

Foreword by **Mark Batterson**

THIS ADVENTURE CALLED LIFE

—  —
**DISCOVERING YOUR
DIVINE DESIGN**
—  —

Dr. Kent Ingle

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT *THIS ADVENTURE CALLED LIFE . . .*

“This Adventure Called Life reminds us that change is possible for everyone. It’s too easy to accept that the status quo is the best it will ever be. That simply isn’t true. If you’ve had a nagging feeling about changing something in your life, this book will help you make the change *before* you have to rather than *because* you have to.”

—Jon Gordon

BEST-SELLING AUTHOR OF *THE ENERGY BUS* AND *THE SEED*

“Most of my career has been focused on helping leaders and organizations understand the power of change. In fact, my blog at philcooke.com is called *The Change Revolution* because change is happening so fast in today’s culture that most people are simply overwhelmed and remain stuck in the past. That’s why I’m thrilled with Dr. Kent Ingle’s new book. It’s an owner’s manual for how to navigate today’s changing and distracted world. Get your hands on this important book and start being a change agent in your family, your community, or your organization. Trust me—you’ll never look at the world in the same way again.”

—Phil Cooke

FILMMAKER, MEDIA CONSULTANT, AND AUTHOR OF
JOLT: GET THE JUMP ON A WORLD THAT’S CONSTANTLY CHANGING

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“You will either live your life by design or default, and this book will help you find the best and highest design for your life. Kent Ingle makes his message of hope accessible to anyone—no matter where they are their journey. This isn’t a book full of Christian vocabulary or insider jargon: it is real talk about real change in a way that makes it relevant to your life right now. This needs to be the next book you read.”

—Mark Sanborn

BEST-SELLING AUTHOR OF *THE FRED FACTOR*

“Kent Ingle lives what he writes about. That means you can trust what you read to come from real life experience. So many people have already been encouraged to make significant changes because of Kent Ingle’s passion and personal example. This book will help you, too.”

—Dr. George O. Wood

GENERAL SUPERINTENDENT OF THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD, USA

“Kent Ingle is a *leader’s* leader! As pastor, college dean, or university president, he has made a positive impact. For decades I have studied leaders. Some ‘leaders’ don’t lead, they just manage. Kent knows how to lead. In this practical book, Kent details proven steps necessary to be an effective leader. *This Adventure Called Life* is a must read for those who want to sharpen their leadership skills and for those who want to be leaders.”

—Dr. Don Argue

FORMER PRESIDENT AND CURRENT
CHANCELLOR OF NORTHWEST UNIVERSITY

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“This adventure called life isn’t fully lived until you discover your Divine design. Kent Ingle has personally shaped my life by helping me take hold of my calling, grasp my true identity, and find my divine design. His life, his leadership, and the many lives he has impacted are evidence to the wisdom found in this book. No matter your age or occupation, you need this book.”

—Taylor Wilkerson

SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY ALUMNUS,
STUDENT AT PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

“It’s one thing to know God has a unique purpose for our lives. It’s another thing to discover this purpose and actually live it out. Dr. Kent Ingle knows how to guide you in this process unlike anyone else. Through Dr. Ingle’s leadership, our church has been honored to partner with Southeastern University in developing the next-generation of servant leaders who are living out their God-given purpose. Students and individuals from all stages of life in our church have benefited from Dr. Ingle’s leadership, and I know you will too. Make this the next book you read.”

—Stovall Weems

LEAD PASTOR, CELEBRATION CHURCH

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THIS ADVENTURE CALLED LIFE

DISCOVERING YOUR DIVINE DESIGN

Kent Ingle



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Published by Influence Resources
1445 North Boonville Avenue
Springfield, Missouri 65802

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Collaboration and Developmental Editing: Ben Stroup
(www.benstroup.com)—Greenbrier, TN

Cover design by James Gerhold

Interior design by Prodigy Pixel (www.prodigypixel.com)

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ISBN: 978-1-93830-913-7
Printed in the United States of America
16 15 14 13 • 1 2 3 4 5

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**To my grandmother, Zeda Sunderwirth.
You forever etched in my mind, heart, and soul
the declaration of Ephesians 2:10—“You are God’s masterpiece.”
You taught me to cooperate with the Divine Artist,
accept the unique process of design,
and always appreciate the Master’s work.**

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FOREWORD

One of the most empowering things we can know about ourselves is that we have purpose, meaning, and significance. To live life without knowing these things, robs us of the joy we are promised. Personal change and transformation are not always easy, fun, or predictable. But we have no other choice but to say yes.

No one understands this better than Dr. Kent Ingle. I can say with confidence that I wish Dr. Ingle had been my president when I was in college. His dedication to students and to be a student of life is inspirational and encouraging.

I know how much time he spends one-on-one mentoring the students who attend Southeastern University. The decision to use his time in this way is costly, but I suspect Dr. Ingle knows whatever he has to give up is worth it. To know you have changed a life forever is the clearest picture of redemption we'll see this side of heaven.

The college years are important. It's a time of great transition where we move from being completely dependent upon our parents to being independent and productive people. The rapid change comes so fast it can be overwhelming. If only I had had a book like this to help make sense of all that I was feeling and experiencing. It wouldn't have made it any easier to endure, but I would have been aware of what was going on around me and in me.

Each person has within a divinely gifted destiny. It is our responsibility to cultivate our skills, assets, and gifts to be

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activated in God's kingdom in a special and unique way. You are the only you there ever has been or ever will be.

This is your moment. If you can find the courage to say yes to the adventure when the invitation comes, you'll discover a life of abundance and blessing. And armed with the knowledge presented as a process in this book, you'll have all you need to step through each phase of the adventure of your life to discover your divine design.

—Mark Batterson

LEAD PASTOR, NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH, WASHINGTON DC
AUTHOR OF *THE CIRCLE MAKER* AND *SOULPRINT*

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INTRODUCTION

Life is a series of decisions. It doesn't simply happen by chance. The details are more clear and specific than random. Life—in short—is a composition of the decisions we make not just today but over a long period of time.

Each person has a unique and specific role in the world. We aren't cosmic robots engineered to execute on command. At times, the tough decisions we face make us wish someone would just take over and decide for us, but a life controlled by someone or something else isn't a life anyone wants to live. We possess the power to create the lives we desire and to define the legacy we leave behind.

Some people live like victims of time commitments and obligations. The phone rings, they answer. The computer chimes, they stop to respond. The next item on their to-do list presses intensely . . . so they work an extra hour.

The Call to Adventure

If life is a series of decisions, then it's also a series of interruptions. Sometimes those interruptions are unexpected human encounters. Sometimes they're unanticipated notices from the electronic devices we carry. But sometimes those interruptions are much more.

Not all interruptions are bad, and not all are intrusive. In fact, some of the most important interruptions we experience in life are so subtle we'll miss them completely if we're not paying attention.

Sometimes interruptions are exactly what we need. They're a call to adventure—an opportunity to experience life in abundance and with greater awareness. It may take us years to realize it, but adventure is the element of life many of us are missing. We desperately want it, but we fear it at the same time.

The Nudge

Adventure comes to us in many forms. It may be a conversation with a casual acquaintance or a close friend. It may be a set of circumstances that point to a moment of decision—whether big or small. It may be the dots that suddenly connect and become a clear indication of what will come next.

Adventure isn't always pleasant. Olympic athletes are filled with pride knowing they will compete for their country on the world's stage, but they also know the training and commitment it takes to get there will be intense, unforgiving, and relentless.

Adventure isn't always predictable. I'm not sure who introduced the strange idea that life could somehow be contained within a formula. Life is much more complex than checking anyone's set of boxes—including our own. There's nothing predictable about life other than what we do with what is right in front of us.

Adventure isn't free of pain and suffering. No writer is free from the effort it takes to put words on a page. No executive is free from hard work and perseverance to strategically lead an organization. No athlete is free from disciplined training and practice. It's in wrestling through the pain and suffering that we uncover the richness hidden within the adventure we've been called to.

The Decision to Accept

We have no one to blame but ourselves. The lives we lead are a direct result of the choices we make. When we receive a call to adventure, it's up to each of us to decide whether to accept or pass on that window of opportunity.

That's not to say we'll receive some sort of cosmic judgment if we fail to take the adventure before us at the moment. There will be another call to adventure . . . because life is full of them. There's no need to stress about getting it right. No one gets it right 100 percent of the time. That would require access to the bigger picture of life, which is clearly beyond our capacity to see or to understand right now.

All we know is what has been and what is now. All we can be sure of is greater things will come. All we can count on is a call to adventure . . . not just once but many times. The decision to accept each call will be made in direct relationship to our awareness of the opportunity at hand.

Destined for Greatness

You were destined for greatness. That doesn't necessarily mean you'll have significant power over masses of people or that you'll have riches untold. That may be the case, no one can be sure, but the greatness I'm talking about is more valuable than power, position, or prestige. Greatness—at least for me—is about living a life of significance and meaning.

You only discover your greatness when you accept the call to adventure. In doing so, new things will happen for you. You'll need to let go of what may be comfortable in preparation for the journey. You'll need to consider new options as you explore new

territory. You'll need to take steps forward in faith as you live your divine design.

You are not a formula. You are not pre-fabricated. You are not limited by the expectations your present circumstances or other people place upon you. You are free to become all God created you to be.

There's no catch. There's no secret. But you must be willing to see and experience life in new ways. You must be curious about what you know and what you have yet to learn. There must be restlessness within your soul that points to something new.

Our Responsibility

One of the most significant acts we can do in any given moment is to say yes to the call of adventure. To say yes to discovering our divine design. To say yes to a life of clarity, confidence, and conviction.

If you don't get in the habit of saying yes, you'll miss the adventure that will make you into the person of your dreams. No great accomplishment comes without a great price. And for many people the greatest price that comes from saying yes to adventure is the act of leaving where they are today.

The older you get, the more complicated this becomes. Yet the stakes are not any lower for those who accept the call to adventure at a young age. I'm not necessarily talking about the need to sell everything and move into a cave to meditate for the rest of your life. What I'm talking about will undoubtedly result in life change, but it may be an inner change.

No one can live your life for you: not your parents, your boss, your spouse, or your children. To expect (or allow) them to do so negates your divine design—the things inside you that point to the significance and meaning of your life.

Clarity, Confidence, and Conviction

No one wants to wake up one day and realize they missed every call to adventure that came their way. That would be a nightmare. Instead, we want to look back on our lives and see the twists and turns, the chaos and disruptions, the uncertainty and victory as a beautiful symphony of adventure that leaves us with a sense of awe, wonder, and excitement.

So how can you be sure you don't get it wrong? This question comes up a lot. People say they're open to the call to adventure, yet they fear getting it all wrong—making mistakes and a mess out of their lives. It's as if they're convinced there's only one opportunity, one decision, and one moment that will define their entire lives.

Such thinking is flawed. Life is full of decisions. Yes, that's plural. Accepting the call to adventure doesn't happen once . . . but many times over. The sum total of any life experience can't be bound in a single moment, decision, or opportunity. Getting it right, or wrong, is not based on one decision but a series of decisions.

This is good news. Discovering your divine design isn't about getting it right as much as it is about saying yes to as many adventures as possible. Clarity, confidence, and conviction only come when we courageously accept the call to adventure. It's a paradox, I know. But you'll never find clarity, confidence, and conviction unless your life is in motion. And—as you know—life is always in motion. The question is, what direction is yours moving?

Directional Living

No one has all the right answers in the classroom of life. What's more valuable than having the right answers is learning to ask

the right questions. It means we're sufficiently aware of our lives to pay attention to the call to adventure when it comes our way.

If you're honest with yourself, you'll admit that you want more than you have and are right now. There are things you wish to change, hope will work out, or dream will come true. We're all like that.

Are you brave enough to follow the direction your adventure might take you? You won't have all the answers. You won't know what will happen next, and you'll have to come to grips with the fact that it might all fall apart before everything is said and done. Nevertheless, the possibility of discovering your divine design is worth the risk, wouldn't you agree?

Directional living isn't about having the answers; it's about understanding how to make decisions. It's about having an inner blueprint that will guide you through your adventure.

Children and Play Dough

I remember playing with Play Dough as a child. This blob of moldable "dough" comes in a variety of colors. Children take the dough out of the canister and create any number of things, limited only by their imaginations and willingness to get their hands messy.

Sometimes the creation doesn't even come close to resembling what the child describes it to be. Yet that doesn't discourage the child. In fact, it makes him even more persuasive as he tries to help us "see" what he "sees" in the blob of dough. And we smile, because we can't help ourselves. There's something deep within that makes us realize the child is right—yes, that is a terrific gold fish!

In a similar way, life comes to us as a blob of dough, and it's our responsibility to make something out of it. As we get

our hands “messy” and make a thousand different decisions, we begin to see what others can’t see . . . just yet. Over time, we gain a sense of the divine design built within our lives. We realize we have something special the world has yet to recognize. By continuing to experiment, play, and create, we become even more convinced that purpose, meaning, and significance are ours for the taking.

Children don’t worry that they can’t read the instructions on the Play Dough canister. They don’t know to ask for input about what they should create. They aren’t afraid they won’t produce what they see in their minds and feel in their hearts. They simply create . . . and in creating, they discover that the process is greater than the outcome. Perhaps we should take our cue from them on this one.

At some point in life our brains switch from functioning with the carefree, creative attitude of children to that of careful, critical adults. We stress because we can’t find the “directions,” and without them, we might get it wrong. We ask for everyone’s input because we desire clarity. As a result, we become a combination of other people’s expectations—not the uniquely gifted individuals we are created to be. We let fear keep us from accepting the call to adventure. We become good at saying no instead of yes.

Love the Process

When we’re young, it’s fairly simple to find meaning in life and to understand our role in the world. Then as we mature we become obsessed with understanding how the pieces of life fit together. In a desperate search for meaning, we stifle the spirit of adventure. Yet there’s still some of that first creative instinct within us: we

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desire meaning more than answers; we desire adventure more than certainty; we desire significance more than precision.

If you're going to live out your divine design and journey through life with clarity, confidence, and conviction, you must learn to love the *process* of life. At its core, life is a process, not a linear connection between two dots. It's a call to adventure and an invitation to explore the world with eyes wide open.

The choice is up to you. Will you stay where you are and accept the discomfort and rumbling within your ordinary life? Or are you ready to step into this great adventure called life and discover God's divine design for directional living? I never imagined my life adventure would take me from being a television sports anchor to a university president. This adventure of discovery will take you beyond your wildest dreams.

I invite you to join me on this journey. I don't have all the answers, but I have outlined a process that will help you discover the divine design for your life no matter where you are on your journey. Great things are ahead for you—greater things than you have ever imagined.

All you have to say is yes.

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STEP ONE **CATALYST**

**An adventure is only an inconvenience rightly considered.
An inconvenience is only an adventure wrongly considered.**

G. K. CHESTERTON

Life happens. Whether we think it happens too quickly or not quickly enough usually depends on our place in the timeline of life. When we're young, life moves too slowly; when we're not so young life moves too quickly. Through it all we laugh, we cry, we celebrate, and we wrestle defeat.

That's life. It's not pretty. It's not clean. It's not neat. But it's the life we are born into and the lifestyles we create by the choices we make. It's the daily humdrum of ordinary life. Yet we experience moments when life has a different feeling. It's hard to describe, but we know it when we stumble into these intersections of time and eternity. We may not grasp the significance of the moment, but that doesn't make it any less important.

It can come through an opportunity we weren't anticipating, a conversation we didn't plan to have, or a decision we didn't know we'd have to make. Whatever it is, and however it comes, something deep within us responds.

We can't quite explain it—the experience may only last for a moment—still we recognize that it has opened a window of invitation, and we have a choice to make: will we accept the risk involved in the adventure or will we retreat to what is familiar and comfortable?

There's a big difference between opportunities we try to create and those that God creates for us. In my life, every major step I've taken has come as a result of divine opportunity rather than something I pursued or attempted to orchestrate.

For example, I was pastoring a church in Chicago, Illinois, when I was first approached with the idea of moving into higher education—a path I had never thought about up to that point. Things were going extremely well at the church I was leading. When I had arrived at the church, it was in desperate need of a turnaround. After years of hard work and determination, things had finally begun to change and the church was growing. We

were in a good place. I had no reason to look for another ministry opportunity when I received an unexpected phone call.

**There's a big
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When I picked up the phone, the person on the other end explained my name had been given to him as a possible candidate for the role of dean of the college of ministry at Northwest University

in Washington. The one who had recommended me was on the search committee. He also happened to be part of my doctoral committee and had overseen the completion of that program.

This individual told the committee he knew the person with the gifts, skills, passions, and interests to do what needed to be done at Northwest. The university wanted to turn around their

college of ministry. Everything I had done up to that point in my own ministry had been about turning difficult situations into opportunities for growth and expansion, so there was an element of this opportunity that was familiar to me.

As I considered this move, I realized just how much it fit my divine design. Higher education wasn't on my radar screen, yet it seemed like a natural next step. After much consideration and prayer, my wife and I decided to accept the opportunity. We left Chicago and moved northwest to take on this new leadership assignment.

UNRECOGNIZED OPPORTUNITY

These peculiar moments happen to everyone, but not everyone recognizes them for what they are. Many simply see them as passing fragments of a puzzle. Rather than see an opportunity embedded in a possibility, they redirect their attention to the tasks and obligations at hand.

There are several reasons why many choose to just walk away from life's invitations to adventure:

Some people see the world as small instead of large and full of unlimited opportunities. This is especially true for people who have never been challenged to reach for something that includes the risk of failure. It may be safe to avoid challenges, but it also robs us of the chance to discover our divine destiny.

Some people are influenced by their environment. When our hearts want to reach for the impossible, we're told by a parent, a boss, or a spouse that they know what's best for us. We're not encouraged to break from the norm to discover clarity, confidence, and conviction because the other person in the equation believes our pursuit is a direct threat to their sense of security.

Some people are held captive to other peoples' expectations. I've been a sports broadcaster, a pastor, a college dean, and now a university president. At every turn, I had to let go of the vision

I had to let go of the vision other people had for my life in order to embrace the opportunity before me.

other people had for my life in order to embrace the opportunity before me. Had I not, I would never have experienced the fullness that life has brought me through these moments of transition.

When we fail to pay attention to the interruptions in life—to see them as windows of opportunity—we leave part of our destiny on the table, but not forever. I'm not trying to give you a guilt trip. But choosing to pass on the invitation now just means you'll have to wait for the next invitation to say yes. In the meantime, you'll live in the midst of unrecognized opportunity.

LIFE IS ALWAYS ABOUT BECOMING

The first two years of our lives on earth are nothing short of a miracle. The transitions we're able to endure are unbelievable. In just twenty-four months, we learn how to roll over, crawl, walk, run, talk, eat table food, etc. Attempting to do this at any other time in life would stress us to the point of a mental breakdown.

Although we may never experience quite the same intensity of change as we mature in life, we're always becoming something new. Even ordinary moments (when life seems boring, predictable, and void of adventure) prepare us for future opportunities to grow, learn, and develop.

Becoming is a natural result of being made in the image of the divine. We are created beings with the power to create. That

doesn't mean we have the keys to the source of physical life. It means we possess the power to say yes, to become more mature in the ways we have been uniquely designed and gifted.

As we live our divine destinies, catalysts provide the opportunity to embrace God's intention for our life, work, and purpose. We don't have the capacity to do this on our own—as if that were even possible. What we do have is the power to recognize the catalyst and to say yes or no to the opportunity for change and growth introduced by the catalyst.

A CATALYST PREPARES US FOR WHAT IS NEXT

Webster's Dictionary defines a catalyst as “an agent that provokes or speeds significant change or action.”

The purpose of a catalyst is to interrupt the normal flow of life long enough to allow us to observe ourselves and our beliefs. It provides the opportunity to take inventory of the motivations, passions, and desires that drive us. Never underestimate the power of taking this type of personal inventory, because what we believe influences our decisions, our decisions influence our actions, and our actions shape the extent to which we experience abundant life.

Catalysts mark the beginning of a process. Life may seem like a series of unrelated events, decisions, and circumstances, but nothing could be further from the truth. Life is a series of interconnected webs that find strength from being layered together.

Life is a process. When most people think about processes, they think about a definite beginning, middle, and end—but life isn't linear. It was relatively late in human history that linear thinking developed. Up to that point, people viewed life-events and processes as connected and interdependent. And they were right! The process of life looks more like a circle than a line.

Catalysts awaken us to the higher calling and divine destiny that rests within our lives. You may not think of yourself as a divine gift to the world, but you are. God has placed something special within you. Catalysts provide a jump-start to uncover what that special something is and to determine how you can share it with others.

CATALYSTS CALL US TO LOOK WITHIN

The world we live in is consumed with the thoughts, perceptions, and demands of others. We have social media to monitor, emails to answer, and expectations from bosses, professors, spouses, children, and parents to manage. If we're not careful, we can easily lose sight of who we are on the inside.

You may not think of yourself as a divine gift to the world, but you are.

When we recognize that we aren't fully who we've been created to be just yet, we begin to wonder and question what's missing and what's coming. Those disquieting feelings are exactly what you should expect. They are emotional responses to the discomfort coming from deep within. This discomfort is necessary to push us through the process of change. Otherwise, we would retreat to what is known, comfortable, and obvious.

A catalyst is just the first step in discovering the divine design of your life adventure. It is the place we all begin—again and again and again. The question is, will you choose to see each catalyst for what it is or will you dismiss it because hunches and intuition don't seem relevant to your situation and lifestyle?

REJECTION AND REGRET

If a catalyst comes with an invitation to step out and make changes, do you have the ability to say yes or no? Yes, you absolutely do. The choice is yours to make.

Some people carry a tremendous load of guilt and regret because they have passed on some important opportunities. Someone told them that if they got it wrong, there would be no chance to recover. But that's impossible.

If life is a process, then it must be supported by a system. If life is supported by a system, then it must be ongoing. If life is ongoing, then we'll have not one but an endless number of catalysts moving through our lives and endless opportunities to say yes or no.

We reject possibilities when we fear losing what is familiar and known and "safe."

Just because you reject one opportunity for change, your life is not doomed. Rejection doesn't spell doom, it spells fear. We reject possibilities when we fear losing what is familiar and known and "safe."

The only way to step into clarity, confidence, and conviction is to overlook the temptation to pass on the potential of cataclysmic moments and say yes. Leave behind the fear that is holding you back and reach toward the next step.

In letting go, you will find strength.

In going, you will find endurance.

In doing, you will fulfill your divine destiny.

THE COURAGE TO MOVE FORWARD

Not everyone will walk away from the invitation. Some will say yes. They will find the courage to move forward, and they will move in the direction the process will take them.

If you're wondering what happens throughout this process, you'll discover that as you read this book. As you will find, if you're hoping to fast-forward through the process, you'll discover that the only button on life's remote is "play."

Courage is a characteristic of brave individuals who decide to move forward in pursuit of their dreams, goals, and passions. We celebrate people who act in the strength of their courage because we secretly want to believe that we would do the same thing. The truth is you can do the same thing because you have even more courage than you believe.

You can say yes just as easily as you can say no. As those catalysts come into your life, I want to encourage you to accept the invitation to begin the journey. Be forewarned though, your life will never be the same. It will be a process of self-discovery. You'll complete the process with insight about yourself and others that will shape you and propel you into a life of abundance, satisfaction, and fulfillment—which, I suspect, was the Creator's plan all along.

CHAPTER ONE IN REVIEW

Key Ideas

- Circumstances and experiences create opportunities for us to reflect on life's purpose and meaning.
- Today's experiences are catalysts because they move us closer to embracing our unique design.
- If we aren't looking for direction in our lives, we can easily miss it.