

STAY AWAKE!

Have you ever gotten so sleepy while driving that it scared you? Yet you continued on toward your destination, your eyes glazed over, your mind on autopilot? Until maybe you glanced down at the odometer—or out the car window at unfamiliar surroundings—and finally snapped out of it, shouting, “I should stop!”

There have been times in my own life when I found myself in this situation. My instincts would tell me stop, rethink my direction, or GET OUT NOW! But I didn’t always listen. Sometimes, in fact, I pushed harder on the accelerator, so hypnotized by my own desire to get what I wanted. In hindsight, of course, I realize that I put a lot at risk.

Now, more mature, it’s easy to recognize the moments in my life when I was sleepwalking. Oh, I walked like I was awake. And I talked like I was awake. But my decisions clearly indicate that I was sound asleep. Unfortunately, I’m not alone. Over the past year, I have been introduced to staggering statistics that lead me to believe that many people are living their lives—and making choices—while seemingly sleeping.

How else can we explain that more than 36 million people around the world have AIDS? That one and a half million children in America have at least one parent who has been incarcerated? That more than three million American teenagers are alcoholics? That nearly 50 percent of all American marriages end in divorce? And, sadly, that nearly ten million US households are headed by a woman or a man without a spouse living in the home?

I know many people who fit into these statistics—some of them within my own family. I think it’s because they fell asleep. If anything, these numbers should warn us to stay awake. Here are some ways that might help:

- ? **Examine your beliefs.** What you *think* you believe isn’t necessarily what you *do* believe. It sounds strange, but it’s true. Sometimes we only think we believe something—because that’s what we’ve been taught. That’s why it’s so important to examine your *own* beliefs about life, education, family, career, religion, even politics. Inherited beliefs won’t become *your* beliefs unless you take ownership of them. For example, you may have been taught that having sex before marriage is wrong. But your actions say that you believe that having *children* before marriage is wrong. Once you’ve figured this out, you can come up with solutions that

connect your belief with your action. You might choose abstinence, you might choose a condom.

- ? **Don't let yourself get away.** For many reasons we let ourselves go. I'm not talking just about physically doing so. I'm referring to our basic human natures. Say, for example, you meet someone you really like. Suddenly, how they view you might become way more important than how you view yourself. HUGE MISTAKE! Why? Because you'll likely start living outside of the beliefs that you took so much time to figure out! Instead, hold fast to staying connected with yourself. Don't fall asleep at the wheel!

- ? **Find your way back home.** But even when we do make detours that take us away from ourselves, we can find our way back home. By "home" I mean being in that place where you're comfortable with yourself. It's hard work, but it's worth it, because there's no place like home. I can guarantee you one thing: Investing time in your personal, professional and spiritual development is the best investment you will ever make in—and for—yourself.

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