

# BOSTON COLLEGE

"LIFE HAS QUESTIONS. THEY HAVE ANSWERS."  
—THE NEW YORK TIMES

#1  
NEW YORK  
TIMES  
BEST SELLER

BILL BURNETT & DAVE EVANS

# DESIGNING

# YOUR LIFE

HOW TO BUILD A WELL-LIVED,  
JOYFUL LIFE

FIRST YEAR ACADEMIC CONVOCATION  
SEPTEMBER 2018



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## WHY READ A BOOK?

We can learn what is in any book via an Amazon review, hear what others think on social media, listen to a Ted Talk if we want to learn from cutting-edge thinkers. So why sit with a thick paper tome when it's far easier to get our information and entertainment in other forms?

One answer is precisely because it is easier, and noisier, to learn and be entertained via digital and truncated means. Technology keeps us connected, linked, always visible, always able to see and be seen. Sometimes this connection, this being linked, on, and seen is valuable, worthwhile and even politically efficacious. Sometimes.

But if all we ever do is check status updates, skim articles, and read summaries of other peoples' ideas while listening to music and texting our friends, something valuable gets lost. That something goes by many names: concentration, solitude, space for reflection, intimacy, and authenticity. Reading a book, we hope you'll learn at Boston College if you don't already know and believe already, brings with it unique form of pleasure and thinking.

Reading can take us out of the smallness of our own perception, our own little lives, the limited boundaries of what we have experienced. We can glimpse into the perspectives and even empathize with people whose lives are vastly different than our own. As Zits, the narrator of Sherman Alexie's novel *Flight* learns, "I can't jump into Dave's body but I can feel and see and understand a little bit about his pain, I guess.<sup>[1]</sup>"

Beyond teaching empathy, reading takes us briefly out of the noisy, overwhelming chaos that is our daily life and gives us something else, which William Dereseiwicz describes well:

"But a book has two advantages over a tweet. First, the person who wrote it thought about it a lot more carefully. The book is the result of his solitude, his attempt to think for himself.

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<sup>1</sup> Alexie, S. (2007). *Flight*: a novel. New York: Black Cat.

Second, most books are old. This is not a disadvantage: this is precisely what makes them valuable. They stand against the conventional wisdom of today simply because they're not from today. Even if they merely reflect the conventional wisdom of their own day, they say something different from what you hear all the time. But the great books, the ones you find on a syllabus, the ones people have continued to read, don't reflect the conventional wisdom of their day. They say things that have the permanent power to disrupt our habits of thought." [2]

Cultivating habits of thought. That's what coming to BC is offering you. Some habits can and should be digital, connected, and even multi-tasked. But sometimes we all need the habit of opening a good book, diving in, and leaving the din of our contemporary moment, temporarily, behind.

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## WHY READ *DESIGNING YOUR LIFE*?

As a member of the class of 2022, each of you will have the opportunity to read *Designing Your Life* by Stanford Professors, Bill Burnett and Dave Evans. On the evening of September 6, 2018, our University community will welcome one of the authors, Dave Evans, to Boston College to serve as the keynote speaker during your First Year Academic Convocation.

From saving the seals to solving the energy crisis, from imagining mice to redefining software — Dave Evan has been on a mission, including helping others to find theirs. Starting at Stanford with dreams of following Jacques Cousteau as a marine biologist, Dave realized (a bit late) that he was lousy at it and shifted to mechanical engineering with an eye on the energy problem. After four years in alternative energy in the late 70's, it was clear that idea's time hadn't come yet. So while en route to biomedical engineering, Dave accepted an invitation to work for Apple, where he led the mouse team and introduced laser printing to the masses. When Dave's boss at Apple left to start Electronic Arts, Dave joined as the company's first VP of Talent, dedicated to making "software worthy of the minds that use it."

After 15 years as tech executive, including two more "real jobs" in telecommunications, Dave decided his real mission was to help others find and pursue theirs. So he went out on his own working with start-up executive teams,

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<sup>2</sup> From a lecture by William Dereseiwicz to the plebe class at the United States Military Academy at West Point, October 2009



some large corporate clients, but also with countless young adults. They were all asking the same question. “What should I do with my life and why?” Helping people get traction on that question continues to be Dave’s real work, which he finds is most enjoyable and effectively done in the university setting.

Dave taught a course for eight years at UC Berkeley entitled How to Find Your Vocation (aka: *Is Your Calling Calling?*) and has been a Lecturer in the Stanford Program in Design since 2007, where he co-teaches the popular course Designing Your Life. Dave holds a BS and MS in Mechanical Engineering from Stanford and a graduate diploma in Contemplative Spirituality from San Francisco Theological Seminary.

As you read *Designing Your Life*, it is the hope of the University that it gives you insight into how to respond to life’s questions and seek direction as you move through your own personal journey. Since 2004, Conversations in the First Year has engaged members of the incoming class in an intellectual and reflective dialogue with a common text, embodying the richness of the Catholic intellectual tradition at Boston College which calls us to examine our faith and experience in conversation with other thinkers in order to pursue the greater glory of God. This conversation among thinkers that will begin for you with this common text will carry over to conversations with all members of the Boston College community during your next four years.

This ongoing conversation is part of the University’s commitment to finding God in all things. “Contemporary Jesuit schools maintain the original commitment to rigorous intellectual development, to personal, moral, and religious formation, and to the discernment of God’s action in all aspects of the student’s experience. The pursuit of the greater glory of God remains rooted in a worldview that God can be encountered in all creation and through all human activity, especially in the search for truth in every discipline, in the desire to learn, and in the call to live justly together.”

From *The Catholic Intellectual Tradition: A Conversation at Boston College*

## A WAY TO APPROACH THE TEXT

As you enter into this Jesuit, Catholic University, we will ask each of you to engage in conversation, to live together, and to share your life with one another. As members of the Class of 2022, your conversation will include this book which invites you to consider how you will design your life.

*The early Jesuits struggled to describe what they called “our way of proceeding.” Their distinctive spirituality can be seen as a three-part process. It begins with paying attention to experience, moves to reflecting on its meaning, and ends in deciding how to act. Jesuit education, then, can be described in terms of three key movements: being attentive, being reflective, and being loving. It results in the kind of good decision-making that St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus, called discernment. Discernment enables each of us to seek the greater good before us. Having this deep interior knowledge of the heart is to communicate with God and trust that the hand of God is at work fortifying and directing us in our lives. One of the many goals of a Jesuit education is to produce men and women for whom discernment is a habit.*

*We can think of discernment as the lifelong process of exploring our experience, reflecting upon its meaning, and living in a way that translates this meaning into action that creates a harmonious community for us all. We can also think of this process as something that we focus on with special intensity at particular moments in our lives, for example, during the four years of college or when we have to make important decisions. When we discern, we want to do so freely and with a sense of what God is calling us to do.*

*Through the practice of discerning, we grow in our ability to imagine how we are going to live our lives and discover our vocations. The novelist and theologian Frederick Buechner describes vocation as “the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” When we arrive at this place of convergence, we understand the fit between who we are and what the world needs of us; St. Ignatius urges us to be unafraid to live with the consequences of this realization and to respond with generosity and magnanimity, because this is the way that we can love as God loves. (from A Pocket Guide to Jesuit Education)*

From the very beginning, the goal of Jesuit education has been to form men and women for others. As part of this formation, St. Ignatius and his companions established guiding principles to cultivate a reflective practice among their students.

These same principles provide the framework for today's Boston College experience:

*To cultivate this formation, St. Ignatius and his companions translated their distinctive spirituality into an educational vision by describing it as a three-part process. It begins with paying attention to experience, moves to reflecting on the meaning of experience, and ends in deciding how to act moving forward. Jesuit education, then, can be described in terms of three key movements: Be attentive, be reflective, be loving.*

*Being attentive is largely about us and how God is working in us through our experience. Being reflective moves our gaze outward, measuring our experience against the accumulated wisdom of the world. Being loving requires that we look even more closely at the world around us. It asks the question: How are we going to act in this world? In part, this is a question about what we are going to do with the knowledge and self-understanding and freedom that we have appropriated by reflection. How shall we act in ways that are consistent with this new self and what it knows and values? (from A Pocket Guide to Jesuit Education).*

*But we can't move very far in the direction of answering this question without discovering that it is not only a question about how our lives can be authentic. It is also a question about our relationship to the world around us and what the world needs us to do. We are not solitary creatures. From the womb, we live in relationships with others, grow up in cultural, social, and political institutions that others have created for us. To be human is to find our place in these relationships and these institutions, to take responsibility for them, to contribute to nurturing and improving them, to give something back.*

*So, for Jesuit education, it is not enough to live authentically in the world. We have to participate in the transformation of the world (the Hebrew phrase tikkun olam conveys the same idea, of mending or repairing the world). For more than four hundred years, it has been said that Jesuit education educated "the whole person." Today, we live with an increasingly global sense of what it means to be human. A person can't be considered "whole" without an educated solidarity with other human beings in their hopes and fears and especially in their needs. We can't pay attention to our experience and reflect on it without realizing how our own lives are connected with the dreams of all those with whom we share the journey of human existence, and therefore with the economic, political, and social realities that support or frustrate their dreams. This is why Jesuit education is so often said to produce "men and women for others" (from A Pocket Guide to Jesuit Education).*

*Designing Your Life* invites this same reflection on three key questions:

- Who you are
- What you believe
- What you are doing

Bill and Dave underscore that we are able to develop a better sense of self when we are able to connect these three questions and our Lifeview and our Workview are integrated. They remind us that "Living coherently doesn't mean everything is in perfect order all the time. It simply means you are living in alignment with your values and have not sacrificed your integrity along the way...If you can see the connections between who you are, what you believe, and what you are doing, you will know when you are on course, when there is tension, when there might need to be some careful compromises, and when you are in need of a major course correction" (pp. 32-33).

At Boston College, these three questions often invite us to think about how we are living most authentically, summarized as "the three B's": be attentive, be reflective, be loving.

1. "What gives you joy?" This is a question about your biggest dreams and your deepest desires. But it's about joy, not just about being happy. Lots of things can make you happy—a good meal, eight hours of sleep, the weather. Joy comes from within and has to do with a deep and abiding sense of the rightness, the goodness of the choices you're making. So, who are you? What things are you passionate about? What is going to make you grow, learn more, become more? It might help to ask yourself what have been the defining moments in your life, the turning points that shaped who you are, the moments when you made decisions that, consciously or not, have made you the person you are today? Do these point to what gives you joy?

2. "Are you any good at these things?" The second question you can take out of your knapsack when you need it is: "Are you any good at these things?" This question is a kind of reality check on your dreams: Do you have the talents to pursue the things you are passionate about? If you're fascinated by people's stories but you really can't write, maybe you're not called to be a journalist but perhaps a psychologist. If you love music but can't play an instrument, maybe your vocation is to be an entertainment lawyer or the business manager of a rock band. Do you even recognize the talents you have? Maybe there are things you're good at but you don't consider them important. Unlike the question about what gives you joy, this question can't be answered by you alone. You can have a pretty good idea of what your talents are but you still need other people—teachers, coaches, mentors, friends—to confirm your sense of yourself and to challenge you when you're going down the wrong road. One way of answering this question is to ask yourself: Who have been the key people in your life who have helped you know who you are and what you can do? What have you learned from them

about yourself and about the talents that are special to you? If someone asked these people to describe your strengths and weaknesses, what specific ones do you think they would mention?

3. “Does anybody need you to do these things?” The novelist and theologian Frederick Buechner describes vocation as “the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” We don’t live for ourselves alone and one of the mysteries of life is that we discover the full meaning of our lives only when we give ourselves in love to other people, to communities, or to significant ideals. After all, our lives have been shaped by relationships and by communities that have marked our personal histories—family, school, friends, those with whom we live and work, the special people we fall in love with—and with them we become part of an ever widening circle of belonging. To belong is to take responsibility for these relationships and to contribute to nurturing them, to give something back to them. So a crucial third task is to define the horizons that give meaning to your life. Who are the people, what are the ideals, where are the needs that invite you to give yourself to them? Do they begin to suggest directions for your future, a way of life worthy enough to call a vocation? These three questions—like the daily examination of consciousness described in Chapter 2—are not gimmicks from self-help books but practices rooted in a spiritual tradition that understands that our lives find meaning when our deepest desires, which reveal the movements of God’s Spirit in our hearts, are matched to the dreams God has for us. If we develop the habit of discernment, we can trust that what we’re looking for and what God is looking for in us can be one and the same.” (The Red Book, 2009, pp. 192-196)

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

The authors include a number of exercises throughout the book that are integral to synthesizing the concepts as you design your own life. In addition to these important elements, there are also a number of questions for you to consider at this distinct moment in time as you begin to design your life in the context of your experience as a Boston College student:

“A well-designed life is a marvelous portfolio of experiences, of adventures, of failures that taught you important lessons, of hardships that made you stronger and helped you know yourself better, and of achievements and satisfactions.” p. xxx

**What are the experiences that have helped you know yourself better?**

“If it’s not actionable, it’s not a problem. It’s a situation, a circumstance, a fact of life. It may be a drag (so to speak) but, like gravity, it’s not a problem that can be solved.” p. 9

**What are the gravity problems you face in your life? How can you get past these to focus on problems that can be solved?**

The Life Design Assessment focuses on four areas: health, work, play, and love. When you look at your health/work/play/love dashboard, what do your gauges measure? How do you care for yourself and your mental, physical, and spiritual health? In what ways do you participate in life – what do you see as work in your life? Where do you find yourself at play? What brings you joy? Who are the important people in your life who show you love and receive yours? (pp. 14-16)

Part of your Life Design Assessment for health includes your spirituality. The Red Book, which is referenced in this guide and published as a resource for the Boston College community, addresses spirituality on pages 56-57:

Spirituality means a variety of things and covers a multitude of practices and ideas. There is spirituality for every religious conviction, for men and for women, for athletes and for grandparents, for environmentalists and for business managers, for liberals and for conservatives. What all these spiritualities have in common is that they attempt to get into the mystery of life. Mystery here does not mean an unsolved crime but rather those deepest convictions and loves and experiences that define who we are and what we treasure.

In the Christian gospel Jesus says, “Where your treasure is, there is your heart.” Perhaps this is the clearest way to express what spirituality does. Spirituality talks about what we treasure even when we cannot always define our treasure or even when we feel distant from it. The treasure belongs to all of us—firm believers, quizzical searchers, and confirmed religious skeptics. The treasure lies outside us and within us. When we discover what we treasure in life, then we also discover our spirituality. (The Red Book 2009, pp 56-57)

**What does spirituality mean to you? How have you matured in your relationship with God on your journey? In what ways do you hope to do so over the next four years at Boston College?**

In the introduction to the workbook that accompanies this book, Bill and Dave remind readers of the tools that are important for *Designing Your Life*. As you consider the tools they recommend, think about what each means as you design your life.

To think like a designer, you can start by adopting five simple mind-sets. These are your design tools, and with them you can build anything, including a life you love.

Be Curious. Curiosity makes everything new. It invites exploration and makes everything feel like play. Most of all, curiosity is going to help you “get good at being lucky.”

**What are the things you are curious about as you begin your time at Boston College? How will you explore all of that the University has to offer – courses, guest speakers, clubs to join, athletics, retreats, spiritual and service opportunities, immersion experiences, friendships, mentor relationships, and more?**

*Try Stuff.* When you have a bias to action, rather than sitting on the bench just thinking about what you are going to do, get in the game and commit to building your way forward. Designers are always trying things and testing them out. They create prototype after prototype, failing but often failing forward, until they find what works and what solves the problem.

**Are you typically action-oriented or do you tend to watch from the sidelines? How will you challenge yourself to try new things? Where have you experienced failure? How can you begin to see failure as a way to move forward?**

*Reframe Problems.* Thinking about something differently is how designers get unstuck. It also makes sure that we are working on the right problem. Key reframes help you step back, examine your biases, and open up new solution spaces.

**When you face a problem, do you become mired in it and unable to see your way out? How can you look at problems through a new lens as you begin your college experience?**

*Know it's a process.* To think like a designer, you have to understand that life gets messy. For every step forward, it can sometimes mean you are moving two steps back. An important part of the process is letting go – of your first idea and of a good-but-not-great solution.

**Are you able to think through multiple solutions to a problem? Can you embrace ambiguity as you live into the answers?**

*Ask for Help.* This last mind-set of design thinking is perhaps the most important. You are not alone; it takes a team. The best designers know that great design requires radical collaboration.

**Who are the people who are on your team now? How do you imagine those relationships will change as you start college? How will you invite new friends, mentors, and conversation partners to be a part of your team at Boston College?**

Bill and Dave stress that there is no one destination in life and that each of us must find our way. This “wayfinding” requires a compass and a direction, not a map and the path we take is often found by following our engagement and energy (p. 43).

**As you reflect on how you have made your own decisions in the past, which method have you used? As you make decisions moving forward, are there ways that you can “design” your life by looking inward to make decisions rather than seeking a singular path? How will you live out those decisions during your time at Boston College? What do you find most engaging and energizing?**

## THE EXAMEN

**The goal of Jesuit education is to produce men and women for whom discernment is a habit.**

*We can think of discernment as the lifelong project of exploring our experience, naming its meaning, and living in a way that translates this meaning into action. We can also think of this process as something we focus on with special intensity at particular moments in our lives -- during the four years of college, for example, or when we have to make important decisions and want to do so freely and with a sense of what God is calling us to. At these times, we might be especially conscious of using spiritual exercises to help us negotiate the process. But we can also think of these three movements as the intertwined dynamics of daily life, the moment-by-moment activity of becoming fully human. (from A Pocket Guide to Jesuit Education)*

The Good Time Journal that Bill and Dave recommend as a way to measure engagement and energy is one method of reflection. The reflective practice of reviewing one's day as part of cultivating a habit of discernment can also be found in one mode of prayer from the Ignatian tradition – the Examen. This is a prayer in five parts which helps individuals move through an examination of conscience, allowing the experiences of the day to guide one's reflection. Its basis is in Christianity, but it can also be considered in light of other faith traditions.

*At first it might be helpful to move through all five of the points, spending two or three minutes on each, just to see what works for you. Or you may want to remain on the first point, giving thanks, after an especially great day. Or there may be times when you want to consider your career or a possible long-term relationship and then you might spend time on orienting your future. There is no single way to make the examination. The only essential is to bring your day before God. At the core of the examination is self-awareness before God. Its power lies in the way you become conscious of your own relationship with God, with your own spirituality.*

- *Giving Thanks.* I thank God for the way God has met me today—in the work I have done, in the people I have encountered, in the letters from home, etc. I begin my prayer with the solid hope that God cares for me, knows me and loves me with an everlasting love.

- *Seeking Light.* I ask for light to understand the specific moments in which God has clarified who I am, what my gifts really are, and how I treat other people. I ask not to hide from the truth. I ask to be gentle with myself and honest, too. I ask to learn from God who I am.



- *Reviewing Life.* I go over the events of the day, noticing the ones where I felt closer to God and the ones where I felt distanced from God. Where today I met weakness or failure, I ask for forgiveness and self-acceptance. Where today I have lived faithfully and productively, I rejoice in God's service. God does not ask the impossible from me, only the good that I can do and be.

- *Noting Patterns.* I stand before my history as God does—lovingly wise about who I am, eager to make me part of the work of the Kingdom, allowing me to understand the patterns of my life that lead me to a more personal sense of how God calls me here at Boston College. Are there emerging insights about the life I should live? Are there difficulties that I keep trying to avoid and know I must face? Are there people, places and occasions that especially open me to God? And are there people, places, and occasions that bring out the worst in me? What does God want me to do with the person that I am becoming?

- *Orienting My Future.* Finally, I ask to live as Christ did. I look at the pattern of openness and the essentials of his teaching. I look at the trust he had in God's design for the world. I look at his availability to people. I accept the strategy of forgiveness, truthfulness and service that Christ portrayed. I want to believe that I am called to live just as Christ was, as a woman or man for others. Of course, I will fail. But failure can be the way to wisdom and compassion if I use failure to know myself better and to understand the human heart more deeply. More important, I look ahead out of the successes of the day. I ask to live with a growing sense of God's trust in my future. (The Red Book 2009, pp 115, 117)

The reflective practice of the Examen is one that Rev. Anthony Penna, Boston College's Associate Vice President for Mission and Ministry and Director of Campus Ministry, prayed that a recent graduating class would take with them from Boston College into the world.

Just before Commencement he offered these words to them:

*St. Ignatius said that the world's great sin is the lack of gratitude. So, I'm going to ask you to consider integrating this simple ritual into your daily life when you move on from Boston College. Every night before you go to bed, take a few minutes to think about your day. Examine the day reflectively, the ups and the downs (for no day is without a few bumps in the road, as is true for a four-year college career). Then, identify one thing that occurred, one thing that happened in the day for which you are grateful and give thanks for that one thing. Let that be the way you end every day before you fall to sleep. If you do this, you'll be a healthier, happier, more spiritual, and more balanced person. This practice will be good for you and everyone else who's a part of your life as well (Boston College Class of 2015 Senior Class Toast, May 14, 2015).*

We renew his prayer for the Class of 2022 as you begin your time here at Boston College!



## CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

As you enter Boston College, you must consider how we live in the 21st century and how the world is growing rapidly and changing in unforeseen ways. In the midst of this globalized and technologically driven world, we ask you to critically evaluate all that has come before us. To enter into the University core curriculum is to enter into a foundation of knowledge and experiences that will better equip each of you to synthesize and adapt to the ever-changing world that you are part of each day. Being able to read, write, and think critically will be important building blocks within your academic journey here at Boston College.

To fully embrace your Jesuit, Catholic education, you also need to consider how you will grow in your own understanding of faith. There are many conversation partners, including the Jesuit community, faculty, staff, and administrators, who are here to be your companions in contemplative action and reflective conversation as you search for truths in your life and the world around you and design your life.

Boston College hopes that each student will deepen their individual faith over the course of their years here. There are a number of sacred places within our community where you can go to contemplate and recognize God in all things.

We would encourage you to seek out these sacred places on our campus: [www.bc.edu/prayermap](http://www.bc.edu/prayermap).



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## FALLING IN LOVE WITH GOD

*Nothing is more practical than finding God,  
that is, falling in love  
in a quite absolute, final way.  
What you are in love with,  
what seizes your imagination,  
will affect everything.  
It will decide  
what will get you out of bed in the morning,  
what you will do with your evenings,  
how you will spend your weekends,  
what you read,  
who you know,  
what breaks your heart,  
and what amazes you with joy and gratitude.  
Fall in love,  
stay in love,  
and it will decide everything.*

—Attributed to Fr. Pedro Arrupe, SJ (1907-1991)

*As you enter into your first year of college, it is important to examine the decisions that you make while here at BC. Taking time to reflect upon your motivations, your desires, and your fears will give you a better perspective on your life—where you came from, where you are presently, and where you are heading. Boston College hopes to partner with you during this journey through the careful discernment of the intellectual, spiritual, and social components that affect you during your undergraduate journey.*



## Go Set the World Aflame!



# YOUR NOTES ON *DESIGNING YOUR LIFE*



CONVERSATIONS IN THE FIRST YEAR:  
A PROGRAM OF THE OFFICE OF FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE



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