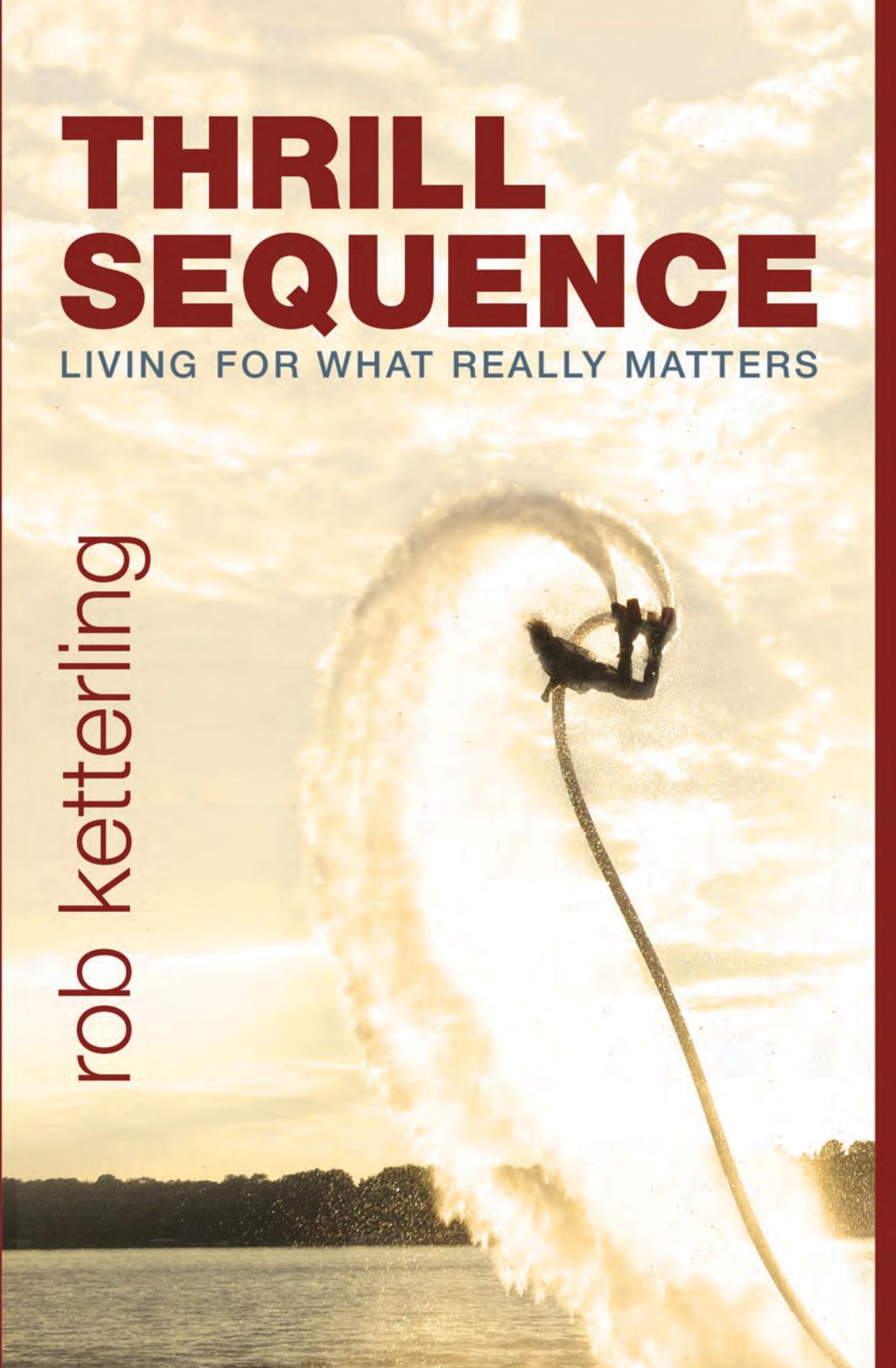


# THRILL SEQUENCE

LIVING FOR WHAT REALLY MATTERS

rob ketterling



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# EXPERIENCE CRAMMING

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“A man who carries a cat by the tail learns something he can learn in no other way.”<sup>4</sup>

—MARK TWAIN

**SOME PEOPLE BELIEVE** we are defined by what we do. Since no one wants to live with a boring reputation, people often feel compelled to engage in ever-increasing activity with hopes of gaining some degree of superiority.

Dr. Frank Farley, the Laura H. Carnell Professor of Educational Psychology at Temple University, has labeled people in our culture as “T-types.” They are in it for the thrill—the risk, the stimulation, the change, the variety, the intensity. These people are comfortable with uncertain outcomes. They are willing to take risks and live with the consequences. They are the new Evel Knievels, and there is not just

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4 BrainyQuote, posted at <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/m/marktwain105031.html>.

one of them or a few of them. There are millions of them with varying degrees of desire.

## **CHRONIC THRILLDOM**

Social media has popularized this lifestyle. Rather than write about their experiences, people now post pictures of whatever they are doing. Their lives are a dynamic online album instantaneously available to the world. This fuels the competitive nature so many people possess. Now we can compete across the globe, not just across the street.

As a culture, we are sucked into the vortex of incessant, sometimes unnecessary, activity. People cram as much activity as possible into their lives in an effort to achieve a desired level of significance. If you can't do it first, can you do more? That's what people are eagerly trying to live out—but there's a problem. The system they believe can produce personal significance can't deliver on its promises.

People want to feel rich, even if their riches are only contained in their experiences. They want to outdo others and are willing to do most anything for the distinction of being labeled “the best” or “the most extreme” or “the first.”

In *We Are All Weird*, Seth Godin says:

RICH is my word for someone who can afford to make choices, who has enough resources to do more than merely survive. . . . The swami I met in a small village in India is rich. Not because he has a fancy car (he doesn't). He's rich because he can make an impact on his tribe. Not just choices about what to buy, but choices about how to live.<sup>5</sup>

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5 Seth Godin, *We Are All Weird*, Kindle version, (The Domino Project, 2011), location 70 of 1005.

We have the opportunity to choose how to live. Therefore, we are all rich. In Luke 12:48, Jesus said, “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted

with much, much more will be asked.” We have been entrusted with a lot. We are accountable for more than our own self-gratification and accomplishments. God expects much from us.

In *The Message*, Proverbs 21:17 says, “You’re addicted to thrills? What an empty life! The pursuit of pleasure is never satisfied.” The first time I read that, it jumped off the page because that’s the thrill sequence! People who run this race will never be satisfied. This isn’t how to find a meaningful life. This is a futile existence that’s never satisfied.

Pastor John Piper said, “America is the first culture in jeopardy of amusing itself to death.”<sup>6</sup> We have so much, we are so rich, but we are so dissatisfied with the quality of our lives. Ultimately, this cycle leads to chronic boredom because we run out of superlative experiences. The next thrill doesn’t exceed the last thrill, so we settle into mediocrity or up the thrills to destructive behaviors that steal our lives away. It’s hard to believe that people who have so much can lose what matters most because we are addicted to thrills.

## ***DIE ALIVE***

You don’t have to die dull. You don’t have to live beneath your potential. There’s a way to find significance apart from the way the world thinks it can be found. If what everyone else is doing works,

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6 John Piper, *Don’t Waste Your Life*, quote posted at <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/247323-don-t-waste-your-life>

We are accountable for more than our own self-gratification and accomplishments.

why are there so many dissatisfied people? The world's plan *doesn't* work. Living for the next big thing leads to emptiness, yet we keep trying to find fulfillment in an empty promise.

Why is this concept so hard to grasp? Why do people continue to do something that doesn't have a track record for success? If you keep doing what you have always done, you will experience results you have already experienced. The future is predictable if your actions are consistent. I think most people would agree with that statement—it isn't the most profound thing you have heard. However, people continue to repeat the same cycles that landed them in their present state of dissatisfaction. This is humanity's folly. The Bible tells the stories of people who tried to do life their way, suffered the consequences of poor choices, and then repeated their pasts.

Perhaps you are familiar with the Bible story in the book of Exodus about the Israelites and their escape from slavery in Egypt. At the time, the distance from Egypt to Canaan could have been traveled in approximately three weeks with normal effort. However, the Israelites didn't take the most direct path. God led them a different way because they weren't ready to face the giants in their way, the Philistines. God's plan, however, was complicated by the nation's persistent disobedience. Time after time, they took matters into their own hands and made decisions that lengthened their journey—and three weeks turned into forty years. Their recipe for success never worked, but they kept doing what they had always done.

You can make your life have more meaning and purpose.

It sounds familiar, doesn't it? We have the same tendencies. Our recipes for success and fulfillment have failed, yet we keep trying them. Meanwhile, the clock ticks, and the calendar pages flip. Car seats give way to driving lessons and first dates. Our babies become

adults who have babies who become adults. And each of us is left with a haunting question: What did I do with my life? Did my experiences even matter?

The time to answer that question isn't later; the time is right now. You can make your life have more meaning and purpose. You can choose a different path. In *A Whole New Mind*, Daniel Pink says:

The paradox of prosperity is that while living standards have risen steadily decade after decade, personal, family, and life satisfaction haven't budged. That's why more people—liberated by prosperity but not fulfilled by it—are resolving the paradox by searching for meaning."<sup>7</sup>

People today think the next thrill will resolve the paradox.

What happened that made people believe busyness would produce fulfillment? Did a switch flip a few years ago, or has this been a gradual process? It didn't happen overnight. Our culture has been building toward this for decades. We have come to believe that one more activity on the schedule or one more organization on the agenda will bring fulfillment. When that activity or organization fails to deliver, we add more and more. Today, our children often participate in activities they don't even like. Parents have become taxi drivers and scheduling experts as they manage their children's busy lives. Why? It's not because the kids want the activities. It's because their parents are seeking significance vicariously through them. When parents can't add anything more to their lives, they add to their kids' lives. Can you relate?

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7 Daniel Pink, *A Whole New Mind* (New York: Riverhead Trade, 2006), 35.

## ***THE NEW “FINE, THANK YOU”***

Busyness is the new status symbol for many people. Ask, “How are you doing?” and you might get, “It’s been a busy week,” in response. We get a similar answer when we ask how someone’s week has been, what’s on their schedule, how their kids are doing, and what do the next four months look like?

About fifty years ago, someone predicted that ours would be a more leisurely generation. Work weeks would shorten as automation eliminated repetitious activities. People would be more relaxed and at peace. Families would dine together at home. Kids would be kids. So much for predictions, huh?

Today, people are trying to outwork their competition. Our media connected society means we are always online. We believe we can multitask, in spite of research that shows multitasking is impossible. We eat in our cars (on average, Americans now eat one of five meals in their cars because they’re so busy<sup>8</sup>) or meet in restaurants that double as playgrounds. Our kids have a soccer shoe on one foot and a ballet slipper on the other, with piano music in the right hand and a science project in the left. Some schools assign homework over the summer that must be submitted when school resumes in the fall. Life is more hectic than ever, and it shows no sign of letting up.

Busyness has a co-conspirator named *amusement*. The breakneck pace of everyday life makes people feel entitled to amusement. They live lives they can’t wait to escape. Is that a recipe for fulfillment? There’s a new trend in our culture. Many people in midlife are taking a closer look at the trajectories they are on and choosing to reorient their lives toward something more significant.

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8 “11 Facts about American Eating Habits,” DoSomething.org, posted at <https://www.dosomething.org/facts/11-facts-about-american-eating-habits>

They are walking away from things they once thought would give them meaning and significance. They have decided the pursuit of pleasure and things is a meaningless journey.

“The pursuit of pleasure is never satisfied” (Proverbs 21:17 MSG). *Pleasure* comes from the Hebrew word meaning *mirth*. That’s not a word we use every day. It means *amusement*. No culture has been more fascinated with amusement than ours. According to the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions, there are more than four hundred amusement parks in America. Twenty-eight percent of Americans say they would be interested in working at an amusement park. (It’s not necessarily a bad idea; I actually worked at one for three years and had a lot of fun doing it!) Amusement parks take in more than \$12 billion per year.<sup>9</sup> Amusement is big business.

Yet amusement is designed to give life flavor, not to be the focus of life. When we give ourselves over to the pursuit of amusement, we compromise our true potential. God didn’t design us to play our lives away. That message, unfortunately, has been drowned out in today’s society. People still seek satisfaction through amusement, in spite of the fact that the Bible says seeking amusement will never lead to satisfaction. There will always be a bigger, faster rollercoaster or a new character-themed ride. People will find creative ways to rationalize spending lots of money on things guaranteed to provide momentary entertainment but no satisfaction.

God didn't  
design us to play  
our lives away.

What gives people pleasure today might not provide the same thrill tomorrow. Just look at the change that takes place each week in the technology industry. Accomplishments celebrated thirty years ago are laughable today. Mobile phones were once the size of a

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9 IAAPA website, posted at <http://www.iaapa.org/resources/by-park-type/amusement-parks-and-attractions/industry-statistics#sthash.ua5uzUpv.dpuf>.

lunch box. Calculators could only add, subtract, multiply, and divide, and they cost a lot of money. Remote controls were unheard of. The technology that amazed our parents is now commonplace in many Third World countries. But the technology world isn't letting up. The devices we use each day are obsolete in the minds of the people who designed them. They were already working on a replacement before my phone hit the market. Recently, Apple sold more iPhone 6 models than any other multi-million-selling iPhone in the company's stellar product sales history—39 million units in its first month<sup>10</sup>—even though most of those buyers already had an iPhone!

## **WHEN MORE ISN'T MORE**

We follow a similar pattern of thinking to the technology industry. Whatever brings us joy today has the potential to be boring tomorrow. We want more, and tomorrow, we will want even more. What's the harm in wanting more? It's a dangerous cycle.

Let's say you decide to jump from a height of one foot today and then add one foot each subsequent day. The one-foot jump is more like a step. Two feet presents no problem. How will you know when jumping from a height is dangerous? You won't until you jump and hurt yourself. That's when you will decide you should have stopped one jump sooner.

The pursuit of pleasure is powerful. We push the limits, hoping to get a bigger thrill than the last. But we never know we've gone too far until we suffer the negative consequences. The Internet is loaded with stories and videos about people who pushed the limits and lost. Some simply got hurt. Others experienced more tragic results.

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10 Hayley Tsukayama, "Apple Crushes Expectations, Sells 39.3 Million iPhones in Fourth Quarter," *The Washington Post*, posted at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-switch/wp/2014/10/20/apple-crushes-expectations-sells-39-3-million-iphones-in-fourth-quarter/>

Although “the pursuit of pleasure is never satisfied,” the pursuit of God always satisfies. Everything entrusted to you—time, ability, money, influence, personality—was given to you by a loving Creator who has an assignment for you.

A youth Bible study teacher pulled a one hundred-dollar bill from his pocket and handed it to one of his students. He instructed the student to place the money in the offering basket during worship. The following week, the teacher asked the student what he did with the money. The student replied that he had put it in the offering. The teacher asked why he did that, and the student said, “It wasn’t mine. It belonged to you, so I did what you said.”

Your life and everything you have is like that one hundred-dollar bill, and you are the student. God handed it to you with instructions. You get to choose to do what He said or to take possession of something that isn’t yours. Don’t try to cram experiences into your life and, while doing so, miss out on what life is all about. It’s not about the experiences; it’s not about the thrill. There’s much more to life than that. So don’t settle for just doing something different. Do something more, and discover the One who can thrill you!

## **KEY IDEAS**

- The “thrill sequence” describes the vicious cycle of continuously searching for the next adventure and the thrills that come with it.
- Social media has helped popularize the thrill sequence. Rather than write about their experiences, people now post pictures of whatever they are doing.
- There’s a way to find significance apart from the way the world thinks it can be found.

- Busyness is the new status symbol for many people.
- Everything entrusted to you—time, ability, money, influence, personality—was given to you by a loving Creator who has an assignment for you.

## ***DISCUSSION QUESTIONS***

1. Take a close look at the definition of “thrill sequence,” and describe how your life is affected by it.
2. What information do you share on social media, and why do you share it?
3. What makes you significant? What is your strategy for finding significance in life? How effective has your previous strategy been?
4. Describe a day in your life. How does busyness affect your ability to hear from God?
5. What do you think is God’s assignment for you? How well can you know your God-given assignment without an intimate relationship with God?

## ***ACTION STEPS***

1. Get a journal or use an online journal to keep track of your activities for a week. Look for clues related to your focus in life.
2. Identify one activity you can eliminate from your schedule so you can spend more time with God. Ask Him to help you understand His assignment for your life.

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

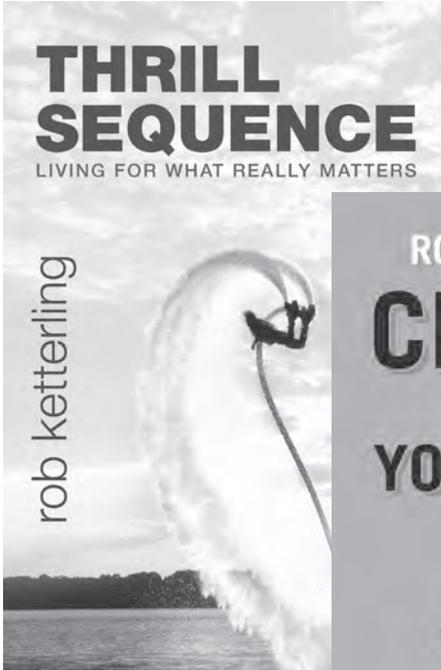
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**ROB KETTERLING** is the founder and lead pastor of River Valley Church, a multisite church started in Minnesota in 1995. It has since grown into a thriving church with over 5,000 in attendance across five U.S. campuses and one international campus in Valencia, Spain, with further expansion plans in its future. Rob serves on several church and para-church boards, including the Board of Regents at North Central University, and is on the lead team of the Association of Related Churches (ARC). He is the author of *Change Before You Have To*.

Rob and his wife, Becca, live in Minnesota with their two boys, Connor and Logan. You can follow Rob on Twitter (@robketterling), Facebook (robketterling), and through his blog (robketterling.com).

**FOR MORE INFORMATION . . .**

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For more information about these resources visit

**[www.salubrisresources.com](http://www.salubrisresources.com)**

**“In his newest book, Rob demonstrates how to make the faith experience something of authentic and lasting significance, rather than a fleeting series of thrills.”**

*—John C. Maxwell, #1 New York Times bestselling author and leadership expert; founder of the John Maxwell Company*

## **Intentionally following Jesus is the ultimate thrill experience!**

We were made to crave! We yearn for days of joy and excitement, for exciting experiences and adventure. We want more but often don't know how to live beyond the mundane. In *Thrill Sequence*, Rob Ketterling provides the key to that full and daring life: a reckless faith.

Are you constantly looking for your next adrenaline-packed experience? Seeking another dose of excitement from an adventure? What if your Christian life could be just as thrilling? Jesus said He came to give us abundant life. Let Rob help you seek adventure in a full-on, reignited faith. Discover the excitement of passionately pursuing a life of service and raw faith—much different and far better than the pointless pursuit of human thrills.



Rob Ketterling is the founder and lead pastor of River Valley Church, a multisite church started in Minnesota in 1995 that currently has over 6,500 in attendance across six U.S. campuses and two international campuses (Valencia, Spain, and Mbekelweni, Swaziland).

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