

The Transformational Power of Purpose

Finding & Fulfilling Your Purpose in Life

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Introduction

In the film *Unbreakable*, Bruce Willis plays the role of seemingly ordinary everyday man David Dunn. His ordinary life takes a turn for the extraordinary when he walks away from a train crash without a scratch and as the sole survivor. This is the first in a series of events that leads him to believe he possesses unique superhuman powers. He discovers that he is, in fact, a real life superhero. With this revelation he begins to conform to his true identity and fulfill his superhuman purpose.

It's a great storyline for a movie because it appeals to the human fascination with the supernatural. We want to believe there is something beyond the mundane and the ordinary. So, the human imagination creates superheroes who find their way into literature and film. And we buy the comic books and movie tickets because of some unexplainable desire to connect with these characters that are human and yet possess superhuman powers. Destiny has called them out for some magnificent purpose. They have important assignments to fulfill on planet earth.

What if you, like David Dunn, are a superhero but just simply haven't discovered your true identity? What if *you* possess supernatural abilities and destiny is waiting for you to accept your calling?

If you believe that *you* have a calling or a destiny in life, you're not alone. Life@Work Magazine surveyed more than 1,000 working American adults and asked if they believed they had a specific calling or destiny in life. While 84 percent believed there is a calling or destiny in their life, 64 percent felt they were not following that calling.

When asked more specifically whether or not a job can be included in that calling, 80 percent agreed that at some level it is. But only 34 percent really believed they were following their calling in their current job.

Life@Work concluded "that American adults do subscribe to the idea of having a calling or a destiny in life, but that it doesn't necessarily have an effect on the decisions they make."

We *want* to believe we have a calling, a destiny, a purpose. We intuitively feel that we are here on planet earth to do something specific, to carry out an assignment. We want to fulfill our destiny but struggle to hear our calling. The resulting frustration is probably best described by Henry David Thoreau who observed, "Most men lead lives of quiet desperation and go to the grave with their song still in them."

Thoreau's observation of the human condition in the 19th Century is still valid today. The mass of humanity is not wildly desperate, just *quietly* desperate — quietly but desperately seeking their calling, their destiny, the reason for their being in this world. It may not necessarily be a conscious quest but a voice deep inside of us keeps telling us we're here to fulfill a specific purpose.

That voice deep inside of us belongs to a *superhuman* trapped inside our mild-mannered mortal bodies crying out to be liberated, “Hey, it’s me — the real you. I’m faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive and can leap tall buildings in a single bound. But I am *bound* by the kryptonite of purposelessness. Free me so I can fulfill my destiny!”

While your superhuman may not have X-ray vision or be able to bend steel with its bare hands it nevertheless possesses unique supernatural abilities. Your superhuman, the real you, is waiting to be liberated so you can complete your assignment.

I know the feeling. I was quietly desperate for 35 years, 6 months and 16 days of my life. I wanted to fulfill my destiny but was struggling to hear my calling. And the answer had to be more specific than an ambiguous generalization. I was not searching for *a* purpose in life or *the* purpose of life — I was searching for *my* purpose in life. And when I discovered that purpose — I was liberated. It was the beginning of an evolutionary metamorphosis that continues to this day. That discovery set me on a collision course with my destiny. My life became *electric*.

The Process

If a tree falls in the forest, and no one is there to hear, does it make a sound? The tree of purpose has fallen in the forest of destiny releasing the sound of your calling. Can you hear it? Not yet? That’s OK. Your calling is like a radio signal carried on the airwaves of a specific frequency. Your purpose is calling you. You just have to get tuned in to the right frequency. I’ll help you. I wrote this book to serve as the catalyst to free the superhuman in you. I’m going to share with you what I’ve learned about *the transformational power of purpose*. You’re about to begin the process of getting tuned in.

This is an archaeological process of self-discovery. It will require you to dig deep inside of yourself. *You* have to find your purpose — no one else can tell you what it is. It’s like the scene from *Forrest Gump* where Forrest, sitting at his mother’s death-bed, asks, “What’s my destiny, Mama?” His mother says simply, “You’re gonna have to figure that out for yourself.” Your purpose isn’t something you *define*, it’s something you *find*.

This process is kind of like playing the board game Clue. If you’ve played before, you’ll remember that you search for clues to the murder by asking questions of the other players as you navigate the board. Finally the evidence leads you to conclude that Professor Plum committed the crime in the billiard room and the weapon was the candlestick. In this game however, each chapter will be a step in building a case for what your purpose is.

At the end of each chapter you’ll complete an exercise. Here is a critical bit of advice. When completing the exercise, the objective is *not* to be brief and concise. The objective is to turn your mind loose so that it may find what you are seeking. Free yourself from any judgmental thinking as you write your responses. Write in as much detail as possible. In other words, don’t discount anything that pops into your mind no matter how irrelevant it might

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seem. Your responses will contain the clues that will lead you to the discovery of your purpose.

God created you for a *specific* purpose. Ask him for supernatural insight as you read this book and complete the exercises. Ask him to make his voice very clear to you as he reveals your purpose to you. Your mind will subconsciously be seeking answers as you read this book and even when you aren't. You'll get flashes of inspiration when you least expect it. Be prepared, these insights occur spontaneously and when you might least expect them. When you do, write them down. They will provide the trail of evidence you need in solving the case for finding and fulfilling your purpose in life.

Enter into this process with a sense of expectancy. You are about to make a discovery that will transform your life. The superhuman in you is about to be liberated.

PS: This book is extremely effective when used in a small group process. To learn how to facilitate this process go to www.purposepower.org.

Chapter 1

The Road *Most* Traveled

“Two roads diverged in the wood,” wrote Robert Frost. And I — I took the one less traveled by. And that has made all the difference.” I was on the road *most* traveled — the road traveled by the quietly desperate masses Thoreau described. Then one day I stopped and asked, “Wait a minute, where am I going?” I was tired of the rat race. The rat race is a perpetual event on the road most traveled. I was tired of competing with all the other rats. So what if I was ahead of the rat behind me — there was another rat ahead of me. And where is the finish line in the rat race anyway?

I was frustrated. Feeling like a V-8 engine only hitting on four cylinders, I knew I had more talent and ability than I was using. I knew I could go faster and further than my little rat legs were carrying me but I didn't know *where* to run. It wasn't so much a case of knowing what I wanted to do, as it was a case of knowing what I *didn't* want to do. And I didn't want to do what I was doing anymore. So, I quit my job. Family and friends thought I was crazy and before I found what I was searching for, I began to think I was crazy, too.

I worked for Central Soya, an agribusiness firm headquartered in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Fort Wayne isn't a big city by most standards but it was a big city to me. And, as far as I was concerned, the rat race was synonymous with the city. My wife, Sondra, and I wanted to get back to our rural roots in Oklahoma where we had grown up in Mayberryesque settings. Sondra's hometown was a teeming metropolis of about 300 souls. I was from a big city relatively speaking, a town of about 700 people situated in the heart of Osage County, which had the unique distinction of being home to the largest population of cows in the state, and the oil field that put Phillips Petroleum on the map.

This was the first time I had been without a real job since college. After graduating from Oklahoma State University I went into sales with the Ralston Purina Company. I didn't just sell Dog Chow® and Cat Chow® — I sold cow chow. Most of my customers were large commercial cattle feeding operations located in the high plains of Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas. After ten years with Purina I spent a couple of years as the national cattle product marketing manager with Central Soya.

I decided to start my own business. My business plan was to do contract marketing for some former customers of mine when I worked for Purina and supplement my income by grazing and feeding cattle.

We wanted to live in the country where we could have some hogs, dogs and a few cows. Some friends of Sondra's folks had an empty farmhouse situated on a small acreage that sounded like it might fit the bill. I had never laid eyes on this place so I had to rely on Sondra's judgment since she had grown up a few miles down the road from there. She said it wasn't anything fancy but described it as livable. The most critical question in my mind was how

much was the rent? She said they weren't going to charge us any rent. That answered all of my questions. As far as I was concerned, I didn't need to see this house, the price was right.

So we loaded up the kids and headed back to Oklahoma where, in the words of Rodgers and Hammerstein, the wind comes sweeping down the plain.

No more rat race.

I'll never forget the morning I first saw the farmhouse we were going to get to live in for free. It gave new meaning to "you get exactly what you pay for." Remember *Green Acres*? Well, Green Acres looked like a palace compared to this place. Eva Gabor would have divorced Eddie Albert before she would have moved into this house. To call it rundown would be too kind. It was dilapidated. The roof was sagging, the porch was sagging, and after seeing the house I was sagging, too. But being a positive thinking person, I told myself it had to be better on the inside.

I was wrong.

The ceiling was falling in because the roof leaked. It had no air conditioning and the main source of heat was a wood-burning stove. The living room was a long, narrow room covered with carpet — that ugly green and orange shag carpet that was so popular around 1970. It must have been designed by someone who was on a bad LSD trip. And as I stood on that green and orange shag carpet pondering our future, the two-by-four of reality hit me square between the eyes. *What in the world have I done? I've quit my job and I'm moving my family into a shack.*

I turned to Sondra and asked, "Are you *sure* you want to live here?" Remember, she was the one who picked this place out. Surely, it was a moment of temporary insanity and now, clothed and in her right mind she would say, "Of course not!" Instead she calmly replied, "Jim, we can live here temporarily."

I now had a headache and felt nauseous.

We drove back to my in-laws' house to spend the night. I woke up hoping this had just been a bad dream. It wasn't. We moved in. When we turned out the lights that first night we heard noises in the attic. Something was crawling around up there. No, something was scurrying. Rats — big rats.

The rat race had followed me and had taken up residence in our attic.

Murphy's Law

Our *temporary* stay at Green Acres turned out to be eighteen months — the longest ten years of my life. This house exceeded my expectations. It was *worse* than I had imagined.

In the winter it was so cold we could see our breath in the morning until we got a fire built. The water pipes froze under the house and burst. I chopped firewood until I thought my arms would fall off. Then I burned anything I could find, cut up and fit in the stove — old fence

posts, railroad ties, crates, pallets, you name it. If it wasn't nailed down it was liable to end up in the fire. I swore I'd never have a wood-burning fireplace again in my life. It was so hot in the summer we slept on cots on the porch. Living there was like a never-ending campout. I was beginning to think it would be better to be back in the rat race rather than to have to listen to it take place in the attic every night.

I ended up getting a masters degree in Murphy's Law — anything that could go wrong did — and at the worst possible time. At the end of six months I'd lost \$30,000 in the cattle business and my marketing venture was a total failure. It was a humbling experience. Feeling defeated and humiliated, I sank into a deep state of depression. I started asking the *why* and *how* questions. Why did I do this and how could I be so stupid? The why and how questions were followed by the *what* question. What am I going to do now?

It was during this time of not-so-quiet desperation that Sondra pulled into the drive one day and unloaded a cage with three chickens inside. She had wanted chickens ever since we moved to the country. Being a cattleman, I didn't have any great affinity for chickens and I told her we weren't buying any. She smiled and explained that she didn't *buy* them — the neighbors had given them to her. I thought this displayed a great deal of intelligence on their part.

And I was right. All three were roosters. Roosters don't lay eggs which, as far as I was concerned, were the best part of a chicken. I wondered how I could get rid of them without getting a divorce. An unlikely ally came to my aid.

The natural enemy of a chicken is a coyote. And we had plenty of coyotes. You could hear them howl every night when the sun went down. Within a week, two of the roosters had not so mysteriously disappeared. I patiently waited for the coyotes to usher the sole survivor of the three Roosterteers on to the big chicken coop in the sky. He must have narrowly escaped the jaws of death one night because he showed up one morning missing all his tail feathers. The coyotes couldn't kill this bird. This was one tough chicken. So now all that was left of our little family flock was one bobtailed Leghorn rooster.

The kids named him Elmer.

Elmer literally ruled the Green Acres roost. He bullied the dogs and cats into letting him sleep on the front porch with them. Roosting on the front porch created an environmental problem. While the dogs and cats preferred to do their business elsewhere Elmer decorated the porch in a style that made the shag carpet look appealing. That porch was an important part of the house since it was our bedroom on sultry summer nights.

If the coyotes couldn't take care of Elmer on their own I decided I would have to help them.

Wanting to be humane, I tried to trap Elmer. I propped up a box with a forked stick and baited the trap with a little corn. I tied a string around the stick and snuck off around the corner of the house and laid in wait for Elmer. I felt like Wile E. Coyote. And Elmer apparently thought he was the Roadrunner because he managed to peck a piece of corn and without as

much as a “beep, beep” escaped before I could trip the stick. I felt a strong urge to call the Acme Corporation and order some roller skates and a rocket.

The elimination of Elmer became an obsession. I’d start my day plotting against him. I chased him off by peppering him with my son’s BB gun but Elmer kept coming back. He was like the Energizer Bunny — he just kept going. *What did I have to do to get rid of this chicken?*

Early one morning, I was sipping my coffee watching the sunrise through the screen door on the back porch. I was contemplating the beauty of nature and thinking peaceful thoughts when the silhouette of a bobtailed rooster eclipsed the rising sun. I grabbed my Ruger 10/22 semi-automatic rifle, jammed in a ten shot clip, jacked in a shell and very quietly slipped out the door. Bracing myself against the woodshed, I drew a bead on Elmer.

It was too late. He spotted me and took off. I was right behind, running and stopping periodically to squeeze off a shot. Every time I fired, Elmer would jump and cluck. The chase took us around the garage and out into the front yard. I was running out of ammunition. Finally, with my last shot, I accomplished what the coyotes had only imagined in their dreams.

When I took off after Elmer, all I had on was my house shoes and my boxer shorts. So, here I was, standing over a dead chicken, dressed like an Aborigine and holding a smoking gun. I looked at the road in front of the house. Fortunately, no one was driving by.

The absurdity of what I had just done struck me. What if someone had witnessed my crime? *I saw the whole thing, officer. That’s right. He was about six feet tall, 190 pounds. What was he wearing? Nothing but his BVDs and a smile — a sinister looking smile. He kind of reminded me of Wile E. Coyote. The chicken never had a chance.*

This was the low point of my life. I had a talk with myself. *You need to pull yourself together, Jim. You’re losing it.*

I hand-delivered Elmer to the coyotes.

Back to the Future

The *why* and *how* questions wouldn’t go away. And the question of *what to do now* would have to be answered soon if we were going to continue to buy groceries and pay bills. One cold winter’s day during this time of soul searching, I was sorting through some old files. I pitched the ones I didn’t want to keep into the wood-burning stove. Like I said, I burned anything I could find.

As I was sorting and burning, I opened up a folder that contained notes I had taken at a seminar. They were dated March 21, 1988. That would have been about a year earlier, nearly six months before I quit my job. At the top of one page I had written a thought-provoking question posed during that seminar — *what’s your purpose in life?*

I can’t tell you much about the seminar other than that one question. That’s really all I can remember. But it was that question that took me on a journey in my mind’s eye. We all have

a mental VCR in our heads that records our past experiences and can replay them on demand. The *purpose* question punched the *play* button on mine and while sitting in the seminar I experienced a flashback from my days of selling feed with Purina.

If you've ever been in sales, you discover that prospects tend to have one word vocabularies and that one word is *no*. Your efforts are constantly met with doubt and defeat. Selling feed is no different. Some of those old cowboys who managed the feedlots didn't want to waste their time talking to salesmen so they did their dead level best to run them off. I was able to survive and even thrive largely in part because I had worked in feedyards. I had cowboied for a living, understood the business, and spoke the managers' language.

Whenever I called on a manager for the first time I asked him a series of questions about his operation, thanked him for his time and headed on down the road. These questions were second nature to me and they started me off on the right foot with the manager. It was how I started building a relationship with a prospect. The questions were my way of finding out the biggest problems the manager was dealing with. My strategy was to then help the manager find solutions to those problems, even when they didn't have anything to do with the product I was selling. It was this simple approach that enabled me to become a top 20 producer in a sales force of 500.

My flashback featured a young salesman I had worked with named Mike. Mike was a sharp young guy but new to the business of selling to these large feedlots. He and I spent a couple of days working together, so I could share some of the tricks of the trade with him. As we were driving down the road between sales calls he looked over at me and said, "Jim, I don't like to admit this but I don't even know what questions to ask a feedlot manager on the first call." I told him to take out his pad and pen and start writing. While we zipped down the road that day somewhere out in the middle of nowhere, I rattled off the questions I always asked.

I never gave those questions or my day with Mike much thought again until a couple of years later when I left Purina to take the marketing job in Indiana. When Mike found out I was leaving the company he said he wanted to thank me for something. I'll never forget what he said, "I still have the ten questions Jim Whitt gave me to ask a feedlot manager on the first call." He thanked me for sharing those ten questions with him.

At that precise moment in my flashback, my mental VCR stopped the video and freeze-framed a close-up of Mike's face. The eyes are the windows to the soul, and as I looked into Mike's eyes, here's what I saw. Potential. I saw the tremendous potential Mike possessed. It occurred to me that all he needed was someone to show him the ropes, point him in the right direction and say, "You can do it." He just needed someone to help him reach the potential he already possessed. That's what I was doing — I was helping him reach *his* full potential.

As I sat by that wood-burning stove on that cold winter's day in that run-down old farmhouse, I looked at the answer I had written to the *purpose* question from a year earlier — *my purpose is to help people reach their full potential.*

That answered the *why* question. It was as if God said, “Good. You’ve figured it out. Now get ready because you’re on a collision course with destiny.” I was liberated. My life shifted into overdrive. I felt like the Blues Brothers — *I was on a mission for God*.

March 21, 1988, is a red-letter date on my calendar because that’s when I discovered the reason for my being. I didn’t know the impact that day would have on my life until I found that file with my notes almost a year after the fact. I wrote my purpose on a piece of paper, stuck it into a file folder and never gave it much thought. But that set supernatural forces in motion.

Looking back on it, I didn’t really understand why I was quitting my job, starting my own business and moving into that old farmhouse. I just thought I wanted out of the rat race and to get back to my rural roots. But the power of purpose was pulling me like a magnet and I didn’t even know it.

Although I discovered my purpose long before we moved to Green Acres, it was there I began experiencing *the transformational power of purpose*. The talents and abilities I felt were underutilized were now beginning to be maximized and I discovered some I never knew I possessed. I started the process of *being* exactly what I was designed and assigned to do. People and circumstances began to come together at exactly the right time, enabling and empowering me to fulfill my purpose. It was the beginning of a journey that has taken me places I hadn’t planned to go, to do things I hadn’t planned to do and experience things I could have never imagined.

I felt a little like David Dunn in *Unbreakable*. I was an ordinary human being who was coming to the realization that something about me wasn’t so ordinary. I didn’t fully understand it yet but the *real me* was beginning to surface.

The superhuman in me was being set free.

For 35 years, 6 months and 16 days of my life I was on the road *most* traveled. Then one day I stopped and asked for directions. I discovered my purpose and that started my journey on the road *less* traveled.

And Robert Frost is right — it does make all the difference.

