
INTRODUCTION

A FedEx commercial parodied the movie *Cast Away*, in which Tom Hanks played a FedEx worker whose company plane went down, stranding him on a remote island for years. Looking like the bedraggled Hanks from the movie, the FedEx employee in the commercial walks up to the door of a home, holding a package.

When a woman comes to the door, he explains that he survived five years on an island, protecting this package in order to deliver it to her. Curious, he asks her to reveal what is in it. Opening the package and displaying the contents, the woman replies that there was nothing of great importance; just a GPS navigational device, a compass, a satellite telephone, a water purifier, and assorted seeds.

Most of us experience times when we feel lost or as though we are just surviving in life. Sometimes we feel disoriented by the circumstances and decisions we face. As young adults, we have to choose a career direction for the first time. Later in life we may have to do so again as the result of midlife changes, job loss, the empty nest, divorce, a spiritual awakening, or retirement. *What should I do? Which way should I go?* we wonder.

Other times we may look at the familiar routine of our days, weeks, and years and be struck by a sense of purposelessness. We fear that we are experiencing but a shadow of the life we were meant to live. In the quiet places of our soul we hear whispered, “There’s got to be more to life than this.”

When we query the purpose and direction of our lives, we are asking questions about our calling. Your calling is an invitation to live the life you are meant to live. You are called to become the person you were created to be and do the things you were designed to do. As you live your calling, you will find the purpose for which you were born.

As with the contents of the FedEx package, the resources you need are right at hand within this book. It contains effective tools for you to use within your unique life situation. Whether you currently are in school, working, at home with children, or retired, this book gives you a road map and the resources needed for finding and fulfilling your mission in life.

We write this book both as fellow travelers and as guides in the search to discover one’s purpose in life. For many years we have had the privilege of serving as career counselors, life calling coaches, and seminar leaders to thousands of men and women. We are grateful to our clients for inviting us into their lives. Trusting us to facilitate their search for work and volunteer activities that use their gifts, they also have looked to us to help them find answers to the larger questions about their purpose, mission, and calling in life. With permission, we have included many of their stories in this book. (Other illustrative examples we use are composites of several people and do not represent specific individuals.)

We believe that we are called to write this book as a travel guide for those who are seeking both spiritual and practical answers to the question, “What is my purpose in life?” We can write authentically only from the context of our own life journey, which is directed and shaped by our commitment to follow Jesus Christ. Throughout this book we draw from the timeless truths found in the Bible, which give reliable and pragmatic instruction for discovering and living an extraordinary life.

Using This Book as a Toolbox to Find Your Calling

We call this book a practical guide because it offers a useful toolbox of principles, assessment exercises, strategies, and other resources that assist you in taking the right action steps to create a life of purpose and passion. In this book you have the opportunity to:

- *Complete six inventories* to identify key dimensions, or “puzzle pieces,” of your unique design: your most-enjoyed skills, core values, preferred roles, personality traits, compelling interests, and spiritual gifts. You can record your assessment results in a document called your Life Calling Map. It is an important tool for clarifying your God-given design and discovering your calling within your work, home, church, community, and the world at large.

- *Enlarge your vision of what you can do.* Most people have dreams for their lives that are too small, limited by lack of vision, fear, and everyday concerns. God calls us to undertake tasks and roles we cannot accomplish on our own so that we can see his power at work.

Your Life Calling Map can be used to identify and explore options for work and volunteer ministry/service activities that are in alignment with your God-given design. Using strategies for brainstorming, dreaming big, and investigating possibilities helps you expand your vision of what God is calling you to do in the world.

- *Learn how to make good decisions within God’s will for your life.* Your calling doesn’t just happen without your participation. Partnering with God to live your calling requires making decisions. Learning to make good decisions about life choices is an essential part of spiritual maturity.

- *Consider emotional, psychological, spiritual, and lifestyle issues that can get you stuck* as you seek to find and fulfill your mission in life. You can assess if any of these “calling blockers” are hindering you in discerning or living your calling. We introduce “calling catalysts” you can use to conquer your personal calling blockers.

- *Motivate yourself to take action.* Learning how to take appropriate action is a key part of becoming a person God can fully use. You will have

the opportunity to create personal mission statements, set achievable and compelling goals, and develop an action plan to create the life God is calling you to live.

- *Learn how to live your calling successfully.* Your life matters in God's majestic plan. Many people are inspired to pursue their calling; fewer persevere to live it faithfully over the course of their lives. Tapping into God's power and resources, creating a vital support system, and more fully developing the characteristics of a called person enable you to fulfill the mission that is yours alone.

Prayerful Action Steps

St. Augustine, the fifth-century theologian, said that we should pray as though everything depended on God and work as though everything depended on us. Living your calling requires prayerful action. The sequence of action steps laid out in this book is a proven path on which to walk. To get the most out of this book and to help ensure your success in discovering the life of purpose God desires you to have, we suggest that you do the following:

- Obtain a journal or notebook to record the events of your journey. Your responses to the discussion questions and activities at the end of each chapter create an ongoing account of how God is working in your life, which helps you discern where he is leading you.
- Find one or more companions to share the journey. Look for people who want to work through this book, and create a Live Your Calling Group. One partner is good; a small group of six to eight people is ideal. There is a Live Your Calling Small Group Guide in Appendix A, at the back of the book; it outlines a suggested twelve-week format for going through this book. You and your partner(s) can assist one another with feedback, input, accountability, and encouragement.

Opening the Package

If you were on a desert island like Hanks's character in *Cast Away*, would you leave one package unopened? The desire to keep one package intact as a tangible sign of hope that we will one day get home to deliver it is understandable. For many of us, however, the symbolic value of the package would be outweighed by the potential real-world value of its contents to help us move beyond survival and expedite our journey home.

Similarly, reading this book may have symbolic value for you, offering hope that you can discover and live your calling. Please don't stop there, however. Open the package. Take out the tools and use them. Everything you need is close at hand. The life God created you to live is within your reach.

Personal Application

(We recommend that when you come to a set of personal application questions in this book, you record your responses in your journal or notebook.)

1. What is your motivation for reading this book? What would you like to see happen in your life as a result of working through it?
2. Reflect on how you would like God to partner with you in this journey of discovering and living your calling. If desired, write a prayer that expresses your thoughts, needs, and hopes.