

**PAUSE.**

**BREATHE.**

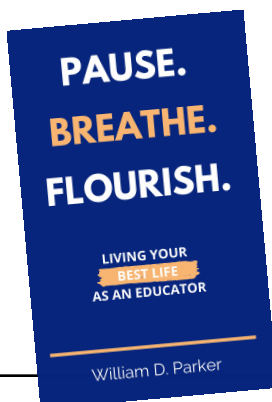
**FLOURISH.**

LIVING YOUR  
**BEST LIFE**  
AS AN EDUCATOR

**STUDY GUIDE**

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William D. Parker



# A STUDY GUIDE FOR

## **PAUSE. BREATHE. FLOURISH:**

### LIVING YOUR BEST LIFE AS AN EDUCATOR

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Pause. Breathe. Flourish: Living Your Best Life as an Educator, explores the habits, practices and mindset necessary for growth as both an educator and a person. Research shows that educators are leaving the profession at alarming rates. Some of the causes stem from the rising expectations and demands that educators find difficult to manage. Unfortunately, for many educators, taking care of others often means neglecting their own health and well-being. This book is grounded in the belief that when you invest in better care of yourself, you can better serve and lead others. Applying those insights is the challenge. Each chapter in this powerful book begins with a mental image and unpacks specific areas for cultivating personal and professional growth. Chapters end with reflection questions to help you take immediate actions for thoughtful application and improved outcomes.

William D. Parker has served schools from more than twenty-five years as a teacher, administrator and education consultant. In Pause. Breathe. Flourish., he provides practical strategies and common-sense approaches for taking better care of yourself so that you can live your best life an educator. Don't become another statistic in the rising number of educators who feel burned out. Instead, reimagine the possibilities that can happen for yourself and others when you take time to pause...breathe...and flourish!

As you read through this study guide, you will find a "Self-Reflection" at the start of each chapter discussion. Take a moment to have each person read or reflect on those questions. Then move into the "Discuss Together" questions. You will also find a "Continued Reflection" section at the end of each discussion chapter. Consider this homework if you want to keep challenging yourself between group meetings. You may want to discuss each discussion question before reading the chapters, or you may wait until you finish reading each chapter before engaging in a dialogue with your team. Each chapter is also filled with content, strategies, stories, reflections and challenges to provoke honest and meaningful discussion. Thank you for investing in Pause. Breathe. Flourish, but more importantly, for investing in yourself and others in order to cultivate a community of learners who aspire for growth. We hope this study guide motivates and inspires educators to do whatever it takes to ensure you and your teammates are flourishing so you can help others reach their highest potential.

# Introduction -Your Self-Care

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## Self-Reflection:

1. Take this Self-Evaluation. How would you respond to the following statements as you reflect on your own self-care?

I find myself dedicating the majority of my work to areas that reflect my strengths and give me the greatest joy in work.

|                       |              |                  |                 |                          |
|-----------------------|--------------|------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Strongly Agree</i> | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Sometimes</i> | <i>Disagree</i> | <i>Strongly Disagree</i> |
|-----------------------|--------------|------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|

Because I invest in my personal growth mentally, physically, spiritually, socially, and financially, I find as much fulfillment in my work as I do in my life outside of work.

|                       |              |                  |                 |                          |
|-----------------------|--------------|------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Strongly Agree</i> | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Sometimes</i> | <i>Disagree</i> | <i>Strongly Disagree</i> |
|-----------------------|--------------|------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|

If money or compensation were no longer necessary, I would still want to do the work I'm currently doing.

|                       |              |                  |                 |                          |
|-----------------------|--------------|------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Strongly Agree</i> | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Sometimes</i> | <i>Disagree</i> | <i>Strongly Disagree</i> |
|-----------------------|--------------|------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|

2. If you're going to help others, you must learn to first put on your own oxygen mask. What are you willing to share with others from your inventory of your self-care?

## Discuss Together

3. Reflect on this quote by Parker: "When you take time to invest in areas of your life outside of work, you find more creativity, inspiration, and joy in serving others." How does this statement compare to your own experience?

## Introduction -Your Self-Care

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4. Consider the 10 self-reflection areas unpacked throughout the book. If you had to pick three, which ones would you identify where you would like more focus or growth?

Your Body  
Your Mind  
Your Influence  
Your Time  
Your Friendships  
Your Spirituality  
Your Resources  
Your Intimacy  
Your Future  
Your Legacy

5. Reflect on this quote from Parker: "If your goal is to influence others in becoming better, you can't ignore this important safety notice: You need to learn to breathe first." In this school year, how have you struggled with "placing the oxygen mask" on first?
6. Describe a time when you have felt like "a shell" of yourself. Who is one person that will tell you the truth and hold you accountable?
7. What is one way you are already "investing outside of work?" Or what is one way you plan to invest in yourself this coming week?

### **Continued Reflection:**

8. What is one area out of the ten that you've already seen significant growth? Of the ten self-reflection areas for breathing first described above, what is one area where you want to see personal growth?

# CHAPTER ONE - YOUR BODY

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## Self-Reflection:

1. Honestly assess your commitment to good nutrition. How often are you engaging in active exercise? How would you describe your sleep patterns? Would you describe your habits as tending excessive or moderate? What commitments have you made to regular breaks or rest? In what ways are you experiencing inspiration? Are you allowing yourself creative or refreshing moments?

## Discuss Together:

2. Consider this quote from Parker: "Your mind is better conditioned for sharp thinking when your body is experiencing good health." In what ways are you physically or nutritionally "tending your garden"?
3. Parker shares a story when he remembers realizing his education leaders were all suffering from physical challenges. This prompted him to think, "If I stay in education, I'm going to die!" In what ways (if any) has being an educator jeopardized your own physical health? Share your experience.
4. Eating good food, exercising and resting will help you be a better version of yourself, which allows for more room for others in our lives and room for your own growth. How have you experienced this?

## Continued Reflection:

5. Consider these questions in the days ahead...
  - How is my nutrition—what goes into my body—affecting my concentration and energy?
  - How is my physical activity—or lack of it—influencing the way I feel about tackling big projects?
  - Am I allowing sleep and rest to influence my levels of patience and endurance?
  - In what ways am I letting moderation—or lack of it—affect my habits or relationships?
  - Does my overall physical health lead to more inspiration or tend toward more anxiety?
  - Now, what is one step you can take this week toward healthier choices for your body?
  - Now, what is one step I can take this week toward healthier choices?

## CHAPTER TWO - YOUR MIND

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### **Self-Reflection:**

1. Describe your own growth in remaining a lifelong learner. Would you describe your mindset as attentive? In what ways are you engaging in experiences to help broaden your knowledge?

### **Discuss Together:**

2. Consider this quote from Parker: "Your mindset plays a powerful role in your openness to continual learning." Do you have a favorite playlist of songs, podcasts or books? What are some samples you would be willing to share with others? Would others listening to your playlist be surprised? How would you describe what is on your mental playlist?
3. In what areas in your work or life do you find yourself resisting change? Why do you think this change is so difficult to accept or manage?
4. When is it hardest for you to practice mindfulness? When was the last time you felt fully present? Share about that experience...

### **Continued Reflection:**

5. We all enjoy learning from those who stay fresh in their own intellectual growth. As you take the next step of investing in your own thinking, others will benefit from your awareness, lessons, and experiences too.
  - In what ways are you purposefully seeking out healthy practices for your thinking?
  - How can you be more mindful of the people, places, and situations you will encounter this week?
  - What books will you read next for your personal growth?
  - How can you take advantage of workshops or professional development?
  - In what ways can you practice cycles of reflection on your practices and experiences?

## CHAPTER THREE - YOUR INFLUENCE

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### Self-Reflection:

1. What kind of atmosphere are your teachers, students, and others encountering when they enter your classroom or your school?

### Discuss Together:

2. Consider this quote by Parker: "If you are teacher, don't forget that building relationships with parents is as powerful as building relationships with their children." How do you see your influence spreading outside of your own classroom or assigned area of work?
3. Who would you consider some your biggest "influencers"? Share about them.
4. Right now, would you consider your influence to be mostly toxic or mostly refreshing? How often do you take time to think about or evaluate your own influence on others?
5. Which one of the following do you relate to most as ways you positively influence others? Pick one and explain why to others.
  - Mentoring
  - Servant leadership
  - Being an example
  - Teaching others
  - Building platforms
6. What is one way you can positively influence the students, parents, or colleagues around you today?

### Continued Reflection:

7. As you know, education is a calling, not just a career. Your ability to serve depends greatly on your ability to see the power of your influence. Would those around you say they are breathing in healthy or toxic emotional oxygen? Explain.

## CHAPTER FOUR - YOUR TIME

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### Self-Reflection:

1. No matter how hard you work as an educator, you will still end your day with many tasks undone, but the goal is to prioritize the tasks that most directly impact the learning, culture, and climate of your classroom and school community. What are your highest priority tasks?

### Discuss Together:

2. In addition to school, when was the last time you really thought about the “next” goals you want to reach for yourself or your family/loved ones?
3. What goals have you set for yourself personally right now?
4. Which of these positive time strategies do you already “practice,” maximizing your time?
  - Reducing time wasting activities
  - Setting appropriate boundaries
  - Scheduling what matters in advance
  - Using time saving tools or hacks
  - Prioritizing and tackling accordingly
  - Scheduling time for your “passion” projects

*Share one example from above.*

5. Parker describes how if you calculate each day of your life, you will have lived 20,000 days by the time you are 55. Where are you on the 20,000-day scale? What goals are you setting for yourself today and for the coming year?
6. What practical actions can you take to make your days more productive?

### Continued Reflection:

7. What is one action you can take today not to give in to wasting time on time-sucking activities? Keep these ideas in mind: Set realistic boundaries. Schedule time for what matters. Use smart tools for scheduling. Prioritize and chunk your time. Allow time for inspiration. What is one action you can take to make certain today has really counted?



## CHAPTER FIVE - YOUR FRIENDSHIPS

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### **Self-Reflection:**

1. Consider this quote from Parker: "The need for relationships is one reason high-performing schools foster an environment of professional learning—teams of educators who meet regularly and work interdependently to find shared solutions for student learning." How are you reaching out to others to form interdependent relationships?

### **Discuss Together:**

2. In your education responsibilities, what percentage of your day do you work in isolation from your peers? What is one thing you could do starting today to increase that percentage?
3. What are some example areas or circumstances where you regularly collaborate with your team and others?
4. Who do you consider as "your people"? Why are they?
5. Consider this quote by Parker: "You may work faster alone, but you always accomplish more meaningful outcomes when you include others on your journey." In what ways have you seen this as true in your own experience?
6. What are the risks or challenges of collaboration?

### **Continued Reflection:**

7. It is safe to say that you are more likely to finish it with strength because of the encouragement of friends. Who are people in your life whom you can rely on for accountability? How can you schedule time to reflect with others? Who are some friends you know that bring out the better parts of you? Reach out to them today and tell them you're thinking about them.

# CHAPTER SIX - YOUR SPIRITUALITY

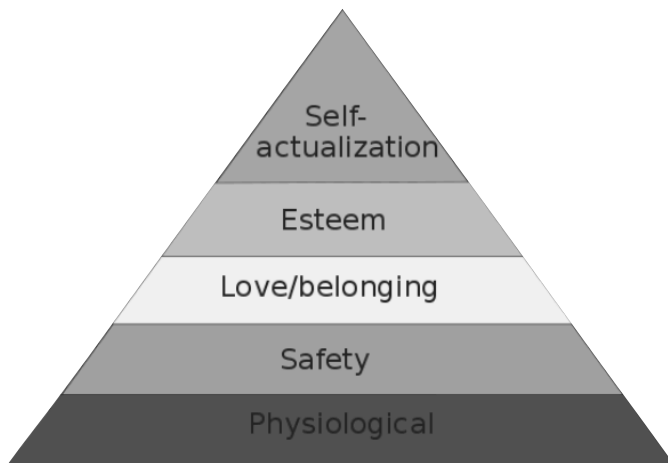
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## Self-Reflection:

1. Sometimes we fail to think about what principles we hold that transcend people, places or time. What are some of those principles you live by and why do you trust these principles?

## Discuss Together:

2. Parker shares that the traditional Maslow model is one familiar to most educators:



Over time, people generally move up the pyramid. However, in later Maslow models, he added transcendence above self-actualization. Parker says: "ultimate experiences involve discovery, awe, and wonder—not just receiving information, but finding inspiration." Would you agree or disagree with this idea? Why or why not?

3. Consider this quote from Parker: "In every aspect of your life, you have to accept that there are some situations and experiences that are beyond your control." What is an example of this you have seen in your own experience?
4. What places do you go emotionally or personally to gain inward strength? What "moves" you to awe, or where do you find inspiration?
5. Do you see education to be a "calling"? If so, why or why not?
6. Consider this quote from Parker: "When you face moments of crisis, your students and teachers need to know they belong to a school where empathy and compassion are available." How have you seen this happen with your students or school community?

## Continued Reflection:

7. How can you make time to accept what is beyond your control by relying in faith for the ultimate good to happen? How can you support others in their struggles or difficulties by pointing them to an assurance that is both present and transcendent?

# CHAPTER SEVEN - YOUR RESOURCES

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## **Self-Reflection:**

1. Consider this quote from Parker: "When you realize what you have is only temporary, you are able to appreciate it more and realize its value is in how it is used, not how much it is worth." What is something you hold dear that you also realize is only temporary?

## **Discuss Together:**

2. Money and resources can surely become either an obstacle or a catalyst to reaching our full capacity. In what way do your resources possibly hinder or influence your time and energy?
3. What is one example or circumstance where a student, teacher or colleague acknowledged something you did to "pack their parachute?"
4. Who do you need to "acknowledge" today, that deserves your gratitude or a meaningful word of thanks?
5. The most important person in the building for student improvement is still the teacher. What stress or pressure may your fellow teachers be feeling as they look for ways to improve their own income or resources? How can you encourage them and one another through difficult times?

## **Continued Reflection:**

6. Read the closing story in the chapter on 'Packing Parachutes' and reflect on the following: When was the last time you paused to thank someone for the ways they helped you with their time, attention, or resources? Could you commit to reach out to them today or this week?

## CHAPTER EIGHT - YOUR INTIMACY

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### **Self-Reflection:**

1. Consider this quote from Parker: "Staying unified in major decisions doesn't mean agreeing on every point. But it does mean not moving ahead until you're in overall agreement." How unified do you find yourself with those you consider your closest loved ones?

### **Discuss Together:**

2. Parker uses the image of a rowboat to demonstrate the importance of your most committed relationships. How have you seen your most committed relationships provide deep, supportive outcomes?
3. Lessons from your most meaningful relationships will keep you humble and inspired as you keep rowing ahead in serving others. How do you ensure what matters most in your deepest relationships is not sacrificed for what matters least?
4. When was the last time you shared what you love doing most with one of the people whom you love the most? If you had that moment, what would you share?
5. What are some meaningful deposits you may need to consider making in your most important relationships today or this week?
6. Even in the busyness of school, what are some routines or practices you follow for staying connected to the ones you love?

### **Continued Reflection:**

7. Think about your most important relationships. How can you make the time to keep them a priority? How can you encourage your fellow teachers and teammates to prioritize time with their loved ones, spouses and families?

## CHAPTER NINE - YOUR FUTURE

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### Self-Reflection:

1. Do this quick exercise on your own surroundings:
  - What are you seeing? Look up, down, around, and behind you.
  - What are you hearing? Stop and simply listen.
  - What are you touching? Your body is full of nerves.
  - What are you tasting? Maybe you're enjoying a stick of gum.
  - What are you sensing emotionally? Are you anxious? Excited? Worried?

### Discuss Together:

2. Consider this quote from Parker: "Leadership is much more than a word. Leadership is influence. It means helping others achieve more." How are you influencing your own emotional surroundings today?
3. Who are your own leadership influencers?
4. How have you contributed to the growth of those you consider "future" leaders?
5. In what ways have you been afforded opportunities by others to develop your leadership skills?
6. What if we treated all those in our sphere of influence as "future" leaders? In what ways would this change the way you perform your own work with students or other educators?
7. Parker cites a strategy from Todd Whitaker. Parker applies this by saying, "By 'shifting the monkey' back to others on your team, you are entrusting them to navigate the pitfalls, identify game plans, and execute plans of action." How might this strategy help you to entrust others with more leadership opportunities?

### Continued Reflection:

8. Consider this quote from Parker: "You can learn to talk honestly to others while treating them with grace and dignity. How others respond to honest feedback is their choice, not yours." Think about someone in your school or on your team who could benefit from positive feedback. How can you include them while making decisions this week? What role can students play in providing leadership for their own learning?

# CHAPTER TEN - YOUR LEGACY

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## **Self-Reflection:**

1. Consider this quote from Parker. "The challenge is learning to pause, breathe, and reflect on what you are learning so that the outcomes can become positive for you and for others." Think about the life lessons you are learning. Are you willing to share them with others - whether that includes students or fellow educators?

## **Discuss Together:**

2. What kind of story do you want to leave behind when your professional life comes to an end?
3. As uncomfortable as it may be to consider, what would you like written on your tombstone?
4. Parker explains you are "not as important as you think" and "more important than you think" in your own influence on others. In other words, your work is temporary so stay humble. On the other hand, your smallest actions influence others so be mindful of the ways you are helping or hurting. How have you seen these ideas applied to ways educators serve others?
5. Consider this quote from Parker: "No amount of policy change, strategy building, professional-collaboration, or curriculum development can improve student learning while absent of meaningful relationships." How is your school investing in building meaningful relationships?

## **Continued Reflection:**

6. As you stay humble, use your influence for good, build meaningful relationships, make courageous decisions, and maintain a hunger for learning, you will touch the lives of others in hidden ways, which may continue for generations to come. The goal of this book has been to give you pause, allow you to reflect on your priorities. What is one step you can take today to encourage others to pause, to reflect and to take action in their own work or life?

# EPILOGUE - YOUR LAUGHTER

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## **Self-Reflection:**

1. Parker quotes the work of Tony Wagner who makes a persuasive argument that “without creativity, people lack the ideas, initiative, and motivation for extraordinary achievements.” How have you seen a commitment (or lack of commitment) to creativity influence your own work?

## **Discuss Together:**

2. What are some ways you can encourage playfulness in your students and teachers?
3. What is one way you can recognize creativity in your students and teammates?
4. How can you celebrate moments of discovery and innovation?
5. What projects can you commit to this year that encourage your own love of learning?
6. Consider this quote from Parker: “Whenever you encounter failure in a student or fellow educator, remember you’ve failed before, too.” How does this idea influence the ways you think about student learning?
7. Parker says, “Remember the bigger picture: Most problems are small ones. Most challenges are temporary. And most obstacles can be overcome.” How do these ideas help you keep difficult times in perspective or even to look for humor in crazy moments?

## **Continued Reflection:**

8. Don’t allow the challenges of being an educator to stifle the fun, creativity and joy of learning. How can you encourage playfulness in your students and fellow teachers? What is one way you can recognize creativity in your students and teammates? How can you celebrate moments of discovery and innovation? What projects can you commit to this year that encourage your love of learning?

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Author’s note: *I want to thank Dr. Jeff Springer, retired teacher, coach and administrator and former TASSP Texas Principal of the Year, who helped me with several of the questions in this study guide. Jeff and I facilitated many of these questions with a group of educators we led through a pilot version of this book study together. I hope you discover the same joy we did in discussing these chapters with fellow educators or team members!*

*-William D. Parker*