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When the Game is Over, It All Goes Back in the Box

A Quick Focus

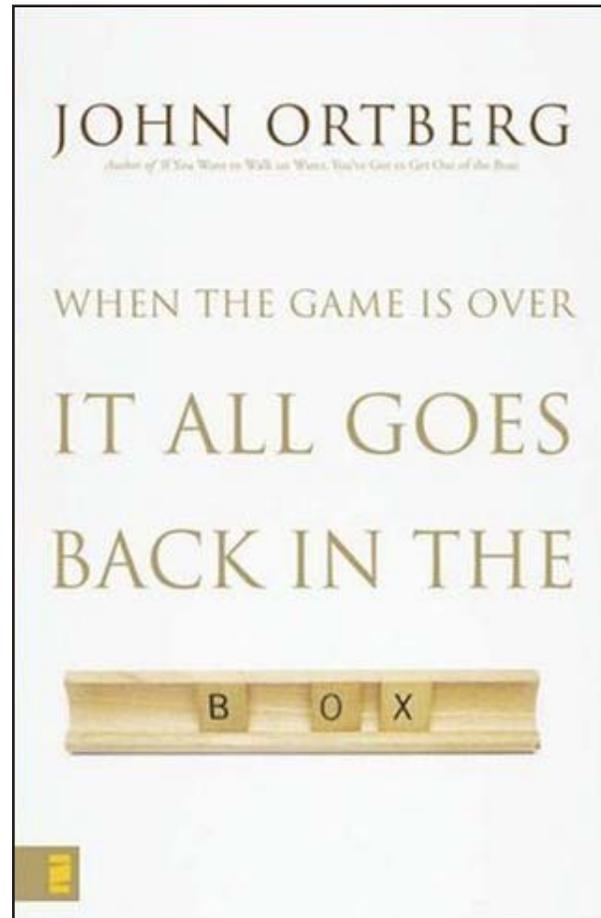
The Book's Purpose

- Use the analogy of a board game to portray the game of life
- Show that life moves toward a goal and that life is not just a set of random activities
- Help believers arrange their life around what matters most
- Serve as a reminder that the game of life will one day come to an end

The Book's Message

Life is like a game of Monopoly. You strategize, take risks, and wheel and deal to improve your position. But when the game is over, all the pieces go back in the box. When the game of life is over, your body is placed in the grave. Only eternal investments will follow you into eternity.

To get the most out of life, you must arrange your priorities around what matters most. A life that focuses on temporary prizes will result in disappointment when the game is over. Life's greatest fulfillment comes when you love God, love others, and nurture your own soul.



by John Ortberg
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the Most Important Rule

My grandmother taught me a lot about life on the Monopoly board. She was a brutal player. It didn't matter that I was ten years old. She played to win. But she taught me how to play the game. Through her influence, I learned the absolute importance of arranging my whole life in light of eternity. Maybe your grandmother was a pushover and allowed you to win every time. But not mine.

Who Controls the Board?

The competitive spirit of my grandmother came out on the Monopoly board. She was a gentle and kind person, but not when it came to Monopoly. I tried to hang on to my money for as long as I could. I didn't like taking risks.

My grandmother, on the other hand, knew that to win, you had to take risks. She bought up property as quickly as possible and mortgaged her property in order to buy more. Before long she controlled the board. As master of the board, she squeezed at my resources and it was only a matter of time before my last dollar was gone, my race car was put back in the box, and the game was over. Another loss. She always told me not to worry because one day I would learn to play the game.

One summer a friend and I played Monopoly every day, and I became a much better player. I finally began to understand what my grandmother had taught me about the game. The next fall I experienced the greatest moment of my life. It happened on Marvin Gardens. My grandmother paid me her last dollar. I had beaten her for the first time. I completely controlled the board.

But then she taught me one more very important lesson. When the game is over, all the pieces go back in the box. As much as I wanted to savor the thrill of the moment, the game was over.

Is that not an accurate picture of the game of life? Life on earth is not going to last forever. This is true whether you are a person of faith or not. You may act like the game is going to last forever. But it doesn't.

The Most Important Rule

In our quest to gain as much in life as we possibly can, we constantly face the battle of remembering the most important values of life. We speed around the board with frantic schedules and shallow relationships. We accumulate temporary rewards that lull us into thinking that the game will go on forever.

One day the game will stop. On that day others will just be starting. But for you the game will be over. The question is, Did you play it wisely?

“Human beings are the only creatures whose frontal lobes are so developed that they know that the game will end. This is our glory, our curse, our warning, and our opportunity.”

The Talmud teaches that we need to treat each day as if were the day before our last. How? By following life's most important rule. What is that rule? We must arrange our lives around what matters most. Don't wait until tomorrow. Begin today.



the Most Important Objective

There was a man living in Silicon Valley who normally worked 12 to 14 hours a day. Even when he wasn't working, his job preoccupied him. His wife constantly reminded him that he *did* have a family.

His knew his kids were quickly growing up and that he was missing it. In his heart, he kept rationalizing that things would settle down soon and that, after all, he was working all these hours to provide for his family.

High cholesterol and high blood pressure warned him that he needed to eliminate the Twinkies and start exercising. But there would be plenty of time for that when things settled down. His wife begged him to go to church, but Sunday was his crash day.

Things were booming so well in his business that the COO challenged him to lead the company through a technological revolution. If successful, he would be set for life. It's this kind of challenge he lived for.

But there was one thing he did not consider. He had a brittle artery that blood could barely sift through. His heart skipped one beat and then two. Then he gasped for air and clutched his chest. He could not even control his own pulse.

At his funeral before a packed house, community leaders and associates passed on one positive compliment after another, bragging on his innovations, his civic achievements, and his leadership. His tombstone contained a list of one-word inspirational accolades. Later, an angel came and added one word: *fool*.

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THE MOST IMPORTANT OBJECTIVE

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The Rich Fool

By now you probably recognize that the above account is a modern-day replication of Jesus' parable of the rich fool. Interestingly, Jesus didn't refer to him as wicked. Just a fool. Why?

The man didn't set out to defy God and neglect his health and family. His goal in life was not to become greedy and obsessed with work. He simply developed a lifestyle that focused on the wrong things. What mattered most to the fool were large crops and bigger barns. He wanted to eat, drink, and have fun~not die!

Life's Most Important Objective

Jesus communicated life's most important objective: be rich toward God. When the game is over, what matters to God is growing a healthy soul, loving others, doing deeds to improve the world, being generous, and living every trip around the board to its fullest.

Jesus clarified this objective by stating the two most important commandments of all: love God and love people. You love Him by spending time with Him and thinking about Him all through the day. You love Him by seeking His guidance and by thanking Him for all His blessings. And tomorrow you seek to love Him a little more.

All the material stuff of life is temporary. It all goes back in the box~TV, car, house, job. It's just stuff. What you need to invest your life in is loving people. You can take people with you to heaven. When you take your last breath, what do you want your life to have been about, stuff or people?

“Wise people build their lives around what is eternal and squeeze in what is temporary. Not the other way around.”

CBS

ScoreKeeping

Robert Roberts tells the story of a fourth grade class playing a game of balloon stomp. The children tied a balloon to their ankle. The object was to stomp on each other's balloon. The one with the last unpopped balloon would be the winner. The game was over in a matter of seconds.

The same game was played with a class of developmentally challenged children. They were given the same instructions, but they played in a different way. They helped each other stomp the balloons. And when every balloon was popped, they all cheered. The two groups kept score in different ways, didn't they?

We All Keep Score

Every game (and practically everything in life) involves scorekeeping. Football scores touchdowns, and baseball scores runs. In Monopoly you count money, and in poker you count chips. Students keep score with grades.

The Bible is filled with scorekeepers. Cain kept score with the spiritual status of Abel. Rachel kept score with how many children Leah had. Joseph's brothers kept score with how many times their dad showed favoritism. Saul kept score with his number of kills compared to David's. The rich fool kept score with the amount of money he accumulated. We're all scorekeepers.

Three Scorekeeping Systems

Basically, there are three primary systems we use to keep score. The first is comparison. People compare themselves with those who are better off, those who are on the same level, and those who are worse off. All three carry dangers with them: envy, competition, and arrogance, respectively.

The second system is competition. Competition gets more serious than mere comparison. We try to outdo the other person. We may even use unethical means to get advantage over another. Who is number one? Who is the fastest? Who is the smartest? Even spirituality can be turned into a competition.

The third system of keeping score is climbing. Climbing is the obsession of moving up the rungs of the success ladder. When you see someone higher, you're motivated to work even harder so that you can get that high. You're never content because someone is always further up the ladder.

How God Keeps Score

The Bible teaches that our attitude should be the same as Jesus'. Do you ever read of Jesus climbing the ladder? No. In fact, we read of Him coming down the ladder. He came from heaven to earth and was born, not in pomp, but in a lowly manger. On top of that, He kept stooping lower and lower. He took the role of a servant and washed His disciples' feet. And He died. But it wasn't just any death. He died like a criminal~on a cross.

“The problem with spending your life climbing up the ladder is that you will go right past Jesus, for he's coming down.”

Here is the irony. God turned the humility of the cross into the greatest triumph of all. God exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name above all names. In the game of life, it is to those who choose to be servants that God grants the greatest rewards. Servants are the top winners.

CBS

Regret Prevention

No second can ever be relived. There are no rewind buttons in the game of life. Therefore, we would be wise to get it right the first time. At the end of life, there are four categories of regret that tend to haunt many people. Perhaps if we focus on these four categories now, we could reprioritize our lives and prevent regret down the road. Remember, we cannot redo yesterday.

“Life is one of those games in which you can only move forward.”

Loving More Deeply

“I was so busy trying to improve our standard of living. Before I knew it, my children were grown and now they are too busy for me.” That’s a very common response given by older businessmen. Some things have a built-in urgency, like a 413 cholesterol reading or April 15.

But the call to love more deeply does not have such a built-in urgency. Playing a game with my children, calling a long-lost friend, acquiring a skill—all these opportunities can wait until things settle down and life is not so full.

We cannot control the speed of passing moments. One day the game will be over; and we cannot control that either. But the good news is that today is before us, and we can choose to engage in acts of love that will prevent regrets later on.

Laughing More Often

In *City Slickers*, Billy Crystal stands before his son’s grade school class and with an air of despondency teaches the children some lessons about life that they probably were not ready to learn. He talked about the way that things go by so quickly and with very little joy.

His speech sounded like a modern-day version of Solomon’s words in Ecclesiastes. Solomon wrote about all the attempts of finding joy in life and concluded that it was like chasing after the wind and that everything is meaningless.

On the contrary, we must recognize that the gospel, indeed, is good news. Sin, death, and guilt are the losers. They have been defeated. So, the joy of the Lord *should* be our strength.

Giving More Generously

In *The Undertaking: Life Studies from the Dismal Trade*, Thomas Lynch, a mortician and a poet, tells of riding in a funeral procession with a wealthy priest who arrogantly states that he wants nothing fancy at his funeral—just a wooden box. The mortician, whose philosophy is that dead people don’t care what kind of funeral they have, tries to convince the wealthy priest not to wait till he dies to give his stuff away. He is willing to help him give it all away right then. The priest is not enthused at all about the idea.

It is true that the dead don’t care. We all would do well to reflect on the question, On the day that I die, will I have any regrets about the stuff I’ve accumulated? Today is the day we can begin to give more generously.



Playing with Integrity

Every game has its own set of rules. Breaking the rules brings consequences. We call those who achieve victory champions and winners. But what do we call those who play by the rules? We don’t have a name, do we? Playing by the rules is an issue of character. Aristotle, long ago, noted that the central issue of life is not what you will do with your life, but what kind of person you will become.

Issues of Integrity

How many times have we heard someone ask, “Do you think I’d lie to you?” The honest answer to that question is yes. Everyone has lied at one time or another. Do you remember the story of George Washington and the cherry tree? He said, “I cannot lie,” and confessed to cutting down the tree. The only problem is that this event never happened. The author who stated these words lied about it.

We are surrounded each day by issues of integrity. Politicians stretch the truth; job applicants pad their resumes; teenagers lie to parents about where they have been; and parents lie to stop their children from bugging them. We’re so busy claiming our own innocence that we don’t even recognize our own lack of integrity.

What Integrity Is Not

Knowing the rules is not the same as integrity. People who wear crosses around their neck and have fish signs on their cars know the rules. But do they always have the love of Jesus in their hearts?

Neither is integrity the same as avoiding sin. The Pharisees were notorious for believing they were God’s favorite people because they were not guilty of breaking the rules. They avoided sin very well. We do the same thing. We think that if we’re not doing certain forbidden things, we are on the right

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PLAYING WITH INTEGRITY

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track. Integrity is much grander than merely avoiding sinful behavior. Integrity means that we want to become the person who earnestly desires to do right.

Most people have a great capacity for self-deception. Lack of character is not the problem. It's that most people cannot see that they lack character. They delude themselves into thinking that they are okay when it comes to integrity. If something good happens to them, they take credit. If something bad happens, they cast blame elsewhere.

Grace and Repentance

When we break the rules, we always have a problem with integrity. We need to see our rule-breaking in the same light that God does. We need to travel the road of repentance because repentance never results in despair and it always leads us home. We must understand that this world has only seen one person who fully lived by the rules. And when our hearts are repentant, He, with grace, always points us back to the right road.

“The way back home for rule breakers is the way of grace through repentance.”



the Squares on your Calendar

The game of life is filled with squares in the shape of a calendar. Each square represents another day. We must learn to fill the squares with what matters the most. Let's illustrate by using an empty glass jar (your life), a pitcher filled with sand, and four tennis balls.

Things You Have to Do

Some things in life are required. For every “have-to,” you add a little more sand to the jar. For example, you have to work. And the workload seems to be ever increasing. Then there are personal tasks, such as sleeping, showering, and exercising. With each personal task, you are filling up your jar with more sand. Don't forget household chores.

You have relationships to be maintained—a spouse to nurture, children to care for, and friends to hang out with. Moreover, you spend a lot of time in your car. Then there is recreation.

By the time you are through with your “have-to” and other obligations on your list, there is very little time left. Yet there is so much more that you want to do with your life. It seems impossible to juggle everything.

The Four Tennis Balls

Jesus taught that you need to seek His kingdom above everything else. The four tennis balls represent the things you must prioritize in order to seek first His kingdom. Somehow these tennis balls must be squeezed into the jar that is already mostly filled with sand.

Let the first ball have the letter *G* to stand for God. He must be the top priority. You know you need to develop spiritually. And to grow spiritually requires that you take time to withdraw in order to immerse yourself in the Bible and prayer.

Let the second ball have the letter *P* to stand for people. You need to take time to strengthen your marriage, to develop your children, and to deepen relationships with special friends.

The third ball has the letter *C* to stand for calling. God has you on earth for a purpose. You are creatively wired to make a difference in this world. God has gifted you.

The fourth ball has the letter *J* to stand for joy. Jesus stated that He came to this world so that your joy would be made complete. He wants every day of your life to be filled with joyful celebration.

Moving Toward the Final Square

One of the squares of the calendar will be your last one. You don't know which one it will be. Have you filled your life with sand, leaving no room for the tennis balls? Most don't intentionally over commit their lives. They just simply get too busy (one of the devil's greatest weapons). What's the solution? It is a radical idea. But the best thing to do is to empty all the sand out of the jar. Start the day with an empty jar. Fill it first by honoring your most important commitments. God will give you the time to do what He wants you to do.

“Unlike your boss, God has never given anyone too much to do. If we find ourselves in that position, it is not God's fault.”



the Danger of More

Experiences of satisfaction and contentment usually wear off fairly quickly. Then we're on a quest to obtain the next thing that promises to bring fulfillment. We always want greater control over the board. We always want more.

Itching for More

Howard Hughes itched for more wealth; so he built a huge financial empire. He itched for more pleasure; so he paid money for the most glamorous women in the world. He itched for more power; so he obtained political clout that made even powerful senators envious. When he died, he was a picture that belonged in horror books. Hughes' story is one of always wanting more. Would he have ever attained enough to live a satisfied life?

"We are all against materialism ... We don't want to be materialistic! We just want more."

For a biblical example of someone who itched for more, look no further than Solomon. In his position as king, he gained wealth, power, and prestige more than anyone else in the world. He devoted himself to looking for the next best thing. He had a thousand wives and concubines. He threw lavish parties. He out-achieved everyone. And when it was all said and done, he still wasn't satisfied.

From Wants to Needs

New acquisitions and achievements thrill and gratify. They bring fulfillment for something we believed was lacking in our lives. Before long, we take for granted the things that gratified, and we realize we "need" something more. **"We suffer from an apparently limitless capacity to take what used to be 'wants' and turn them into 'needs.'"**

The problem is not that we want more. The problem is that we try to substitute things for the very thing that will bring us the greatest sense of joy. We are spiritual beings, not physical ones. Our deepest hunger is spiritual in nature. We hunger for love, redemption, and meaning. Underneath all of this hunger is our need for God.

In Jesus' story of the rich fool, the man's problem with covetousness was not just because he wanted a comfortable retirement. He was foolish in believing that his stockpiling of grain would solve the basic problem of his human existence.

Living with Contentment

The fact that things never satisfy is a sure indication that we were created for another world. Materialism is enemy number one. For most of us, our level of contentment is directly proportional to the contents of our wallet. We can learn to be content. It has nothing to do with how much we acquire. It has to do with how we think. We always think that the "more" train will lead us to the "satisfaction" station. If we had a better car, we would be satisfied. If we had the mortgage paid off, we would be satisfied. Life doesn't work that way. That is not how God created us. Instead, we need to see the train as contentment and the station as heaven. This earth is not our home. We will never be fully satisfied until we arrive in heaven. And the most fulfilling way to prepare us for heaven is to ride the train of contentment.



Playing with Grace

If you want to improve your skill at Monopoly, check out *The Monopoly Companion*. Mr. Monopoly's number one tip is to be the kind of player that others don't mind sitting next to or losing to. To win requires wheeling and dealing. And if the other players don't like you, chances are they will not trade with you.

Many people lose at the game of life because they hold on to resentments, they have difficulty forgiving, or they don't handle disappointments with grace. In life, we need to become the kind of people others like to sit next to. The Bible calls this grace.

Lose Gracefully

Losing happens. The issue is how we react when we lose. When someone else gets the promotion or when the team makes a decision we think is not the best, how do we respond? Losing without grace can be lethal.

My grandmother couldn't stand it when one of us grandchildren pouted when we lost. I didn't like this quality in her at the time. But now I understand. Maybe you can teach children self-esteem by letting them win. But true esteem comes when a person learns to handle reality, and that includes knowing how to lose.

Win Gracefully

Winners can remember the terrible feelings of losing. They understand that life is much bigger than winning and losing.

Abraham Lincoln serves as an excellent model of gracious winning. When it came time to name his cabinet, he appointed his greatest rivals for the presidency. Why? Because he knew they were capable of leading. Star attorney Edwin

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PLAYING WITH GRACE

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Stanton had no use for Lincoln and didn't mind letting the whole country know it. Most people in the president's shoes would have built up resentment. But not Lincoln. When the war was going badly for the Union, he needed someone to oversee the War Department. He called on Stanton, and they developed a relationship characterized by a lasting affection for each another.

Forgive Gracefully

Whether you win or lose, you will get wounded. When the wounds come, you must develop the grace to forgive. Carrying a grudge is like toting around a bowling ball. The funny thing about a grudge is that you never hear someone say, "Today, I'm going to voluntarily carry a grudge around with me." Yet people do it all the time.

Lamech lived a few generations after Adam and Eve. He was a descendant on Cain's side. One day someone inflicted hurt on him, and the bitterness began to fester in his heart to the point of explosion. He killed the young man for injuring him and had no remorse for doing so. In his mind, he was justified for what he had done. Bitterness destroys the capacity to love. It is never satisfied no matter how much pain is inflicted to get even.

Jesus taught that we must forgive someone seventy-seven times. His point was obvious. There is never a time when it is acceptable to allow bitterness to creep in. The best place to take grudges is to the foot of the cross. At the cross, you remember that you need forgiveness too. At the cross, our Savior administered forgiveness with relentless grace. At the cross, you receive the grace to forgive others.

"There is only one safe place for grudges, and that place is at the foot of the cross."



GameOver

The "Now I lay me down to sleep" prayer may have been a morbid way for a young child to end the day, but at least it taught him to recognize that life on earth is not permanent. The fate of the soul has always been life's greatest question.

Alternate Views of Mortality

Some people try to ignore mortality. Think about the many ways we avoid talking about death. We purchase life insurance; but to collect it, we have to die. We eat a breakfast cereal called Life. Would you eat a cereal if it were called Death?

Other people try to hide mortality. Hospitals used to keep a danger list. When it became obvious that a patient could not be cured, his name was put on the danger list, and the pastor or priest was called in. Such

a list is no longer kept because the appearance of the clergy might indicate that the patient's life was in peril.

Other people try to outsmart mortality. For example, for a hefty fee, the Alcor Life Extension Foundation will freeze your body at the point of death. You will be kept frozen until the medical field has discovered a cure for what killed you. Then you can be thawed and administered proper treatment.

A Better Alternative

Within our souls, there is a longing, a recognition, that there is more to life than our earthly existence. We aren't interested in an extension of years, especially if it is just more of the same.

Do you remember the story of Lazarus? After his death, his sisters were disappointed that Jesus was not there. Had He been there, He could have kept His friend from dying. Jesus said to Mary, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies" (John 11:26-27).

Jesus' claim is staggering. Do you know of any other religious leader making such a claim? Buddha, Mohammed, or Confucius never did. Jesus was teaching that death does not have the final word.

One More Move

Two men in a museum noticed the painting of a chess game between a man and the devil. The man had only one piece left. The title of the artwork was *Checkmate*. One of the patrons, a chess champion, was bothered about the painting. After studying the art for a lengthy period, it dawned on him. The king had one more move.

David was facing Goliath in what appeared to be a checkmate situation. But the king had one more move. Daniel was thrown into the lions' den. Checkmate? No. The king had one more move. Pharaoh's army was right on the heels of the fleeing Israelites, who

GAME OVER

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are stalled at the Red Sea. Checkmate? No. The king had one more move.

On Good Friday, earthly powers hung Jesus on a cross. After He died, they placed Him in a tomb to rot away. It was time to go home because the show was over. Checkmate? Wrong!

One day everything will go back into the box. You may have thought you were the master of the board. Or you may have been the pawn. But when the game is over, those things don't matter. The key is to live wisely and not to despair. Why? Because the king has one more move to make.

“My grandmother always understood one simple truth that a lot of really smart people forget: it all goes back in the box.”




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