

Understanding Your Path

Alexander Ligons

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Dedication

I dedicate this book to my beautiful wife, Terry, who is part of my journey, and provides great support to the work of God in my life. She exemplifies a virtuous woman that has given in great ways to our family while pursuing other areas of her purpose. It has been her willingness to support me while in college or ministry or in family transitions that has helped us to continue our path to bring glory to God. I am eternally thankful for the woman God gave me.

I dedicate this book to my son, Bradley. He was a 2020 graduate during an unprecedented time in the history of the world. He has experienced the impact of a global pandemic that caused him to miss the experience of a senior prom and traditional graduation ceremony. While it was difficult for me to fully understand or know his feelings and questions to God about that season of his life, it is my prayer that my book offers guidance. In his struggle with ADHD and his desire to become extraordinarily successful, I share my life of challenge, persistence, and faith that it will bring perspective for him to understand his path. God orchestrates many events in our lives to move us to our divine assignment. May God

inspire and provide direction for his path and that he discovers and walks fully in his assignment.

I also dedicate this first book to my brother, Dwayne, and my father, Iradell. Dwayne's last year of experiencing life on earth was 2008 and my dad's last year was 2017. My heart desires to leave a legacy on their behalf through this book. It is my sincere effort to remember and honor their lives while encouraging others to understand their path in life. Understanding your path is about bringing awareness to your life to become all that you are destined to become. My father produced a large family of 7 sons and 2 daughters. He was a man of many talents, ideologies, and adventures. In all his creative outlets, he did not show many dull moments in life. While raising a large family, he lived his life with energy and tenacity. He had his faults, but he is remembered as my father who lived out loud. He had no apologies for his adventurous life. My oldest brother followed in his footsteps with 3 sons and 2 daughters. He was creative and energetic. Dwayne did not show many dull days in life and lived with excitement and energy. It is the essence of my father and brother that I want to pass along to you as you live and understand your path.

Preface

Sometimes, to start something, you have got to jump in and start and quit pondering that everything must be in place. I remember in 2015 starting a video blog on Facebook and being encouraged to fail forward. It was the best thing I could have done during that time. It eventually led to a 52-week video blog on Facebook that was completed in 2016. It was not perfect, but it was a project that started, ended, and produced a launching pad for other endeavors. I delayed and combined weeks, but I completed the project. It allowed me to build some momentum to write my first book.

My book was initially going to be an autobiography, but I realized I needed a topic that everyone approaches in life but not sure how to navigate. I needed to be creative with intertwining life's questions, setbacks, paths, and experiences with references to Biblical scenarios that would climax to a powerful resolution. We all have a story to tell and there are pieces from our past that help us see or understand our future and purpose. An autobiography just would not accomplish my goal. The title of the book needed to resonate with readers. I felt led to navigate life's

uncertainties and to associate the book with understanding life's journey. What do you make of your life and the pursuit of your heart's endeavor during a changing landscape? Today's time is quite different from the previous decades up to 2010. We have seen a highly creative and innovative age emerge that is competitive to grab our attention. With so many things to focus on, it was difficult to find time to write. I started the idea to write a book in mid-June of 2017, less than three years before a pandemic. The year 2020 has been by far an entrance into a new decade like no other. Twenty-twenty was a significant milestone and an opportune time to complete the project of writing this book. Although I started my effort in 2020, I completed the book in June of 2021, approximately 4 years later from the initial start.

My book is about how an individual deals with disappointments or faces challenges to understand his or her path and launch a life of purpose. Enduring in your endeavor has the potential to elevate the essence of your being to a purpose. Navigating the rough terrain of life is the journey that produces a purposeful life. The challenges of life create your story and cause an individual to find the explanation for his or her true existence. This book is

important to you because you need to have a game plan when you feel that everything you have done has not yielded your expected results. You must answer the question, what are my options? What else can I do in a changing and challenging life or world? There are two options, you keep pushing or you settle. Settling was not an option for me. If it's not an option for you, we need to understand clues that will keep us pushing and pressing forward to understand our path and live a purposeful life.





See the journey



Accept the process



Defeat the challenges



Choose transformation



Discover significance



CHAPTER ONE

Uncommon Beginnings

My dad lived in South Carolina, moved to the big life in Jamaica, New York and gained new life experiences before he returned to South Carolina. As a man from the south, he adjusted with ease to the culture of the Big Apple. He went from plowing fields and working with crops in South Carolina to becoming a department manager in a Jewish grocery store and a member of the Knights of Columbus, a Catholic men's organization. Later, he met mom in Cincinnati. It was not many years later that my three oldest brothers were born in New York. After moving back to South Carolina, I was born. Dad did not waste time taking steps toward his dreams. My dad built a nightclub while the family lived in a

mobile home. By 1980, I was 10 years old and was a middle child with three older brothers and three younger brothers. My mom and dad produced a workforce that helped with his dreams to be a businessman who provided entertainment to the community. After 7 sons, my parents' last two additions to the family were daughters.

A large family, two sisters and six brothers, created a lot of improvising. My dad was a creative man and knew the art to survive. His ability to provide for a large family caused him to take job opportunities in welding and machinery. As a side hustle, he pruned peach trees. He did not have a concern with moving from one job to the next, and he did not seem to worry about a lapse in a paycheck. During the cold winters, we would keep firewood stacked alongside the house. During the coldest time of the winter the water froze in our water line. We carried gallons of water from our spring to store in our tub or pots for immediate use. My dad's homemade stove would provide an adequate platform for heating large pots of water.

What was in my dad was the ability to not let anything stop him. With the only person in the household

working, he added to his plate a nightclub. He loved people and loved providing an atmosphere of entertainment in rural South Carolina. He worked at a club called Ponderosa. It fed into his dreams to start his own business. He helped a neighbor with his nightclub while working with his own nightclub named Bamboo. It was another form of income, and it allowed him to thrive in his passion. When things got rough with keeping the mobile home, he allowed the home to be repossessed. We moved into a compartment of the nightclub. My imagination led me to believe that dad did not want the financial responsibility and obligation of a mobile home payment while pursuing his dream. The Bamboo became the alternative housing arrangement. He knew how to figure things out, keep moving, and refuse to let major events stop him. The second country nightclub was built roughly 200 yards from our make-shift home. The second nightclub was called the Funky Jungle, and it was well known in the community for its soul and its ability to bring the crowds of black folks. It was a social outlet. Dad took big steps in his personal endeavor and made progress in accomplishing his dream of managing a nightclub. His day job funded his dream and supported his household.

His day job was not always a pleasure for him. I remember how my dad used psychology to psych himself into going through a day of work. He would tell himself that he only had one more hour until he eventually reached the end of the workday. He had a strategy to deal with things he did not like and a passion to pursue the things he liked.

The nightclub life exposed me and my brothers to nightlife, while my uncle exposed us to Christian life. My dad's youngest brother built a church, Faith Tabernacle, it was two football fields away from the Funky Jungle. My uncle was known in the church community to the same level my dad was known in the entertainment community. My dad and uncle constructed facilities with the goal of serving people. They were only separated by a few yards and trees. The trees provided a barrier. The two facilities that served people's needs were spiritual and physical. It was a reminder of the movie, *The Color Purple*. In the movie, there was a country club that was near a river in a wooded area with the church only a half mile away. Both backgrounds had an impact on me as a young teenager. I saw intoxicated people who let their fun get out of control. There was a lot of room for me and my brothers to go down the wrong path. I saw people drunk in the Spirit

of God in my uncle's church. From birth to age 16, I was a Catholic, and my first encounter with the Pentecostal Holiness setting was just as strange to me as the nightclub scene. They were shouting; it was not in the form of yelling. Shouting in the Black church is a joyful dance before the Lord. In some ways, it was an intoxication that seemed uncontrollable while in church. Church members were allowed spiritual moments to be expressive while God's presence permeated their being. The experience brought comfort and assurance to life challenges that God will be with them. Church members were speaking in tongues while being filled with the Holy Spirit. My brothers and I saw the boundaries crossed in the nightclub, which led to fights, vulgar confrontations, and intoxication. We also saw new territories to consider living a holy life. It was Bruce, my second-to-the-oldest brother, that rescued me in two near-drowning experiences, and he was the first to be a role model to accept Christ in our family. He made a big influence on choosing the new territory for a holy life. My dad and uncle had many challenges as Black men, which caused them to pursue the passion in their hearts while placing them on their path to fulfill their dream. While my dad

impacted my life in a practical way to become a man, to be responsible, and support a family, my uncle impacted my life to help me see the spiritual responsibilities that were equally important.

The bonding of a father and son relationship was minimal but occurred through the various projects my father embarked upon. My dad was a machinist and built his own wooden heaters. While raising 7 boys and pursuing his dreams, he knew how to integrate creativity which in some ways could have been disguised as his natural ability to know how to survive. My dad had his home-grown workforce for house building projects, nightclub expansion projects and regular side projects for extra money. We were his workforce and crew for pruning peach trees and hauling tree trunks out of his wooded land. My dad was well known in the community, and he did not apologize for doing the unusual. He purchased a bus and removed seats from the second half of the bus to use it as a truck to haul trees. While it could have been embarrassing to us with this unusual work, my dad was not moved by one person's stare. If my dad drove my brothers and I to town to fill the bus with gas, we were to "suck-it-up" and forget about being embarrassed.

There was always something to do each weekend from early morning to four or five in the evening. My dad did not avoid opportunities for my brothers and I to be involved in manual work. This is something that is missed in today's generation. With all these things going on, my older brothers lived their lives with minimal supervision. We were to figure out things along the way. My brothers shared their first car. Eventually, all my older brothers worked and purchased their first car, and it became their project. I purchased my first car in high school. My dad gave us room to become responsible and work for the things we wanted.

In all that I experienced as a young teen, there was a developed and undeveloped foundation for my future. Some teenagers lived in a household with structure throughout their youthful years to help them grow to become extraordinarily successful adults. With minimal structure, there is room to go down the wrong path and it affects the future path of one's life. I was fortunate to choose to get involved in my uncle's church to change the trajectory of my life. For those who can look back over their life and wonder, what would it have been like if I made this decision or that decision? I could do the same. I

could ask what my life would look like if my dad did not move back to South Carolina or if I had grown up in New York? I cannot answer that question, but what I do know is that God allows some paths to develop for our lives based on other people's decisions, and we are to develop out of that path. God allows people to make decisions that are part of the path they are not fully aware that they are to follow. Those who are impacted by that decision are still on the path that God has for them. It is not too late for God to work all things in your life for what is ultimately for your good. It culminates to create your life story and testimony. The book of Job illustrates the life of an individual that has a good life and calamity fell upon him and his family. In the end, he was restored with a new life and family. The story did not end with suffering, pain, disappointment, and defeat. It ended with restoration and exposure to a greater relationship and walk with God. Let's continue to gain meaning about the transitions on the journey.

CHAPTER TWO

Young and Full of Energy

Operating in minimum faith

In the younger stages of life, we have more energy, but we are less focused with minimum faith to accomplish great things. As a youth, life's clarity is inadequate for the high level of energy we possess to develop our lives. I went to a 2-year college to study engineering graphics, earned a 2-year degree, and eventually completed a BA degree in graphic design. Based on my limited faith, I pursued what I believed I could accomplish. I thought that was the ultimate direction for my life. We have a lot in us and sometimes God will allow us to go down a path with our natural abilities to do what is most interesting and most

obvious to us. My dad pursued the thing that leaped in his heart. He loved people and impacted their lives by his personality. I believe he could have been a college professor and minister, but his life impressions did not lead him down that path. As an extension of my father, I am carrying out the legacy of a college professor and minister.

My oldest brother, Dwayne, pursued what was in his heart. He had the ability to draw, cook, and customize cars. He poured his heart into those areas of his life while raising a beautiful family. Dwayne had a lot of energy and a creative spirit that showed in his work. He loved his “old school” Chevrolet cars. He was the first person I knew that attached a colorful set of lights to the stereo that caused the lights to blink to the beat of the music. One year he drove me and my brothers to Cincinnati playing “Planet Rock” with the lights blinking to the music in his ’67 Chevrolet car for the 8-hour trip. You can imagine we did not want to hear that song for a while. He took pride in his car that had chrome Cragar rims, a two-toned blue/gray paint job, and a 327 cubic inch, V-8 engine. The car was known as the “Dazzler.” His creativity will never be forgotten. It

was known in his drawing, cooking, and modifying cars. His legacy lives on in his children, who carry the same passion and interest in being creative.

High school experiences contribute to our path, and it is a preview to adult life that is driven by important decisions and necessary responsibilities. While I was in high school, others knew of my ability to draw. I entered art contests. I was asked to create a banner that included the high school mascot for the senior class. My first big decision outside of being creative was to go to college and major in art. When I was in college, I worked in my uncle's Pentecostal Holiness church as an usher, graphic designer, musician, and sound engineer. While operating in a minimum faith of what was provided as a service to others, more insight was realized about my talents, gifts, and abilities. My dad pursued things in his heart and in the process, he was serving others. Dwayne loved cooking and sharing his meals with others, and he is remembered as a giver. The true passion of faith to believe and do great things for God was not discovered in my youthful years. It was a process of making decisions, doing something, and serving others that led to becoming

responsible and creating possibilities. The possibilities are driven by faith and passion. We often run with what we know to do for our lives on a surface level to take care of our natural responsibilities. It is often not channeled for things of eternal value. One of the greatest struggles in my life was not knowing the person I truly would become. It may not seem like a big struggle when compared to other life challenges. We all have different types of struggles and are impacted differently in our lives to move to our divine assignment. If you have struggled with your purpose, your passion, your position, and your promotion, I encourage you through this book that you can move forward to walk the assigned path for your life. It comes at a cost. The cost is time, energy, determination, money, faith, prayer, disappointment, struggle, failure, relationship, and perspective.

Minimum vision in youthful years

The minimum vision for our life in our youth is strongly associated with our inability to know what we are passionate about. We become powerful and purposeful later in life because of our focus. Few have the gift of clarity and focus to direct their energies to a

purposeful life at a young age. There is a reason why an impactful life does not come in earlier years of life for many. It is our journey that provides the necessary insight into discovery. David discovered himself while tending to sheep. Your journey involves challenges and disappointment and that becomes part of your life assignment, purpose, and path. The thing that has brought difficulty, distraught, disappointment and defeat, becomes the path to blessing others. Our vision for life develops over time. It develops quickly for some and not so quickly for others. My dad and uncle gained awareness of the thing they were to pursue. It became a reality in their decisions. Our purpose and vision are subjected to God's timing for our life. For those that grasp the vision for their life earlier, it means their awareness for purpose occurs earlier. God's work for you emerges as you exercise your gifts that leads to walking in your purpose. Over time, there are opportunities that shifts into other assignments that could not have occurred without being involved in previous assignments. David received his anointing for his future assignment while becoming a warrior tending to sheep. In 1 Samuel 16:10-13 is the record of David's recognition which reads,

[“]¹⁰Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, ‘The Lord has not chosen these.’ ¹¹So he asked Jesse, ‘Are these all the sons you have?’ ‘There is still the youngest,’ Jesse answered. ‘He is tending the sheep.’ Samuel said, ‘Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives.’ ¹²So he sent for him and had him brought in. He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features. Then the Lord said, ‘Rise and anoint him; this is the one.’ ¹³So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David. Samuel then went to Ramah.” (NIV)

What activities are you currently performing that are preparing you for the next chapter of your assignment?

Opportunities in the unknown

The experience of considering college was an unknown path with unknown opportunities. I remember two years before graduating high school; I purchased my first car. Car insurance was a responsibility that came with the new purchase. I was a student who drove a school bus and worked a mini or weekend shift in a cotton mill, earning nearly \$400 a month as a high school student. After high school, I decided to go to a local

technical college to enroll in the Industrial Drafting program. I realized that working in a mill had a positive impact on me. The opportunities in the unknown shed light on providing direction for my future. Knowing the importance of being responsible was the unknown while working and making decisions. My friend and I had an unusual experience on a slow day at work. We decided we would take another break in the locker room. It was also the restroom. It was after our manager had already seen us taking our one-hour lunch break. We were caught, sent home, and told when we could return to work. Our boss removed the option for us to retain our jobs. He saw the job as having the potential to lock us into working in a mill for the rest of our lives and not considering a college education. The irresponsibility because of a bad decision caused an unknown experience – we were fired. The unknown experience of a closed door opened a new consideration that college was the next best option. I wanted a better future which meant pursuing education and training.

Persisting when your life path isn't clear

Doing the best-known thing in your life is a path that provides direction to greater clarity. You will be challenged to continue to do something although there are no promises of success. This will be an opportunity to demonstrate your faith. It is the substance of things hope for but are not seen. Faith is demonstrated by action toward the unseen. Not stopping or turning away is an opportunity to demonstrate tenacity and perseverance for an unknown future. It is your desired future that causes you to fight the unknowns to bring focus to your purpose. Less demanding endeavors were not allowed to steal my attention. As a person pursuing a dream to accomplish something in life, it was necessary to be hopeful. It required the necessity of harnessing skills, knowledge, and gifts for purposeful goals.

With a passion that increased my faith, I decided to transfer to Midlands Technical College. It was an hour away from home. It was a meaningful drive each day to college and work. I was determined to put forth an effort to be exposed to greater things to achieve greater success. I did not have a clear picture on my path to becoming a Computer-Aided Design Drafting Technician, but I knew

it was the closest field to my artistic background. I completed the 2-year degree program and applied to nearly 50 career opportunities and only landed 5 interviews. All 5 interviews were unsuccessful. It was an eye-opener that I needed to expand my college education.

The second attempt involved a greater investment of money and a greater action of faith. I enrolled in the University of South Carolina art program with a concentration in graphic design. I only knew that I had to keep trying on my path to obtain success. I only had enough vision to do what came easy and natural to me. Just as my dad, uncle and brother pursued interests in their hearts. I took the same approach. Sometimes life's path must be walked on the most common grounds until other things become clearer.

Abraham had to leave and go to a land that God would show him, which required great faith. Genesis 12:1 and 12:4 reads, "The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. So Abram went, as the Lord had told him..." He did not have a clear picture, but he acted. From my 2-year college experience to my 4-year college

experience, there was a lot of uncertainty and lack of clarity while walking in faith.

Persistence was the greatest action and demonstration of my faith. Faith was exercised more than doubt during the time in my life when clarity of my future was absent.

Reflective Statements

- *We have a lot in us and sometimes God will allow us to go down a path to use our natural abilities to do what is most interesting and most obvious to us.*
- *Life's path must be walked on the most common grounds until other things become clearer.*
- *We all have different types of struggles and are impacted differently in our lives to move to our divine assignment.*
- *Your journey involves struggles and disappointments and that becomes part of your life assignment, purpose, and path.*
- *The opportunity of the unknown sheds light on providing direction for my future.*

CHAPTER THREE



Gaining Traction

Efforts of faith produces traction for the path

My faith made a path to graduate, to land my first career, and to marry Terry, my college girlfriend. My 2-yr. and 4-yr. college experiences were challenging. Often, I would ask my father for gas money. He was pleased with my efforts to continue my education. There were times he would lecture me and my brothers about being responsible young men. Sometimes it was under the influence of alcohol, but he still wanted his sons to be successful. Being an hour away from home with only five to seven dollars meant \$3 or \$4 for the tank and \$2 or \$3 for a snack. Fortunately, during the 1990s, gasoline prices

were around \$1 - \$1.15 per gallon.¹ With a general search on the Internet, a fast-food combo meal was about \$2.79. There were times when my car had mechanical problems, and I had to figure out quickly the repair plan to avoid missing class. There were rainy, sunny, and sleepy days while driving to and from school and work. It was God's favor that I did not have an accident. As a devoted member of my uncle's Pentecostal church, I worked in ministry while in college. It was not easy to establish a boundary between church work and schoolwork. As a result, my grades suffered. I was spread thinly with many responsibilities. I remained faithful to church duty while believing I would finish college successfully to reach a brighter future. College work-study was a financial and educational benefit while working part-time jobs at Lowes and BestBuy at different stages in college.

Persistence was my demonstration of faith. I did not stop as I kept believing that my college work was the best use of my time during those years. Our path in life is consumed with monotony, the common pattern of everyday tasks and challenges, but it is our job to keep positive traction. God honors steps of faith, and we see His hand helping us on our path. I graduated in four years,

in 1992. I remember being at my uncle's church in the fellowship hall and thinking about the next chapter. I had already gone down the path to find a career after 2yr-college graduation. I realized I wasn't ready for a career. This time, I did a better job of making greater efforts to gain valuable career-related work experience. It was a sincere effort to establish a good future to be equipped with education and skills to provide for a family. God gives us multiple opportunities to operate in faith that He can show Himself to us. When Zacchaeus was in the Sycamore tree, he went ahead to see or encounter Jesus. He made physical provisions due to his limitations for an encounter. His anticipation to see Jesus caused a spiritual awakening. He encountered Christ, the anointed one, and was prepared to have Jesus visit his home. Luke 19:2-9, the passage reads,

“A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy.³He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd.⁴So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him since Jesus was coming that way.⁵When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.’⁶So he came down at once and welcomed him

gladly.⁷ All the people saw this and began to mutter, ‘He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.’⁸ But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, ‘Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.’⁹ Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” (NIV)

Zacchaeus’ heart displays sincerity with an eagerness to correct the wrongs of tax fraud among the people to ensure he was on the right path moving forward.² What physical steps do we need to take for a spiritual encounter to prepare for our true path for life?

After college, it was time to see doors open and go to another level of faith. In 1996, Terry and I were both looking for career opportunities. I graduated the prior week before her graduation, and we were both editing and printing resumes while searching for career opportunities in the summer of 1996. We both landed opportunities in Greenville, South Carolina, and found ourselves moving towards a new chapter of life as young professionals. Our paths were jointly being opened to new opportunities that required faith. When you have thoroughly prepared for the next stage, doors open easier than if there had not

been the proper preparation. David would not have been prepared to fight Goliath if he had not previously fought wild animals to protect his sheep. In his season of preparation, he was in front of the opportunity that was presented. The path God reveals about your life over time will present challenges that will cause you to let go of the familiar and move into the unfamiliar. My first career after college required me to move to Greenville, South Carolina. I was embarking upon my first experience living independently. My experience of living with a college roommate prepared me to live in a studio apartment with an entry-level career as an online producer with a salary near \$20,000. My girlfriend got her first opportunity and found an apartment and was living on her own. Our lives shared the same experience because of our faith and persistence.

My path led to another big decision that required faith to marry my college sweetheart. We waited a year after moving to Greenville to consider marriage. I never planned to marry someone only a few miles from my home. We were familiar with each other as early as head-start. We had a 3-year courtship, and we took the necessary path to marriage. Although we lived only 2.5 miles apart,

played in the community and played on the playgrounds of preschool, we pursued premarital counseling and addressed issues that were important before taking the next step. Although we had a strong faith in moving toward marriage, it was not faithless to consider a formal process to gain additional insight into our decision to marry. I remember the challenges that occurred in the last year leading to marriage. There were challenges on the path that exposed the true essence of relational conflict. There were outside challenges to our relationship that caused me to go back to God for clarity. God provides peace in a decision that has been careful, thoughtful, and prayerful. My fiancé and I followed a process to confirm our faith and gain the necessary insight through pre-marital counseling. We felt at peace and saw a green light moving forward to marriage. I believed that my fiancé was a partner in the future work and call that God had upon our lives. During those challenges, I found peace without fear, and we got married on November 22, 1997, 24 years ago (as of 2021). When Esther resolved to go before the king, she knew the peace and decision in her heart was for a greater cause. Esther's faith was far beyond her fear, and her heart for a greater cause prevailed. Esther 7:1-5 reads,

“So the king and Haman went to Queen Esther’s banquet,²and as they were drinking wine on the second day, the king again asked, ‘Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted.’³Then Queen Esther answered, ‘If I have found favor with you, Your Majesty, and if it pleases you, grant me my life—this is my petition. And spare my people—this is my request.⁴For I and my people have been sold to be destroyed, killed and annihilated. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king.’⁵King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, ‘Who is he? Where is he—the man who has dared to do such a thing?’” (NIV)

Your path has a greater cause than allowing your fear of failure or any other challenges to hold you back. Your faith and actions must rise above everything else, and upon these efforts, God sees it as a good thing.

Paying attention to the environment and adjusting

In my last year of college, I became more interested in multimedia or digital media than only maintaining an interest in a four-year art degree with a concentration in graphic design. God placed me with Mrs. Cunningham who demonstrated professionalism to the highest level. She was a great blessing in my technology and professional development. During the last year of college, I

noticed the environment was placing much emphasis on the Internet. My interests lined up with the emerging of graphic, web, and interactive design with the Internet. This was a positive movement and reinvention wrapped up into one package. The path that God has for you will match a need for the environment you are to impact. It is important to pay attention to the longing of your heart. Nehemiah had an ache in his heart for God's people who were in exile. The temple was destroyed, and the walls of Jerusalem were broken down. It was a disgrace to the Israelites. Nehemiah, a cupbearer, requested of the king to restore the walls and rebuild the temple. This was an effort to deal with the affairs that were in his heart.

Nehemiah 2:2-5 reads,

“...²so the king asked me, ‘Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.’ I was very much afraid,³but I said to the king, ‘May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?’⁴The king said to me, ‘What is it you want?’ Then I prayed to the God of heaven,⁵and I answered the king, ‘If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it.’” (NIV)

What has God placed in your heart that is an ache or desire for you to be positioned as the solution? Have you ever thought about the traction in your life that comes or the door that opens after significant efforts proved that you wanted success? If you do not settle and become stubborn and unwilling to let go of your endeavors at all costs of comfort, you begin to see footsteps on your journey.

Abraham and Gideon allowed God to show them even if there was discomfort. Gideon lived during a dark time in biblical history. It was a heightened time of sinful acts and ungodliness. There was not a chief prophet like Moses to provide spiritual guidance or the word of the Lord. As a result, there was a greater propensity for sin during that time. There was not one faithful leader that provided Godly direction after Joshua left the scene. Some judges were appointed as military leaders. There was destruction and a loss of freedom throughout the land. The enemies of the day were feasting and taking control of the proceeds of others in the land. The Midianites were the oppressors who caused God's people to seek shelter during their invasions. Judges 6:11-24 reads,

¹¹The angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. ¹²When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, ‘The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.’ ¹³‘Pardon me, my lord,’ Gideon replied, ‘but if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, “Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?” But now the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian.’ ¹⁴The Lord turned to him and said, ‘Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?’ ¹⁵‘Pardon me, my lord,’ Gideon replied, ‘but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.’ ¹⁶The Lord answered, ‘I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive.’ ¹⁷Gideon replied, ‘If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is you talking to me.’ ¹⁸Please do not go away until I come back and bring my offering and set it before you.’ And the Lord said, ‘I will wait until you return.’ ²²When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the Lord, he exclaimed, ‘Alas, Sovereign Lord! I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face!’ ²³But the Lord said to him, ‘Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die.’ ²⁴So Gideon built an altar to the Lord there and called it The Lord Is Peace.” (NIV)

There are times you must ask questions while on your path. Are there barriers blocking your assignment? Are you in a season that feels like gross darkness? Are you lacking the word of the Lord? Will you allow your discomfort or disbelief to close the door to the next chapter of your journey? Do not let that, which seems impossible or out of reach, stop you from believing and walking in faith on your path. Your next bold move does not necessarily mean you will not be challenged to step out of the box. Going to college, starting a business, getting married, making a major investment, answering the call of God, or moving to another state, city or country means you must be willing to take the step of faith with confidence that God is guiding you. There are dark times that we must plow through that show our faith is in action.

Experiencing movement

After reaching a level of success, your movement is accompanied by your heartache for adjustments. Your heart guides your movement. After 5 years in my first career, I moved from online producer to online manager. Instead of staying at the company, I felt a need to stay in my career field that I obtained the most passion. The

trajectory of my first career was positioning me to a future in management. There was less passion for that area. It is important as a professional or ministry leader to allow your heart to guide your decisions for your assignment. You must be directed by the Spirit of God so that you do not have someone in the marketplace or ministry placing you in a role or assignment you do not feel called to.

Abraham left his familiar environment and exercised his faith in what God would show him.

Allowing God to show you His direction while you are in uncharted waters will be your greatest experience of developing your faith and spiritual walk with God. It is better to go alone in faith than with the crowds without faith. I left one career because my heart felt it was time to shift gears. At different times, I left ministries that I was serving because of what I felt in my heart. In some cases, the leader was not ready to accept my need to grow in a new assignment. Leaving a ministry should be about continuing the assignment and path God has for an individual. I believe in most cases that my change was at the appropriate time and was a necessary change for the divine plan for my future. My first career was at a company in Greenville, SC, that I left after 5 years. Years

later, the company downsized and is no longer a prominent presence in the community. Experiencing movement that is divinely orchestrated is a peaceful assurance that God is ordering your steps. Some movement comes with unknowns. After I left the 5-year long career, my next career was a good experience for one-in-a-half years. The months leading to a 2-year anniversary were not thrilling. After I completed a big website redesign project for the college, my responsibilities were snatched from me. I was abruptly given a new role within the college after nearly two years of being hired to work at the college. I remember the day I intensely prayed to God, crying out to Him about the situation on my way home as I was driving down the interstate. This movement within my career reminded me of David being a blessing to Saul and shortly after being a blessing, Saul tried to kill him. After completing the project and providing a newly designed website for the college, the Communications Department decided it was time to eliminate my role and take ownership of the website. God opened a door and provided a blessing for me to work with a person I knew from my first career as a young professional. She was not the best boss, but she was a better alternative to the

current situation at that time. It was part of the process on my path. We get out of one pot of boiling water to be in another pot of hot water that is not boiling yet while building a testimony. After I moved from the 2-year career, I stayed in the next position for nearly 16 years with various adjustments and situations. Movement on your path will not always be quick, clear, or favorable, but it is never immobile. After Joseph shared his dream with his family, it wasn't long before he was in a pit.

Reflection

1. *Your path has a greater cause than allowing your fear of failure or any other challenges to hold you back.*
 2. *Your faith and actions must rise above everything else, and upon these efforts, God sees it as a good thing.*
 3. *What has God placed in your heart that you are being positioned to be the solution?*
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4. *Have you ever thought about the development of your life or the doors opening after significant efforts proved that you wanted success?*

Chapter Reflection Response

CHAPTER FOUR



While in Your Dungeon

Allow your frustrations to be fuel

In 2010, I was in my third career and was at the highest level of frustration with a need to figure out the next course of action. I worked on a project for months to make a great contribution to the organization using my college education and skills. I developed a professional presentation to the VP of Marketing and Technology. It was an endeavor to research, to design and to produce an intranet environment for the college. My efforts were tossed to the side. I did not know how to process the situation. I felt disrespected in utilizing my college education and skills to positively contribute to the future development of the college. I redesigned the college's

website 5 times and did not understand the situation. I could only imagine that while Joseph was in a pit and dungeon, he could not understand why he was in that situation. The questions surfaced. What do you do when you are not valued? What do you do when you feel you are in a dead-end situation? What is the next option to rebound from such disrespect? In 2014, I felt like I was in a dungeon for four years and felt that my path was at a halt. I practiced making positive contributions while feeling a high level of insignificance. During the four years, I was seeing others promoted to positions and moving on with life. I applied to 3-5 positions within the organization and was given the courtesy of a response months later after the position was filled. I felt I was not experiencing any favor for a breakthrough on my path. In the dungeon, I had to seek God for direction. I could not see any way out of the dungeon and had to find a way to cope with the frustration. It is in the dungeon that you must build an altar for the Lord. This is the place where you surrender to His will. It is the place that you recognize that your life must be dedicated to the Lord for His purposes to prevail. You lay before Him to get an understanding of what you are to prepare to do for His plan. I think of an altar as a

place where heaven receives an expression of agreement from earth to cooperate with God to accomplish His plan. Jacob fought an angelic being as he requested a blessing from God, and he later made an altar to God. He became a servant for God. While the dungeon for Joseph was a place of restriction, the altar is a place of sacrifice to be given wholly to the Lord.

What can you do in the dungeon? Is your dungeon the negative impact of a pandemic? Is it a dead-end career, a sickness, a divorce, a financial loss or the death of a family member or friend? The situation you face has caused you to feel trapped, depressed or discouraged. It seems that there is no light at the end of the tunnel. Out of frustration, I laid before God in prayer and faith seeking answers. In faith, I felt that God placed upon my heart to go back to school to complete two college degrees. The first goal was a master's in business administration and the second was a master's in Christian ministry. Out of my place of greatest frustration, God allowed me to use the frustration as fuel to embark upon the greatest thing I could do during a time of career disappointment. Two master's degrees were completed. What frustration do you have that is so great that you need to replace with a

positive endeavor for your journey to purpose to continue? I imagine behind closed doors, my father expressed his frustrations with mom, and as a result, he pursued his dream to own a nightclub. My frustration was so great that I often considered the idea of pursuing a doctorate but left the idea with God to open doors for me to pursue that goal without incurring further debt. While obtaining various degrees, I remained faithful to serve in ministry.

Joseph was in prison but provided the service of interpreting dreams to those who were in prison with him. He remained hopeful in his undeserved treatment. Genesis 40:14-15 reads, ¹⁴But keep me in mind when things go well for you. Be sure to extend kindness to me by remembering me to Pharaoh. Bring me out of this prison, ¹⁵because I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews. Not only that, I haven't done anything that deserves me being confined to this pit." What dungeon are you in and remain hopeful while pressing to your new day? If you did not have the opposition, would you make the correct progress on your path?

How do you view opposition?

Throughout the path of life, we have challenges, tests, and problems that are surprises to us, and we must

decide if it is opposition or opportunity? It is a natural inclination to see opposition as a problem. It is our problems in life that produce the best person we can become. A problem touches an emotional, spiritual, intellectual, physical, financial, or relational part of us that is very intimate to our life. That is the challenging part of seeing it positively. We are touched at the core, and it is difficult to separate the positive benefits of a problem and the impact it has upon our lives. Paul was an example of a person who had a symbolic thorn in his life. The second letter to the Corinthians 12:6-10 reads,

“⁶Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say,⁷or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.⁸Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.⁹But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.¹⁰That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in

difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (NIV)

He was dealing with conceit, false teachers, a potential apostasy, and the opposition of other religious leaders.³ He found the benefit of these challenges to elevate his spiritual position. He celebrated to God what the challenges were producing in him. It is not easy to celebrate the benefits of suffering. Is it possible to shift from the pain of suffering to the promise that can be produced? Romans 8:17 - 24 reads,

[“]¹⁷Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. ¹⁸I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. ²⁰For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. ²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the

redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in this hope we were saved.” (NIV)

On February 7th in 2017, I received a phone call from my brother that our father had passed away. As I was leaving the office, the sadness hit, and tears started to flow while on the interstate driving home. It was a day that the pause button was pressed and everything around me was put on hold. The pain of a loss is hard to process. Eight years earlier, my oldest brother was killed in a car accident. I was still in the process of finding a way to honor my brother’s life. Life is short and we all must be intentional and purposeful. Death is a reminder that we do not have time to waste on the path of life. Sometimes we can get so numb in life by bereavement or disappointment that it is hard to seek God, have faith, and keep moving forward to a better day. It is during those times we must call out to God to help us. It is during those times that there is only one set of footprints in the sand because God is carrying us. You listen to inspiring music, meditate on a passage of scripture, watch encouraging videos, talk with family members or close friends for support, and sit in God’s presence to sense that He is near. You talk to others for comfort and keep pressing towards God, and one day,

you begin to feel alive again. Life's challenges and disappointments are part of the process that should cause us to look within to see what is being produced. As a result of the loss of my dad and oldest brother, I have not allowed the endeavor to complete this book to be hindered. The door that has opened for me to complete my doctorate is partly to contribute to the legacy of their lives and to answer the heartache to navigate the challenges of the next generation's path to God.

What is your SWOT analysis?

Your personal SWOT analysis is an effort to investigate and assess your life. An analysis of yourself is a profound introspection to learn and answer questions for personal improvement. What are the strengths that cause you to make a great contribution to the world? According to Internet sources, Albert Humphrey, a business and management consultant, was recognized for the SWOT framework for businesses. The SWOT analysis is defined as a tool for managers to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats about its business performance.⁴ As a professor, I have had students complete SWOT analysis assignments for researching

businesses.

Another creative approach to using a SWOT analysis has been to take a deeper dive into a person's life, starting from childhood, early family life, and present life. What are those things that impacted you positively and negatively at different stages in life? What are your strengths? As we can identify our high-quality skills, are we able to see our talents, gifts, and abilities intersecting with a demand for a solution to a problem? Can we find the path to this intersection? I remember in 2005, I had reached a plateau in my career and aspirations. I had achieved all that I could imagine in 1996, nine years after I graduated college and obtained my first career. I was reentering an uncomfortable path to rediscovery and reinvention for my life. What was next after my career of designing websites and being creative? This was a form of a SWOT analysis. I was looking for new opportunities for my life that I had never considered. I entered a place in life where I was forced to think about a foundation for the next 10-15 years of my life. The greatest need in our lives when we reach great uncertainty is more direction and guidance from God. It is through our honor, respect, reverence, and proper perspective of God that we gain

knowledge. Proverbs 1:7, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction,” points out the importance of recognizing, respecting, and reverencing God. An individual operates with the correct knowledge or information for life through their proper honor to God. Wisdom is the ability to apply godly principles in life’s situations, while information is used for day-to-day decisions that are not spiritual or life-defining. Going back to the source for my life’s purpose was the necessary step to move forward.

What are your weaknesses? Our weaknesses are those things that will hinder us from reaching our life goals. A weakness is a way of thinking that is demonstrated in bad habits, actions, and behaviors that lack discipline and structure for us to reach important life goals. Our calling, destiny and purpose are dependent upon the ability to remove barriers or weaknesses. An appropriate scripture that is an important reference in our daily affairs of life is Proverbs, 4:23 which reads, “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.” Weaknesses in the business world are categorized by internal and external characteristics. Organizations evaluate their systems and processes. If there are faulty

issues within the business, the weakness must be addressed and corrected. Our heart or spirit is the most internal part of our being that must be searched and placed before God so that we can properly reproduce according to His plans. It has been a natural tendency for me to be negative and to complain. I have had to work hard at changing these flaws. These flaws are weaknesses that have the potential to impact my future. I have had to think about where or how this flaw developed in my life. A consciousness of correcting problems is easier when there is a greater perspective of seeing the negative impact.

What are your opportunities? When we think of opportunities, we may be more prone to think about doors that are presented by someone. What about the hidden avenues that can be explored for greater outcomes in your personal life or business? What about the spiritual realm of our lives? Do we need to wait for opportunities to be presented or do we increase within ourselves by seeking the Spirit of God to direct us to create opportunities? Proverbs 18:16 say that a man's gift will make room for him. What is our part in developing the gift within us that doors will open? We are to take steps every day is an opportunity to live intentionally and pursue the things

that are in our hearts. My father and brother were great examples of tackling each day with new energy and creativity for possibilities. Their lives did not waste time on negative situations or lost opportunities. They kept life moving forward.

What are your threats? In business, I would look at a threat as an external force that works against the company's ability to perform or produce. As I look at life through the lens of threats, I look at the external elements that can negatively impact or threaten an individual's life. These are the sins that come through external elements such as drugs, alcohol, sex, pornography, gambling, and larceny. The condition of an individual's heart is a clue to the existence of threats. It is important to remove the barriers that threaten the potential of following your divine assignments for your path. A large percentage of men have struggled with pornography. To some individuals, there is no harm in engaging in pornography. The grip of pornography has the potential to impact the sexual relationship of marriage if left unattended. Our path has no room for obstacles to move us away from purpose. I remember a friend in high school who had access to pornographic magazines. The magazines came

from his father. It was years later that his parents divorced. I remember another friend who had a pornographic magazine that was easily accessible. It was between 7-10 years later that his marriage ended.

Reflective Questions

1. *What do you do when you are not valued in the workplace or ministry?*

2. *What is your dungeon?*

3. *What can you do while in the dungeon?*

4. *Are you able to use frustration as fuel to move toward your dreams?*

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5. *What frustration do you have that is so great that you need to replace it with a positive endeavor for your life path to be retained?*

6. *What are your strengths?*

7. *What are your weaknesses?*

8. *What are your opportunities?*

9. *What are your threats?*

10. *What are your gifts, talents or God-given abilities and where is the intersection to be a solution or meet a need with your abilities?*
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CHAPTER FIVE

Attitude that Opens Doors

Attitude of service

On the path, your willingness to serve a local ministry or volunteer in a non-profit organization provides an opportunity to discover your likes, dislikes, and gifts to help others. It has been regular practice to be involved in ministry to provide my gifts of service to the local church. Serving ministries in my community for over 30 years allowed me an opportunity to understand where my heart for service truly lies. I worked in various capacities from sound engineering, recording sermons, providing graphic designs, testing video recordings, teaching a children's ministry, supporting streaming media users, utilizing church presentation software, leading a men's group, teaching premarital classes,

facilitating outings for men's groups, playing a keyboard in various church settings, and serving as a leader for the praise/worship ministry. The willingness to work in different capacities allowed me to contribute in different ways to various ministries.

Over the years, my heart for service changed. The technology field was my initial interest, but as time progressed, my passion to serve shifted from working with things to working with people. A greater need for fulfillment and significance came in seeing others benefit from my involvement. The willingness to serve regardless of our current situation is an important part of our path. It is not until you serve that you can be used by God. While Joseph was in a dungeon, he was called upon to answer the request to interpret the king's dream. In his situation of being wrongfully accused, he retained an attitude of service. Genesis 41:9-16 reads,

[“]⁹Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh,
‘Today I am reminded of my shortcomings.

¹⁰Pharaoh was once angry with his servants,
and he imprisoned me and the chief baker in
the house of the captain of the guard. ¹¹Each of
us had a dream the same night, and each dream
had a meaning of its own. ¹²Now a young
Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the
captain of the guard. We told him our dreams,

and he interpreted them for us, giving each man the interpretation of his dream.¹³ And things turned out exactly as he interpreted them to us: I was restored to my position, and the other man was impaled.'¹⁴ So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was quickly brought from the dungeon. When he had shaved and changed his clothes, he came before Pharaoh.¹⁵ Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.'¹⁶ 'I cannot do it,' Joseph replied to Pharaoh, 'but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires.' (NIV)

As you are denying yourself to help others, you begin to discover your service are assignments for the work of God's plan. Our gifts are to help others and through our problems, we have the experience to relate to those we are helping. The person who found the secrets to life after divorce is positioned to give hope to others on that path. As individuals understand their path, if it includes divorce, they gain a perspective after that life event. The person finds purpose in the experience to help others and increases insight for a second marriage with God's blessings upon the marriage.

Attitude of expectation

In my years of pursuing goals, there was an expectation component to grow as I served. As a premarital teacher for young couples or a team leader for a men's ministry, I was pushed to be an excellent teacher and role model. On the path of life, we need coaches who help us grow so that we can become greater contributors to others. These are opportunities to help us see and experience God working through us. I remember one of the leadership meetings at a retreat where we gave a speech. I was nervous but realized I was with my brothers in Christ, who pushed me on to become a better leader. Through our faith that leads us to unknown experiences, we grow and develop. It was not until Elisha made a request in faith to Elijah for a double portion of Elijah's anointing that the door of possibilities opened. The second letter of Kings in chapter 2 verse 8-10 reads,

⁸Elijah took his cloak, rolled it up, and struck the water with it. The water divided to the right and the left, and the two of them crossed over on the dry ground. ⁹When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, 'Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?' 'Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit,' Elisha replied. ¹⁰You have asked a difficult thing,' Elijah said, 'yet if you see me when I am

taken from you, it will be yours—otherwise, it will not.” (NIV)

Elisha’s willingness, faith, and expectation for a double blessing showed his heart and attitude for greater work in ministry.⁵ On our journey or path in life, we are to expect, but we should remember that in our expectation, we are to be contributors to our community. While on our path during difficult and challenging times, the best remedy is to serve. This allows an opportunity to remove thoughts about oneself and to help someone else in need during your time of expecting God’s blessings.

The attitude of focus and determination while in preparation

Considering the focus and determination of an ant is a good example of persistence. The ant prepares for the winter in other seasons before winter. In Proverbs 6:6-8, the ant is focused and determined by taking one step at a time to accomplish the goal without a leader directing the efforts. I remember the times I wrote down goals, created vision boards, and scribbled to-do lists. I would have the greatest success with my to-do lists. In some cases, the to-do lists led to greater goals being accomplished. The factor that is just as important as identifying your goals is

staying focused. The to-do lists were the smaller size items that were easier and had a shorter time frame to accomplish. The bigger the goal, the greater the focus and determination. I have accomplished many of the things I wanted in life. Writing a book was a big goal and required more focus and determination than smaller goals. Sometimes, it might be the season or timing that becomes a big factor.

I previously shared the frustration in my career and the steps I took to accomplish my goal to graduate with two master's degrees. However, I had another encounter of career dissatisfaction. My boss called me into his office to tell me that I was no longer reporting directly to him. I was reporting to someone that did not have a background in web development. He did not have the adequate level of education for me to report to him. I had a new level of fury on top of my existing frustration. I felt my body was not responding well to this situation. I began to feel chest pain. It was at the point that it was not enough to sit back and expect a new career opportunity to appear. I had to take extra measures of searching, praying, believing, and applying myself that my expectation and anticipation could only lead to an open door. In the fall of 2017, I was in

a season of challenges that were to produce a focus and determination that I would not settle after obtaining two master's degrees. Through my focus, determination, and faith, in August of the following year, I started a new career.

When we are ready for a change and we are involved in the necessary tasks to bring a change and we run out of options, that is the time you become creative. Read a book, serve a ministry need, write a book, create a blog or podcase, study the Bible, learn a new language, become an expert in a new technology, teach a class, start a social media project, begin an online class, find a health/fitness goal, or research for financial/investment goals that will increase your insight and feed your attitude of determination while in your season of preparation.

An attitude of commitment to God

Regardless of the negative situation, it is an opportunity to keep God first while on our path. We must understand that our problems show our attitude. Problems also show how we are being attacked. The unexplained problems and challenges with great complexity that cause our faith to be shaken are often spiritual attacks from evil influences. In Luke 20:31, Jesus

mentions that “Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat.” How do you respond to this type of challenge? On our path, it is important to remain close to God or reconnect to God. It is important to identify that it is an attack in the spiritual realm. If on our path, we have been removed from God and have been engulfed in sin, it is time for repentance. Turning back to God is the greatest blessing that comes out of the situation. Genesis, 50:20 is a scripture about Joseph telling his brothers, “You meant evil against me, but God used it for good.” Joseph's brothers were jealous of him because he was favored by Jacob, his father. It did not help the situation for Joseph to share his dream that his family would bow to him. It was God's plan that caused the family to be restored. It was an evil ploy of the brothers to sell Joseph into slavery, but God's plan prevailed. Satan's evil has great potential to propel an individual back to a commitment to God. What is meant for evil is for our good. Our attitude has a direct correlation to our altitude on our journey with God. My wife has often reminded me of the times I was going through difficulty. Her question would be, what is the God factor in my situation? What is God trying to help me see or change? When our attitude is highly committed to

God, it is easier to look to Him in every situation for understanding. When we do not have an attitude of commitment solely to Him, we will try to solve or sort things out in our life without understanding God's involvement. Abraham and Sarah were promised a child. Genesis chapter 16 is an account of Sarah and Abraham helping God with the blessing God promised. When it did not happen on their timetable, they decided to help God. Abraham was intimate with Hagar to give birth to the child of promise. In a nutshell, it was not the answer. It was not the perfect plan orchestrated by God for the blessings and promises that He would provide. We must remain committed to God and realize His timeframe is not ours and remain with an attitude to God's process for our lives.

In our commitment to God, we are to remain in a position or posture to be receptive to Him regardless of the condition. Understanding our path is understanding that the divine order of God for our lives will not always be the easy path but the correct path to our purpose.

When we stay connected to Him, He will help us make the shift when we are not fully aware of the need for a shift. I remember when I felt it was time to leave my first

career. I did not realize the future position of the company. It was nearly 8 years after I left the company and was bringing my students to tour the facility. It looked 180 degrees different. When talking to staff, the processes were different with a major reduction in the workforce. In my third career, God allowed a door to open through an opportunity to teach. I was not expecting it or had not fully wrapped my mind around it. It was the working of God to keep me on the path to my purpose. The interview went smoothly, I was hired and worked at the college for 5 years teaching digital interactive, graphic, and web design.

God opened doors for our assignment to expand, and it is through those doors we progress on our path. What doors do you see that God has opened for you that is or was part of your path because of your attitude?

Reflections

1. *The willingness to work in different capacities is an opportunity to contribute in different ways while understanding the desire of your heart.*
 2. *A greater need for fulfillment and significance came in seeing others benefit from my involvement.*
 3. *As you are denying yourself to help others, you began to discover your service are assignments for the work of God's plan.*
 4. *While on your path during difficult and challenging times, the best remedy is to serve.*
 5. *The factor that is just as important as identifying your goals is staying focused.*
 6. *In our commitment to God, we are to remain in a position or posture to be receptive to Him regardless of the condition.*
 7. *What is the God factor in your situation?*
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8. *What doors do you see that God has opened for you that is or was part of your path because of your attitude?*

Additional Reflection Response

CHAPTER SIX



Clues of Vision that Point to your Future

Inspired by your vision

After attending a leadership conference in 2006, I gained a glimpse into my future. During the end of the minister's session, he dared the congregation to believe in God for the thing that only God could do in their lives. It was a heavenly tug on my heart for my vision to come forth. The realization in my heart was the desire to see other individuals reach their God-purposed life. I saw being a leader and carrying out things in a capacity that was beyond my ability. It was a defining moment in the conference that came by the work of God's Spirit. There was nervousness as I believed beyond what I had ever

been pushed to believe about my future. For most of my life, I felt that my purpose was not clear, and my spiritual growth was limited. I pursued entrepreneurship for years and maintained a home-based web design business. Along the way, I realized that my desire for business was not my greatest passion. My desire shifted to help people be connected to their purpose in God. I was inspired after attending the conference, and I was awakened to a passion to go after God. This was the same year that a door opened for me to become a men's group team leader. It was a ministry that groups of men met monthly for a year to discuss an assigned book about a topic that pertained to men in leadership for their family, ministry, and community. This ministry opened my heart to the call to be a blessing to others. It was a clue to walk in my assignment. God allowed me to discover parts of my purpose. My desire expanded to establish a ministry that operated in a spirit of excellence to impact lives with significant change for eternity. The mega ministry that I attended was a physical model for my vision to increase. As time progressed, there were adjustments and revisions to the specific work for the assignment. In the

interim, I look to God, who is still at work for the complete vision in my heart to become a reality.

Obstacles that confront the vision

The challenges that exist while pursuing a dream are to sharpen focus and increase efforts. Starting down the path of vision reminds me of the story of Nehemiah. In Nehemiah 2:2, his heart was to rebuild, but along his path, he was confronted with obstacles. Throughout the book of Nehemiah, the story is filled with impossibilities and challenges with a small window of possibilities.

Have you ever felt that there was something in your life that was too difficult to obtain that you need to give up? Vision for the future is a difficult task. It requires the ability to look beyond the current situation. The obstacles nearest to our heart are the things that get our attention. If obtaining vision was easy, most people would have accomplished many things by now.

A clear vision must go against ambiguity and the changing times of uncertainty. Have you ever driven down the road at 5:30 a.m. or 6:30 a.m. and all you could see was fog as you drove? You could only see 5 to 10 feet of the road in front of you. How did you feel? I felt nervous, and I felt

that I could not see enough to know where my direction on the road. I felt this way with the Lord during 2018 - 2020 as I prepared to give sermons. What is the benefit in this situation? We rely on the Lord closely to direct us like the reliance on the headlights to expose the road while driving. Your efforts to increase the focus of your vision or dream comes out of your closeness to God. In seasons of your life, God is near, and things are clear to see further down the road to sense the way.

There are times when it seems that the Lord is far away, and it is hard to see the way. That is the time to understand that you are challenged to remain faithful and persistent. Do you approach the Lord only when you have a need? Do you come to the Lord asking for things but never taking time to thank or appreciate Him for the simple things in life? Such an approach to the Lord becomes an obstacle to gaining vision. Have an obsession for God and ask, what can I learn from you today? When you lay before the Lord to listen and hear His gentle voice direct you, there is clarity for vision. As the psalmist wrote, Psalms 23:2-3, "He makes me to lie down in green pastures, and leads me besides quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's

sake.” Our life can be guided by our good or bad efforts. Most importantly, we must note that bad efforts cost and impede forward progress on the path.

The complainer’s snare and honorable work

The story of Aaron and Miriam and the story of the Israelites complaints are examples of the snare that halts blessings but provides insights of work that God honors. Aaron and Miriam were complaining about Moses’ Ethiopian wife and that God only uses Moses. In Numbers 12:1 – 2 (NIV), “Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite. Has the Lord spoke only through Moses?” they asked. ‘Hasn’t he also spoken through us?’ And the Lord heard this.” God was not pleased by the attitude that was expressed through the words of Miriam and Aaron. In my personal assessment of the passage, the effort of their complaining takes the focus off God’s work and plan while not honoring the work of God in someone’s life.

A clue to God’s work in your life includes those who do not celebrate your progress. Clues to your future include conflict from others. Those who are complainers about the direction of your life become the judge and express their preferences on how things should be

arranged. Realizing that God's plan is bigger than the complainer's desires and preferences is a better focus. From the perspective of being a quality control specialist, who sees how to improve things, it is easier to be critical of things and assume the position of judge. There is a context in 1 Corinthians 5:11-13 that we are to judge the actions or fruit of the sinful believer. However, the unbeliever's actions are to be judged by God. Matthew 7:1-5 emphasizes not judging and focusing on our shortcomings before we can help someone else.

It is important to understand the obstacle of complaining and the impact on vision for your future. The second story of the Israelites going around the mountain or wandering in the wilderness illustrates the trap of complaining. Numbers 11:1-6 is an account of the people of God complaining. Numbers 13 is the scenario of the spies sent to Canaan. They were to give a report, but their view about the matter did not acknowledge God's ability to make provision for them. Numbers Chapter 14 illustrates how complaint, unbelief, and unwillingness to pursue what God had promised halted the blessing from the Lord. In Numbers 32:11 and 12, all those who were 20 years and older died in the wilderness. It was a halted and a missed

blessing because of faithlessness and stubbornness by opposing God's provisions. The action of complaining has the potential to be an opposing force to the provisions for our life. As we are gaining understanding of the vision for our life, remember that the opposing forces are clues for your life's vision. Do not feed into the issues but see that the opposing force is to be treated in a way to propel you to your future. One other caution is our ability to be thankful.

The impact of a lack of gratitude

Is it possible that a clue to obtain your desired future is understanding a barrier that relates to thankfulness? When I struggle to show gratitude and thankfulness to the Lord, I am not honoring the Lord. In Luke 17:11-19, there is an account of ten lepers that were healed but only one returned to thank Jesus for their healing. The quickest way to show ingratitude is to not thank someone for a kind act toward you. To overlook the small blessings for the big blessings is a big oversight. Today's culture is engulfed in an entitlement attitude. People are used to life events going their way or feeling they deserve certain privileges. There is less focus on a need or patience for God if He does not bless on their

terms. We want Him to do things, or we expect things of Him without thankfulness for what He has already done. We do not look at the value of small things such as good health that is incredibly important to live productive lives. Have you asked the Lord to do something for you, but you have not done anything for Him? Have you tried to get money out of your checking account and did not realize you were at a 0 balance? We can request the Lord and do not have a positive balance for a heavenly withdrawal. We have insufficient funds, which equate to an insufficient relationship with God. Our insufficient time and minimal acquaintance with God show a lack of honor to God. If I do not recognize the gift of God, to be aware of what He truly did for me, I am at a disadvantage of being truly thankful to God. If I do not know God's way, how can I expect from Him? It is through my effort to study God and listen to spiritual leaders for guidance to gain the insight of God to encounter Him. Through my thankfulness of properly recognizing His blessings, I am allowed additional provisions for my life to be a contribution to God's work. While consideration and thankfulness to God are important to remove barriers to your future dreams and visions, it is necessary to evaluate your thirst for God.

Clues of Vision that Point to Your Future

Living a life of purpose is a spiritual matter.

Chapter Reflection Response

CHAPTER SEVEN

What is Your Thirst Quotient?

Without a thirst for the divine/spiritual source for your life, there is no true way to walk fully in your purpose. The truth and principle for a meaningful life comes out of a thirst for God's fulfillment in our lives. At different stages of my life, I had to address the thirst level. Let's explore the areas that address our thirst quotient on our path.

Inadequate thirst

The woman at the well had an insufficient connection to Jesus as she asks about living water. If I do not acknowledge and give God proper respect, I cannot connect with Him effectively. In John 4:19, the Samaritan woman said, "I perceive you are a Prophet." If I am

approaching God from the perspective of tradition or out of a common practice like the Samaritan woman at the well, can I connect with God? Mark 7:13 indicates that the traditions of man render the word of God to no effect. We cannot have impactful lives for God practicing meaningless traditions. The woman at the well was talking to Jesus, a Jew. Historically, Jews and Samaritans did not mingle. In John 4:7-14, it reads,

"⁷When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, 'Will you give me a drink?' ⁸(His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) ⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, 'You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?' ¹⁰Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.' ¹¹'Sir,' the woman said, 'you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?' ¹²Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?' ¹³Jesus answered, 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again,¹⁴but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'" (NIV)

Jesus asks for a drink, and out of tradition, the Samaritan woman reluctantly responds, how is it you asked of me to drink? In my observation, her response is not one of

recognition or honor towards Christ. A personal conclusion is drawn that without an awareness of God, we are not able to properly recognize, address or respond to Him. Without a sharpened spiritual perception or discernment, we look at things from the physical realm. She addressed the physical limitations of Jesus, and Jesus approached the heart of the matter and addressed her spiritual lack. We are unable to obtain the vision or path for our life without a connection to God that comes through our thirst for Him. The thirst for God is a serious matter as Jesus pointed the woman to her thirst being fully satisfied in knowing the living water that comes from the Spirit of God. We can truly pinpoint our level of thirst for God by answering the following questions:

1. *Can you be thirsty for God if you have not been filled with His Spirit?*
2. *Can you be thirsty for God and give more attention to the riches of life?*
3. *Can you be thirsty for God by seeking fulfillment apart from Him and following your way?*
4. *Can you be thirsty for God by seeing problems greater than the power of God?*
5. *Can you be thirsty for God if you have given more attention to the affairs of life and have not spent time with Him to know Him to experience His peace, presence, and power?*

6. *Can you be thirsty for God if you do not understand His principles?*

Thirsty for God or living without His Spirit

The first question is foundational and fundamental in the context of spiritual matters. You cannot be of God if you are not drawn to Him. It is only by God's Spirit that you are connected to Him. It is not possible to desire God without an encounter with God's Spirit. On our path to understanding our purpose and existence, it is through our spirit being reunited to our Creator that helps us to understand our function and role in all of God's creation.

Thirsty for God or distracted with the riches of the world

In the second and third questions, I am reminded of the rich young ruler. In the Gospel of Matthew 19:16-30, Mark 10:17-31 and Luke 18:18-30 are accounts of Jesus' encounter with a rich young ruler. He mentioned to Jesus that he had kept all the commands of the law from his youth. Jesus confirms that he had kept the commands but found an important question. It was one thing that Jesus discerned that the young ruler had not properly dealt with. It was his attachment to his riches. When Jesus told

him it was one thing he needed to do, it pointed to a root issue. His heart was more loyal to his wealth than God. We cannot serve two deities. We cannot be wholeheartedly loyal or give the highest honor of priority to two authorities. We cannot follow our own way above God's way. Striving for a successful life through personal efforts alone, apart from God, hides true fulfillment and will ultimately leave you unsatisfied. Any other thing that is respected and honored above God is idolatry. Our true spiritual DNA has allegiance to God, the One who transcends time. Where do I want to exist in eternity?

Thirsty for God or magnifying problems over the power of God

Question 4 reminds me of the scene with Lazarus in John 11:1-44. Jesus was not present when Lazarus died. The family and loved ones were sad and grieving the loss. Out of their disappointment and focus on the problem, they did not fully know the power of God to address their situation. Their words were, if only you had come, Lazarus would not be dead. What requires immediate attention and stands out as the most important thing in your life? Is something enlarged beyond God's ability to bring solutions to you? Our focus on the problem causes an

inability to see Jesus as the resurrection in all our situations. It was my change in focus on going back to college to align with God's purpose for my life that I no longer gave more attention to the issues in my career. Be thirsty for the work God wants to do through you. Just as Jesus raised Lazarus, allow the Spirit of God to resurrect you to life's purpose.

Thirsty for God or giving more attention to the affairs of life

Question 5 brings to my mind the story of Mary and Martha, Luke 10:38-42. Martha was troubled by many affairs that pertain to the simple aspects of life while Mary was focused on the profound aspects of life. Martha's attention was on temporal and less meaningful things. Mary's attention was on eternal and most meaningful things. Do we go through most of our life, the path God has for us, focusing on things that are of less value in comparison to eternal value?

I remember in 2020 watching a YouTube video of a person experiencing Hell and Heaven in their near-death experience. The thing that stayed with me after watching the video was the shift in focus between the present and eternal realms. In the eternal setting, the individual

experienced the absence of the mental, conscious, and emotional attachment from everyday life. There was no recollection or reference to the physical realm or the dimension of the earthly domain that we currently occupy.⁶ The attention we give to the spiritual realm on the earth is often too limited, blurred, distracted, or dismissed. On our path, we have many events in our lives. Some of these events are to get our attention. What does it take for us to come to the feet of Jesus to listen and be removed from the distractions of life? Although Mary went to Jesus to express her concern, Jesus expressed the sentiment of Martha's heart that should remain with us in our daily actions. We are to choose the better part of life by keeping our attention on the guidance of the Spirit of God, so we do not live a distracted life that leads to vanity.

Ecclesiastes 1:14 points out that all is vanity and vexation of spirit. The book emphasizes all is meaningless and that life is like vapor and fleeting wind. According to the Bible Project video, the word hevel is repeated nearly 40 times in Ecclesiastes. The Hebrew meaning is steam, vapor, breath, foolishness, vanity, meaningless, and absurdity.⁷ What are we to take away from the book of Ecclesiastes? We are to live a true, simple, and enjoyable

life in wisdom and understanding of God without a preconception of what life should be. In this understanding, we fear, honor and respect God and keep His commandments. Giving more attention to things that have no spiritual value must be rigorously evaluated. A mature person will spiritually assess and be led by the Spirit of God about his or her involvements and commitments. I constantly review my to-do lists, house projects, personal commitments, professor work tasks, priority items, personal development goals, professional development benchmarks, technology test tasks, 3-yr. goals, partnership projects, 1-year goals, and ministry-building endeavors. I must be careful to properly discern the time and commitment to give my attention to specific projects, tasks, or involvements.

Thirsty for God or living without understanding God's principles

Question 6 is an appropriate question for the servant in the parable of the talent in Matthew 25:14. The servant buried money or a gift. The money or gift from God represents something that was divinely given to be cherished to reproduce on the earth. The servant did not recognize the gift or talent that he was to reproduce. He

did not know the principle of God. Our life is a gift from God to be used on earth to reproduce. We should not misunderstand God's principles. Whether it is physical money or a God-given ability (anointing or calling) or talent from God, we are to consider it as our highest priority to reproduce. This is a principle of God's kingdom. The parable of the mustard seed in Matthew (13:31–32), Mark (4:30–32), and Luke (13:18–19) represent the growth of the Kingdom of God. We are to be kingdom agents by the Spirit of God contributing to the growth His agenda. This occurs by fulfilling the purpose of our lives. After I began to focus more on learning God's ways and experienced His principles, the desire for ungodly things diminished. The thirst for God and His principles brings purity to our lives.

Reflection Questions

1. *Can you be thirsty for God if you have not been filled with His spirit?*
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2. *Can you be thirsty for God when you are preoccupied with the affairs and riches of life?*
-

3. *Can you be thirsty for God when you have left your first love relationship with Him and following your way instead of God's way?*
-

4. *Can you be thirsty for God when you have magnified or enlarged your problems over the power of God?*
-

5. *Can you be thirsty for God if you have not spent time with Him to know Him to experience His peace, presence, and power?*
-

6. *Can you be thirsty for God if you do not understand Him in His ways?*
-

What is Your Thirst Quotient?

Additional Reflection Response

CHAPTER EIGHT



Birthing Purpose out of the Unexpected

The unexpected in a career change

I moved to another city for my career, but I did not realize what would occur after a year's effort to relocate. In 2018, I was turning the page from 21 years of building my life, my family, and my connection to ministry in Greenville, South Carolina to continue the journey living in Columbia, South Carolina. I prayed for a new chapter and believed that God would allow a career change that aligned with purpose. My new career allowed me to be a full-time faculty member at the college where I earned my first degree. It has been a blessing while still learning new

things and unexpected turns in the transition. Letting go and embracing new things is an opportunity to grow.

How do you handle the unexpected things in your new chapter? Being in a place of unsettledness while expecting to become settled was a challenge to remain in faith.

Transitions have required faith, patience, focus, persistence, perspective, and intentionality.

Transitional stage

In the transitional stage, I had to find a way to leverage the time, season, and situation to be prepared for my next chapter. As much as I wanted to be out of the transitional stage, positive traction was necessary to move forward in the transition. To be efficient during a transitional season was to think about and act upon the things that could be done in faith to continue to develop. The activities that could be done were to prepare sermons, grow in faith, write daily journals recording personal experiences with God, enhance streaming media developments with social media platforms, read books, study scriptures, learn about self-publishing, improve communication skills, and develop effective teaching methodologies. Boundaries were required and established by discipline and focus to reach the next level. In the

transition stage, it also meant that business was not as usual. It is critical to pay attention to any feelings of urgency to pursue the possibility of missed personal, professional, or ministry development. In all our efforts, we must continue to believe that doors will open, favor is granted, resources are made available, and people who are assigned to you will be part of the team that will help you achieve God's plans. The people that you are being prepared to reach and the platforms that you build are by God's divine plan. You will be impactful in the appointed season because of your desire to remain persistent with perspective through your transition stage. As you are increasing in your insights and experiences of God, you are adjusting your position in life.

Transitions to transformations

Transition is a position change that becomes the forerunner to transformation. When I think of transition, it is something that is changing from one condition to another. Is it possible that a transition occurs when someone or something is in one location, position or condition and a change occurred by some impact that brought another location, position, or condition? A change that occurs in a person's heart because of an eternal

perspective becomes a heart transition for God. It is a transition that occurs in the heart or spirit to see things from the correct perspective for a purposeful life.

When I think of Zacchaeus, he made a physical and spiritual position change to encounter the Lord. He did what was necessary to see Jesus. When he encountered the Lord, he had a true transition from sin to purity that occurred in his heart. It was the condition of his heart that changed. He took the first step to do everything he could to prepare himself for an encounter with the Lord. His willingness to climb a sycamore tree to elevate his position was the first step. As a result of taking the necessary steps, God help is available to those who exercise faith. We initiate a life process that requires faith for God to work in us. Your life will go through a transition that moves to the plan God has for you when you seek God's perspective. You are increasing in your spirit and progressing in your movement to God, and your elevation is an outward confirmation of your preparation.

When our perspectives change, we are ready to change from one condition to another, which becomes our transformation. A positional change in our heart (mind

and spirit) leads to a conditional change in our life. We must answer questions about the predecessors of transformation. What is the positional change for a transition in my heart and mind that leads to transformation for my future? What is God saying or doing to bring transformation in my life? What is in motion in your life that is the orchestrated work of God? When do you sense the presence of the Lord in such a way that you are at unrest? My transformation is in progress when my mind, my heart, my conversation, my attitude, and my actions can no longer do business as usual. In my personal assessment, Zacchaeus' encounter with Jesus was the result of his unrest to see Jesus. An individual's transformation will come to life with an attitude to encounter God. Our God-given gift is associated with being an agent for the Lord to carry out His plans. It is my delight to speak into the lives of others, to teach in an impactful way, and present the need for spiritual transformation. Communicating to others about transformation will take the form of video recordings, virtual sessions, printed materials, and oral presentations while utilizing technology. I desire to write more books. When you are being transformed to walk in your purpose,

you are being elevated to take responsibility for walking in your calling. You begin to clearly understand your path. You are no longer feeling held back. You start finding ways to remove the barriers by creating opportunities. You do not wait for opportunities to be given to you. You have sight to see the urgency of the hour and utilize time wisely. You are active and in motion in this season, which is the precursor to your breakthrough, your exit, your steps to a new season, or your new day. We demonstrate our faith by applying perspective, persistence, perseverance, and patience that brings significant growth and preparation to graduate from our current season. You began to clearly hear your direction from the Lord to cause you to be promoted to what He has ordained. He has a pre-determined plan for your life as you align with Him. You are rising and seeing things from God's perspective, and your transition leads to your transformation.

Journey to Destiny

As I was reading a book that related to destiny and journey, it began to resonate with me. Dealing with ambiguity and change on the journey got my attention. As a leader, it is important to understand that there is a way to operate in a dynamic time of change and uncertainty in

a progressive environment. While I was thinking about how the author shared his story of accomplishments, he started out as a janitor and later became the president of the college.⁸ I began to look at my own life to see the transitions and accomplishments of my story. We all have a story.

With our story, we might sometimes feel that we should have accomplished more, or we should have reached a certain status based on our efforts. As I think about my ministry credentials to have a legal ministry entity, I must look at what God is doing and what doors He will open. Our story is still being developed while our faith is in motion. There are numerous things in our heart that we want God's favor to accomplish. I believe God will lead us to examine the many things in our hearts so we can clearly discern the direction and steps needed to progress toward great achievements.

The church facilitates our steps to our future. When we have deep questions, repeated conversations or thoughts about things that are important to us, we must think about these topics as part of our path that leads to purpose. Our church experience is an opportunity for

confirmation and spiritual support to be gained about things in your heart that only you and God know.

One morning I could not sleep thinking about this season. I was not too excited about the thoughts that I kept dwelling on about my decisions based on my faith from 2018 to 2019. It was a period in which I moved from one city to another and was feeling disappointed about the outcome of my decision. A small thought hit me about ministers that have ministries, and they have stepped in faith to expand their ministry. They could have been asking the question, why have my days of exercising faith and preparing for future expansion gone this way? My ministry was preparing to move powerfully, but we have a major life interrupter, the Covid-19 pandemic.

I thought about words I heard from a message. The message emphasized that it was not a bad step I made or that I had done something wrong. God is not displeased with our steps of faith. I can identify with Job. He did not plan for disappointment. He suffered much loss, and he could not explain it as much as he tried and relied on his friends for insight. Even in our lack of motivation and passions that result from disappointments and discouragements, God is still with us. On our journey, we

must find activities to support a persistent faith that keeps us on the path.

I remember one morning I opened a book about the next big step to take. I happened to be directed to the last pages of the book. The book mentions the seasons of life, the activities in certain years of life, and the clues to the stage of significance.⁹ It is by understanding those transitions that we sense the movement on our journey. Have you ever stopped to ask the question, why does it appear that some people take off and things happen quickly while others are forever in a season that seems to be little progress? Some people can work on a system in the world and take advantage of networking which allows things to open for them quickly. They might even say that it was God that made it happen, and it could have simply been their ability to network with others.

God moves slower with others because He does not want a bad foundation. So, I ask myself the question, would I want quick success within two years, and then at the end of ten years, I experienced a divorce that led to a broken family? Everything that you think you want or believe in is for you might not be the way you thought. What have you been desiring or believing for strongly that

seems to be further away than close to you? What season are you in, and what are some things that you have learned or gained? The author helped me to see that I was in a development season to be prepared to help others. Seasons are associated with the path of your life. While doors open and provide opportunities, there are events that occur to disrupt, but we are still on our path that sharpens our navigation to our destiny.

Implications of the pandemic

Why am I in this season? Why am I in this season that seems so foggy? Why does it seem that certainty is so far away? I awake many mornings thinking I wanted to hear God's gentle voice in my thoughts. I often think through this chapter of life and the events that have taken place. I think about the decisions that led to this point in life, the things I cannot change, and the unknowns of the future. I often think about my decisions and feel disappointed. I have tried to make sense of this chapter in life. Like so many people, the year 2020 was an unexpected time. At one point, I was journaling and writing, there were 225,000 deaths and only two days before the presidential election. At another point of writing this book (54 days later), there was an increase of

just above 325,000 deaths. In the final stages of writing my book, there were nearly 600,000 deaths from the virus.¹⁰

We have learned from this season the things that are in us or the things that are not in us. If we were a person that has grown numb to the condition of the world, it might be an indicator that there is a greater glaze of world culture upon us. In other words, there has been a greater influence of world culture from the physical realm upon us than an influence of wisdom and truth from the spiritual realm.

Developing a closer walk with God

Instead of trying to answer the question, why? It has been more important to answer the question, what should I be doing in this season? Around October 7, I visited a friend in the hospital who had cancer. This was the friend I knew from high school. He was the friend that I shared the experience of getting fired from our mini-shift cotton mill job. I had an opportunity to sit with my friend and pray for his healing. It was good to see he was acting like his normal self, but his situation was more serious than he let on. I was positive and encouraging while believing that his healing would come through chemotherapy. He went into the hospital for one thing

and found out other things. Three weeks and two days later, which was 23 days, he died. It was shocking news. It caused me to deeply reflect upon life and the unprecedented time of 2020-2023. My personal assessment was that the question, “why” was not as important as “what.” “What should have been done during that season?” was more important than, “Why were we in a pandemic?” The global pandemic should have heightened our awareness of a serious time, but I think people allowed themselves to be deceived, distracted, or unfocused about what was at stake. What understanding was gained about people throughout the country that did not take the pandemic seriously while there were daily reports of deaths? The question remains, what should have been the focus? To some extent, we all may have acted as if the activities or events in 2020 did not have any potential to impact on our plans. Others may have also expected this time to be a prosperous time and became angry about the inconvenience of the pandemic. Was there disappointment of the disruption of a pandemic? These thoughts and viewpoints were immature.

I began to do the things that were extremely critical in this season, which was to study the Bible, apply

wisdom, seek discernment, and increase my skills. I noticed in Ezekiel chapter 1, he was in exile. As a result, the nation was subjected to another culture and government while in captivity. Their lifestyles put them in a position to be on an alternate path, a path that was to bring correction by being in captivity by another nation and authority. When you understand your journey, you continue with your assignment regardless of what appears to be an interruption. Ezekiel at the age of 30 was moving up the ranks to become an ordained prophet.¹¹ He was anticipating a blessing to walk in his calling as a prophet, but he was in exile. In other words, he had been inconvenienced on the path for his assignment, but that did not change the course of what God would do in his life. On our path, are we oftentimes distracted? Do we see the bigger picture? Our true path has more to do with our purpose, our assignment, and our existence that are impactful for God's plans. When we think about Paul, he carried out the work of his assignment as an apostle regardless of the inconvenience in his mission. Unlike Ezekiel who was a messenger to the nation, Paul was a missionary to the early church. His life was filled with much inconvenience and pain for his path. Out of the

unexpected pandemic, what will you see beyond this time that was produced in your life?

Virtual Bible Study

In March and April of 2020, I was blessed with some precious moments in God's presence. Before realizing the magnitude of the pandemic, I was finding a secret place in God's presence and being reconnected to the vine. The demands of life can cause an individual to drift from focusing on God. I was reunited and refreshed in my spirit as I spent time with God. I began to see the need to start a virtual Bible study. It was something in my heart four years ago, but I never knew if that idea would happen. I was pressed to go deeper in my Bible study after the effects of the pandemic increased. It has become a divine assignment that I believe has expanded me to walk in my purpose while helping others expand.

Reflections

1. *Why am I in this season?*

2. *What should I be doing?*

3. *Out of the unexpected pandemic, what will you see beyond this time that was produced in your life?*

CHAPTER NINE



Connecting the Dots

Understanding focus

Seeing the connections in life requires a focus to understand the things we have accomplished and the things we have not yet accomplished. When we have little focus for our target in the path of life, we can reach two conclusions. We hit the target every time because our target does not require a lot of focus, or our target is so undefined that everything is the target. Secondly, our target requires great concentration so that we get closer to hitting it. I have talked to numerous people who were not sure what they should be doing in their life. In my attempt to help them, I pointed them back to God, directed them to do a soul search of the hurt or pain that

has been in their life, asking them to complete a personality assessment or spiritual gifts assessment. The efforts and tools give insight into things that bring satisfaction or dissatisfaction to produce clarity to their focus for their purpose.

There was a period in my life when I pondered what brought satisfaction? The changing careers and understanding how to live purposefully and passionately were more difficult in 2006. I remember when I reached a point where I had accomplished all that I saw for my life. I reached a plateau. What else should I pursue? I realized that not everyone is living and doing the thing that they are passionate about. I have read that where your passion intersects with your ability to support yourself and your family is your sweet spot. Some people have supplemented their dream by working in a manufacturing company or service industry. Plan A supports plan B until you can fully launch plan B. Some people do not know their passion or have a plan A or B for their lives. The flip side is that we could have charted a course for our lives and accomplished many goals but are not navigating life on the correct path. You do not want to be the person who climbed a ladder to success and at the top of the ladder, you realized your

ladder or path to success was misled by ambition. As a result, the success was not a long-term rewarding success.

Life events and family responsibilities are the dots

God uses everything in our lives, and we can see the dots connecting life events to bring focus. I have completed four degrees and am still pursuing a greater cause for my life. The interesting thing is that some people learn about purpose early in their lives. They may have had a lot of clues and inherited the passion and drive for life that came directly from their parents. Others spend a lifetime discovering their purpose. An individual has multiple purposes for their existence. God stated in Genesis, “Let us make man in our image and after His likeness.” Gen. 1: Man and woman were made to be in a life-long relationship to procreate. In Gen 2:21, being a husband, a father, and a provider or a wife, a mother and a nurturer give purpose to life. Raising a child in the way he should go is another purpose. Being a mentor to help your children become responsible adults in life is part of life’s purpose. In a lost world where divorces are on the rise, the need to display and provide the correct model for marriage is another purpose for the path of life. Being able to

support your family and provide a comfortable lifestyle is another purposeful responsibility for our lives. It is out of daily living that we should find greater meaning for our lives to be purposeful. David was a shepherd, musician, warrior, writer, worshipper, and king. In each area of his life, he developed his gift to carry out his purpose. His life had meaning through his gifts that served others. As a ministry facilitator and an adjunct instructor, it was easier for me to find meaning in the work that I performed that helped others. As an IT professional, I worked with applications, systems, and upgrades which became less meaningful to me. What is my point? We are all put on the earth to make an impact. You choose what you will impact. I chose at one point in my life to impact the design field because of my art background. This area involved the digital technology world, which was the earlier years of my career to support my family. I was in the field for over 15 years, and I realized I wanted to impact people instead of things. At different stages in life, passion shifts, and significance become more important than success. What are you impacting that is meaningful to leave a legacy?

The impact is the line to the connector

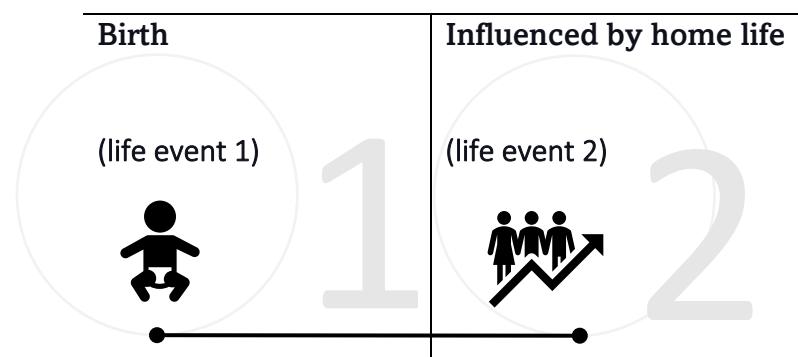
What do you want to impact? When I look at the story about Elijah and Elisha, Elijah was taken up to go to heaven, and Elisha wanted the blessing of a double portion anointing (2 Kings 2). Perhaps, he realized his greatest impact is by God's work through him. The customs of the time were to pass along a blessing to those who were departing the earth. The story of Jacob and Esau was an account of Jacob cheating Esau out of the blessing that Isaac was intending to pass on to Esau. The irony is that God worked through Jacob despite the path taken, and his impact was through birthing the 12 tribes of Israel.

It is only by God's anointing that we can have a true impact. Elisha wished for a big thing that Elijah could only defer to God for such a thing to be granted. What do you wish for that is so great that can only be granted by the favor of God? Should this be the challenge that most individuals give focus to for life's purpose? Our greatest impact is with God's Spirit working in our lives. Through our life endeavors, we learn through public school, go to work after high school, go to college, get married, start a family, continue to grow, and develop while serving others. In the process, we pursue God enough to know

what He wants for us. Our experiences with God are part of the process to gain focus for an impactful life on our path. From one life event to the next are the small achievements that emphasizes the impact of God in our lives. The paths or lines are the connectors to the dots or events of life.

The line is a decision of faith
and passion

The dot is a life event.



Completed public school

(life event 3)



Go to college, work, or ministry

(life event 4)



Employed in a career, military or college (cont.)

(life event 5)



Pursued/pursuing marriage

(life event 6)



Start a family

(life event 7)



Serve community

(life event 8)



Achiever

Walking completely in success, achievement, fulfillment, and purpose with significance leaving a legacy

(life event 9)



other life events

Out of each major decision and life event that defines your path, you are driven by passion or desire. This becomes your impact to that which you feel profoundly called to, and it is your life's assignment that leaves a path while creating the future path.

Most of the major events in our lives should include the involvement of church. Sunday morning has been a practice for most individuals to have an opportunity to connect with a message from God. This is a weekly practice to bring clarity to your path. Before the pandemic, it was regular practice to attend church.

It is important to assess church attendance to determine if something has been lost. What do you mean? Do we know God, or do we know church? I have gone to church since my teens and accepted Christ in my teens and have been involved in numerous church meetings over 30 years. On our path, we must pay close attention to our spiritual practices to go deeper to experience a profound relationship with God. The path to God is essential to finding or understanding your path. In the life of Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Gideon, Ruth, Hannah, Esther, David, Elijah, Elisha, Daniel, Nehemiah, Paul, Peter, and John, there was a God connection. Other prophets,

servants, priests, kings, judges, and leaders were used by God. Their path was left for the lives of others to be influenced by walking in their assigned path. These individuals shared a common ground. It was the courage to believe God and stand in faith that God will come through. We have the comfort of the Holy Spirit to help us. How much more should we be comforted and assured of God's leading through these unprecedented times.

In Psalms 51:6 (NIV), "Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place." In the inward part of your life, the thing you are birthing which begins with your intellect, stay faithful to it. Your faithfulness to your call includes being faithful to God because your purpose is in His plan. In the inward place, persist in faithfulness to enter the hidden (secret) place to operate in God's wisdom. With God's wisdom, you concretely walk the path of life and purpose that God has given you. Stay faithful to the process and committed to God. He will continue to help you understand your path.

Reflections

1. *What do you wish for that is so great and can only be granted by the favor of God?*

2. *What am I impacting that is meaningful to leave a legacy?*

Reflection

Date: _____

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