

MAGIC IN THE MUG

DISCOVER A LIFE OF PURPOSE IN A SINGLE CUP OF COFFEE

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CHAPTER ONE

SO, YOU BOUGHT A COFFEE FARM

**“IF I HAD AN HOUR TO CHOP DOWN A TREE, I WOULD
SPEND THE FIRST FORTY-FIVE MINUTES SHARPENING
THE AXE.”**

—ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Ok, so you probably didn't actually buy a coffee farm. If you did in fact buy the farm and subsequently bought this book to learn how to turn that farm from a vast expanse of undeveloped nothingness into a densely populated grove of trees that produce the gloriously caffeinated nectar on which so many have come to depend daily, then I apologize. This is not such a book. However, if you hang in there with me you may learn a few things about yourself, your life, and your purpose anyway. The first of these things is that research is a necessary first step in any new business venture. I mean seriously, who buys a coffee farm before doing a little research? What if I told you that a single cup of coffee could point you toward your dreams and your purpose? Maybe this premise sounds a bit far-fetched but stick with me. You don't need to buy a whole coffee farm; there's magic in the mug.

The magic in the mug comes from its journey. From start to finish, coffee goes through transformations and changes that make the final product extremely different from its origin. The coffee journey covers thousands of miles, countless hours, and intense processes. And it all starts with a plot of land that its owners hope will become a lush and active farm someday. I imagine staring at that plot of land and being completely overwhelmed. I imagine there are quite a few things on that untamed and unprepared plot of land that could stand in the way of the farmer's goals. There would likely be vines, rocks, hard soil, animals, and even stringent governmental regulations that could potentially stop any new crop from growing.

When it comes to coffee everything matters and you have to get it all just right. The location of the farm is just as critical as how you tend it. Coffee only grows in very specific conditions, conditions which are only found within the climates of the earth's equatorial zone. That zone is located between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn and is why there are so few coffee farms in the United States. The only US states or territories located in this zone are Hawaii and Puerto Rico. One of the critical conditions found in this zone is altitude. Coffee typically only grows above 1500

feet. To grow the really good stuff, your farm probably needs to sit above 3,000 feet. Hawaii is a bit of an exception because of its nutrient rich volcanic soil. So, if you have a volcano, bonus points to you. High altitude matters because these climates have ample moisture in the air. While that makes it sound possible to grow coffee in Colorado, it isn't. Beside the fact that my skin has never been less hydrated than when I lived in Denver, it's also way too cold. Coffee thrives in temperate environments making the right combination of temperature and altitude critical. There are plenty of places around the world that have one, but not the other.

In addition to temperature and altitude, coffee thrives in regions that have distinct wet and dry seasons. The wet seasons are ideal for planting and growing while the dry seasons provide the perfect opportunity to harvest and prepare the beans for the long journey ahead. Trying to find the right balance of these factors while also adding the right balance of sunlight, the appropriate amount of water, perfect drainage, and a superb soil containing exactly the nutrients needed, makes growing coffee as easy as trying to get an eight-year-old to eat their dinner. If you are unfamiliar with this concept trust me when I say it's difficult. Their "needs" are a moving target. Their favorite food last week is offensive today. In coffee cultivation and juvenile nutrition, conditions must be perfect and even still, there are no guarantees.

All of these obstacles must be addressed and removed before the real work can begin. Before our hypothetical farmer friend can begin the work of planting, harvesting, or processing, they must start by preparing the land. Once any hindrances have been removed (and proper government forms filed, of course) they must then cultivate an environment that encourages and supports growth. This practice is not a one-time thing. Fields must constantly be refined, cultivated, and renewed in order to continue to produce fruit. New weeds will sprout and new wildlife will move in threatening to choke out or consume the new growth. But the committed farmer is always willing to put in the hard work necessary to

keep his fields in a position to support new growth and sustained life.

Living our purpose and chasing our dreams is a lot like this. Before we can begin chasing these things, we must prepare our hearts, our minds, and our lives. We must prepare our hearts for the inevitable ups and downs that happen along the way. We must prepare our minds so that we can have the focus and tenacity to stick with it when it gets hard. And we must prepare our lives so that we have the space in our schedules and on our calendars to dream big dreams and pursue our goals. This part must include the people close to us. Living your purpose and chasing your dreams without the support of your spouse, family, and close friends is like trying to grow coffee in Detroit. One of the necessary conditions for our growth is community. We aren't designed to, and we shouldn't, do this alone.

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So, the conditions are right, you've prepared, and you have support. There is something else we need to address: Distractions. The fact is, there are a lot of good or even great things that you can do that are outside of the purpose for which you were created. These things, while fun and exciting, become nothing more than distractions if they keep you from pursuing your purpose. They can act as weeds and rocks in your path to cut off, choke out, or even completely kill your dreams. Don't get stuck living a distracted life. Be relentless in pursuing your purpose, in chasing your dreams, and running your race. This type of preparation can be extremely difficult. A farmer must remove even good plants if he wants to dedicate

the ground to coffee alone and there will be some good, or even great, things that have to be removed from your life if you want to make room to say yes to and pursue the best things.

I've had to do this a couple of times in my own life. Recently, I found myself in this position again. Throughout my career, I have always lived in this tension regarding my relationship with music. I love music. I love listening to it, I love creating it, I love leading worship, and even performing cover gigs. Songs have been known to make me cry because music seems to be my heart's primary language. Want me to remember something? Write a song about it. For a long time, one of my life's goals was to become a professional musician and I wanted it badly. I wanted to be on the big stage with the fog and the lights. I wanted to hear people cheering me on and singing my songs back to me. I wanted to tour the country on a smelly bus exploring new cities during the day and putting on great shows at night. This desire was so intense that I began to believe that any other path would mean that my life was nothing more than missed opportunities and unrealized potential. AKA, a complete and total failure.

I went all in. I started a band, wrote some songs, hit some open mic nights, and eventually booked a few gigs. Things were going really well when the first roadblock happened. Because of some relational drama and a couple of alcohol-charged arguments between two of my bandmates, the band broke up. I was a solo act again. Even still, I stayed the course. I stuck to my dream. I played solo gigs hoping to meet some other musicians with similar dreams to rebuild this thing and pursue that smelly tour bus. One night, I got what I thought was going to be my big break. A band that was recently signed to a major label was coming to town. They were touring in support of their debut album and needed an opening act. I got the call and jumped at the opportunity. In my mind, the story wrote itself. They would hear my music, we'd all become the best of friends, they'd invite me to open for them on the rest of the tour, my career would take off, and I would have my tour bus. That is not how the evening went. About

15 minutes before I was supposed to go on, my throat began to feel a little scratchy. By the time I took the stage, I was completely hoarse and could barely get the words out as I attempted to sing my songs. I fought my way through the 20-minute set while new waves of disappointment washed over me with every note I played. As I left the stage that night, three things happened. First, I felt my dreams being crushed once again. Second, my voice returned almost immediately. The third thing that happened was the headliners took the stage and put on an absolutely amazing show and no one in that room gave me another thought.

My relationship with music would continue in this way for years. I would get an opportunity that looked like it was going to be my big break only to have a door slammed in my face. Eventually, I came to terms with the realization that I wasn't created to be a professional musician. Even so, music remained a big part of my life for a long time. I got involved in the worship teams at my church and while I got a few opportunities to lead worship, I was most often playing guitar or drums. That finally changed at the church in which I currently serve. While it wasn't part of my job description, I was able to regularly lead worship on the weekends, in the youth ministry, and other events here and there. It honestly felt like a dream come true. To go from being rejected for years to finally feeling accepted and even sought after was, honestly, amazing.

Over the last few years, my role has shifted as I have grown. Growth always brings new responsibilities and increased demands on our time. As these shifts continued to happen in my career, I noticed that worship was beginning to become more of a distraction and a burden than a blessing. I still loved leading and playing music, but I couldn't help but think of all of the other places I should be or all of the other things that needed my attention. The things that were my responsibilities were regularly slipping through the cracks and I wasn't leading my team well. Finally, I received another promotion at my church and moved from overseeing our youth ministry team to overseeing both the youth and kids ministry teams. This

has been such a blessing and I love what I get to do to impact the lives of the next generation. This change obviously came with new responsibilities and new opportunities. Translation: there was a larger demand for my time and it was becoming harder and harder to deliver my best.

I had to make a change. I tried backing down the number of weeks I was available to serve with the worship team. Eventually, I had stepped back to the point of being the “in case of emergencies” guy. Even then, it wasn’t long before I knew I had to be done. I had to step away completely. In one of the hardest decisions I have ever made, I sold most of my guitars and music gear. Music would always be a part of my life, but “musician” would not.

Leading worship wasn’t just a good thing that I did, it was a great thing that I loved. It got me excited, helped me experience God in major ways, and connected me with people as well. The decision to remove this part of my life wasn’t one I took lightly. It was hard and it hurt a lot. But that decision has created so much more space for me to pursue the things that I have been uniquely created and purposed to do. I didn’t realize it at first but playing music had become those weeds and rocks in the field of my life. God was trying to grow something new, but He couldn’t until they were out of the way.

As I recall my own story, I think of a guy named Peter. Peter was a fisherman who had an encounter with Jesus that changed his life forever. In Luke chapter 5, Jesus is standing by a lake. A crowd of people is coming to hear him preach and they’re pressing in on him. There are no microphones or stadium seats by this lake, so everyone is trying to get close enough to Jesus to hear what the teacher would say. That’s when Jesus and Peter connect. Jesus asks Peter if He can use his boat as a temporary stage. Peter obliges and they push out into the lake a little to create a natural amphitheater. Jesus teaches the people from the boat and, when He finishes, tells Peter to “put out into deep water and let

down the nets for a catch” (Lk. 5:4 NIV). Peter is tired and frustrated from a fruitless fishing expedition the previous night and doesn’t seem interested. Besides, he’s the expert here, maybe Jesus should stick to teaching. Peter says to Jesus, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets” (Lk. 5:5 NIV). Despite his exhaustion, he acquiesces to the request of Jesus and what happens next is truly amazing.

When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken... (Lk. 5:6-10 NIV)

I wish I knew more about Peter’s fishing career. I wish I knew if he was successful. Did people think of Peter as a great fisherman? Was business booming or was he struggling? I wish I knew if he felt like I did about music. Was fishing always his dream, or did he just inherit the family business? Was he constantly looking for his one big break? Did he have moments where it seemed like the business was going to take off, he was going to become a world-renowned fisherman, scale the business, (and the fish), and eventually franchise? I just don’t know. But here’s what I do know: the catch of fish they brought in that day was life-altering. Scholars have estimated this to be over 62,000 pounds of fish based on what is known about the style of the boats these fishermen used and their capacities. They go on to estimate the sale price of these fish to be between 700,000 and 1,000,000 denarii depending on the quality of the fish. For the four guys on the boats that day, the payout would have been between 12 and 36 years worth of their normal wages. If there was such a

thing as a big break in the fishing business, this was it. But what happens next is truly remarkable. Scripture tells us that “Jesus said to Simon, ‘Don’t be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.’ So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything, and followed him” (Lk. 5:11 NIV).

I’m grateful that in my own life, my decision was made for me. My voice tanked and so did my opportunity to make it big. I can’t help but wonder what would have happened if I had absolutely killed that night. What if all of my musical dreams were laid out right there in front of me and the headliners invited me to join them on tour? What if their label representative wanted to sign me on the spot? I know what would have happened: I would have jumped at the chance. I would have been on that bus faster than you can say “Grammy award winner Brandon Hair.” Hey, it could happen. As I envision this, I also wonder what would have happened if, in that moment, Jesus approached me as I was about to get on that bus and said, “Come and follow me.” That’s the choice Peter faced. He wasn’t at his lowest point feeling broken and hopeless. He was in a boat being crushed by the weight of his greatest success.

I can’t say for sure what I would have done, one foot on that tour bus. But Peter chose Jesus. Peter would leave the fishing business that day and would go on to become Jesus’ go-to guy, His right-hand man. Because Peter put down his nets, he got to experience closeness with Jesus, he got to witness miracles, he got to see lives change, and he got to be on the leading edge of this new movement that ushered in the redemption from sin, freedom from bondage, and peace with God. Because Peter gave up fishing for fish and went all in on fishing for people he got to step into his true purpose and become what Jesus described him as; “The rock on which [Jesus] will build [his] church” (Mt. 6:18 NIV). What a story, and what a life. Peter wasn’t perfect. He made mistakes, he failed, he messed up, and he stumbled back into old patterns and old routines numerous times. But he never stopped pursuing Jesus and who Jesus called him to be. What crops have you planted in your life that are actually weeds,

standing in the way of the true fruit you've been designed to produce?

In addition to letting go of my music dreams, I had to make one other career-shifting decision: The day I knew my Starbucks career was over. I had stepped away from ministry to pursue that career and things were going really well. I loved Starbucks. I loved leading the team and I loved serving the customers that walked into my store. I was at the height of my career and I was making substantially more money than I had ever made before. Things were working and I had no plans to make a change. That's when I heard Jesus ask me to lay down my nets and follow him. It was difficult and painful. Leaving that store for the last time was honestly heartbreaking. It felt like I was walking away from an incredible story that I was co-writing with incredible people. But deep down, I knew it wasn't the story I was created to write.

I wish I could say that I went back to the church and "They all lived happily ever after," but to be completely honest, the next few years in ministry were some of the hardest years of my life. We'll get to that a little later in the book but suffice it to say, I was back in the correct genre, but still not writing the correct story. As difficult as that season was, it all led me to where I was designed to go. This was only possible because I was willing to walk away from something good knowing there was something great. I knew that my best 'yes' was still out there and I was committed to tracking it down.

Pursuing a life of purpose is a process. You won't wake up one day and discover that you've arrived. This process has many phases and many stops along the way. Don't get discouraged, don't get distracted, and lean into the process, knowing that if you don't give up, a delicious cup of coffee awaits. Also, purpose. The coffee is a metaphor.

So, whether you did or didn't buy a coffee farm, know there is so much to learn from the process. Accept that our stories, much like coffee's, are way better than we give them credit for. As you are by now well aware,

this book isn't about coffee farming. It's about purpose, passion, Jesus, me, you, and how all of our stories tie together to make this beautiful picture we call humanity. This book is about the magic in the mug and how we can use that magic to help us discover the same magic within ourselves.

Let me ask again, what are you growing in your life that is in the way of what you could be cultivating? For me, it was music and coffee. For Peter, it was a fishing business. There are plenty of good things that can distract us if we're not careful. This sort of drift happens over time and often by accident. While it's not unheard of, we rarely drift into our purpose, usually, we drift away. Living our purpose takes intentionality. It takes planning and care. And it takes committing to be the person you were created to be. I am certain that if I stayed in the coffee business, I would have been successful by the world's standard. I am great at customer service, processes, and leading people. But God designed me for something different. So, like Peter, start this journey by clearing away the good; and maybe even the great, to pursue God's best for your life.