

Patrick Gray and
Justin Skeesuck

From the Best-Selling
Authors of *I'll Push You*

Foreword by Seth Haines

Joy
Love
Kindness
Mercy
Grace
Compassion
Happiness
Understanding
Empathy
Affection
Faith
Honesty
Vulnerability
Devotion
Hope

Imprints

The Evidence
Our Lives
Leave Behind

Praise for *Imprints*

Filled with lessons of love and compassion, *Imprints* is a beautiful reminder of the life God calls us to live each day.

– Bob Goff, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Love Does* and *Everybody, Always*

Our lives are filled with choices. Every moment is an opportunity for us to bring light or darkness into the world. Patrick and Justin remind us how simple it is to choose light.

– Jeremy Cowart, artist and founder of The Purpose Hotel

It's impossible to engage with Patrick and Justin and not walk away inspired, curious, and ready to be the person you are meant to be in the world. *Imprints* is a moving reminder of finding strength in the small things—gestures of kindness and connection—and of how the culmination of these acts fills our own lives and communities with authentic purpose. A must-read reminder that it's the small steps of love that leave imprints along this path of life.

– Jessica Honegger, founder and co-CEO of Noonday Collection

Justin and Patrick are compelling forces for good. Their latest book, *Imprints*, is a must-read, one of those rare books that invites and guides you to step into brave new places with your one and only life. Their words will surely help you live the kind of life that demands an explanation.

– Steve Carter, pastor and author of *This Invitational Life*

If we knew that our actions and choices could be the bread crumbs that others could follow into a better life, would we live better? I think so. This book is the encouragement we need to live more intentionally, leaving a trail of hope and love to those around us.

– Dean Nelson, award-winning author and journalist

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Foreword

by Seth Haines, author of *Coming Clean*

ANN CURTIS WAS A SLIGHT WOMAN who stood somewhere near average height, if you included her silver beehive hairdo. She was a woman of few words, at least as far as I knew, but still, her life spoke plenty. It was well known that Mrs. Curtis took the morning shift in our church prayer room. In fact, it was rumored Mrs. Curtis took two morning shifts and would sometimes cover a third on account of the fact that said hour was claimed by a traveling salesman whose morning calls and morning prayers were sometimes at odds.

Mrs. Curtis lived across the street from the prayer room, a convenience for the slow-going woman, because she spent the majority of her day there. Her husband had passed some years before (how many I couldn't say), and instead of becoming some kind of assisted-living hermitess, she committed to spend what days she had left serving the church in prayer.

Every morning Mrs. Curtis walked to the church, sometimes stopping by the bakery afterwards to grab a loaf of bread, a pastry, or a pint of milk. She did a great deal of walking, I remember, and I think this was because she had some kind of difficulty

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driving. In my young estimation, the trouble with driving was brought on by neither old age nor senility; instead, it was the sort of trouble brought on by a hairdo that didn't much cooperate with being mashed against the ceiling liner of her old Buick. So Mrs. Curtis walked just about everywhere, lips moving all the while in prayer.

When I was fifteen, our church youth group held one of those Don't-Have-Sex-Till-You're-Married retreats made popular by the Evangelical 1990s. At the closing ceremony of the retreat, the pastor invited us to sign pledge cards vowing to wait till marriage to taste the sweet fruits of monogamous marital bliss. I signed my card, walked to the front of the church, and placed it on the platform. The pastor then invited the congregants to make their own pledge.

"Come to the front and take a card," he said. "Pledge to pray for the person whose name you draw until that person is married."

Even then, I questioned whether such a commitment was feasible, but as fate, fortune, and the Holy Ghost would have it, Mrs. Curtis drew my name. She never told me that she had come into possession of my pledge card, though. She never broached the subject of purity or lust with me, which is good, because the awkwardness quotient of any such conversation would have been rivaled only by the time Sister Sarto had the "sex talk" with my class of sixth-grade boys in Catholic school. Instead, if Mrs. Curtis ever exchanged words with me at all (a fact I do not recall all these years later), it wasn't much more than simple pleasantries.

I went on to college, and as young men tend to do, tried my best to leave my hometown behind. I didn't think much about my old church or the faithful men and women who'd attended for so many years, Mrs. Curtis included. And so, seven years and two children into marriage, you can imagine my surprise when someone called to tell me Mrs. Curtis had passed away.

“I’m sorry. But why are you calling to tell me?” I asked.

“I want you to know,” the calling minister said, “that Mrs. Curtis kept your pledge card in her Bible till the day she died. I happen to know that she never missed a day of praying for you, even after you were married.”

For over a decade, she’d prayed for me. For over a decade, those prayers had been a sort of guide, even if I hadn’t known it. For over a decade, she’d given time to me. And as I stood gape-mouthed on the other end of the phone, I knew her prayers had left their mark. Ann Curtis had left her imprint on my life.

Imprints—each of us will leave them along the way. Some will use their time, talents, resources, and words in more selfish ways, leaving negative and lasting imprints on their families, friends, and communities. Others, like Mrs. Curtis for example, will leave a different sort of imprint, an imprint that speaks of the reality of God’s Kingdom. In this book, Patrick and Justin don’t just analyze, examine, and teach us how to leave a Kingdom imprint (though they do that in spades), they pay homage to the men and women who’ve left Kingdom imprints on their own lives. Through their own experiences, they give us a cast of characters—coworkers, friends, and a cast of otherwise serendipitous acquaintances—who’ve lived lives of intention, lives that have made an impact. You might not recognize their names, and you couldn’t pick them out of the crowd, but the people in this book are the great saints of this world. They are people who’ve dedicated themselves to knowing God and making him known.

As you read these pages, take note. Discover how to live in a way that’s present to the world around you, that’s mindful of the mark you’ll leave. Press into that understanding and let it shape the time you have left here on earth. After all, though your money, success, and accolades may fade, your imprints carry on. And on. And on.

Introduction

WE LIVE IN A BROKEN WORLD. Every time we turn on the television or peruse a news feed, pain, suffering, and negativity lead the headlines. Not a week goes by where we don't hear about riots, mass murders, starvation, or abuse—so many people in so much need. If you're like us, this often feels overwhelming. With so much hurt at every turn, it's easy to feel defeated—to feel as if nothing we might say or do could even begin to make a difference.

Then we hear the story of a man or woman who has started a non-profit equipping people in developing countries with food, water, homes, and educational resources, or a team of individuals raising millions to combat homelessness through shelters, counseling services, and job placement programs.

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Our hearts swell with hope—someone out there is actually making a difference, fighting against the darkness. But there is a lingering feeling that what *we* do still doesn't matter, because *we* aren't feeding starving children or building homes for the homeless. This lie can subtly work its way into our hearts and minds—and if we aren't careful, the lie becomes truth—we believe we aren't enough, and as a result, we stop doing the things that matter.

If we want the world to heal and hope to rise, we must understand that the little things we do every day have great significance. No matter how large a person's platform or how world-changing their organization, a legacy isn't built on grand acts. It is the culmination of all the little things we do—this is how we fulfill our purpose. The legacy we pass on to future generations is who we are when we think no one is watching, how we live our lives in the day-to-day: the way we treat a waitress, the times we acknowledge servicemen and servicewomen for their contribution and sacrifice, the moments we look a grocery clerk in the eyes and call her by

Who we are on a day-to-day basis is the greatest testament to what we believe.

name. These little things in everyday situations carry weight; they are significant—because no act of love goes unnoticed and no deed of compassion is futile. There are a million moments in each of our lives where we have the opportunity to bring joy or pain, light or darkness, heaven or hell to others

through the words we say and how we say them; through the things we do and how we do them. Each one of us has significance, because each one of us has the power to bring love and compassion to the lives of every person we meet.

Yes, the world needs nonprofits that build freshwater wells in African villages or equip underserved communities with medical resources. But living in a manner where we actively seek

opportunities to love in simple yet profound ways is just as, if not more, important. Every day is filled with moments in which we can positively impact our friends, families, significant others, children, and strangers—because every single act leaves a mark on the lives of those around us, for good or ill. Every decision, every word leaves an imprint on others, but we often fail to notice these imprints because we don't appreciate the influence we have on our world.

Who we are on a day-to-day basis is the greatest testament to what we believe. The way we treat others and the intentions behind our actions leave impressions on those we encounter. These marks are the evidence our lives leave behind.

Every one of us has remarkable power and influence. Understanding this is the first step toward making this world a better place.

Part One

We're All Guides



God may not guide us in an obvious way because he wants us to make decisions based on faith and character.

– Dallas Willard

LIFE IS A JOURNEY filled with millions of decisions. Some are as simple as what we eat for lunch or when we choose to go to bed. Others, though, have lasting consequences, implications not only for our lives but also for the lives of others. The tone of voice we use when frustrated with a child, the way we respond to a stranger who cuts us off in traffic, the words we choose when talking about people who think or act differently than we do, the way we treat those who can do nothing for us—these behaviors affect not only the people they're directed toward, but also those who observe them.

Every day, we are guiding others down a path. We can influence their faith and help shape their character, or we can take them down a path of pain and destruction. Is our path filled with love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness? Or is our road marked by hate, insecurity, self-doubt, and fear?

Someone is always watching. Someone is always listening. Someone is always following.

Whether we like it or not, we're all guides. Where are you taking those who choose to follow you?

Your Life Is a Compass

1

History is not everything, but it is a starting point. History is a clock that people use to tell their political and cultural time of day. It is a compass they use to find themselves on the map of human geography. It tells them where they are, but more importantly, what they must be.

– John Henrik Clarke

FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS, sailors have used the heavens to guide their journeys through unknown waters, discovering new or forgotten places, or cultures previously unknown. And just as grand adventures across the sea were successfully navigated by bright stars in distant space, men and women were able to find their way home from their grand adventures because of reference points in the sky. Some ancient cultures believed the heavens were filled with gods or celestial beings that provided safe passage, guidance, and wisdom. Many prayed to the stars or the entities these stars represented to help them find their way.

The most significant celestial body used in ancient navigation is the constellation Ursa Minor. Over millennia, the axis of earth's rotation came to point at what we refer to as the North Star (part of Ursa Minor), and it became the focal point for maritime navigation rather than the entire constellation. This ball of fire in distant space has gone by many names: Polaris, Alpha Ursae Minoris,

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scip-steorra (“ship-star” in Old English), Dhruva (Hindu for “fixed” or “immovable”). But no matter the name used or the ocean sailed, every sailor looked to this star (or group of stars) for orientation. Every map drawn and navigation chart created was done with this star’s position in the sky in mind. Why? Because it identifies true north. It is a reliable guide.

But using a star as a reference point works only at night. And often clouds blocked man’s view of the sky, storms filled with wind and rain obscured both horizon and the heavens, and crews found themselves off course because true north wasn’t visible. Distractions or dangers residing much closer than a distant star compromised many a journey through the open ocean. But for thousands of years, stars in distant space were the best the world had to offer.

More than two thousand years ago, the Chinese developed an invention that would revolutionize navigation, on and off the water. The first compass, made of lodestone, was crafted in the Han Dynasty between 300 and 200 BC. Due to the earth’s magnetic field, this naturally magnetized iron ore is attracted to the North Pole, making it possible for travelers to identify true north even when the North Star isn’t visible.

It turns out we can learn a lot from a compass.

In life we need direction, something to point us toward the good we want to do and the people we want to be. We need help navigating dark times or simply dealing with changes that catch us off guard. Sometimes we don’t know we need a course correction, but our lives are desperate for it. For many, faith provides this direction; it is our true north—the thoughts, ideologies, and philosophies that inform our decisions and guide our actions. But

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faith is something we can't touch. While we experience it in various ways, we can't see it, and often it feels out of reach, like the distant North Star. And just like this star, our faith can easily be hidden, clouded by distractions, and our reference point is lost from view.

These distractions come in many forms: trauma, addictions, selfish behaviors, financial struggles, unexpected deaths, disease, divorce. The list of things that derail us is long because we have a million different things vying for our attention. The storms of life bring wind, rain, and dark clouds that can completely obscure our faith. It is in these times that we must rely on things much closer to us to keep our hearts and minds focused on what's important. We must find a compass that can help point us in the right direction, so when the clouds part, we don't find ourselves lost at sea.

Each person we know has the capacity to guide us: gently, and sometimes firmly, shifting our focus, turning us toward the things that matter. Their life experiences and what they have chosen to do with those experiences can be the compass we need to show us true north, clarifying the path we need to be traveling. Each person's history can help us understand where we are, but more importantly, their story can help us understand what we must be. They guide us in being better employees, parents, siblings, or children. They increase our capacity for love and grace as we strive to be the best friend, mentor, or spouse we can be. Our lives are filled with compasses waiting to be used at every turn. We find these people in our churches, workplaces, book groups, friendships, families, kids, and even strangers.

Our lives are filled with compasses waiting to be used at every turn.

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College was a challenging time for me (Justin). I had left my family and my home in small-town Ontario, Oregon, for a much busier lifestyle in San Diego; my best friend, Patrick, was going to school a thousand miles away in Idaho; and a progressive neuromuscular disease was slowly stealing life from my body. A car accident had triggered the disease when I was fifteen, and throughout my college years, it crept its way deeper into the tissues of my legs. I had to give up tennis and running because my strength and balance were fading. Eventually I had to use braces to keep me from falling to the ground when walking.

Despite the support these braces offered, walking to classes became too much for me on the hilly campus of Point Loma Nazarene College, so I was forced to drive to many of them. As I navigated college life, questions about my purpose in this world and doubts about my future often crept to the surface of my mind. *How long will I be able to walk? Will I ever find someone who will love me despite my failing body? Will this disease eventually take my life?* Each year of college brought many struggles, primarily due to my disease.

But my four years pursuing higher education were also exciting. I got to stretch my wings as I sought independence, experienced new restaurants, explored new subjects, discovered new relationships, and learned from some amazing people.

My parents and many friends have had a remarkable influence on me, but during this time in my life, one man stands out—not because he was a better mentor, but because he possessed something that, though I didn't know it at the time, I would one day desperately need.

One sunny San Diego day during my sophomore year at Point Loma, I drove to class, parked my car in a handicap spot, and began walking to my nearby classroom. On my way there, a stranger approached me. With a warm smile and firm handshake, he

introduced himself. Jim Johnson said he'd stopped me because he saw the braces that supported my lower legs; I assumed his curiosity had gotten the best of him, like so many other people on campus. Not a week went by where someone didn't ask, "What's wrong with your legs?" I had gotten used to the curiosity and did my best not to get annoyed. But in our conversation, I learned that Jim was a professor of Disability Studies and Psychology at Point Loma. He had taken an interest in what I might be dealing with as a disabled student. Throughout the remainder of my college career, we frequently encountered one another on campus, and every time, Jim stopped me and asked how I was doing. He sought to learn how my disease was impacting me physically and emotionally, and he always encouraged me.

I never took a class from Jim, but our conversations always stuck with me. However, it wasn't what we talked about that carried the most weight. Jim always had time for me. It felt like the world stopped during our interactions. Every discussion started with a hug, an embrace that told me I mattered. Jim's genuine interest in me as a person, what I was doing with my life, and where I was going, always took me by surprise. He frequently told me to see past my disability, to not let it define me. While I hadn't necessarily let my limitations define me, I certainly hadn't recognized how much I could do or what I could be in the face of my disease. Jim saw the potential in every person he met, and he saw purpose in me, even when I didn't see it in myself. And I saw something in him, something that I didn't have but wanted.

Questions about my purpose in this world and doubts about my future often crept to the surface of my mind. *How long will I be able to walk? Will I ever find someone who will love me despite my failing body? Will this disease eventually take my life?*

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After graduation, Jim and I saw each other less frequently. But one day he invited my soon-to-be wife, Kirstin, and me to sit down with one of his disability-focused classes. Sitting in front of thirty or so young men and women, I was a little nervous. The topic was the impact of disability on relationships. I don't remember the details of the class session, but I do remember the love and respect Jim showed to each student—the same love and respect he always showed me. Jim was so proactive in cultivating relationships, so kind and compassionate; this was what I had seen in him several years earlier that I wanted to possess.

But life got busy. I got married, my wife and I had children, and my disease progressed. Honestly, life didn't just get busy—it got hard. Being a father and a husband in a wheelchair took me down some dark roads, and I needed someone I could look to for guidance. I needed a compass to point me in the right direction so when the clouds parted, I wouldn't be lost. I needed Jim. Though he wasn't disabled, and we had very different life experiences, Jim's ability to build love, compassion, and empathy with all he met drew me to him in a powerful way.

When I called Jim to tell him I needed someone to help me navigate this life I was facing and asked if he would be my mentor, he said yes without hesitation.

Over the next several years, Jim and I spent hours in conversations discussing life, death, faith, and love. And through them all, I was reminded of how the love and compassion Jim showed me was the same love and compassion I wanted to show others. His life wasn't perfect—he had his own demons—but in spite of the pain he battled, he chose to love others and not focus on his own darkness. It's not that he ignored it, but sharing in the pain of others, and sharing his pain with them, made everyone's struggles easier to bear. I needed to do the same thing.

Though I have long since moved from San Diego, I still come

back to those conversations and the wisdom Jim shared so many years ago. His conviction that I had purpose is something I have leaned on time and time again through recent years. Now, I live life from a power chair, unable to use my arms or legs. I am dependent upon my wife, Patrick, and others for care. They feed me, bathe me, help me go to the bathroom. Life is a struggle; there is always a darkness lurking nearby. But because of Jim, and others like him, I have something to point me in the right direction, even when I can't see where I need to go.

Jim's life has been a compass for me in many ways. The random encounters on campus carried just as much weight as the hours of mentoring over coffee. My relationship with Jim has evolved as we have grown closer. But that first moment, when he approached me as a complete stranger, looked me in the eyes, and treated me with so much compassion, is one I return to often. It is a powerful reminder that my life is a compass for others, whether I like it or not. Even a brief encounter has the potential to change someone, to offer hope, or to develop into a deeper connection. While I'm not always proud of where I am taking those that follow me, knowing that my decisions and actions can have an impact on someone else, just as Jim's decisions and actions have influenced me, is a powerful motivator to live in such a way that I am proud of where I am taking others.

We all have a history, events that shape who and what we are. And when others turn to us for help, our histories can help shape who and what they are: a young woman using her abusive childhood to help others in similar situations, a man's interest in cars leading to an after-school program to keep teens off the street, a college student volunteering at the local homeless shelter because she knows what it's like to be alone and scared. Our lives are filled with a host

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of opportunities to provide direction to others. The beliefs and behaviors we exhibit are a guide for others when they have lost sight of their true north or need to be pointed in a direction they never knew existed.

This can be a terrifying realization, because the idea that we are constantly influencing others means we have the power to lead them off course. Highly magnetized objects or locations can compromise the integrity of a compass. Many ships have gone down because a compass was distracted by other forces and wasn't pointing the right direction. In the same way, when we allow ourselves to be influenced by selfish desires, anger, or deception, we can easily lead people to disaster. We can be the broken compass that points others to dangers waiting just below the surface

The beliefs and behaviors we exhibit are a guide for others when they have lost sight of their true north or need to be pointed in a direction they never knew existed.

of the water: the "cool" neighbor who gets a kid to try drugs for the first time or the friend who starts a rumor about someone who has slighted them. Damage is so easy to cause. Casting a negative influence on others is simple when we are driven by selfish desires or anger-filled motivations, or are deceptive in our intentions. When have you led others off course, when have

you been the cause of pain or darkness for someone else? If we are honest with ourselves, we have all been there. We have caused pain; our behaviors have fueled addictions; our selfish desires have led us to put our needs above our friends, spouses, and children. Every one of us has been a broken compass at some point in time. We all have given others bad information or pointed them down a path of pain and suffering. And still people follow.

So what are we to do? How can we ensure that we are worth

following? How do we know our history will be one that points others to where they should go and to what they should be? We don't have all the answers. But we do know this—if we lead with compassion and love, if our actions are fueled by a desire to ease suffering and pain, our compass will point others to a place where that same love and compassion abound.

And that is a direction always worth following.