

WHAT'S NEXT

YOUR DREAM JOB, GOD'S CALL,
AND A LIFE THAT SETS YOU FREE

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What's Next: Your Dream Job, God's Call, and a Life That Sets You Free

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CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i>	9
1. What's Next?	11
2. The Elusive Dream Job	21
3. The Call of God	29
4. A Guy Named Moses	37
5. A Guy Named Jonah	45
6. A Look at Father God	53
7. A Surprising Verse About God's Will.	65
8. Common Callings	71
9. Digging Deeper	79
10. A Life That Matters	89
11. Discovering Purpose and Fulfillment.	97
12. Called to Freedom	109
13. Unexpected Ingredients to Success.	121
14. Fight, Fight, Fight!.	131
15. God's Specific Callings	141
16. Nothing Wasted	153
<i>A Final Word: Redefining Success.</i>	163
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	167
<i>Notes</i>	169

1

WHAT'S NEXT?

I never imagined I would be thirty years old and still trying to figure out who I wanted to be when I grew up.

As a boy, I thought for sure I would fly F-16s. It's all I wanted to do with my life. I was so serious about it that I built control panels out of Legos, commandeered the joystick from my parents' computer, and set up my bed as a cockpit. I flew thousands of missions all over the world. I don't mean to brag, but I was the best fighter pilot ever to maneuver a four-poster bed.

As I got older, my desire to fly airplanes only grew stronger. When I turned seventeen, I contacted my congressman, and he agreed to write a recommendation letter for my acceptance into the United States Air Force Academy. Unless you're a really bad student with a criminal record, a letter from a congressman almost always guarantees acceptance into the Academy. So I was set.

Before I sent in my application, however, I met a cute little

WHAT'S NEXT

Cuban girl and fell in love. Suddenly, the thought of moving out of state to attend the Air Force Academy sounded terrible, so I never sent in the application. Instead, I went to a local university, and Rebecca and I were married a few years later.

My desire to fly hadn't gone away though. In fact, a few months before our wedding, I met with an Air Force recruiter to check out the process of becoming a pilot without going through the Academy. Providentially, he was a terrible recruiter, and I left the meeting without any peace about the possibility of becoming an Air Force pilot. Rebecca wisely reminded me that God is a God of peace, and she encouraged me to pay attention when my heart is in turmoil.

I tried a different route. I contacted my uncle, who had flown missionary planes for the Jungle Aviation and Radio Service for fifty years. He advised me about what it would take to become a missionary pilot, and soon I was accepted by a university that specialized in the type of training I would need. But again, I didn't feel peace. Instead of changing colleges, I finished my business degree at the local university.

And then I entered the workforce. Over the next few years, however, whenever my job became difficult or stressful, I felt a burning in my chest to abandon everything and jump into a cockpit. I got to the point where I felt that if I didn't become a pilot, I could never be content in any other job.

What is it that fuels that discontent?

IN TRANSITION

I'm now 100 percent certain that I'm not supposed to become a professional pilot, and I've lost all desire to go into the Air Force, but contentment was still elusive for a long time. The

idea of watching the sun rise and set from high above the earth sounded so beautiful and adventurous. It sounded like the perfect dream job. What else could I do that would be as great as flying a fighter jet?

“What’s next?” was constantly on my mind. And I’ve since discovered that it’s on lots of people’s minds.

Right now, I manage a restaurant and family entertainment center—the kind with go-carts, laser tag, mini golf, and an arcade. Our family-owned business employs about sixty people, and I would say the majority of our staff are “in transition.” They are like you: some know exactly what their dream job is, some have no idea, and some are simply searching for the next step in their education or career. Some are students and young adults, and some are men and women in their thirties, forties, and older who are searching for something better. These folks are looking for what’s next, but they may not know what that looks like.

If the people who work with me were divided into “teams” based on where they’re at in life, we’d see their diversity. Maybe you can relate to one of them . . .

The first team is Team Senior, and no, I’m not talking about those ages sixty-five and up who get free coffee at restaurants. These are young adults who are trying to figure out what’s next after high school. If you’re in this group, you may have applied to a few colleges or universities and are anxiously awaiting answers. Or you may have already decided on a college but still have no idea what your major will be. You could also be in this group if you’ve decided to take a break from school until you know for sure what you want to do with your life. Either way, you are asking—or at least thinking about—“what’s next” and would really like to know the answer. It’s also possible someone

who really cares may have purchased this book for you because they want you to begin thinking and dreaming about your future. That's great because you'll get a head start on one of the biggest questions people face in their lives and, if you take this search seriously, you can avoid a lot of the trouble the rest of us have experienced.

Team College is next, and it's diverse. There are those who, like I did, are bouncing—with much stress (and possibly whiplash)—from major to major. If that's you, you probably expected to have your goals figured out by now, and are frustrated that your “what's next” is still “What major should I choose?” You could also be on Team College if you're approaching the end of your studies, and the guaranteed job you thought you'd have is not as guaranteed as you thought. The timeline in your head included a job offer before graduation. Now graduation is closing in—or has already passed—and you don't have any promising prospects. You're still working at a burger joint, and the question “what's next” means “When and where is my career going to start?” This is such a difficult place to be.

I've had many friends on Team Rut because they feel like they're, well, in a rut. If that's you, maybe you took a break between high school and college to figure out what career field to pursue, but now years have passed and you're still cleaning public bathrooms or running a cash register. Or you may have what many people consider a good job—steady work, regular raises, vacation—but you're bored; it feels like a dead end. Either way, you may still ask “what's next” every once in a while, but you may have given up hope on ever finding the answer.

Team Bills is a really large group! They understand the need for an income and are humble enough to take whatever job they can get to pay their bills. I've had some incredibly overqualified

people work for us who took the job to make ends meet while getting back on their feet. If that's you, you are probably happy to have a job, but are still eager to find "what's next"—especially because you know that you have so much more to offer.

Team Deck-of-Cards includes people who have been dealt a rough hand through their own decisions, the decisions of others, or circumstances outside of their control. Maybe you had a dream career that you were pursuing, but a sudden death, divorce, job loss, or illness ravaged your plans, your emotions, and your life. Now you're floundering and questioning God. Maybe you're working for an hourly wage at the only job you could find while you try to put the pieces back together. I can only imagine how personal the question "what's next" is for you.

Finally, there's Team Hero—the few people I know who have purposefully given up on a dream to become an unsung hero for someone they care about. Maybe the situation caused you to take on responsibility before you were ready for it, to care for others physically or financially and put their needs before your own. You are a hero for boxing up your dreams and putting them in the attic for a little while, but I know the question of "what's next" is still important to you.

Regardless of where you are, I don't think it's too much of a stretch to assume that if you're reading this book, you're probably having a hard time finding an answer to the question "What's next?" And if that's the case, you just read a whole bunch of examples that illustrate a comforting fact: you're not alone. But the comfort of not being alone isn't good enough, is it? You're not heartless, but really, who cares if other people are having a hard time discovering what's next for them? How does that *help* you? You want to know what you're supposed to do.

Well, here's the good news: The rest of this book is designed to help you figure that out. And the first step is to consider what you are really looking for.

WHAT WE'RE LOOKING FOR

After working and talking with so many people in transition (and being there myself)—after hearing their stories, their dreams, and their problems—I've gradually come to the conclusion that we all have something in common. Although our reasons for asking “what's next” may differ, all of us want to find purpose and fulfillment in what we do, including our jobs. See if you agree with me . . .

First, we want to feel a sense of *purpose*—to have a reason for doing whatever it is we are doing. We want a good answer to the question “Why am I doing this?” Very simply, we want to know that we are doing something meaningful. Whether we're in a high-power job that makes us rich or doing repetitive tasks that bore us, we want to know that our contribution matters to the big picture. All of us long to know that there's a reason behind our existence—that our lives are in some way important.

Is this true for you? Do you want your life to mean something? On a scale from 1 to 10, from pointless to meaningful, how do you rate the sense of purpose you have in your current or most recent job? What would you like that number to be?

I have a theory about why a sense of purpose is so important to us: This world is a big place, and we share it with a lot of people. When I fly over a city at night—in the cabin, not the cockpit—I like to look down and think about how each glittering streetlight or house light or car light represents someone's

existence. I imagine their stories. In just a few moments, the lives of thousands of people flash by—all those lives, a lot like mine, yet completely different. I'm amazed at the size of the world in which we live. This is a *big* place! And the more technologically advanced we become, the more of the world we get to observe. I think this may have led us to struggle more intensely with our desire to matter. In relation to the whole world, we feel like a tiny speck. We want to know that our lives mean something, that our existence in the world is part of a bigger plan and that we are accomplishing something great. We want to know we are special and important to our families and friends. We want to know that in our jobs—jobs that take up a large portion of our waking hours—we are not just pawns in the grand scheme of a massive world economy. We want to believe that the tasks to which we dedicate our lives make a difference in the world, or at least in the life of someone we know and care about.

We long to matter and to make a difference, and these desires shape the search for what's next. Although we may not go so far as to say we don't care about how much money we make, we want a sense of confidence that our everyday tasks affect the world in a positive way.

Second, we want some level of *fulfillment*—the sense of satisfaction we have when we've done a job well. We feel fulfilled when we enjoy what we do, do it successfully, and are appreciated for doing it. I don't think I've ever talked to anyone who doesn't want to enjoy his or her work and achieve some level of accomplishment.

As I've talked with members of my staff, I've heard many different definitions of what it means to enjoy work. Some want

to experience adventure and travel the world, while others want to care for children, create or capture beauty, or compete at the highest levels of a sport.

What would enjoying a job look like for you? What would give you a sense of satisfaction or accomplishment?

Accomplishment, like enjoyment, looks different for different people. Some people are all about the cash and want to reach a high level of wealth. Others couldn't care less about money and would find fulfillment in knowing they are helping people.

This isn't about how important the job seems to be. I immediately think of the team of people working in the restaurant I manage. A few of these individuals take a lot of pride in their jobs. A salad is not a salad unless the customer they hand it to smiles at how beautiful it looks and how good it tastes. A milkshake is not a milkshake unless a child giggles at the whipped topping with gummy worms sticking out of it. These individuals may still be asking what's next, but in the meantime, they've found a way to find purpose and fulfillment in their current jobs.

What about you? Do you want to find purpose and fulfillment in your work and in your life? Do you want to enjoy going to work while also knowing that you are accomplishing something great? I think for most of us, the answer to those questions is obviously yes! Throughout the rest of this book I will present some ideas for how you might discover purpose and fulfillment while also discovering an answer to the question "What's next?" My prayer is that you will ultimately discover hope and freedom. Hope that answers are coming, and freedom from having to figure it out all on your own.

WHAT'S NEXT?

WHAT'S NEXT

1. Which “team” are you on? If you didn’t identify with one of the teams described above, write a paragraph describing your “team.” Specifically, what has brought you to this point of asking “What’s next?”
2. What does a job have to provide in order for you to feel a sense of purpose and fulfillment?