



mark batterson

SOUL
PRINT

discovering your divine destiny

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The names of some individuals whose stories are told in this book have been changed to protect their privacy.

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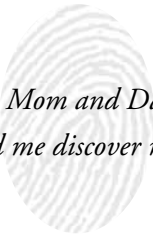
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*To Mom and Dad...
You helped me discover my soulprint.*

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OPENING

Soulprint

The dullest and most uninteresting person you may talk to may one day be a creature, which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship.... It is in light of these overwhelming possibilities...that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never met a mere mortal.

—C. S. LEWIS, *The Weight of Glory*

There has never been and never will be anyone else like you. But that isn't a testament to you. It's a testament to the God who created you. You are unlike anyone who has ever lived. But that uniqueness isn't a virtue. It's a responsibility. Uniqueness is God's gift to you, and uniqueness is your gift to God. You owe it to yourself to *be yourself*. But more important, you owe it to the One who designed you and destined you.

Make no mistake, this is no self-help book. Self-help is nothing more than idolatry dressed up in a rented tuxedo. So let me be blunt: you aren't good enough or gifted enough to get where God wants you to go. Not without His help. But here's the good news: there is nothing God cannot do in you and through you if you simply yield your life to Him. All of it. All of you.

This book is all about you, but it's not about you at all. The fact that there never has been and never will be anyone like you simply means that no one can worship God like you or for you. *You were created to worship God in a way that no one else can.* How? By living a life no one else can—your life. You have a unique destiny to fulfill, and no one can take your place. You play an irreplaceable role in God's grand narrative. But fulfilling your true destiny starts with discovering your true identity. And therein lies the challenge.

Most of us live our entire lives as strangers to ourselves. We know more about others than we know about ourselves. Our true identities get buried beneath the mistakes we've made, the insecurities we've acquired, and the lies we've believed. We're held captive by others' expectations. We're uncomfortable in our own skins. And we spend far too much emotional, relational, and spiritual energy trying to be who we're not. Why? Because it's easier. And we think it's safer. But trying to be who we're not amounts to forfeiting our spiritual birthrights. It's not just that we're lying to ourselves. Somewhere along the way, we lose ourselves.

I'm not sure where you're at in your journey of self-discovery. Maybe you're on the front end, trying to figure out who you are. Maybe you're on the back end, trying to remember who you were meant to be. Or maybe you're somewhere in between, trying to close the gap between who you are and who you want to be. No matter where you are, I want you to experience the joy of discovering *who you are* and the freedom of discovering *who you're not*. It won't be easy. And there are no shortcuts. But if you are breathing, God hasn't given up on you yet. So don't give up on yourself. Let this promise soak into your spirit, because it will energize your reading: *it's never too late to be who you might have been*.

SECOND PERSONA

Self-discovery is a lot like an archaeological dig. It takes a long time to uncover the hidden treasures that lie buried beneath the surface. You can never be certain of what you will find or where you will

find it. And it is a painstaking process. But the failure to dig deep will result in a superficial life. If you live as a stranger to yourself, how can you find intimacy with others? Intimacy is a function of self-discovery. It's hard to truly get to know others if you don't even know yourself. And beyond the relational ramifications, there are occupational implications. If you haven't discovered your unique gifts and passions, how can you find fulfillment in what you do? You might make a living, but you won't make a life. You'll never experience the joy of doing what you love and loving what you do. And, finally, it's the spiritual side effects of superficiality that are the most detrimental. Superficiality is a form of hypocrisy. If you fail to discover the truth, the whole truth, about yourself, aren't you lying to yourself? Your life becomes a half truth.

I live in a city, Washington DC, where image is everything. Meg Greenfield, who spent thirty years covering the city as a journalist with the *Washington Post*, likened it to high school. She referred to high school as a “preeminently nervous” place, and she believed that Washington was even worse. “High school is the time when people first contrive to have an image,” observed Greenfield. “It is an attempt to fabricate a whole second persona for public consumption.” And it's that second persona that results in a secondhand life. Instead of narrating our own lines in the first person, we live second-person lives by allowing others to narrate our lives for us. And that is hypocrisy at its worst. Our lives become lies. We not only cheat ourselves and others—when we fail to discover our true God-given identities and God-ordained destinies, we also cheat the Third Person. Greenfield wrote:

Life inside the image...requires continuous care, feeding, and, above all, protection. That is the worst of it.... It's like never being able to get undressed....

We are, most of us, much of the time, in disguise. We present ourselves as we think we are meant to be. In Washington, this is greatly in excess of the ordinary hypocrisies...that exist everywhere else.¹

I wish this were true only in Washington, but it's everywhere. In fact, superficiality is the curse of our culture. And the primary reason we live as strangers to ourselves is because we're afraid of what we'll find if we start digging. We don't really want to see ourselves for who we are. But if we can dig deeper than our fallen natures, we'll find the truth that lies buried beneath our sin: the image of God. We'll find our true identities. And our true destinies as well.

In the pages that follow, we'll dig into your past, looking for clues to your future. We'll dust off the lies you've believed and insecurities you've acquired until your true identity is unveiled. And we'll make discoveries, both painful and pleasurable, that will forever change the way you see yourself. In fact, you'll never see yourself the same way, because you'll see yourself through the eyes of your Creator.

DESTINY CLUES

Time may be measured in minutes, but life is measured in moments. And some moments are larger than life. And it's those

defining moments that dictate the way we see life. Some of them are as predictable as a wedding day or the birth of a child. Others are as unpredictable as an accident. You never know which moment might become a defining moment, but identifying those moments is the key to identifying who you are.

Psychological research suggests that one's self-concept is defined by a very small number of experiences. Ninety-nine percent of life's experiences vanish like vapor into the subconscious abyss. Only one percent make it into our conscious memories. And less than one percent of that one percent are not just memorable but truly unforgettable. Those are the moments that define us. And managing those memories is a form of stewardship. Every past experience is preparation for some future opportunity. And one way God redeems the past is by helping us see it through His eyes, His providence. So the key to fulfilling your future destiny is hidden in your past memories.

When we look in the mirror, what we see is a reflection of our accumulated experiences. And defining moments are like defining features. In a sense, we are an aggregation of where we've been, what we've done, and who we've known. But there are a few places, a few experiences, and a few people that leave their imprints in ways that become parts of our soulprints.

Exactly what, you may be wondering, is a soulprint? Think of it this way: Your fingerprint uniquely identifies you and differentiates you from everyone else who has ever lived, but your fingerprint is only skin deep. You possess a uniqueness that is soul deep.

I call it your soulprint. It's not just who you are, present tense. It's who you are destined to become, future tense. It's not just who others see when they look at you from the outside in. It's who God has destined you to become from the inside out. Not unlike your genetic code that programs your physical anatomy, your soulprint hardwires your true identity and true destiny. So while you live your life forward, God works backward. The Omniscient One always starts with the end in mind.

The best example of how God uses defining moments to reveal a person's destiny is found in the life of David. He wrote,

*All the days ordained for me
were written in your book
before one of them came to be.²*

As with the psalmist, all of your days are ordained by God. And it's your holy responsibility to discover that God-ordained destiny, just like David did. His epitaph speaks for itself:

*When David had served God's purpose in his own
generation, he fell asleep.³*

Despite humble beginnings and huge mistakes, David fulfilled his destiny. And that's why David's life is the backdrop for this book. He is the soulprint prototype. The defining moments or scenes in his life double as destiny clues that will help you serve

God's unique purpose in your generation. In the pages that follow, we will dissect David's life in a way that will help you discover your own destiny.

On the most memorable day of his life, David bent down by a brook that didn't just bisect a battlefield. It bisected his life. His life would never be the same after that day, and he knew it. His life was about to end or about to begin.

Giant footsteps got louder as Goliath drew nearer, but it didn't disrupt David's laserlike focus. Like a child trying to find a flat stone for skipping, David was searching for smooth stones from the riverbed. He knew that the shape of the stone would determine the trajectory of the throw. Then David had a moment, a defining moment. As he bent down by the brook, he saw a reflection of himself in the water, and it was like he was seeing himself for the first time. Everybody who had ever known David, including his own father, saw David as nothing more than a shepherd boy. But as David stared at his reflection in the water, his true identity was revealed. David saw the person God had destined him to become: a giant killer. That was his true identity. That was his true destiny.

Like the ripple effect created by David as he reached into the river, there are defining moments that reverberate down the years of our lives. In fact, they forever change the trajectory of our lives. That's what this book is about—identifying the defining moments that reveal our destinies. We'll think of the five defining moments from David's life as those five smooth stones he picked up that day. And while you may have a few more or a few fewer

such moments, those from David's life will help you see your own reflection more clearly.

IMAGINE DEL CUORE

To the average eye, it was a mutilated piece of marble. The aborted sculpture had been abandoned half a century earlier by Agostino di Duccio, but a young artist named Michelangelo saw something in that stone others did not. Chiseling the eighteen-foot block of marble would consume nearly four years of his life, but that seemingly worthless stone was destined to become what many consider the greatest statue ever sculpted by human hands. Giorgio Vasari, a sixteenth-century artist and author, called it nothing less than a miracle. Michelangelo resurrected a dead stone and, breathing his artistry into it, brought *David* into existence.

As he chiseled, Michelangelo envisioned what he called the *immagine del cuore*, or image of the heart. He believed the masterpiece was already inside the stone. All he had to do was remove the excess stone so *David* could escape. He didn't see what was. He saw what could be, what already lay within his heart. He didn't see the imperfections in the stone. He saw a masterpiece of unparalleled beauty. And that is precisely how the Artist sees you.

*We are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.*⁴

Every work of art originates in the imagination of the artist. And so you originated in the imagination of God. Awesome thought, isn't it? You were conceived by God long before you were conceived by your parents. You took shape in the imagination of the Almighty before you took shape in your mother's womb. You are His "masterpiece," from the Greek word *poiema*. And it's where we get our English word *poem*. But it refers to any work of art.

You are His painting.

You are His novel.

You are His sculpture.

"Christ is more of an artist than the artists," observed Vincent Van Gogh. "He works in the living spirit and the living flesh; he makes men instead of statues." God is painting a picture of grace on the canvas of your life. God is writing His-story, history with a hyphen, through your life. God is crafting your character through the circumstances of your life. To see yourself as anything other than God's masterpiece is to devalue and distort your true identity. And it's in discovering your true identity that your true destiny is revealed.

A sense of destiny is your sacred birthright as a child of God. And it's anchored to the truth found in Ephesians 2:10, quoted above. The word "planned" is drawn from the Eastern custom of sending servants in advance of a king to prepare the road ahead. It was their responsibility to secure safe passage and make sure the king got to his destination. Paul took that ancient imagery and turned it upside down, or maybe I should say, right side up. The King of kings goes before His servants to prepare the road ahead.

In other words, He strategically positions us in the right place at the right time. God is setting you up. And that ought to fill you with an unshakable sense of destiny.

DUAL DESTINY

Michelangelo's masterpiece, *David*, is enshrined at the Galleria dell'Accademia in Florence, Italy. And thousands of tourists wait for hours every day to get a glimpse. But many of them fail to notice the series of unfinished sculptures that line the corridor on the way to David. Like petrified prisoners, their forms are identifiable—a hand here, a torso there, a protruding leg or part of a head. The statues were intended to adorn the tomb of Pope Julius II, but they are non finite. It's almost as if those sculptures are trying to break free and become what they were intended to be, but they are stuck in stone. Michelangelo called them captives.

Have you ever felt like a captive? You can't seem to break free from habitual sins that have held you back and held you down? A dream God conceived in your spirit years ago hasn't taken shape the way you wanted it to? You know who you want to be, what you want to do, and where you want to go, but you can't seem to get there. I have no idea where you're stuck or for how long you've been stuck. But I do know that God wants to finish what He started.

In His first sermon, Jesus stated His mission in no uncertain terms: to set the captives free.⁵ We tend to think of that statement in judicial terms. Salvation is our Get Out of Jail Free card. But it's

much more than that. Maybe we should think of that statement in artistic terms. Jesus didn't die just to get us off the hook. He also died to resurrect the person we were destined to be before sin distorted the image of God in us.

And He doesn't just set us free spiritually. He also sets us free emotionally and relationally and intellectually. We are held captive by so many things. We're held captive by our imperfections and insecurities. We're held captive by our guilt and anxiety. We're held captive by expectations and lies and mistakes. Jesus died to set us free from all of the above. He doesn't just set us free from who we were. He sets us free to become who we were meant to be. Salvation is not the end goal. Salvation is a new beginning. When we give our lives to Christ, God goes to work. He begins using our circumstances, no matter what circumstances those may be, to chisel us into His image.

When it comes to the will of God, we tend to focus on *what* and *where*. But *what you are doing* or *where you are going* are secondary issues. God's primary concern is *who you're becoming*. It has nothing to do with circumstances. It has everything to do with the character of Christ being formed within you until you look and act and feel and talk and dream and love just like Jesus. The end goal is not a revelation of who *you* are. The end goal is a revelation of who God is. After all, you won't find yourself until you find God. The only way to discover *who you are* is to discover *who God is*, because you're made in His image.

You have a dual destiny. One destiny is universal: to be conformed to the image of Christ. To follow Christ is to become like

Him. That is our chief objective in life: to be just like Jesus. But our other destiny is unique to each of us: to be unlike anyone who has ever lived. Those two destinies may seem to be at odds with each other, but they are anything but. To become like Christ is to become unlike anyone else. He sets us free from who we're not, so we can become who we were destined to be.

INCALCULABLY UNIQUE

As you may recall from a high school biology class, you have forty-six chromosomes. Twenty-three are from your father, and twenty-three are from your mother. And it's that unique combination of chromosomes that determines everything from the color of your eyes to the number of hairs on your head. Your identity is human heredity. But it is also God heredity. The image of God is your heredity and your destiny.

The mathematical probability that you would get the exact twenty-three chromosomes you got from your mother is .5 to the twenty-third power. That's 1 in 10 million. But the same is true for the twenty-three chromosomes you got from your father. So if you multiply those two together, the probability that you would be you is 1 in 100 trillion. But you also have to factor in that your parents' chromosomal history had the same probability, and their parents, and their parents' parents. My point? You are incalculably unique.

All of us start out as one-of-a-kind originals, but too many of us end up as carbon copies of someone else. Instead of celebrating

our uniqueness, and the uniqueness of others, we're too often threatened by it. We forfeit our uniqueness because we want to fit in. Instead of daring to be different, we sacrifice our soulprints on the altar of conformity.

In one of his best-known essays, "Self-Reliance," Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, "There is a time in every man's education that he arrives at the conviction that imitation is suicide. He must take himself for better or for worse." I think that is precisely what David did as he prepared to duel Goliath:

Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head. David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he was not used to them.⁶

Arming a warrior for battle was a major ritual in David's day. Armor was an extension of the warrior's character. David could have gone into battle dressed like a king. But David said, "I cannot go in these, because I am not used to them."⁷ So he took them off.

What if David had gone out to meet Goliath on Goliath's terms—fully armored, fully armed? I think David would have lost because David wasn't a swordsman. In fact, he probably had never touched a sword in his life.⁸ For better or for worse, David was a shepherd. The sword would have posed a greater threat to David, via self-inflicted wounds, than it did to Goliath. But David was deadly with a slingshot.

David came to a crossroads. He had a choice to make. And it

was a choice that would determine his destiny. He could go into battle as Saul—wear Saul’s armor, wield Saul’s sword, hold Saul’s shield. Or he could go into battle as himself—a shepherd with a slingshot. David decided not to don Saul’s armor or brandish Saul’s sword for one very good reason: he wasn’t Saul. David decided to be David. And we’re faced with the same decision. There comes a point in all of our lives where we need the courage to take off Saul’s armor. And it’s the rarest form of courage. It’s the courage to be yourself.

THE GREATEST REGRET

On a recent vacation that took my family through the Black Hills of South Dakota, our first stop was the Crazy Horse Memorial. In 1948, Korczak Ziolkowski, was commissioned by Lakota chief Henry Standing Bear to design a mountain carving that would honor the famous war leader. The great irony, if you know your history, is that Crazy Horse never allowed himself to be photographed. I wonder what he would have thought about his 563-foot-high statue on the granite face of the Black Hills. Ziolkowski invested more than thirty years of his life carving the statue that is intended to be eight feet higher than the Washington Monument and nine times larger than the faces on Mount Rushmore. Following his death in 1982, Ziolkowski’s family has carried on the vision their father started. Their projected completion date is 2050.

That vision, carving what will be the largest sculpture in the world, begs this question: why spend a lifetime carving one

larger-than-life statue? In the words of Ziółkowski, “When your life is over, the world will ask you only one question: Did you do what you were supposed to do?”

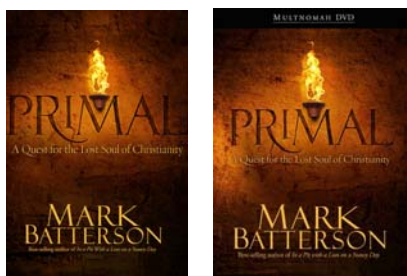
Why do composers write music? Why do athletes compete? Why do politicians run for office? Why do entrepreneurs start businesses? Why do doctors practice medicine? Why do teachers teach?

There are certainly lots of answers to those questions, but the right answer is this: they do it to give expression to something that is deep within their souls. That something is the soulprint. We find fulfillment in doing what we were originally designed and ultimately destined to do. The song or box score or legislation or company or surgery or curriculum is more than the work of our hands. It’s an expression of our souls. It’s a reflection of our soulprints.

The failure to give expression to our soulprints will result in our greatest regrets. What a person can become, he or she must become, or be miserable. It’s the only way to be true to ourselves and, more important, true to God. “The deepest form of despair,” warned Sören Kierkegaard, “is to choose to be another than oneself.”

At the end of the day, God isn’t going to ask, “Why weren’t you more like Billy Graham or Mother Teresa?” He won’t even ask, “Why weren’t you more like David?” God is going to ask, “Why weren’t you more like you?”

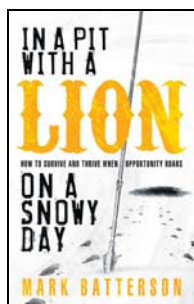
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