

Renew Your Life: Discovering the Wellspring of God's Energy
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"I was dying from the inside out and could envision nothing life giving, nothing energizing, nothing vital happening in my life. Ever. Again."

— Kai Mark Nilsen

Burned out by the demands of life?

What inspired you to write *Renew Your Life*?

Kai Nilsen: I had lived through my own period of depleted energy and as I told the story, more and more people said, "Me too." The experience compelled me to rethink what I knew about the process of transformation and write about it in such a way that people who have experienced in the past or are presently experiencing a similar physical and spiritual exhaustion can begin to imagine a more vital life.

Why do you think this is an especially timely topic?

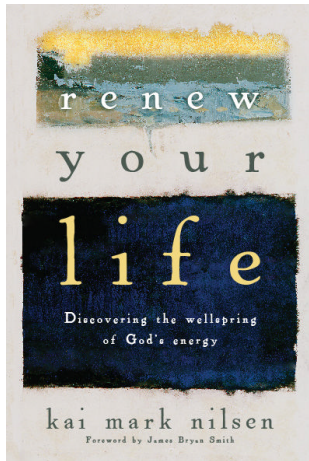
Kai: People are burned out by the demands of life, the culture of more and even the burden of their religion. One of the book's endorsements says it well: "With practically perfect timing for a digitally connected yet detached world, Kai Nilsen digs into the deep wells of biblical wisdom to bring to light the important challenge of rediscovering and reclaiming vitality and energy in life. It's a must-read for busy people who are chasing, but not catching the wind!"

Who in particular is *Renew Your Life* written for?

Kai: Anyone struggling with the crushing weight of living in our culture and who is desperately seeking new possibility: those people in their early twenties facing the pressures of adult life and high expectations, those forty to fifty year olds who have pushed hard in life and discovered the empty promises of materialism and consumerism. People who are willing to invest the time and energy it takes to ask, reflect and act on what they discovered. Pastors and church leaders who are burned out or are burning out.

What is at the heart of *Renew Your Life*?

Kai: God longs for us to experience the vitality of life. Even though the pressure of living in our culture can be debilitating, God has embedded seven renewable energies into the design of creation from the beginning. Our task is to be open to and to intentionally access their renewing power. It is possible. The use of Genesis 1 as the narrative guide for the journey is unique. It presses us to consider that these principles of renewal have been part of God's wisdom from the beginning. We then, as followers of Jesus, claim these core principles and view them through the lens of his love and grace. The use of "Essential Life Questions" throughout encourages the reader to take their own journey, and not a journey mapped out completely by the author.



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"Perhaps you are among the many who would say that they have become numb – numbed by unrelenting stress, numbed by the superficiality of relationships, numbed because of work that has become meaningless and empty, and even by the numbness that comes from compassion fatigue. Grace-filled and authentic to the core, Kai Nilsen has written a book that will wake you up, renew your life and energize you with fresh insights wrapped in the free gifts of God.

– **Rick Barger**, president,
 Trinity Lutheran Seminary,
 Columbus, Ohio

Creative, Renewable Energy for Your Soul

In Western culture, too many of us are attempting to navigate the mind-numbing pressures of our lives with eyes blank, spirits diminished, relationships drained. Though we appear orderly and presentable on the outside, within our energy has drained away. Paradoxically, what we often need the most—the renewing energy of connective relationships—is what we have the least time and energy to pursue.

In 2013, the Barna research team highlighted a disturbing trend.

Ten years ago, slightly over one out of ten Americans self-identified as lonely. Today, that number has doubled – a paradoxical reality in the full swing of the social media age. . . . "As a nation, we are embracing the digital revolution and, ironically, we are becoming a lonelier population. While there are many benefits of being participants in possibly the most relationally connected age in human history, the social media revolution has not made us feel more connected, less lonely, or replete with friends."

This book chronicles my attempts to restore the energy I once had, the energy I desperately needed in order to revitalize my work and refresh my relationships. I write hoping that readers struggling with similar issues will not feel alone, will find helpful guidance and will be renewed in their ability to access life-giving energy. As the apostle Paul reminds us in Colossians, "For this I toil and struggle with all the energy [□νέρυμαι] that he powerfully inspires within me" (Col 1:29). . . .

Over the past decade I have been fascinated by stories I have heard from friends and acquaintances about their creative life changes. Whether losing weight and recovering a new vitality in body, wrestling through a relationship issue and discovering a new vision for their common life, or overcoming a destructive habit and experiencing new freedom, the generative energy behind the change and the sustaining energy that led them through the change were described in similar ways. They adopted a new vision for their life, whether driven by fear or hope. They knew and were willing to embrace the struggle inherent in the process of change. They were strengthened and encouraged by some relationship. And they intentionally crafted a new rhythm of life that supported the desired behaviors.

The change themes were so consistent that I wondered about a common source. Then, it hit me. This wellspring of renewing life energy is articulated in the story of creation (Gen 1:1-2:4).

The biblical creation story is often considered a description of what God did in the past.

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However, Christian theologian Claus Westermann states that this creation story is not a static event but a dynamic, ongoing source of power and inspiration for each generation. He writes, "All over the world people know that their existence and their relationship to the world goes back to a beginning and they try to relate this beginning in some way to the present; . . . they trace back to its source the power which carries on their existence from generation to generation."

Within the creation story, I have uncovered seven creative, renewable energies that were unleashed and continue to empower life from generation to generation. We do nothing to deserve or earn them. They come from God's loving and gracious hand. We are designed to receive and use them as a wind turbine is designed to pick up the energy of the wind and turn it into power. And these energies are renewable; they will never run out. The seven creative, renewable energies include:

Grace (Gen 1:1). Receiving the grace of life itself, I open myself to God's ever-flowing energy in which I "live and move and have [my] being" (Acts 17:28).

Possibility (Gen 1:2). Hovering over the waters of chaos, the Spirit of God makes possible hope for the new things God has already declared (Is 42:9).

Paradox (Gen 1:4). Wrestling with the reality of both light and darkness in our lives and in the created world, we receive the energy to move from suffering to endurance to new character to hope that will not disappoint us (Rom 5:3-4).

Natural world (Gen 1:9-25). Tapping into the ever-present wonder of God's creation, we learn what the natural world teaches us. "Consider the lilies of the field . . ." (Mt 6:28).

Relationships (Gen 1:27). Opening ourselves to the divine image in the other, we discover the vitality that comes from relationships. "And who is my neighbor?" (Lk 10:29).

Fruitful work (Gen 1:28). Engaging our daily work we multiply our capacity to contribute to the good of the world. "For this I toil and struggle with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me" (Col 1:29).

Rest (Gen 2:3). By embracing a Sabbath rhythm for life, we learn to let go and trust God's providential care. "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest" (Ex 33:14).

I call these *creative, renewable energies* for three reasons: First, they are *creative* because they are embedded in the creation story and, therefore, accessible to all. You do not have to consider yourself an artist to receive these creative energies. They are simply the energies we all need to live vibrant, vital lives. Second, they are *renewable*. Unlike a gas tank that runs dry or an oil field that becomes depleted, these energies are always available, waiting for us to



access them. Third, I use the term *energies* because they infuse power for living and for loving service. For instance, the energy of grace connects us to the God who loves us no matter what, freeing us from the burden of others' expectations or our own harsh self-critique. God's grace is embedded in the creation story and renewable from generation to generation. The energy we gain by receiving this gracious presence makes us more alive and more willing to participate in loving service.

—Taken from the Introduction