

Called:
Living the Life

by
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Introduction

What is called? Am I called? If I am called, what is it I am called to do? How does being called affect my life?

When I was a child I knew I was called. But, at that time, I had no idea what was involved in my "calling." How was I supposed to know what this calling was? How did I start making it happen? These were questions I would ask myself and I had no idea how to answer them. I thought that being called meant I had to go to seminary and know the Bible like a theological genius. I thought I had to have a past of mistakes and then have a God- encounter that would change my life forever. I thought I had to go to church fifty-two Sundays a year and fifty- three in a leap year. I had no idea that my calling was simply a way of life instead of a function in my life.

Over the years I have learned what being called really means. If you have a pulse, you have a purpose. I believe that we are all called. But what exactly is it that we are called to do?

We are all on a journey, whether it's the journey of a 9 to 5 job working in a factory, as a dental hygienist cleaning people's teeth, or as a business executive running a Fortune 500 company. Each one of us has a story with a past, and yet each one of us is called. Your background, your genealogy, and your heritage do not matter. You are called. It does not matter if you came from a family that was abusive or if you were a part of a family that was homeless. You are called. You may have no hope right now. Your life may be falling apart in front of you. You are called. Your family may want nothing to do with you. You are called. You may have been fired from a company you gave over twenty years of your life to. Remember this, you are called. Every day, no matter what life brings you, you are called.

What is it that you are called to do? The answer is very simple. You are called to love God and love people. First Corinthians 9:24 says, "You are called on your journey to run your race and run it with focused intensity towards God."

When God began to put this book on my heart, I began to notice there were people all around me who knew they were called, but they were just living life aimlessly. Unknowingly, they were living a life without a desire to know God more. That will not help you to fulfill your calling. I want to challenge you in your walk with God through this book. I want to encourage you and motivate you to understand that you are called

by God, the Supreme Commander and Chief of our world. Each chapter that you read will help you to know one thing—you are called to pursue a relationship with the Father. You will also learn how to make that happen.

My desire is not that you read this book one time, but that you read it over and over again. Because we all get busy with life, we have to remind ourselves to daily choose to understand what our purpose is and know that we are called!

CHAPTER 1

Called

The eagle is one of the most admired birds in the world. When you think of an eagle, you think of strength and power. You think of an eagle soaring through the Grand Canyon, swooping and soaring, gliding through the wind. Eagles are a fascinating species.

What many don't know about eagles is that they court their mate before accepting each other for life. The female bird wants the male bird to prove he is good enough for her and to raise her kids. She'll actually fly down to the ground and pick up a small stick. She will then fly into the air with the male bird and drop it. It then becomes the responsibility of the male bird to swoop down and catch the small stick before it hits the ground. This process is often repeated several times and with heavier objects each time. The female bird is determining if the male bird is strong enough to take care of her young. At the appropriate time, the female bird will fall and the male bird will lock his talons together with hers, signifying they have bound for life. It is quite an acrobatic stunt and absolutely magnificent to see. After the female bird has chosen to accept life with the male, they mate until death.

After the eaglets arrive, the male eagle will help take care of the eaglets—feeding them, watching over them, and playing with them. At some given point, the female knows it is time for the eagles to fly. She will push them out of the nest, one at a time, where they will free-fall, learning how to flap their wings. It is the responsibility of the male bird to swoop down and catch the eaglets before they hit the ground. (You can see how the courtship ritual comes in to play here.)

The male eagle will then bring the eaglet back up to the nest to try again. The female repeats the process with all the eaglets and the male keeps swooping down to catch them one by one until the eaglets learn how to fly on their own. This phenomenon was created in them at the time of their creation. The Bible confirms this in Deuteronomy 32:11 when it says, "Like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions."

There are three stages eaglets go through that I want us to dive into just a little deeper.

1. Sheltering and nurturing stage
2. Disturbance stage
3. Success stage

There is a natural progression that takes place in each eaglet's life. Let us compare that process to our own lives. We are people who are sheltered and nurtured as babies. Our parents, or guardians, care for our needs—they feed us, clothe us and hold us close to build in us that sense that we are being taken care of.

Then there is the disturbance stage. Our parents push us to get jobs, go to church, make friends, and, as we get older, to move out of the house and begin lives of our own. This causes us to get out of our comfort zones.

Then we reach the final stage: success. We begin this new phase of our lives with our spouses, attain good jobs, have children, and the process starts over with the next generation.

Let's now compare that to our Christian lives. We are born into Christ. We give our hearts and lives to Christ and say, "Jesus, we want to make You the center of our lives." At that time we become baby Christians and learn what it means to be a Christian. This is the sheltering and nurturing stage. People demonstrate to us or take us under their "wings" to teach us what it means to truly follow Christ. We get comfortable in our faith. There is a sense of a new inner joy and happiness that was not there before.

We then move on to the disturbance stage where sin tries to creep back into our lives. The devil tries to bring along people or circumstances that cause us to doubt who we are in Christ and if we are really saved. During this stage, trials and tribulations come and we have to learn how to fight through them. When we do so, we make the right decisions and press on toward the goal of the upward call of God.

When we get comfortable and get pushed out of our nest, we must rely on Him. When we fall out of the nest, He swoops down and picks us up, as He is our Father, much like the male eagle catching his eaglets. Sometimes, during this stage, it can seem the presence of God is distant, or disappear at times. That is never the case. We just have to walk by faith and refuse to live by our feelings...again, part of the training process.

Finally, there is the success stage. We have discovered how to pray and how to rely on God. This does not, however, mean everything is going to work out the way we want it to every time. What this success stage is teaching us is that we do not have to go through difficulties alone. We learn that God is our Source and our Provider. It is Jesus Who gets us through times of stress and trouble. I want to remind you—it is time to get pushed out of the nest and move into the success stage of our Christian lives.

The eagle was created to excel above all the other birds. The Bible says, "We will be lifted up like the wings of the eagles" (Isaiah 40:31). We were made to excel. We were made to achieve greatness in our walk with God. We cannot stay comfortable. We

must move through the stages of growth in order to do and become all that God has planned.

I am a big believer in being open and honest. That is how we are to live our lives and I want that to be our motivation as we read the next few chapters. Let's be open with each other. We have all gone through times where we have been on spiritual highs and the next day we were asking if God was even around. I have been there. My wife, Adrienne, has been there. These are struggles we all face, but we have to get real with each other and just open up.

There will be times in our lives that I call "nesting" times. These are times when we are not moving forward. We are just resting in the nest. You may be resting because you just had a great victory in your life. You are feeling good about what is going on. Maybe a new job promotion, maybe your child decided to give his or her life to Christ, or maybe you did something good for someone and you feel great about it.

You may be resting because what you are doing is successful. You don't want to stretch anymore. You are in that comfort zone. Life is going by and you are busy with the mundane activities of your everyday life. I call this a rut. You and I both know what a rut is. It is your grave with the ends kicked out. You cannot stay in a rut. Again, there are seasons of being stuck in a rut, but we were not made for "rut" living.

The third reason you may be resting in the nest is immaturity. Oftentimes, we think our faith should grow automatically. We unknowingly reason that, when we wake up, we are just going to grow in our relationship with God, and that is that. We have not learned how to pay the price to stay away from complacency. Immaturity will cause us to do things based off our emotions, not what we know to do. I have seen people make decisions based off their emotions only to regret it later, and that is immaturity in faith. The fourth and final reason we rest in the nest is that we feel we are being attacked. Sometimes, when going through trials, we feel the best thing to do is to hunker down and stay out of the fire. There were seasons in my life, when I was being attacked and all I could do was hunker down and hold on. I was resting in the nest. I discovered that during those times we can lose our joy for being a Christian (Psalms 51:12). We can get bored in our Christian walks because we have let the fire die as we were resting in the nest too long.

Have you ever noticed that when you do something good, you want to be around people to bask in the glory of the goodness? When things are not going well, we often want to withdraw and isolate ourselves. That is dangerous. When my family was attacked by false accusations, my wife and I isolated ourselves. We didn't want to be around anyone. We didn't want to hear anyone's opinions, so we hunkered down and waited for the fiery arrows of the devil to pass us by. We rested in the nest. I have to

admit, at the beginning it was tough to rest in the nest because I wanted to attack, but I knew the season was to be in the nest. As I was in the nest longer and longer, my spiritual life weakened, my relationship with my wife weakened, and my circumstances caused me to become complacent.

These seasons in our lives will come, but we are not made to rest in the nest. Everyone goes through some kind of situation they would prefer to avoid, but the difference between us and them is that we didn't stay in the nest. It was not easy to get pushed out of the nest, but we knew we could not stay there. The mature Christian knows there are times to rest in the nest, but they also know that season does not have to last long. You were not created to rest in the nest. You were created to motivate yourself, your family, and those around you to achieve greatness in the Kingdom of God. You were made to make a difference. You were made to achieve success. You were made to become the light in a dark world. You were made to share your faith. You were made to overcome everything the devil tries to throw your way. You were made for greatness! Of the four situations that cause us to stay in the nest, the fourth is the most difficult. It is in this place where we become complacent and the fire and passion that we once had for God seems to dissipate. This is a dangerous place to be and a dangerous place to remain. When you become complacent, your life merely becomes an existence. Your excitement goes away. You are no longer a pumped up, motivated, motor-scooter. You do not have joy anymore. You walk around with the "woe is me" syndrome. You are no longer spending time praying and reading the Bible. You find yourself in the routine of going to work, eating, going to bed and waking up to do the same thing all over again.

My dad once gave a sermon called, "It's the Grind That Gets Em'." The entire basis of the message was when you drive a car day in and day out, it is the daily grind that begins to wear the vehicle out. Driving it just one day won't do much damage to the vehicle, but it is the daily use. Doing the same thing every day is what wears the vehicle out. In other words, it is the grind that gets em'.

This is true when we come to the place of complacency while resting in the nest—when we come to a place of survival mode, trying to get by another day, doing the same thing over and over again. The grind begins to take a toll on our lives. When we lose our hunger for God, we stop fighting.

Think about a sports team. When a professional or college sports teams wins the national title, very seldom do they win back-to-back. Why? They become complacent in their victory. They fought hard to get there and now they feel they don't have to fight because they have already arrived. The fight on the inside of us will get us to success, but complacency will kill us. Complacency will keep us from fighting on.

When in college, I worked for a company cleaning carpets. We had all sorts of fun. It wasn't that I enjoyed the actual work, because that was terrible. It was the owner of the company that made it such a great place to work. He and I had even talked about opening up other locations.

During my first two years of college I studied for a business degree, although I knew that my passion was full-time ministry. You see, I got comfortable cleaning carpets. It was easy for me. I knew how to do it. I was good at it. It was a steady paycheck. It had potential for growth. But what I saw happen was that the desire I had to achieve great things for God slowly began to wane. I desired to do what was easy, but not my passion.

I do not think cleaning carpets is less important. We need everyone. But with my giftings and callings, it was not for me. The owner of this particular company was great at what he did. I believe God anointed him and called him to do this so he could help fund the kingdom of God (Romans 12:8). I had to make a decision. Was I going to remain resting in the nest or was I going to get pushed out and have some disturbance? I chose to jump. It was not easy, but when I did, it was almost as if God swooped down and picked me up before I hit the ground. I relocated and finished up school, then, I went into full-time ministry and am now on staff at one of the greatest churches in the country—all because I wouldn't stay resting in the nest.

If you are going to become a great person of faith, you have to get out of the nest. If you want to achieve greatness for the kingdom, then you have to get out of the nest. If you want to achieve levels of business success that your peers are not currently experiencing, then you are going to have to get out of the nest. If you don't get out of the nest, you will never fulfill your purpose. You have to get a crusade. What is God calling you to do? What is God saying to you about your calling? And what is causing you to stay resting in the nest?

I love history. I love studying our founding fathers and how they made decisions. I loved that Abraham Lincoln had so many mess-ups and so much turmoil in his life, but he continued to jump out of the nest. I love how president after president had the option to become complacent when they were defeated, but jumped out of the nest again.

The secret to success is this...one more time. Are you willing to jump out of the nest one more time? Are you willing to take that leap of faith that God is calling you to make...one more time? There were many good men in the Bible who fought opposition and found themselves resting in the nest. But the difference between the good men and the great men was that the great men jumped out of the nest. When King David

sinned, he ran back and said, "God, as the deer pants for the water brook so pants my soul after you" (Psalms 42:1). He jumped out of the nest and said "God, I am a little disturbed, but in order for me to move forward, I am going to have to feel a little bit of disturbance." The difference between ordinary and extraordinary is simple... "one more time."

My job in this chapter is to teach and motivate you to get out of the nest. If you want to enter into a life of faith and achieve greatness in your home life, business life, or spiritual life then it is time you get out of the nest and know you are called! It is time that you take that step and trust God to swoop down and pick you up before you hit the ground.

You may be asking, "How do I get out of the nest?" There are some elements you want to consider when you are about to jump out of the nest. First, you must know what you want. Don't jump out of the nest and say, "I will figure it out on the way down." The goal of the momma bird and the eaglet is simple. She pushes the baby bird out to teach the eaglet how to fly. The Bible says, in Habakkuk 2:2, "Write your vision down and run with it." To get out of the nest you need to first write down what you want to do. Speak that vision daily and call it into existence by faith. The starting point for all achievements is knowing what you want. You can measure success by how you define success in your life. I want to remind you that your destiny is not determined by what you possess, but rather by what possesses you.

There are sometimes areas where you want to jump out of the nest. It may be an area in your marriage. If so, then what do you want your marriage to look like? It could be your relationship with your children. What do you want your relationship with your children to look like? Or your job and so on. Find out what it is that you are jumping out of the nest for and define what you want it to look like. The second way to jump out of the nest is to determine exactly what you will give. There is a price for everything. What price are you willing to pay?

I love to play golf. I am not the best at it, but I enjoy getting out there and playing. I learned a long time ago that if I wanted to get good at golf, I would have to play a lot. If I wanted to play college or pro golf, there was a price I had to pay. I was not willing to pay that price. It simply wasn't a priority to me. My spiritual life is of utmost importance to me. I knew what my personal goals were and I knew what I needed to do to get there. I was willing to pay that price to get to a place where I felt God was calling me. But I was not willing to do it for golf! Are you willing to pay the price to get there?

Jesus told us to take up our crosses and follow Him. As He was recruiting His followers, or disciples, He told them to leave their friends and families and completely follow Him. There was a price to pay to get to the place of success.

The Bible says, in Acts 9:15-16, "But the Lord said to Ananias, 'Go! This man is My chosen instrument to carry My name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for My name.'" That is a price. Are you willing to pay it?

Jump out of the nest to reach a level of personal success. That will not come until a price is paid. It is a sad reality, but people's dreams die every day. That's not because they don't have the ability to do it, but because they are not willing to pay the price to get there.

The baby eaglet has to take a bold step. The thrill of soaring begins with overcoming the fear of falling. If anyone ever tells you that it is going to be easy, they have never jumped. These defining moments in our lives are what separate us from those who don't make the jump.

The third way to jump out of the nest is to have a definite plan and a time to do it. Things very rarely just happen. Jesus did not stumble into the wilderness of Judea. He had a plan and a purpose. Jesus said in Acts 1:8, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Jesus had a plan and set it in motion.

What are you using your faith for? When are you going to set in motion the plan God has for your life? John C. Maxwell says, "The secret to success is your daily agenda." In other words, are you setting up a plan to jump out of the nest or are you just waiting for something to fall into your lap?

The fourth way to jump out of the nest is to enter into that vision every day. Work on your plan. Think about it. Write it down. Pray about it. Talk it over with other people. Dream about it. Allow it to take hold of every part of you. When something reaches your heart, it can create your future. What happens when you allow the dream that is on the inside of you to captivate your heart? It takes a hold of everything you do. Before I married Adrienne, we spent a lot of time together. We hung out, went to baseball games, played golf, ate at restaurants, watched movies and had a great time as a couple. The more time I spent with her, the more of my heart she had. If I hadn't spent so much time with her, I would have never loved her the way I did when we got married. Our hearts grew together as we shared time together.

When trying to achieve your dream of getting out of the nest, you have to spend time learning what God is calling you to do. Take, for example, this book that you are reading. It did not come about with me just sitting down and writing it in one afternoon. I thought about it. I wrote out many chapters before we came to this point. I was constantly working with it until I knew I had it the way I wanted it. My vision came to pass by writing it down and working on the vision every day.

The fifth and final way of jumping out of the nest is to never fear failure. Do not be afraid to mess something up. Do you know how many times I have tried things and failed? More times than I can count. Failure is a part of success. King David failed. Paul in the New Testament failed. Michael Jordan, the great basketball player ever, failed. The list goes on and on of people who failed, but later succeeded. They were willing to get back on their feet and jump again one more time.

When you are standing on the edge of the nest about to jump, fear will rise up and you will feel weak. Your tendency will be to crawl back down in the nest, or your place of comfort. It is the easy thing to do. In fact, that is what most people do. In order for you to get out of the nest and achieve success, know that you will have to go through some disturbances, but trust in the Lord that He will carry you through.

In the next chapter we will dive into an area that can prevent you from moving on with God. Surrender. You were created and called for surrender, so it is time you get there. I want you to remember this about the eagle—until the eaglets learns how to soar, they fail to understand the privilege they have as eagles. Until you understand that God has called you to a purpose and a plan for your life, you will fail to understand the privilege it is to have been born with the destiny God has called you to.

The nest can be a great place to get nurtured and comforted. But it is a terrible place to stay complacent. God would not have allowed you to come to this earth if He didn't have a special plan for your life. Don't allow fear, your past, or given current situations to stop you from becoming all that God has destined you to be. Let me assure you of one thing that I know about you, you were not made to rest in the nest! You are Called!

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