

# take less. do more.

## SURPRISING LIFE LESSONS

IN GENEROSITY, GRATITUDE, AND CURIOSITY  
FROM AN ULTRALIGHT BACKPACKER

## Study Guide for Book Clubs

**From the Author:** Thanks for your interest in reading **take less. do more.** in your book club! I hope that even if you're not a backpacker (which most readers aren't), you will be able to apply some of the lessons I learned on my backcountry adventures to bring more joy, meaning, and purpose to your daily life in the "front-country." Rather than going lesson by lesson, I've drawn on six general themes discussed in the book to help frame your discussions.

—Glen Van Peski, Bend, Oregon, April '25

### INITIAL REACTIONS

❖ What was your overall impression of the book? Did particular stories or lessons resonate with you?

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❖ How did the author's writing style and personal anecdotes contribute to or detract from your engagement with the book's messages?

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❖ Were there any parts of the book that challenged your existing beliefs or perspectives? If so, which ones and why?

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❖ Are there stories you identify with? Share one and explain why you relate to it.

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## THE POWER OF GENEROSITY

**"No one has ever become poor by giving." —Anne Frank**

1. On page 77, how did the author's experience with the generosity of elderly strangers in Chatsworth, Illinois, shape his views on generosity and kindness? What lessons about the impact of small acts of generosity can you learn from this encounter? Recount a personal example of being the recipient of kindness/generosity.

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2. Starting on page 88, the author describes his technique for being intentional with his generosity. If you're comfortable sharing, describe your system or discuss if you plan to incorporate some version of the separate checking account described in the book.

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3. On page 89, the author recounts an arrangement he set up with a nearby flower shop to bless others anonymously. What are some similar ways to be generous to those around you?

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## REFRAMING YOUR PERSPECTIVE

**"Gratitude turns what we have into enough." —Aesop**

4. Consider the author's experiences during his cross-country bicycle trip and his backpacking adventures. What are some of the things that a weekend of sleeping in the dirt (or even considering the life of someone in another part of the world) would give you a new appreciation for? How does time spent in the wilderness reset your expectations and increase your gratitude?

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5. The author describes how the enormity of wilderness provides perspective and reminds us that "it's not about us." How can this realization foster gratitude? Share if you have had a similar experience in the wilderness.

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6. The author mentions a 2x2 matrix **on page 101** (have/don't have v. want/don't want) that reminds us to be thankful for things we don't have that we also don't want. How can this perspective shift your focus from what you lack to what you're grateful not to experience? Can you think of examples from your own life or those around you that fit this category?

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7. **On page 221**, the author presents two depictions of his life, both factually correct. Can you use a similar exercise to discuss a limited aspect of your life, like your health, marriage, kids, or job? Which "story" do you find yourself focusing on more?

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## THE GIFT OF MARGIN

**"Simplicity is not about deprivation.  
It's about clarity and purpose." —Joshua Becker**

8. On page 84, the author states: "When I carry only what I need, I have a greater capacity than I'm using at that moment; I have not maxed myself out." How does this wilderness example of carrying a lighter pack translate to creating margin in everyday life? What areas of your life could benefit from "lightening your load"?

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9. The author describes helping his wife by carrying her pack in addition to his own during a hike in Buckskin Gulch. How does having margin in our lives allow us to better serve and support others? Can you think of a time when having extra capacity allowed you to help someone unexpectedly?

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10. One way to create financial margin is to consume less. The author discussed contentment and some hacks like his "When I'm Rich" list (page 102) and his friend's "Shopping Diet" (page 104). What are other ideas for increasing contentment and lowering consumption to create margin in your life?

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## INVEST IN RELATIONSHIPS

**"The quality of your life is the quality of your relationships." —Tony Robbins**

- 11.** The author has noted in interviews that: "Everything you want to accomplish in life will involve others." How does this perspective shape the way you approach your goals and relationships? Can you think of examples from your own life where investing in relationships led to unexpected opportunities or achievements?

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- 12.** The author emphasizes the importance of creativity in showing people you care about them. What are some unique or memorable ways you've seen people demonstrate their care for others? How might you cultivate more creativity in your relationships?

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- 13.** On page 147, the author relates how a handwritten note early in life made a big impact on him. This prompted him to develop the habit of writing notes in his personal life and business to forge and maintain relationships. In our digital age, why do you think handwritten notes still hold such significance? Have you ever received a particularly impactful handwritten note?

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- 14.** The author shares several anecdotes throughout the book about how investing in relationships has enriched his life and career. For example, on page 237, he describes how hosting "Growler Thursdays" for neighbors helped build connections in his new community. What are some ways you can create opportunities to nurture relationships within your own neighborhood or social circles?

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## EMBRACING SETBACKS

**"I have not failed. I just found 10,000 ways that won't work." —Thomas Edison**

- 15.** On page 182, the author lists some of the benefits of failing. Which of these is a new way of looking at failure for you, and how might it impact your choices?
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- 16.** The author mentions on page 63 that "anything worth doing right often involves a series of trials and failures." How does the iterative approach the author used in pack design relate to having a growth mindset? What parallels exist between refining gear and personal development?
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- 17.** The author's cross-country bicycle trip (described starting on page 67) was a significant risk for an 18-year-old. How did this experience shape his approach to taking on challenges later in life? How can you encourage yourself or others to take calculated risks that promote personal growth?
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- 18.** The author's willingness to test gear, like chopstick tent stakes (page 63), required facing potential ridicule. How does curiosity counteract the fear of failure? How can you cultivate more of this in daily life?
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- 19.** The book describes several instances where the author tried new things, like becoming a Boy Scout leader (page 43) or taking a dishwashing job in retirement (page 195). How do these examples illustrate the importance of not letting fear of failure hold you back? What new experiences might you consider trying despite potential risks or fears?
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## SAY YES AND REMAIN OPEN

**"Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail." —Ralph Waldo Emerson**

- 20.** The author's curiosity about lightweight gear led him to tinker and create innovative solutions (**pages 58–65**). How does curiosity drive innovation and problem-solving? How can you cultivate curiosity in your daily life?

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- 21.** The author's willingness to invite strangers on hiking trips resulted in new friendships and connections (**page 200**). How does openness to new people and experiences enrich your life? What are some ways you can practice being more open in your daily interactions?

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- 22.** The author's experience working as a dishwasher at Sparrow Bakery (**page 23**) demonstrates how being open to unconventional opportunities can lead to unexpected benefits. How can stepping outside your comfort zone create new possibilities in your life?

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- 23.** In the Conclusion (**page 233**), the author describes using his connections and resources to help others. How can remaining open and cultivating relationships allow you to make a positive impact on others' lives? Can you share an example of how you've used your connections to help someone?

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