

Live

LARGE!

*7 Lasting Lessons
for Navigating Life's
Twists & Turns*

“*Real-life stories that prove
how present and active
God is in our lives.*

*Dr. Henry Cloud
New York Times
Best-Selling Author*

Bob Lonac

Thank You!

I'm so glad you chose to preview my book, and I hope it speaks to you.

If you have any feedback, please let me know at bob@boblonac.com.

boblonac.com/blog is another resource for book recommendations, leadership tips, and insights into following Christ. It's updated regularly.

And, if you haven't already, I invite you to join my bi-weekly newsletter for timely encouragement at boblonac.com/newsletter

Enjoy *Live Large!*

God Bless,
Bob Lonac

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Praise for Live Large!

I like reading books that teach important spiritual principles, and I like reading books that share real life stories that prove how real, present and active God is in our lives. Bob's book was a great combination of both... I loved the principles but also loved how he illustrated them through powerful, true, experiences he has had with God in his own life. This is a good book for those who are looking into faith for the first time, and those who are well into their journey. Thanks Bob, for this gift

— **Dr. Henry Cloud, Clinical Psychologist
and *New York Times* Best-Selling Author**

Bob Lonac's book, *Live Large!*, is a must read if you want to know how to lead in challenging circumstances, navigate life's most difficult situations and find a path of joy in the midst of it all. Bob's life lessons flow from a life of authenticity and speaking the truth in love. His stories will capture your heart and inform your mind with practical applications for your life. Don't miss it!

— **Phyllis Hendry Halverson, President Emeritus, Lead Like Jesus**

In *Live Large!*, Bob Lonac guides you on his adventures in following Jesus. He methodically works the disciplines and fundamentals of faith-in-action so that it strengthens the heart. Be ready to travel from being still and knowing God to standing in the intense spiritual crossfire between good and evil. What I love most is experiencing his wonder in the miracles of God and then personally receiving a fresh dose of encouragement so I never settle for less than living my life large.

— **Tami Heim, President and CEO, Christian Leadership Alliance**

I will be forever grateful for the leadership Bob provided in the formative years of IJM. He helped shape not only our leaders and our organizational processes, but he also helped build our culture in ways that continue to live on today. I am so grateful he has taken the time to write down lessons from his many years of leadership and service and I trust there will be many who benefit from his wisdom and candor, as I have through the years.

— **Gary Haugen, CEO, International Justice Mission**

Within the pages of his book, Bob masterfully translates the simple, miraculous work of God in his own life through stories that emanate from those encounters. Bob doesn't just share the easy stuff. His vulnerability makes the stories both relatable and encouraging for others who are still on the journey, wondering how God will work for good in their lives. This book is for everyone who questions where God is in the midst of the mundane, sorrowful, or even joyful times of life... You will not be disappointed with what you learn.

— **Jacinta Tegman, CEO, CRISTA Family of Ministries**

I've known Bob Lonac for over ten years while he led CRISTA Ministries. I'm thrilled to see this book *Live Large!* One word that describes Bob to me is that he is passionate. He cares a lot about relationships with people and God. *Live Large!* highlights a pathway for each of us to develop relationships that allow our lives to flourish.

— **Al Lopus, CEO and Co-founder, Best Christian Workplaces Institute**

Lonac's reflections in *Live Large!* invite a response. Through the adventure of his own life, he calls people to live unafraid, increasingly attuned to hear God's voice through trials and joys. For those wanting more out of the ordinary and extraordinary of the day to day, *Live Large!* is welcome wisdom.

— **Sharon Cohn Wu, Principal Advisor,
Violence Against Women and Children,
International Justice Mission**

To maintain the anonymity of the individuals involved, some details, like names and dates, have changed. These are Bob Lonac's memories, from his perspective, and he has tried to represent events as faithfully as possible. RJL Consulting has made every effort to contact all copyright holders.

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RJL Consulting
830 Cary Rd.
Edmonds, WA 98020

Published in the United States of America
Library of Congress Control Number: 2020925627
First Edition: ISBN # 978-1-7361165-0-0
First Edition PDF: ISBN # 978-1-7361165-2-4

BobLonac.com

Book Design by RWL Design Ltd. • RwlDesign.com

Live Large!

7 Lasting Lessons for Navigating Life's Twists & Turns

by Bob Lonac

published by
RJL Consulting

To my family:

*Kathleen, Todd and Tanya, Susannah and Szac,
Sophia, Sam, Josh and Jeanna, Rob, Charlie,
Brandon and Amy, Jack, Micah, Finn, Ryan and
Jenni, Keva and my sister, Nikki. I am the richest
and the most blessed man I know!*

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The Croatian Athletic Club swatters, circa 1934

Here's my dad Rudy's baseball team in the '30s.
He's standing in the middle, back row.

Introduction

What led me to write this book

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.

—Isaiah 55:8

I know I am supposed to write this intensely personal book for my family. I want to commit to the written word as much of what I have learned for my wife, my four sons, their wonderful wives, and my nine grandchildren. One of my grandchildren is married. That adds up to 20 people, counting me, in my immediate family. I hope my sister and her family get to read this too. Anything else that comes out of what I share is not my responsibility, but rather the Lord's.

I'm Croatian. My grandfathers and grandmothers all immigrated through Ellis Island and moved to Aberdeen, Washington. Hanging in my office is a picture of my dad with his baseball team, the "Croatian Swatters". Aberdeen was full of Croatians, who were blue-collar people through and through. My dad had five brothers and two sisters. My mom was also Croatian and had two sisters and a brother. They were not a religious family, at least not that I could see. We never talked about religion, or about other important things in life. My parents were pretty typical of people of their era. My mom was a housewife, and my dad worked hard. My dad and mom picked up and moved to California one month after I was born. He was a carpenter and that's where the jobs were. Every vacation I can remember as a kid involved returning to

Aberdeen to celebrate each holiday. We dug razor clams, and I learned to fish.

My mom saved my report cards all throughout school. She showed them to me later in life. There was one overriding theme typified by this quote from one of my elementary school teachers: “Robbie could be a great student if he would only quit fooling around and apply himself.” In high school, I was put in a special program for underachievers. I was a social being, was popular in school, and majored in having fun, not academics. I never really thought about my future, and I cannot remember ever talking to my parents about what I wanted to become. No one mentioned college. My dad never graduated from high school. My mom did. That was it.

The summer of my junior year, a Young Life leader by the name of Bob Runyon picked a few of us out of the crowd to help open a Young Life club at Clayton Valley High School in Concord, California where we lived. He showed us a movie about a camp called Malibu in British Columbia, Canada. It had girls and water skiing. I remember thinking that since I lived in America, I qualified as a Christian, so I was all in. That week changed the course of my entire life.

I look back now with wonder and amazement. Not that I have not had my share of tragedy and heartache. That, too, has been a big part of how I have become the person that I am.

I have learned along the way. In fact, I have learned a lot along the way. Now I want to leave behind the most important lessons for my family and anyone else who might be interested. Someone once told me that you need

to learn from experience, but it doesn't have to be only your own experiences. And boy, have I had experiences.

I don't want to simply tell you what happened. I want you to go with me on the journey, so you can experience the story for yourself.

I want to take you up into the Jervis Inlet in western Canada, where I was hoodwinked into participating in an exorcism of a demon from a teenage girl who could bend spoons with her mind.

I want to take you to the wind-swept plains of western Kenya to help me try to figure out how I ever became a Maasai elder.

I want you to meet a young man who showed me what heaven must be like. He went there and came back. I've got the goosebumps to prove it.

Despite my successes, my life has not been a bed of roses. There have been a few thorns along the way that have taught me lessons worth sharing.

In each of these stories, my hope and prayer are that you'll find a piece of your own story and rediscover God for yourself, as if for the very first time.

This very thing happened to me not long ago. Come with me, and you'll see what I mean.

Thanks for reading. Bob Lonac

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Be Still and Know That I Am God

*The day a precious little girl taught
my heart to listen*

Be still and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth! The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

— Psalm 46:10–11



Me at age 7.

One day after work, I went to visit my mom at her apartment. We hugged at the door and after catching up with each other, she said, “Take a seat, I’ve got something I want to show you.” Mom turned, went to her closet, and pulled out an old shoe box, which she set in front of me on the dining table.

Something told me this wasn’t about a new pair of shoes. Mom smiled at me, and said, “Here, this is for you. Go ahead and open the lid.” I was taught to always obey my mother, so I carefully did what she said and looked inside. I reached down and touched my childhood.

My mom had saved every one of my report cards from elementary school through high school. “I thought you’d like to see how you did,” she said.

My first three years in elementary school were “Satisfactory.” Grades started in the fourth grade. The biggest thing that jumped out at me wasn’t the grades but the teachers’ comments. With each teacher and school year, I noticed a common theme: “Robbie has a lot of potential if he would just quit fooling around in class and pay attention.”

The words unhinged a certain memory. In high school, one of my teachers took me aside to tell me I was an underperformer because I was always messing around in class. Sometimes I think I might have been diagnosed with ADD (attention deficit disorder), but that wasn’t on anybody’s radar back then. Bottom line: I was very social and good at talking, but not so good at listening.

When I met the Lord in high school, my Young Life leader, Bob Runyon, formed what he called a campaigner group made up of five guys who had given our lives to Jesus that past summer. During our senior year, we met weekly for nine months without missing a day.

We started out examining what it meant to follow Jesus. That meant reading the Bible, praying together, and lots of discussions. We were open and transparent with each other. Our time together was meaningful and fun.

The group taught me how to engage others without judging, so they would want to keep coming back. Something interesting was also happening. Our conversations inevitably led to a discussion about what this thing called “quiet time” was supposed to mean and how it was a real challenge to actually pull it off with any regularity.

We very slowly began to see a daily time of silence was a needed discipline for people who were serious about their walk with Jesus. I understood the Bible study part:

read, memorize, meditate on, and practice God's Word. However, the words "quiet" and "discipline" continued to prove a real challenge for me.

You were supposed to spend some time every day (yep, every day) reading the Bible and praying, in quietness. At that time, I thought praying to God only meant talking to Him and asking Him for stuff. I had a lot to learn.

I attended Westmont College and this idea of quiet time was prevalent. I continued to fail at it a lot, especially the "every day" part. Yet, God had something in mind for me.

After I graduated, I joined Young Life, where I'd work for the next 33 years, eventually serving as an executive of this great ministry. I became quite involved and embraced the gifts God had given me. I graduated from Fuller Seminary during my first seven years on the Young Life staff and certainly became knowledgeable about God's Word. While I had the privilege of learning from some of the world's best teachers of the Christian faith and highly valued reading the Bible and praying alone, I was on-again-off-again with God. Still, his unconditional love for me never wavered.

For years my wife, Kathleen, and I have begun our mornings with Bible reading and prayer. She has graciously shown me how to intentionally walk this contemplative path with God.

Looking back I wish I could say we followed through *every day*. Yet, life happens, schedules change, trips come up. You have children and then grandchildren who you love and cherish. This means time and effort. Suddenly the kids need help with something, the grandkids take time, and it's easy to wonder, "How can I be still and learn

to be with God in the midst of it all?” I discovered the answer in a most interesting way.

After 33 years with Young Life, I joined the International Justice Mission as Chief Operating Officer at their headquarters in Washington D.C. The mission of IJM is to partner with local justice systems to end violence against people living in poverty. This could never have happened without prayer.

Gary Haugen, IJM’s founder, instituted the practice of bringing the staff together each day at 11:00 a.m to pray for our work. Gary and I would often talk about how to continue to instill the practice of prayer into our everyday lives. He and I spent a lot of time praying about this “radical” idea and how to structure it. We decided to not offer any guidance to IJM’s staff except one friendly reminder: praying hands couldn’t send emails, sort paper, or pick up a phone.

The idea was welcomed with open arms. In addition to the group prayer time, everyone on staff received 30 minutes of quiet time at the start of each workday (there’s that phrase again). People were simply asked to draw close to God, praying and listening to Him about the day ahead.

This daily ritual and rhythm of prayer sent IJM on a new trajectory of continuing to grow a culture of listening to God and acting on what He says. This had been our intention all along, but formalizing an organizational practice like this reminded everyone each day of our commitment to follow Jesus in all things.

Those 30 minutes of quiet time and being still in prayer continued to be tricky for me. I had a long commute to work each day and frequently traveled around the world. Kathleen and I continued to grab and hold on to that time when we could, but often it still felt more like an obligation than a joy.

My career certainly didn't slow down. In 2006, I became the Chief Executive Officer of CRISTA Ministries in Shoreline, Washington, just north of Seattle. For the next 13 years, I was responsible for leading a staff of 1,800 to love God by serving people. My passion became trying to build a culture of fully devoted followers of Jesus. We needed spiritual practices, which included, you guessed it, quiet time.

Kathleen and I got better at the practice of starting the day together. We would wake up early, grab my coffee and her tea, and sit together on the couch. We would pick a book of the Bible to read through one chapter at a time. I would read, and then we discussed it. Kathleen is a great question-asker and always sees very different things in the reading than I do. We would then pray together, taking turns praying out loud. Oftentimes one of the richest moments would be sitting quietly together.

Even then, being quiet required dedication.

But I never thought that retiring in January of 2019 would provide the opportunity to learn my greatest lesson about being still before the Lord. How was I to know my teacher would be a child not even old enough to walk?



KEVA



In big block letters, we put up “KEVA,” which in Gaelic means “gentle, beautiful, and precious.”

Her name means “gentle, beautiful, precious”

Kathleen and I are blessed with four sons and eight grandchildren. We treasure the time we have spent helping them each grow. We were thrilled to have that chance again when our youngest son, Ryan, let us know he and his wife, Jenni, were expecting a baby girl named Keva. Make that nine grandkids.

With the extra time on hand in retirement, Kathleen and I were ready to lend our support. Mom- and Dad-to-be bought every baby item you could imagine, and we helped decorate the nursery. In big block letters, we put up “KEVA,” which in Gaelic means “gentle, beautiful, and precious.” A perfect choice.

Kathleen and I asked Ryan and Jenni if we could watch Keva one day a week to get to know and bond with her. They were all for it.

After Ryan and Jenni went back to work, Wednesdays became our day together with Keva. Right away she grabbed our hearts, and we cherished the time with her. We knew babysitting was going to be a great adventure. During the next five months, we really enjoyed our time with her. We both pitched in with our whole hearts and shared all the needed tasks.

Later that year, we learned that Keva's nanny had to take a 11-week break to fulfill a previous commitment. Ryan was looking for a short-term nanny but could not find anyone suitable. Kathleen and I entered into a quiet time of prayer like no other. We knew this would be a big time commitment. We were both convinced in our hearts we really wanted to do this in spite of the big commitment we sensed was ahead.

We asked the new parents if they'd be willing for us to watch Keva every day for the next 11 weeks. Their eyes watered and they smiled. Ryan hugged me and said, "I can not think of anything better. That would be such a huge gift."

Our daily schedule dramatically changed, but we felt very blessed by our time watching Keva. She was seven months old when we started being with her five days a week. Ryan would deliver her to our house every weekday around 7:15 a.m. Kathleen and I would always greet them at the door and make a fuss, so Keva would know we were excited she was coming to our home. Then we would play with her, feed her, walk her, and then she would take a nap. I thought she was the most beautiful baby ever born. She was always very calm, and I don't remember her crying very much at all. At that age, she seemed alert and would look into my eyes. My heart melted each time.

She would take a couple of naps every day. I would pray the same thing each day. "Dear Lord, Keva is indeed gentle, beautiful, and precious. I am asking you to put those character traits in her heart, so she is like that on the inside as well as outside. And I want to ask for one other thing. Make her a courageous woman who seeks after you every day. Thank you for answering this prayer."

I would prepare Keva's bottle, and Kathleen would feed her sitting on the couch. I would then take Keva and walk with her around the house until she fell asleep in my arms. I started to sing the same song while I was walking her – one I liked by the Mills Brothers called "Across the Alley From the Alamo":

*Across the alley from the Alamo
Lived the Pinto pony and the Navajo
Who used to bake frijoles and cornie dough
For the people passing by*

Maybe it was the people Keva and I were passing by as I walked her. Perhaps it was those beautiful harmonies I heard as I sung this little tune out loud. All I know is that I noticed Keva began to associate this song with me. As the music floated around us, her beautiful little eyes would start to close. She and the Pinto pony were off to dreamland.

Each day little Keva fell asleep a little sooner. A few days after I started this routine, I sat down in my easy chair in my office (still singing along with the Mills Brothers, of course) with Keva on my chest. As she slept, I grew quiet.

In case you haven't experienced a baby sleeping on your chest, I want you to know there aren't many things you can do without waking them up.

Like I said before, it's hard for me to sit still. But with Keva laying on my chest, I had no choice. So, I succumbed to the moment. My breathing became slower and more steady as I took in the wonder that a baby really does look and smell like an angel.

I spent a lot of time just looking at this tiny grandchild lying asleep on my chest. As the minutes passed, I prayed:

Lord Jesus, thank you for Keva. Make her what her name means: gentle, beautiful, precious, and beloved. But more than that Lord, give her inner beauty and a heart that reflects who You are. Give her the courageous heart of a mighty warrior. Allow her to grow up to be a woman after your own heart. In Your Name, amen.

I would look down at her angelic face, joy would overwhelm me, and my eyes would fill with tears. The moment wrapped me in God's creative wonder. Twenty-minute naps turned into one hour naps twice a day, followed by a third short one. I genuinely felt like I was the most blessed man in the world.

Without criticism or shame

I had entered into this experience thinking that Kathleen and I would have to sacrifice a big part of our free time in order to care for Keva. With hindsight, I wonder if Kathleen and I were the real winners because of what this precious little girl taught me about life and love.

Can I let you in on a dream I've been keeping to myself? I'm waiting for the day when Keva and I can sit together and I can tell her how she taught me that just being together can be better than talking.

I want to tell her how she taught me that it takes patience and time to listen well to your own heart and to hear the voice of God clearly.

I want her to know that as I saw her at peace, safely in my arms, I was seeing the Father's will for all of us. It was in these still and quiet moments I felt God's presence. Through God's gift of faith, I knew I was His child and He was holding me in His arms.

During those 11 short weeks Kathleen and I cared for Keva, I learned to slow down. In slowing down, I learned to become still. And in discovering a new capacity and desire to be still, God drew near to me.

I began to listen and quiet my heart and mind. Almost without fail, I was filled with a deep sense of gladness and all of my senses became more alive. Often, I would hear God's still small voice speaking about seemingly small things.

Here are a few things I heard the Lord say to me.

- *"Relax, I am in charge of this world and all the heavens."*
- *"I will never say anything to you or anyone that is not affirming and loving."*
- *"I have made you as clean as the fresh-fallen snow through my death for you."*

During the entire time with Keva, no criticism or shame came my way from God, only affirmation and love. Thankfully, I had insights into things I had been thinking about and inspirations about current tasks. Now I try to pause before I start tasks like phone calls, errands, and

most everyday stuff I do. I ask God to direct my path and my spirit. There is no rush. Sometimes even just waiting on God brought me peace and pure joy.

Psalm 46:10–11 says, “Be still and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth. The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.” I have actually experienced this verse many times and still do. In knowing God and experiencing Him, we find worship spilling from our hearts and exalt His name.

The Westminster Catechism begins with a question and a direct response: “What is the chief end of man? Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.” My time with Keva has taught me to slow down, listen for God, and savor God.

This is my hope for you as, together, we notice that God has been with me all along, and what He still longs to do in me—and you—each and every day.



Take a Moment...

Stories have a way of drawing us in to reconnect with the places we've been, the people we've known, and the things that truly matter. I hope that's been the case for you in this opening chapter. I invite you to take a moment or two for yourself to reflect on what you've read.

Think of this time as your own private retreat in a favorite setting you like to call your own. For me, it's a comfy couch in our family room, or that big, comfortable chair in my office where I read, pray, and draw close to the Lord.

Life is busy and we all have a lot to do. Don't feel forced into a daily quiet time with God. I practiced that errant "spiritual discipline" too long. We need to remember it's all about taking the time and making room to grow closer to a God who is already present and desires to be with *you*. Before moving on to the next chapter, take a moment with these questions:

- Has there been a time when your desire for God took you to a place inside yourself of silence, rest, and being able to hear that still, small voice (1 Kings 19:12)?

- When did Keva's story begin to speak to your experience as a mother, father, grandparent, aunt, uncle, or caring friend involved in the life of a newborn or growing child?
- In the past few months, where have you sensed or responded to God's presence in ways words can't describe?
- And consider this: How might the Lord be inviting you to "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10)?

Being still is often how God steadies us, readies us, and returns us to Himself, especially in times of uncertainty and crisis. Stillness *before* God is necessary for trusting *in* God, especially when the challenges of life begin to mount, and we need to hear *from* God. And that is where I'd like to go with you next, to discover what it means to listen to the Lord who is present with us, right here, right now.

Live **LARGE!**

By Bob Lonac



Someone once told me that you need to learn from experience, but it doesn't have to be *only* your own. And boy, have I had experiences.

Will you join me on a journey across 7 personal moments where I felt God change my life?

In each chapter, my hope and prayer are that you'll find a piece of your own story and rediscover God for yourself, as if for the first time.

“ I loved the principles but also loved how he illustrated them through powerful, true, experiences he has had with God in his own life. This is a good book for those who are looking into faith for the first time, and those who are well into their journey. Thanks Bob, for this gift.

Dr. Henry Cloud

Clinical Psychologist & *New York Times* Best-Selling Author

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