

# CONTENTS

*Introduction* . . . . . ix

## **Part 1: Getting Ready to Dream Big**

1. Don't Go Alone . . . . . 3  
2. Thermometer . . . . . 7  
3. Get Under the Ice Cap . . . . . 13  
4. Who Are You? . . . . . 21  
5. Where Are You? . . . . . 27  
6. What Do You Want? . . . . . 31  
7. Chase the Jeep . . . . . 37  
8. Getting to the "New" Part . . . . . 45  
9. Sleepwalking . . . . . 51  
10. One Hundred Calls a Day . . . . . 59  
11. Sea Otters . . . . . 65  
12. Finale . . . . . 73  
13. Comparison Is a Punk . . . . . 83

## **Part 2: Set Absurd Expectations**

14. Gather Your Leaves . . . . . 91  
15. Sizing Up . . . . . 99  
16. Get the Sticks Before the Drums . . . . . 109

## **Part 3: Explore Opportunities**

17. Keep the Moon in the Window . . . . . 117  
18. The Number for the White House Is (202) 456-1414 . . 123

## CONTENTS

### Part 4: Clear the Path

- 19. Hostage Negotiation . . . . . 131
- 20. Give It a Quarter Twist . . . . . 137
- 21. Be a Quitter . . . . . 143

### Part 5: Take Action

- 22. Living on the Edge of Yikes . . . . . 153
- 23. 10:34–10:35 . . . . . 159
- 24. One Thousand Words a Day . . . . . 167

### Part 6: Expect Setbacks

- 25. Pick the Vespa . . . . . 175
- 26. Three Epic Fails . . . . . 183

### Part 7: Sustain Belief and Land the Plane

- 27. Check Your Ropes . . . . . 191
- 28. Ground Effect . . . . . 197
- 29. Matters of the Heart . . . . . 205

*Epilogue* . . . . . 213

*The Dream Big Framework: Reflection Questions  
and Action Ideas* . . . . . 215

*Acknowledgments* . . . . . 233

*About the Author* . . . . . 235

*Connect with Bob* . . . . . 237

# INTRODUCTION

What will you do with your  
one extraordinary life?

I have been teaching as an adjunct professor at Pepperdine Law School for more than a decade. It's a place filled with bright, ambitious law students, many of whom have had a lot of life break in their direction. I also teach a class at San Quentin State Prison. My class there is filled with men who are felons, and their misdeeds have exacted a high price from them—namely, their freedom. I learn quite a bit from both sets of students, but the contrast between them cannot be overlooked. There is an authenticity that brokenness can refine in our lives if we'll let it. Ironically, the guys with the life sentences often seem to be living freer lives than the law students with all the opportunities. Their brokenness ultimately led them to a personal freedom, even behind bars.



## INTRODUCTION

Have you ever wondered why some people achieve so much with their lives and others don't? One person starts with no money, some terrible circumstances, and seems to be the happiest, most fulfilled and self-aware person you've ever met. Another person is born with a trust fund, good looks, and endless apparent opportunities, and yet they lead a sad, self-absorbed, meaningless life. What happened to allow some people to make the shift and others to miss the ramp? Some people seem to move from success to success, while others seem to be stuck in a loop of pain and sadness and distress. Some people also have a rich and vibrant faith that is taking them places, while others believe the same things just as much but seem stuck struggling with their beliefs and how to reconcile them with their lives.

In short, why is it some people live inspired lives and others can't? How come some people glide through life and others grind it out? Why is it that some people seem to be living three times more than a normal life, and others feel like they are only living half of one? These are all questions most of us ask ourselves at some point. Where do you think you fit on the spectrum? Don't shade it, fake it, or sweat the answer. Just get real about it. Here's why: we need to figure out where we are before we can plot a course forward.

The fact is no map will take us where God wants to lead us. We are all off-roading most of the time. Yet there are plenty of clues out there for living the big and meaningful life that Jesus talked to His friends about. Instead of telling them to look for a plan, He pointed them toward their much bigger purposes. In the pages that follow, let's figure out where your purposes are and then hatch a plan to get there.

I've written a few books, and some of the stories probably made you laugh, while others made you cry. I want this book to make you think. In the pages that follow, I hope you'll figure out where your purposes lie and then chart a course to get there.



When I was out of college and living alone, I had a closet in my house where I would throw the things that didn't have a specific place to go. Naturally, this closet quickly became a huge, disorganized, impenetrable pile of debris. Everything in there was evidently important enough to acquire at some point and even valuable enough to keep, yet none of these things remained accessible to me anymore because there was no order to them. As a result, a whole lot of items, with individual value, were collectively worthless because I couldn't get at them.

Our lives are not much different. We gather experiences, emotions, knowledge, and self-awareness. We amass pains, triumphs, disappointments, and wisdom. Without some shelves to put them on, though, we can't access these things or what they've taught us to help us move forward. These experiences and "aha!" moments are the stuff you'll need to access as you figure out what your next moves are going to be in the direction of your ambitions. Put aside the self-help talk. What you need is a good set of shelving to access what you've already experienced and a willingness to reflect on what you find there.

It took 220 years after the pencil was invented for someone to invent the eraser. I'm glad they did because I've erased in my life much more than I've kept. We all get to do this. We take what we've written about ourselves, what we truly believe God thinks of us, and decide what to keep and what to erase. We're not the only author of our lives either. Like the ones who have signed the pages of a high school yearbook, other people who have intersected our journey have written over us too. Some of what they said is true and beautiful and lasting. Other things not so much. "Never change" was written in my yearbook by at least a dozen people. It's the worst advice I've ever received. We're supposed to change constantly—into kinder, humbler, more faithful versions of our old selves. This change and growth happens when we sort out the truth from the lies in our lives. Here's some great news. The next version of you is the one who will pursue the ambitions all the previous versions were unable to accomplish.



## INTRODUCTION

Our understanding of who we are and how God sees us is worth all the time and energy we'll put into the task. The trick is figuring out what is true after all the distractions, misstatements, and misunderstandings have been eliminated from our lives. Here's what makes it worth it: when we sort through all the words written by ourselves and others, and when we discard what isn't true or doesn't matter anymore, we'll find the clarity we need to choose the desires worth pursuing. What's left over will be your truest, most beautiful, and lasting ambitions. That's what this book is all about.

My faith has shaped my worldview and plays a big part in my ambitions. I decided to make my first and last ambition to love God and the people I come across without an agenda. I certainly haven't arrived, but I'm somewhere along the way of getting there. You are too.

My relationships play a big role too. Some people are easy to connect with. If you want to achieve great things, find a couple of these people to do life with. Also find a couple of difficult people to engage with love. Don't make them projects; make them friends. This is where you'll grow. If you do these things, I promise you will lead a purposeful and meaningful life. Sure, it will be complicated at times, and you'll mess it up more than once, but your purpose will never become clearer. I know this because if you go deep with a few people and stay close to those who rub you the wrong way, you will have accomplished the ambitions Jesus said were always worth the effort.

While no efforts of yours or mine will be more important than loving God and the people around us, our ambitions can be much broader, more expansive, and more varied than this. I want to talk about those things too.

Achieving your ambitions isn't going to come easy, and it won't be cheap. Don't bail out. Will you have setbacks along the way? Of course you will. The reason is simple: you are you and life is life. Stay the course. We've brought leaders together in countries riddled with conflict only to have our meetings raided. I've been detained, held

in jail, and even kicked out of a country for freeing children held in brothels. We've started schools in war zones that failed completely and other schools that shouldn't have worked but did. Don't be put off by the difficulties you'll face; remember the reason why you started. Keep your ambitions and your life's purpose in mind. Why? Because our lives are on-the-job training for eternity.

If ambitions had two handles, they would be love and hope. There have never been two forces in the world more powerful than these. Much of life involves simply grabbing ahold of love and hope and never letting go.

One of the writers in the Bible named Paul nailed it when he said, "The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." I agree. It's easy to mistake faith with all the doctrine you believe to be true. Faith, however, is what you do about what you believe. It's easy for most of us to hope big things for other people. It's beautiful and right, and we should keep doing lots of that. This book is about hoping a couple of things for ourselves as well, then engaging our most important ambitions with confidence and a strategy so we can release those ambitions into the world.

Setting aside a time for personal reflection about who you are, why you think what you think, and why you do what you do is the heavy lifting you'll need to do if you want to accomplish things in your life you haven't been able to yet. I'm not advocating you go on a hedonistic bender and make everything about yourself. You will find nothing less fulfilling than making everything about you. This book is about self-discovery, not self-help. It's not about simply having dreams. Dreams are too easy. Even my dog wags its tail when it's asleep. I want you to become fully awake to your biggest and most worthwhile ambitions by becoming fully awake to yourself and your God-given purposes.

All this requires developing a new way of thinking. To do this you're going to need to carve a new groove in your brain so you can get after your ambitions rather than just push them around on the plate



## INTRODUCTION

like a bunch of peas. Carving a new groove in your brain is like blowing up a balloon. A big balloon. Sometimes your head starts spinning after a while when you think about your ambitions. Take some breaks. Rest is holy. Get as much as you need, but know when it's time to be fully awake and get back to work. If we're going to get after some of your unexecuted ambitions, we need to take that new groove you're carving and go Grand Canyon on it. Doing this is going to take some effort, but hey, do it anyway.

Let me get this out there. God is over the moon about you. Honest. I've asked Him. He's not grimacing at your past failures; He's smiling at the bright future you have with Him. As you pursue your ambitions, rest in knowing that heaven is simply nuts about you and can't wait for you to get there. That said, you've got some time right here, so make good use of it. Making eternity one of your biggest ambitions is terrific, but what if we use this desire to better understand your short time here on earth and what you'll do next with your life.

I'm really excited you chose to pick up this book. It's a reflection of the life I've tried to live for decades. I've had a couple of successes and plenty of failures. I'll let you know about both. I have tried to tease together my best explanation for why these things happened and what I learned when they did. While I hope you have a blast reading this book, know that there is a process and a journey baked into its pages. If all we had in the end was a bunch of words, what good would that do us? We need a path, and I hope this book provides one that moves you toward your ambitions. I also hope you'll find your deeper purposes in these pages. Let's have some fun together, sure. But don't get distracted and think that a good time is all we're about. We want to be the kind of people who release amazing things into the world and are willing to do whatever it takes to make it happen.

To this end, there is a section in the back of the book with some questions for you to think about and some actions you can take to move toward your dream. I hope you'll have a pen in your hand while you

## INTRODUCTION

read. Maybe get a journal, too, dedicated to the process in this book. I've based the questions and the words you'll read in these pages on a live workshop I've been doing called Dream Big. We've had leaders from our country and Middle Eastern countries, Grammy-winning musicians, megachurch pastors, stay-at-home moms, billionaires, and broke college students attend. I've watched these and thousands of others follow the ideas and principles we'll discuss as they move forward with their ambitions. This book is my attempt to show you what those thousands of others have learned for themselves—that there is a path to discover and release your most beautiful and lasting ambitions into the world. Don't settle for anything less, because God says you're worth it.





Part 1

# GETTING READY TO DREAM BIG



I



## Chapter 1

# DON'T GO ALONE

If you are serious about your dream, surround yourself with people who love you well.

There she was. Maria. She wasn't "Sweet Maria" yet because we didn't know each other. She was definitely still sweet, but I hadn't gotten the chance to call her that. When I first saw her across the room thirty-five years ago, I was immediately smitten. I would have jumped out of a moving car to meet her. It took a while, but she figured out I liked her. Perhaps it was the list of names I created for our children and gave her a short time later. Eventually, she reluctantly learned my name. She even said it once or twice, or at least I thought she did, because she was usually walking away. I remember her saying things like, "Thanks for the invitation, Bob, but no," and "I'm sorry, Bob, but I'm busy that year," and "Bob, are the pair of panda bears in my yard from you?" I think I'm an acquired taste.



## DREAM BIG

After way too long, Maria started liking me back. When this happened, it was like the part in *The Wizard of Oz* when everything goes from black and white to color for the first time. It was in my pursuit of Maria that I learned the importance of having an ambition and staying after it, no matter how big or impossible it seemed. I knew what I wanted, why I wanted it, and I decided what I was going to do about it. There is a silent flip of a switch that happens when we make this determination about something we want. It's the point where we move from just thinking about an ambition to actually doing something about it.

I clinched the deal when I invited her rock climbing with me. I had her tied to the end of the rope, and before she started climbing, she looked up at me and saw me confidently holding the rope. She told me later she realized in that moment she could trust me with her life. Pursuing your ambitions will take an equally big dollop of trust. God's got you. Take the risk. It's worth it.

Eventually Sweet Maria said yes, and we made a few kids to go with my list of names. It's thirty-five years later, and whatever I'm good at these days, it's because Sweet Maria Goff is better at it. One of the many things she's good at is knowing herself and finding joy in her unique set of gifts, abilities, and desires. She doesn't compare her abilities and ambitions to anyone else's. She knows that God doesn't compare what He creates. She also knows what she wants, why she wants it, and what she's going to do about it. Having this kind of clarity is rare and beautiful and unstoppable. Aim for this in your life and you will find great joy.

Sweet Maria and I could not be more different. I love meeting new people, and the more of them in a room the better. Maria, on the other hand, thinks having me in the room is a lot of people and finds her purpose in being fully present with our family. Not many people get to see her. It's like seeing a unicorn. She simply doesn't need or want the attention.

She wrote a bestselling book once. Instead of going on a book tour or having a release party and inviting thousands of our friends, she ordered a medium pizza for the family and we made root beer floats at home. The way she lives her life is a daily reminder to me that our purpose is not found in another person's validation. It's not found in familiarity or approval or popularity either. It is discovered somewhere far deeper within us. Maria lives her life solely and sacrificially for our family and a handful of friends. She not only helps us better understand the complex world we live in, but she also helps me get ready each day so I don't leave the house with one pant leg tucked into my sock.

I'll admit, it's a lot of work to live with a guy who acts like he's sponsored by Red Bull. They call my drink of choice at the local coffee stand "Goffee." It's two shots of energy drink and three shots of espresso. I may die young, but I'll be wide awake when I do. Sweet Maria likes to say I'm the balloon and she's the string. This beautifully describes the right kind of codependence. If you want to achieve your ambitions, don't be all balloon and no string in your life. We need to be anchored in God and tied to one another.

Being different isn't always easy. Perhaps you've felt like you were different than your friends or family. That's a good thing, and we're going to need to settle into who God created us to be if we're going to move ahead. To be purposeful and at ease with who we are, we're going to need to be incredibly truthful with ourselves and the people around us, which is something Sweet Maria lives out every day. If she told me ghosts pooped Tic Tacs, I'm certain I'd believe her. In these pages it will seem like you're reading my thoughts, but you're actually reading what I've learned from her.

I'm always the optimist, and we sometimes see things differently. Recently Sweet Maria texted me upstairs at breakfast. She said there were "creeps" waiting for me in the kitchen. I was guessing "crepes" but had my fingers crossed. When I got to the kitchen to see who was



## DREAM BIG

there, Maria was looking at the weather forecast. The exchange went something like this:

Maria (shaking her head): “It’s going to rain today.”

Me (bright-eyed and smiling): “Isn’t that terrific? Sounds cozy.”

Maria (grumbling under her breath): “Bob, just say something’s bad, okay?”

Maria (looking up after a short pause): “Did I just say that out loud?”

While different in so many ways, we both share a common faith and a strong sense of adventure. I find mine in traveling, talking with lots of people, and starting schools in war zones. Maria finds hers in the more difficult work of loving and nurturing our family, making places of peace in our lives, and giving us all a place to return to. Yet we’ve found our superpowers *because* of our differences, not *in spite* of them. We’ve used these differences to sort out what things are worth the effort to pursue and which ones we should leave behind.

Our kids and the people they love are my teachers, my advisors, and the ones I go to for clarity on the many things I don’t quite understand. They help me sort into piles those things that will last in my life and the others that won’t. As you embark on this journey to identify your ambitions, find these kinds of people to surround yourself with. It’ll be worth the effort.

Someone wiser than me once asked, “If God answered every one of your prayers, would it change anybody’s life except your own?” I’ve seen Maria’s prayers change countless lives. I know her prayer for you and for me would be that we would leave all the planning behind, figure out what our lasting ambitions are, and get back to building those rocket ships that were supposed to be our lives. To do this, she would want us to trade what is easily available for what is actually worthwhile. It’s a distinction that has the power to change everything in your life.

## Chapter 2

# THERMOMETER

We all are going to mess up.

**W**hen I was in kindergarten, we had nap time. We would all curl up on mats on the floor after an hour or two of loosely paying attention. I think there's a strong argument out there that we should continue this at all ages and stages of our lives. The big honor in class was to be the "wake-up fairy." This person would don a set of gender-neutral fairy wings and, with wand in hand, tap each of the sleeping students when it was time to wake up. This was one of my first ambitions I can recall. I wanted those wings. I wanted that wand. I wanted them badly. I wanted to be able to wield that kind of power over others. Think back. What was your earliest ambition? How long was it before you got your shot at it? And when you did get your shot, what did you do with it?



## DREAM BIG

After weeks of impatiently waiting and practicing in front of the mirror at home, my day came. I strapped on the wings, grabbed the wand, and ran across the classroom to wake up my best friend. Unfortunately, in my fairy-induced exuberance to get to my friend, I tripped over a sleeping classmate's nose and broke it. It turns out this was a large enough infraction to have me immediately lose my wake-up fairy duties. Like Icarus, I had flown too close to the sun and it cost me my wings. My ambition became my undoing.

Failure happens. I should have made a bumper sticker or a hoodie. You know this is true because it's happened to you before, and it'll happen to you again. You swing for the fences, your fairy wish is granted, you run with joy and anticipation, and the wheels come completely off. This is the way ambitions work—sometimes they simply don't. Resist the tendency to be discouraged or thrown off the scent when it happens to you. It's what you do next that says a lot about who you are.



I was a good kid in junior high school but a confused one. My dad smoked cigarettes when I was growing up, so I figured I would too. Back then, cigarettes were sold at the post office in a vending machine. You could pick up a roll of stamps and emphysema on the same trip. After school one day, I went to the post office to get a Marlboro hard pack for myself. The soft pack was for novices, but the Marlboro hard pack had a lid and everything, so it made you look James Dean cool. It cost only two quarters for a pack because tobacco companies hadn't been sued for billions and people didn't know they would die if they smoked. Even the Marlboro Man didn't know back then.

Just after I put my second quarter in and pulled the lever, my Boy Scout leader came up behind me. It was certainly an awkward moment. I wanted to say that the cigarettes were for my mom, but the

scoutmaster knew my mom and that she didn't smoke. So I did the honorable thing and told him they were for my sister.

Some of us start early telling lies about ourselves or others. We do this for a number of reasons, but primarily because we're uncertain about who we are and how we fit into the larger arc of our lives. We're insecure and looking for acceptance, so we do dumb things in our desperation. We smoke or cuss or dress or act like someone we really aren't to gain acceptance from people we don't really know. We're all going to make mistakes. Some are premeditated and weirdly intended to be self-destructive. Others just arise simply because we don't understand what is happening around us. Those are the mistakes that remind us of our humanity and help us be truthful with ourselves about the fact that we don't have it all figured out. I'll give you an example.

I'm usually a pretty healthy, upbeat guy. For me the glass is not just half-full but overflowing-so-get-a-bigger-one. But when I get sick, the wheels totally fall off. I get sad and melancholy and weak. It's beyond silly. It's almost clinical. I catch a simple cold and I act like I'm on chemo. What makes things worse is my need to constantly check to see which way I'm going. *Is that a new ache? Am I getting better or sicker? Will I even make it? How about now? Better or sicker? Have I updated my will? Better or sicker?* I open the refrigerator door and think I'm walking toward the light.

One time when our children were young, I caught the flu. It would've been no big deal for anyone else, but this is me, so I assumed it was terminal. This angel-of-death flu started to come on really strong as we all went to bed one night. I wanted to keep track of my demise as I slipped toward the abyss (and also milk this thing for as much sympathy as I could get from Sweet Maria). I gave her updates every few minutes on how truly awful I felt. I thought an update every three to five minutes would be just about right. In the middle of the night, I was feeling worse than I could describe, so I thought I should get some additional proof of how much I was suffering. I went to the



## DREAM BIG

bathroom where we kept our medicines to find a thermometer in the cabinet.

After rummaging through mostly empty medicine bottles and baby supplies collected over the years, I found a thermometer and put it under my tongue. I planned to show Maria my triple-digit temperature so she'd know how heroic I was to still be clinging to life. My mom always told me as a kid how I needed to get the thermometer way under my tongue, or the reading wouldn't be accurate. I buried it as far as it would go.

I took the thermometer out of my mouth a couple of times to see how high it was reading. I really couldn't tell. But that didn't surprise me because I probably didn't have long to live. I put it back under my tongue for a couple more minutes and checked again, imagining there was hardly enough mercury in the thermometer to record how high my temperature was. It was dark and I couldn't quite make out the numbers, so I woke up Maria and asked for help. As I slowly pulled the thermometer out of my mouth to give to her, I said, "Hey, why is there a big knob at the end of this thermometer?" Maria looked back at me for a long moment and then was swept over with laughter and horror.

She broke the news to me that the bulb was to prevent the thermometer from going missing when it gets used. "Go missing?" I was processing the information slowly as I pulled the thermometer from my mouth. I had grabbed the kids' rectal thermometer by mistake.



I used to think that we had to have our act together for God to use us and for our ambitions to be attainable, but I don't think that anymore. Here's the incredible thing: I couldn't even take my own temperature, but God still finds a way to use me. He'll use you, too, if you're willing. Something happens when we mess up. We get to start fresh. Are we going to get it wrong from time to time? Yep. Will we make big

## THERMOMETER

things out of small things? You bet. Yet God is infinitely patient with us. Sometimes the mistakes are small ones and sometimes they're big ones. I'm still messing up the simple things in my life like taking my temperature, but God calls me His own nonetheless. He does the same with you. We need to get this straight as we explore our ambitions, or we'll let our past failures block our bright futures.

We've all suffered setbacks. Maybe you've tried to go after some audacious dreams that got derailed along the way. Maybe a few others sunk at the dock. What do you do when this happens? This book isn't full of airtight answers, but it will ask a few questions and offer a pathway to reframe your thinking. In the meantime, though, don't feel bad about not being perfect before you start.





## Chapter 3

# GET UNDER THE ICE CAP

Keep asking the important questions.

**T**here's a city in the high desert in California called "Goffs." I'm not kidding. It's one of those towns typical of the West, a bustling little community that disappeared when they built a bigger, better highway diverting traffic somewhere else. It came up for sale recently, so I offered \$7,500 cash for the whole town if they threw in both street signs. I'm waiting for an answer, but so far it's been crickets (which are the only things living in the town). I've already decided if I get the place, I'm going elect myself the mayor. I'll hold big rallies and have a parade. I'll have bumper stickers made and probably shoot off some bottle rockets. Sweet Maria said she isn't coming, so I'll be the only person voting. It should be a landslide if it rains hard enough, and



## DREAM BIG

there will be no hanging chads, unless a guy named Chad shows up and starts hanging out.

Once I take over as mayor of Goffs, I'm going to make all the rules. Speeding won't just be allowed; it will be encouraged if you're moving toward something that matters. There will be no stopping at stop signs, because I'm taking them down if they keep people from moving toward their beautiful, lasting ambitions. People will be allowed to yield to traffic but not to difficulties. There will always be reconstruction work, though. Some of our ideas and perceptions will be tear-downs, while others will just need some major remodeling when it comes to limiting beliefs. The town will be filled with people full of the guts and grit it takes to dig deep and get at the foundations of what they believe and why they believe it. There will be signs and hard hats and Big Gulp cups and successes and failures everywhere. These aren't scorecards; they are simply evidence that people are hard at work.

I once owned an old Victorian home that needed a lot of repairs. When I purchased it, I did a little research, and it turns out it was once owned by Wyatt Earp. How cool is that? He had evidently moved to San Diego after the whole OK Corral thing. The problem with the house wasn't its age; the problem was with its accessibility. You see, the only way you could get inside was by climbing a lot of steps. This meant that only some people could get in. Only the ones without problems and limitations. We wanted everybody to have access to this place, so I replaced all these steps with ramps so everyone who wanted to get in, could. This book is not about taking a series of steps; it's about on-ramping your ambitions. I want everybody to get in. I want *you* to get in—but only if you want to.

Here's a tip. Don't make the things in this book too simple or too complex. I'm aiming for somewhere in between—which is the place where most of us are. You can insert your name here for the kind of place you want to build, but for me, it's a place called Goffs.

## Who are you? Where are you? What do you want?

I've been flying airplanes for twenty years. Still, every time I come in for a landing, I tell the tower I'm a student pilot. Mainly because I still am. What I've found is the people in the control tower are nicer to me over the radio because I'm a student. No one cuts off a student driver, right? Well, some of you do, but you should feel really bad about it. If you want to engage your ambitions like you never have before, self-identify as a student in all things—be a student dater, student husband, student employee. You get the idea. We're all amateurs at love and acceptance. Nobody goes pro and gets sponsored by Hershey's Kisses or the Hallmark Channel. Don't be a pain, but ask people you admire lots of questions. Let them know you're still a student and want to learn. Sure, some people will blow you off, but don't sweat it. They're just insecure or distracted. Most people will want to help you out and the kind ones always will.

Don't act like you've got it all figured out. Nobody wants to give that person extra time. Instead, be humble, self-aware, and punishingly truthful. Jesus never had a problem with people who knew their shortcomings; He didn't tolerate rookies who pretended to have gone All-Pro and have it all figured out but were just faking it. Once we get real with where we actually are and our desperate need for God's help, He's got a person He can do something with, and He'll drop the people you'll need in your path to help. Your job is to find them.

Being a pilot comes in handy because our family lives for part of each year in the Lodge we built in a remote location in British Columbia, Canada, and I fly a seaplane in and out. I love everything about flying except talking on the radio to air traffic controllers. Normally I like to talk to people, probably to a fault, but getting on the radio in the airplane to talk with a control tower has always intimidated me. They talk so fast and expect you to know what they're saying. I might be wrong, but I think I heard a controller ordering a



## DREAM BIG

pizza once. I'm also afraid I'll say the wrong thing on the radio and end up redirected to Saskatchewan, so I don't say anything, which can also get me in trouble.

I decided maybe the problem was that I'd never met a controller in a tower, so I called the local airport and made an appointment to meet one. I got to the flight control center, walked up several flights of stairs, and stepped into what looked like a movie set. There were several people sitting in front of screens. Each screen had dozens of dots representing airplanes with actual people in them. The controllers spoke infrequently to each pilot, but when they did, they didn't try to give them all the instructions they could possibly give. Each of the controllers was in charge of just a few dots, and their goals were simple. They wanted to help each plane get to its destination and avoid hitting other ones along the way.

Up in the tower, one of the controllers took me aside and said, "Bob, I know it's hard to talk on the radio sometimes, and it can feel confusing and more than a little intimidating. Everyone feels this way sometimes. So just do this: Say who you are, where you are, and what you want. Then listen closely." A lot of people feel the same way about talking to God or discovering their ambitions that I felt about talking to the control tower. They're up in the air, don't want to crash or hit someone else, and just need a little help getting to their destination.

Make no mistake, identifying and pursuing your ambitions is going to take a lot of courage and clarity. It's also going to take more than a little personal reflection. Organizing your thoughts around these three questions will help you accomplish in the future what you haven't been able to make happen in the past.

Start with acknowledging that deeper longing within you. If I had to take a guess, that's why you're here. You can feel it. I don't even have to define what *it* is—you know exactly what I'm talking about. *It* is that "something more to life" rumbling around in your gut, that

tug drawing you toward a scary, audacious dream. It nags you when you feel stuck at a job you once wanted but have since outgrown. It fuels the late-night conversations before college graduation. It hovers around coffee shops and kitchen tables when parents become empty nesters. It is everywhere. Boardrooms and bedrooms, subways and surf shops, galleys and galleries. It is in the passenger seat on a long road trip, uttered through quiet prayers, and found in pop song lyrics. These are all expressions of us searching for a life that matters.

I believe this pursuit is a combination of finding answers to the three big questions: Who are you? Where are you? What do you want? These are some simple words, but they are actually some of the most beautiful, most difficult, and most confusing questions we can ask of ourselves. They can be a cocktail of identity, desire, purpose, rejection, life experience, struggle, fear, hope, and longing rolled into one. If we're going to discover and realize our most beautiful and lasting ambitions—the ones that are really worth pursuing—we have to lean into these questions.

By the way, I've never met anyone who had all of this figured out—even if they told me they did. In fact, if they said they did, I'd take it as proof they needed to keep searching. Maybe this side of heaven life was made for searching. Instead of a final destination, or striving for complete certainty, maybe our ambitions are like the smell of a pie in the oven—a reminder and invitation to follow the scent, to enter, to keep trying, keep looking, and keep discovering.

Maybe you know your ambitions (or have a pretty good sense of them) but have been too afraid to make any moves. There are a lot of people in this exact spot. Perhaps you've been living with unexecuted dreams for years, wearing them like an old T-shirt, yet avoiding them like a weird roommate. This is something that happens to our best ideas all the time. We're so close to them, or we've ignored them for so long, that we can't even see them for what they are anymore. Then just when we think we have corralled them, they change. When this



## DREAM BIG

happens, don't get bummed out; get current with your new ambitions. I know it feels like a hassle, but it's a good thing. We're supposed to be new creations, and there will be nothing new about us if everything remains the same.

I get it—all of it. That's why I wrote this book. To help you get unstuck. I want you to line up all your ambitions and distinguish between the ones that sound good but aren't, the ones you should completely ignore, and the ones that are worth throwing everything you've got into. When you figure these things out, in Starbucks parlance, I don't want you to merely go Tall or Grande; I want you to go Venti on them.

What I'm offering is a path, not a prescription. It's a path I've tried to take my whole life. The truth is, I'm still cutting trail myself, but it's a path I've seen thousands of others take as well. I think it works pretty well, but hear me clearly about this: doing what I suggest in these pages won't fix all your problems. It won't fill in your bald spots, get you to fit into skinny jeans, give you the dimples you wish you had, or make you a gazillionaire. What it will do, though, if you're willing to put in the work, is lead you to the life you're longing for. A life of purpose, full to the brim with intention and anticipation. A life lived with your eyes wide open, where you actually want what you see ahead of you rather than obsessing over the past or living scared about the future. A life that leads to purpose and legacy and fulfillment. It's the life you have been too confused or afraid or discouraged or disillusioned to move toward. It's a life where you can sort out what's worth your time and what isn't.

Can we just look each other in the eye through these pages and say, *No more doing what merely occupies, entertains, and numbs us?* It's time to go after your dreams, your faith, and your ambitions with gusto. It's just simply time. You know it. I know it. The people who love us know it. Let's stop deferring, ignoring, and screwing around, distracting ourselves with things that won't really matter next week, much less

in our next life. Let's instead throw our efforts and emotional weight into those ambitions which will outlast us and leave all the rest behind.

In this journey we're setting out on, I'm not your guide; I'm a Sherpa. I'll tell you why. Guides tell someone what mountain to climb. They order all the equipment, get the food, buy the tents, and tell the climber what route to take and direct all of the steps taken. Sherpas, on the other hand, let the climber pick the mountain to be climbed, then spend most of their time laying the ropes in advance so the climber can move a little faster. More importantly, Sherpas tell climbers what they *don't* need to take in order to make the summit. If you've ever seen an overeager climber, you know exactly what I'm talking about. Their pack is so loaded down with things they don't really need that they'll never go the distance or get to the destination. The same is true for you, and we're going to need to offload quite a bit of what we've accumulated if we're going to make it to the top of our ambitions.

Tie your boot laces, get your backpack on, and let's go.

