are at every level of fame and at every level of income. From star athletes, to movie stars, to billionaires. There is not a single one of them that doesn't have a deeply human side where one day there's awesomeness and the other day is just a world of suck. I think we tend to look at people as having arrived at a certain point in their lives and said, "Okay, they've made it, they're done, they're there." The truth is, there is no there, there.

All you do is you wake up every day and you do the best you can do and no matter how much you achieve, it's beautiful to acknowledge in that and to be grateful for everything that's come your way and at the same time, there's work to be done. There are new circumstance that come your way that will challenge the way you bring yourself to the world and the way that you interact with people around you and you can either look at that as terrible or you can look at it as this amazing gift that you get to never stop learning and I think depending on which lens you choose to wear, it's either going to lead you to be pretty miserable or lead you to be pretty curious and sort of stand in a place of possibility and pretty optimistic and that's a choice.

I think one of the other huge awakenings to me has been that people who seem to really have their last dialed in do not live reactively and people who don't tend to wake up in the morning and the minute they wake up, they are allowing their lives, the agendas, the to-do list for the day to be set by almost everybody but themselves and that's sort of like a fast track to seeing time go faster and faster and faster. And then you are letting a decade pass and saying to yourself, "Wow, I was wall to wall busy and there was not a whole lot that was deeply meaningful to me that just happened."

And it tends to plant the seeds of a lot of sorrow and futility and people who I've seen really flourish wake up and they come from a place of being mindful, present, and intentional. Whereas when you're reactive and mindless, you live in the past and in the future. That is not a life well lived. But the sad truth is it's been my experience that the vast majority of folks do live in that place. I think it's time for a little bit of a wakeup call.

[00:31:50.6] JG: Yeah, that's a good word. I wanted to thank you for over a year ago now, we met at a conference, which we do almost every year either on purpose or accidentally just getting ice cream at the same time, like we did this year. And we went for a little walk and I asked you for some feedback and I said, "You know, what can I be doing better?" Or something. I can't remember exactly how I asked the question but you answered it by saying, "You know when you did that thing, I think it's fine."

And you are very non-judgmental about it. You were like, "It didn't feel like you," and, you know that resonated with me in a really powerful, and I would say spiritual way, where I was starting to disintegrate who I really was and the role that I was playing which was this increasingly successful writer and growing this business and making more money and becoming more famous and it was this thing that I thought I wanted.

And it just kept leading me in places where I felt like I had to, I don't think I'd ever compromised values, but I just kept making these small little compromises or decisions. And it was just like, I don't know that I want to do more of this but I think I am having to do these things because I think it gets me to that illusive "there" that you mentioned and yeah, that was really powerful.

[00:33:15.6] JF: Yeah and I actually remember that conversation and it's funny because I remember the conversation and I also remember my inner voice really trying to be sure that I was trying to not come from a place where it would be taken as being judgmental. Because I didn't want it to be, and also because the truth is the only way we know where our edges are, the only way we know what we're comfortable with and what we're not and what's okay with us and what's not is when we push past them.

It's when we run those experiments and we try something and we're like, "Am I comfortable with that?" I mean, I've done that a million times and there are a whole bunch of times where I have

done something and I'm like, "You know what? That was from a pure business metrics standpoint, it was successful but I'm not going to do it again because from a right intention standpoint, from me feeling okay with myself standpoint, it just didn't feel right."

[00:34:09.6] JG: Yeah and I think, I mean, that started this six, seven month soul searching journey and then by the end of the year I called you again and debriefed it with you and said where I was at in terms of, "I don't know that I need to keep growing the business the way that I have been growing it." Because I just was becoming more of an internet marketer who writes than a writer who was using the marketing and the business to fund the stuff that I wanted to make. And I think the thing that resonated with me is, it doesn't have to be a hard and fast morally right and wrong. If it's not you, it's not you, you know?

[00:34:48.8] JF: Exactly.

[00:34:49.3] JG: And I didn't want to lose myself in that journey.

[00:34:49.3] JF: Yeah and there are other, I mean, we both have friends who are considered great people who are upstanding and ethical who are totally comfortable doing the exact same thing because it feels okay to them, and that's cool. Like, "Rock on, do it." It's a completely subjective and personal thing.

[00:35:10.7] JG: So you have served as a guide to me in that journey and I appreciate that. Who have your guides been?

[00:35:18.9] JF: You know, it's interesting. I've actually — my guides are less about business. It's really more probably just personal and spiritual conversations. People like Susan Piver who is a dear friend of mine and also a Shambhala Buddhist meditation teacher and a beautiful New York Times bestselling author. She's a dear friend who I've had some really great conversations with and who I can bounce things off of when I'm just trying to find my way a bit.

On the almost exact other side, and this is somebody I know who you know is Charlie Gilkey, who's another dear friend and his brain works from a process and systems and logistics way.

My brain just doesn't go there. He sees process and systems and he geeks out. That's what lights him up and that's what empties me out.

So I'm deeply fascinated by human behavior and by writing to fuel action and he's deeply fascinated by, "Okay, what happens next when somebody shows up to take action? How are you going to take them by the hand and create a system or a process that's linear and intelligent and will actually deliver an outcome and then build systems internally around that?"

So he's somebody who I turn to all the time and then my wife who is also my business partner. Stephanie is my one and only in life and in business and she's definitely a check for me. I tend to be the dreamer and she tends to be the pragmatist. So we tend to meet somewhere in the middle and that's been a real blessing because I think it leads to better decisions.

[00:37:01.5] JG: I love that. I was having dinner with my team right after our conference and my wife and family came and we got onto talking about something and I'm the dreamer and I've got the team to carry things out and Ashley isn't involved in the business but she's involved in me and whenever I don't share big decisions with her and just go do it and don't get her input, it blows up and I go, "Yeah, I did this thing and it blew up," and she's like, "Well I would have told you not to do that." I was like, "I know."

But we were sitting down and we were just having dinner and she's like, "Okay, all you all, you need to listen to this because I don't know if he's going to listen to me but I just need to tell you guys to make sure this happens," and it's funny. She just kind of takes command and I am grateful for it because it allows us to avoid a lot of missteps.

[00:37:48.3] JF: Yeah, no doubt about it. I mean, it's a blessing.

[00:37:51.6] JG: Totally. So one of the things that I think you and I both have a little bit, you've got more wisdom than I do in this and I am literary learning this from you because I think you've been across the success spectrum, on all kinds of sides of it. And for me, anything I do I want to feel like I'm going to top it. I need to top it. And so for me with having the business but also writing books, it was like, "Well I have to grow. I can't not grow, that's not possible." I'm the eldest of four siblings, so maybe there's something there? "I have to do better."

But really it wasn't about I need more money, because I didn't, and it's not like I wanted more money and I think this is true for a lot of people find themselves as business owners and entrepreneurs, it's a game and you're like, "I have to get more. I need more points, I need to score more otherwise I am losing." And so for me, I have sort of reoriented what success means to me and what I'm measuring and evaluating but I'm still measuring something and I am wondering, we talk about what it means to live a good life, what does success mean to you today? What are you measuring? Evaluating? Or are you?

[00:39:00.3] JF: Yeah, I think I am and there are probably a couple of different things and different domains. So on a more broad level for me, it's about am I spending as much time as I can absorbed in activities and relationships that fill me up surrounding myself with people I can't get enough off and in some way, contributing to something bigger than me? That's like my big metric. When I have an opportunity to invest time, money or energy in something, and I am trying to figure out whether it's a yes or a no, that's one of the big questions that I ask.

On a more granular level as a maker and as a creator, I want to learn. I want to constantly be learning and I'm on a mastery quest and that's not right for everybody. But when it comes specifically to writing, I would bet that you have a similar thing. There are books that I would pick up and I would read the sentence and I'll just start laughing. Not because it is a funny sentence but because I am awed by the craft that went into that sentence and I know it's going to take me 10 years to be able to write a sentence like that and I'm just like, "Oh man like that was just stunning," and I yearn to have the skills to write on that level.

So when I write a book and I write something, I'm not just writing to convey information. I'm writing because I am deeply interested in the craft of language because I want to understand how to put together words and sentences and paragraphs in a way that doesn't just convey information but that brings people into an emotional experience and takes them from point A and leaves them in a different place. And what's interesting is that just pieces together pretty recently is that, that's actually been a pattern that's existed in my entire adult life.

So when you go back to the time when I was actually teaching yoga, people would show up and I would have a packed room of 50 people in a sweaty studio, mat to mat, and my job as a

teacher was I had 90 minutes to take people from frenetic, stressed, and burned out at the end of a work day to a profoundly different calmer, more still, and renewed space in 90 minutes. That was my job.

If go even back further when I was in college and I was a club DJ, my job on the dance floor was to create an immersive experience where people showed up in one place and four hours later left in a completely different place. And now, my pallet, my brush has changed over different seasons in my life, but I have always been deeply fascinated and right now, mastering language as a writer, as a vehicle to create that journey, that moving people from A to B and taking them through a bit of an emotional experience along the way, that's something I'm deeply invested in and my sense is I will be for decades to come, God willing.

[00:42:10.1] JG: I love that, yeah.

[00:42:11.8] JF: Do you share that too? Because I have a feeling you do.

[00:42:13.6] JG: I do, yeah, I mean it's really interesting. I like how you compartmentalize that. On one hand, so we've got the Tribe Conference and I was like, "I love this." I love making something, I love doing it better than we did last year in seeing lives changed. This one guy, you know, it's a conference for tribes, there's a lot of writers and creatives. This one guy who came up to me and he goes, "I did something that I don't think anybody else has done here."

This was like Sunday morning and we started on Friday. I said, "Okay," and he goes, "I wrote a book," and I was like, "Okay." And he wrote this little tiny book like the size of your thumbnail and he had written, I don't know, it was 20 pages or something. But he wrote a book and I was like, "That's cool." So I like that. I like being a part of something that's certainly bigger than me and then on the other hand, there's part of me that's like, "Everything I do just has to be better next time."

For the conference, I love helping people with it but if it were up to me, if it were a little bit messier and a little bit more helpful or a little bit tighter and stronger and made better in the way that I sort of quantify and qualify those things and help fewer people, there's part of me that would go, "It's got to be better. I want it to be a wonderful piece of art or something."

So yeah, totally. I totally get that and it's interesting. I love the Hemingway quote, "We're all apprentices in the craft nobody masters," and I think mastery in any craft is that way. I think Dan Pink calls it an asymptote. It's this thing that you get closer and closer to it but never reach and that's what's maddening about it and that's what's also amazing about it.

[00:44:02.0] JF: Yeah, totally and I don't have any expectation of ever hitting that point. I just want to work towards it and I want to know that — You know, it's funny, if I read something I wrote five years ago, I'm almost invariably embarrassed by it on some level.

[00:44:16.8] JG: Sure, of course. Yeah.

[00:44:18.3] JF: And I think that's a good thing. I think if I looked back and I wasn't, that tells me that I spent the last five years going sideways rather than getting better and to me that would be a bad thing.

[00:44:29.3] JG: Right, yeah that's well said. So I wanted to end our interview with an adjustment of the question that you asked your guest on the Good Life Project. You ask people, "What does it take to live a good life?" I want to ask you, what does it mean to you, on this subject of mastery, what does it mean to you to be a good writer? Because this is something that I love talking to you about even where you're working on your next project.

There is this sense that this is great, but there's more to come. I always feel like I am trying to get through all the bad books so I can start writing the good ones and it's going to take me, I don't know, 10 or 12 to get to those and I am always trying to take the project that I am working on the most seriously but there is the sense that I am still apprenticing trying to get closer and closer to mastery and I know you're a thoughtful and avid reader and I know you want to get better at that craft, so what does that mean to you?

[00:45:24.0] JF: Yeah, it's such an interesting question. So the thing that comes to my mind first is that you have developed a craft to a level where you can move people deeply, profoundly, emotionally to laughter, to tears, to inspiration, to provocation, to see possibility and the writing itself vanishes. Where they're not aware of the quality of the writing because they just transfer

into the experience of reading and there isn't a distinct writing along with the experience of reading.

They're just so deeply pulled into the page that they become a part of it and the writing vanishes into the background because it's so pure and it's not like they don't notice that there's somebody there who is trying to impress by the quality of writing. And it's funny because I had mentioned earlier that I'll read a sentence and I would just be blown away by the quality of writing and I think that's because I am a writer and I think a lot of writers do this.

I am always reading as two people. I am reading as a reader and I am reading as a writer and it's very hard for me to drop the writer side because I'm constantly analyzing the writing but that's unusual. I think your average person, if you can write in a way where the writing is so exquisite and beautiful and vivid and then it moves them deeply and they're not even aware of the writing, that's the place that I think I aspire to go as a writer.

[00:47:05.4] JG: I love that. It remind me of the quote by Elmore Leonard, "If it sounds like writing, rewrite it."

[00:47:11.8] JF: Yeah, I love that.

[00:47:12.6] JG: Yeah, I mean even as a writer, I felt caught up in a book, I think you recommended, *When Breathe Becomes Air*, and I read that on a flight to Portland recently and it was so easy to read that I was getting through a few paragraphs and I was going, "Wait, I didn't stumble over anything and I wasn't criticizing," which I do when I read books and then I go back and analyzed it and I was like, "This is really good."

[00:47:43.7] JF: Right and you're reading and you know Paul Kalanithi wrote this, he wasn't trying to prove anything and maybe it's because of where he was when he was writing this. He was moments from passing. The most — it's interesting, I read that and I was so moved. The thing that destroyed me with that book is not actually the body of the book that Paul wrote but it was the epilogue that his wife Lucy wrote and I made the mistake of starting that on a plane, similarly.

I've gotten about three pages in and I started to weep a little bit and I closed the book. I'm like, "I don't want to be reading from the plane, because I am going to totally lose it if I read that on this plane." I got to my hotel and I read it and I just sobbed and sobbed and sobbed and it wasn't because the writing was complex or these beautiful turns of phrases. It was just so profoundly raw and true and beautiful and to me, that's the place that I want to go.

[00:48:46.1] JG: Yeah, agreed. I mean there's something really simple about it. Good writing is at once simple and also I think complex in the sense that it is hard to get to that simplicity. I think another writing quote I like is Nathaniel Hawthorn says, "Easy reading is damn hard writing."

[00:49:05.5] JF: Yeah, well the same thing with speaking, which I know like you've got a lot more — give me an hour to speak and that's really easy. Give me 10 minutes to speak, that's brutally hard.

[00:49:16.5] JG: Yeah. Well man great chat. Thanks for your time. I love chatting with you, love the new book and it's just an honor to have you as a friend. Thanks for your time Jonathan.

[00:49:26.9] JF: Yeah, my pleasure man. Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:49:35.7] AT: If you feel like you've lost your way and are still seeking the good life, we hope this episode has helped. As Jonathan and Jeff mentioned, we all struggle. So we'd love to hear what you learned today and how it's going to help you get back on track to the good life. So you can go find today's episode at goinswriter.com/124 or message Jeff on Twitter @jeffgoins.

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I'm Andy Traub and on behalf of Jeff Goins, thank you for spending some time with us today. Now, go build your portfolio.

“**JF:** If you’re strongly wired as a maker but you also want to make stuff as a living, you have to find a way to make sure that it’s as of service, that you’re helping somebody with with you’re making. Or else you’ll be doing it on the side.”

[END]