SOAR!

ALSO BY T. D. JAKES

Inspired to Soar!

Instinct

Destiny

Reposition Yourself

Maximize the Moment

64 Lessons for a Life Without Limits

Making Great Decisions

T. D. Jakes Relationship Bible

Great Investment

Ten Commandments of Working in a Hostile Environment

On the Seventh Day

Not Easily Broken

So You Call Yourself a Man?

Woman, Thou Art Loosed!

He Motions

Mama Made the Difference

God's Leading Lady

Can You Stand to Be Blessed?

Let It Go

SOAR!

Build Your Vision from the Ground Up

T. D. JAKES

Faith Words

New York Nashville

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To the more than ten thousand former inmates who have successfully graduated from our Texas Offenders Reentry Initiative. Your strength, determination, faith, and dedication exemplify what it means to build a new life and mount up on wings like eagles. May you continue to soar even as you inspire others to follow you across the sky!

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SOAR!

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INTRODUCTION

Cleared for Takeoff!

If we worked on the assumption that what is accepted as true really is true, then there would be little hope for advance.

—Orville Wright

You never forget the first time you fly.

Racing down the runway in a huge metal cylinder with wings, you gasp as the plane surges and lifts and you realize that the two-ton machine you're in no longer touches the ground. Through the porthole window, you watch as the terminal, parking lot, trees, lawns, houses, parks, businesses, cars, and highways recede until they become as small as children's toys littering a quilt of gray, brown, and green.

Then you can no longer see what is beneath you as the plane climbs higher and higher into an expanse of blue embroidered with white. You smile to yourself as golden strands of sunlight filter through the clouds like giant hands fingering the endless silk of the sky. Your mind marvels at the fact you are thousands of feet in the air even as your stomach lurches to remind you it prefers the solid ground below.

The only sounds are the drowsy hum of the plane's engines and your own heartbeat drumming a rhythm of equal parts terror and

exhilaration. You wonder if this is how a bird feels as it soars high above the earth, never looking back at the branch from which it departed, only ahead toward the distant horizon. You know you will never forget this experience and all its sensations of delight and wonder, anxiety and fear.

Perhaps your first flight was not as magical as my own, but I bet it was just as memorable. I was young, probably around eleven or twelve years old, and flew by myself from Charleston, West Virginia, to Cleveland, Ohio, where my father was receiving medical treatment for the kidney disease that would eventually claim his life. My mother was already there and would be the one to pick me up on arrival. Even my concern for my father's health could not dampen the thrill I experienced flying that first time as a child passenger.

That excitement had been ignited in me years earlier when my father would drive our family up the hill toward the airport for one of life's simple and absolutely free pleasures—watching the planes come and go. Summer days especially we would drive up and park where we had an optimal view of the Cessna jets with their wealthy business travelers as well as the commercial 747s shuttling assorted passengers through the friendly skies. The red-orange sun would be descending in the afternoon sky, heavy from the weight of its own sweltering heat, and we'd have all the windows rolled down to catch a breeze as my siblings and I laughed and pointed out specific clouds to each other—a camel, a roller coaster, the face of one of our aunties—while waiting for the next plane to land or take off.

We couldn't afford the trips to the Florida beaches or vacations to the Grand Canyon that my classmates would boast about the rest of the summer. But we had the next best thing, stimulating our imaginations more than any visit to Disneyland, driving up that hill by

the airport before or sometimes after dinner from time to time. As we sat in the car or ventured out on the lot to get a closer look, we would imagine we were on those planes, going God knows where, to see God knows what!

Defying Gravity

Flying for the first time is a lot like creating your own business, launching a start-up, or establishing a nonprofit organization. Undertaking such ventures requires overcoming the inherent fear of leaving the safety of solid ground behind, defying gravity, and embarking on a journey of unexpected variables within predictable patterns toward a deliberate destination. In other words, both require a little bit of crazy and a whole lot of courage!

Sitting there as a kid and watching planes fly in and out, I loved listening to my parents tell us how their parents grew up during a time when all they could see in the sky were birds and clouds, occupying space where people could not go. My mother was born in 1926, and while I'm not sure when her mother was born, I suspect it was around the time the Wright brothers first successfully launched their fixed-wing aircraft at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, in 1903. Why do I suspect this? Because my great-aunts were afraid of flying until they died!

I wasn't afraid so much as I was curious. Even as a kid, I couldn't help but wonder what Orville and Wilbur Wright must have had on their minds and in their hearts that caused them to build a machine heavy enough to hold human beings and yet light enough to fly through the air. What compelled them to utilize scrap materials from a bicycle shop to build wings that would forever change the world? What drove them to try and fail and try some more and to

keep trying time and time again even when the wind was against them? Whatever it was, their passionate pursuit of innovation transformed inspiration and perspiration into aviation!

The Wright brothers knew the laws of gravity worked against them. They knew that people thought they were crazy for even trying to create a flying machine that could soar through the skies above everyone else. However, they defied the odds—and gravity—by refusing to give up until they discovered new laws, principles of aerodynamics that enabled a craft of a certain weight traveling at a certain velocity to gain momentum and catch flight. These pioneers of the skies created a new normal, a paradigm shift so life-changing that it transformed the way we travel, transact business, and conduct warfare.

Now maybe you aren't interested in building a flying machine. But in essence the Wright brothers' endeavor is the goal of every entrepreneur. What do you need to build in order to get up there into the sky of economic viability? How can you take what you have and escape the gravitational pull of a salary that limits your ability to escape from living paycheck to paycheck?

At the end of the day, the same innovative, relentless tenacity that fueled the Wright brothers determines the direction of your own dreams. It is the power of one transformative belief held firmly in place, the daring idea that says just because I haven't seen it modeled in my past doesn't mean that I cannot create something that changes the trajectory of my future. Simply put, it is the power to make the seemingly impossible become your new reality.

When I stood in the parking lot watching the planes soar all those years ago, I wondered if I would ever travel beyond the confines into which I was born by embarking on a flight that would carry me off to new, exciting adventures and a life defined by limitless possibility.

Could I create my own flying machine that would enable me to soar into a future with more options and opportunities than the ground beneath my feet presently offered? Standing out there as a boy I knew that someday, some way, my personal vision of what I could do would become a reality. I would build something that would transport me beyond where I stood into the place where I, too, could mount up on eagle's wings with the help of the Lord.

I knew I could build my vision from the ground up and find the power to make it *soar*, and that has made all the difference!

Get Your Vision Off the Ground

You, too, hold within your hands the power to soar.

You may not have known it and believed it at an early age like I did, but it remains true nonetheless. You don't have angel wings sprouting from your shoulder blades, possess superpowers like many heroes on our movie screens, or own a Cessna aircraft, but if you have the desire for advancement in your life and you're willing to risk the familiar comfort of where you are for the adrenaline-fueled thrill of where you want to be, then you can fly. Flight is possible even for those who are emotionally, financially, and creatively fatigued. You can take your vision, build it into something remarkable, and reach heights you could have never imagined.

If you doubt my faith in such flight for your own life, then consider the wind—invisible yet powerful enough to level buildings. Even as it provides lift for planes weighing thousands of pounds, wind has no color, no texture, no visible shape, and no sentient intentionality. As a force of nature, wind is easier to document by its external effects than by its inherent attributes.

Likewise for a person rising from where they are to where they

want to be: their ascendancy on the outside must begin with the transcendence of a personal vision for what they can be on the inside. As surely as wind moves a 747, a change in your life's perspective cannot always be conveyed adequately by language. But its effect could have immediate as well as generational consequences on your ability to reach new heights beyond your present wingspan.

And that's what this book is all about.

I will share many tips as we prepare for this journey. My hope is that they will be valuable whether you are new to this whole entrepreneurial process or whether you are a venerable veteran of catapulting new endeavors into the wild blue yonder. I do not know everything about being a successful entrepreneur, but what I do know I humbly offer you within these pages. Your business plan—whether conceptual or concrete—will serve as your flight manual for getting your vision off the ground and sustaining a successful flight toward a divine destination beyond your imagination.

From the Control Tower

Years ago, when I was much younger, I worked for the now defunct Piedmont Airlines in the baggage claim area. It was merely a summer job, but after my early years of gazing at planes from the parking lot, I got a much closer look at how they operated. I quickly learned that a landing plane receives directions and guidance from the ground crew. Waving a brightly colored flag or illuminated baton, these team members guided the pilot to park the plane at a specific gate or in another area designated for passengers and baggage to be unloaded.

Learning these signs was requisite for any full-time airline employee working on the tarmac, and obviously the pilots had to understand what the signals meant in order to comply. But I also

recognized that when it was time for a plane to take off, no such ground signals were available or implemented. All direction came from the lofty pinnacle of the control tower tasked with navigating the pilot through the maze of other flights taking off and landing. The pilot received directions transmitted by a voice within his headset. No matter how experienced the pilot may have been, he was unable to see all the other aircraft lurking in the clouds, circling the airport, or preparing to land. This kind of guidance was given by the informed person in the tower, someone with the ability to take into consideration comprehensive information that wasn't just privileged but was also critical to increase safety and to avoid calamities.

Like a veteran air traffic controller, I want to do the same for you. I want to help you avoid the dangerous liability of not clearly seeing information that could drastically change the outcome of your smooth takeoff into unknown skies. Here are a few tips that are designed for the benefit of increasing the likelihood of success and to diminish the likelihood of casualties and collateral damage associated with getting your new venture off the ground. From my perch of many decades of living, working, and thriving as an entrepreneur, I hope to provide some vital information to help you gain velocity as well as offer directive guidance for avoiding potential disasters that could cause you to crash.

A Bird's-Eye View

There is no easy formula for entrepreneurial success, for part of the joy inherent in flight is building your own wings from scratch and discovering new destinations. But over the years I've identified an adaptable and progressive process that will focus your energies in the most productive ways for the sustainable flight of your new venture. For the entrepreneur already airborne, I hope to

introduce concepts that will enable you to become more streamlined and to increase your momentum by decreasing the excess baggage impeding your ascent. Some steps in the process may be familiar while others may surprise you, but I can guarantee that all of them will challenge you, inspire you, and elevate you beyond ground level.

Here is a bird's-eye view of our journey together.

1. ***CATCH A VISION OF YOUR DESTINATION***
   We will first explore how to turn your flights of fancy into fights you can win in the battle to get your vision off the ground. We'll discuss how to connect to your passion and how to identify your motives for wanting to soar as a new business owner, discovering along the way why the time has never been better for female entrepreneurs to take flight. Next, I will guide you in identifying a problem that intersects with your passion, because no matter how gifted and enthusiastic you may be, if there is no market for what you want to offer you're doomed to spin your wheels on an endless runway of frustrating futility. Digging deeper into your desire to be an entrepreneur, we will examine the commitment required if your vision is to take flight.
2. ***BUILD YOUR WINGS***
   Taking action to turn your dream into a flying machine requires a strategic flight plan and the resourcefulness to use the materials available to you. As with building a plane, most entrepreneurs start with pieces, parts, and potentials. Your proficiency at fusing these fragments creates the uniqueness of your brand and hastens your goal of operating at higher altitudes than your past experiences have propelled you. While

imitating those who have gone before you is crucial to your success, knowing how and when to innovate and blaze your own trail is just as vital. And if you're going to construct an aircraft capable of sustained flight, you need a flight crew of kindred spirits willing to build, bond, and board this new venture with you.

3. ***CLEAR THE CLOUDS***

   Defying gravity and getting off the ground is only the first step in sustaining a long, smooth flight for your new business. Understand that between liftoff and stability, you will experience a certain period of volatility that's inherent with growth. As you learn to anticipate turbulence as part of the process, you will discover that rough air is always an attribute of ascension. Your ability to anticipate that turbulence rather than be rattled by it is an important part of flight. Experience reveals that what may seem gut-wrenching at first is merely a sign that you're at a higher level. You can relax in the midst of those bumps and explore new routes both above and below your current altitude, where your business can enjoy smooth sailing. Learning early on from small mistakes often determines the difference between your business's ability to survive a crisis and the likelihood that it will crash.

4. ***SOAR TO NEW HEIGHTS***

   Thriving and growing frequently require adapting to new conditions, adjusting your flight plan, and even changing course for a new destination. While refueling your engines and maintaining the body of your business may seem obvious, you may be surprised how many new ventures fail in their first year because of easily avoidable mistakes and misperceptions. No matter your venture's focus, once it's airborne you can break

the barriers beyond previous possibilities if you're boldly willing to go where no one has gone before.

Kiss the Clouds

Whatever your business may be, it will never work if you can't get it off the ground and into the air. It is my hope that I can share tips and tools with you that will help you build the internal fortitude necessary to get your dream off the runway and into the air. Guiding and assisting you to the best of my ability, I want you to experience the exhilaration that comes only from watching something you've created from scratch catch the winds and trends of sustainable flight. There's no greater, more satisfying feeling in the world than giving birth to a dream with strong wings.

If you've never done this or if you have done it many times before, you know there are risks involved. But with any endeavor of value, risk is requisite for reaping rewards. Yes, there will be a wave of anxious fear, which is a healthy caution. Just imagine what the Wright brothers must have felt as their craft left the ground and kissed the clouds! Surely it was a heart-racing, head-spinning moment of jubilation unlike any other. And you can feel it, too—that thrill experienced by every visionary when their abstract ideals and figurative fantasies materialize and take flight.

So buckle up and fasten your seat belt because objects and ideas overhead are definitely about to shift! Whether you are twenty-six or sixty-six, this feeling of liftoff makes the hair on your head or the sweat on your bald spot tingle! Already you can start to feel yourself break away from the gravitational pull that keeps gazers on the ground. Your feet are itching to rise into the air and ascend as you make your vision a reality! This is the pivotal moment of decision

that creates the exhilaration of entrepreneurs, a high that is beyond anything you've ever experienced.

Are you ready? Are you willing to leave the safety of where you stand now in order to soar in the limitless skies above? Then turn the page, my entrepreneurial friend, and let's get started—you have been cleared for takeoff!

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PART I

EXPAND YOUR VISION

Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.

—Proverbs 13:12

CHAPTER 1

Ignite Your Flight

Putting Vision in Motion

Flight without feathers is not easy.
—Plautus

People frequently ask me, "Bishop Jakes, how do you do all the things you do? How do you juggle your ministry with speaking, filming, producing, recording, and writing?" Typically, these questions are followed by further interrogation about the various diverse endeavors that consume my energies and how others can similarly turn their passions into possibilities as well. While there's no one-size-fits-all answer, I love to address these questions because my answers can be found in the way I see the world and my role in it. Simply put, I consider myself an entrepreneur, although that is the "high cotton" term, as my grandmother would say.

In fact, I come from a family of entrepreneurs, but we never used that word to describe ourselves. My father always said he was just trying to hustle and stay in the game, like everyone else. You may find the term *hustler* an irreverent way to describe my dear old dad, Ernest Jakes, but no other word comes to mind to convey his combination of boundless energy, desperate innovation, and relentless determination.

My father was a good man, hardworking and relentless. The vision for his life wasn't to be rich or famous. He considered such an aspiration too high for someone so low on life's proverbial totem pole. My father was hustling just so we could get by. He worked double shifts and weekends so that he and my mother could finally afford amenities like a doorbell, carpet in our living room, and maybe, if they could save up long enough, a garage where he could store his tools and protect his truck from the elements.

My father wasn't devoid of ambition, but it wasn't the driving force in his heart. He was a black man in the 1960s, raising a family in West Virginia, who didn't have time to think about what he could acquire beyond meeting our basic needs. He wasn't dreaming about shiny new Cadillacs or gold-plated bathroom fixtures. He was just trying to buy a house for his family that perhaps had more than one bathroom and maybe a bedroom for each of his three children. Those were his goals. They were simple and he was focused on providing for his family.

And in order to do that, he had to hustle.

Attitude Affects Altitude

When I was growing up and someone would ask me what my father did for a living, it was always a difficult question to answer. Because he did *everything*: he sold appliances and household items through a company called Service Wholesale. On weekends, he had another gig selling fresh fish shipped into town on the train. My mother, brother, sister, and I would weigh and wash the fish, then wrap each piece in newspaper before we packed the fish back into the boxes. Then my father drove around the neighborhood, going from house to house, selling the fish to neighbors for a minimal margin of profit.

Whether he was selling new cookware or fresh trout, my father's

beat-up old red Ford pickup truck was his "distribution channel." That truck also served to get him to his other jobs, such as odd jobs for neighbors and cleaning up after hours for local businesses. Fortunately, in the process of working all those jobs, my father finally stumbled upon a business through which he was able to drop many of his side endeavors and focus on one primary enterprise.

He gradually went from being a jack-of-all-trades juggling many jobs to a singularly focused entrepreneur. We had others in our community who paved the way, a few black doctors and lawyers with their own practices. Those educated men had to hustle up their own business, too, but because they were educated, they knew there was more to business than just making the sale. They knew you had to be well rounded in business, providing the service as well as the management.

Looking back, I suspect they learned this lesson quickly, although my father never did. He didn't wield a college degree the way they did and never had a wealth of opportunities. What he did have was a mop, a bucket, a strong work ethic, creativity, and a can-do, never-quit attitude. With that, my father started a janitorial services business, beginning as a one-man operation cleaning office buildings.

My father scraped and scrambled in order to do all that needed doing—getting new customers, spreading the word about his business, and of course the actual cleaning itself. Over the years, he built his company to more than fifty employees, with janitorial contracts all over the state. He even had to get an office after a while and eventually hired a secretary, Greta, who had bright red hair.

Although his business was growing and he was providing for his family, my father was never able to break through to a higher level because of his mind-set. He got the wings of his vision off the ground, but he never left the low altitude of his I-have-to-do-it-all attitude. He struggled with managing his business and his employees

because he ran it the same way he had when he was selling fish from the back of his old Ford truck. He was still out there talking up business instead of taking care of business. There was no one casting a bigger vision and looking at the larger picture, connecting the dots between the daily details and the distant destination. No one was minding the business of his busyness, making sure bookkeeping records were in order, bills were being paid, and customers were paying on time.

My father's vision was limited. He was able to build his flying machine and get it in the air.

But he didn't know how to help it soar.

Legacy of Love's Labor

My father came by his work ethic honestly, though. It was in his DNA because his mother, my grandmother, was herself a force to be reckoned with. It had been passed down to her through the generations because *her* grandmother had to pick cotton for slave masters just so she could survive. So she passed that do-whatever-it-takes drive on to her children.

And my father wasn't the only entrepreneur in our house. My mother was a teacher by day, but when she came home after work she took the little bit of money she and my dad had set aside and invested in real estate. She rented out small homes and apartments, collecting rent until the day she died. So, in our house, the entrepreneurial mind-set was a family heirloom passed down from generation to generation to generation on both sides of the family.

That's how their entrepreneurial example, the legacy of their love's labor, was passed on to me. When I was growing up, however, I had no idea that my parents were setting examples that would influence my future. I didn't really know what was happening or realize how

much I was absorbing from listening, watching, and contributing to their endeavors. But no one could have the kind of hustling work ethic they had and not impact their children. Through the years, their creativity and resourcefulness got inside my head, inside my bones, became a part of my skin, and etched itself on my heart.

My family's own-your-own business, earn-your-own-money, laziness-is-not-accepted work ethic hit me before I was even a teenager. As a boy I delivered newspapers, I sold Avon products, and I even sold vegetables from my mother's garden. And that work ethic stayed with me as I entered the ministry. I started off with only ten members in my storefront church, so of course not only did I keep my day job, I also worked odd jobs to support my family and the church.

My siblings were equally affected by our parents and their expectations for us. We were taught to be creative, to build our own, to do whatever had to be done. Today, my brother is a Realtor and my sister is an author. We all know how to work with what we've been given; we're all entrepreneurial in some way. And it wasn't just us. In various ways, my cousins and other kin are all entrepreneurs, too.

Hone Your Hustle

Sadly, my father died when he was forty-eight years old and I was only sixteen. The doctors said that his cause of death was renal failure brought on by hypertension, but I disagree. That may be the medical explanation, but I believe my father died due to his inability to transition from struggling to soaring. His business could have done so much better and my father would not have had to work so hard if he had just learned the basics of business. I truly believe that his janitorial operation would have soared if he'd had a bigger vision for its potential and gotten the know-how to manage it properly.

My father's vision was limited, plus he never had the administrative, management, and leadership training necessary to take the tremendous opportunity he'd created with his janitorial service and turn it into a larger success. To this day I can't help but wonder what my father might have been if he'd been able to build a bigger vision for his life, and then, on a practical level, hung up his mops, handed over his brooms and buffers to his employees, and traded those responsibilities for developing a business plan, a marketing strategy, and monthly reports. If my father had been able to catch that vision and make that shift, I am convinced it would have ensured his success. He may have lived a longer life without the constant stress that goes with a hustler's mentality.

While it's important to have a vision and that drive, that hustler's mentality, inside you, that longing to be your own boss and run your own business, it's not enough. As necessary and commendable as that kind of work ethic may be, you still need to make a shift if you want to fly and soar to new heights. Otherwise, you will keep circling and hovering within small, familiar spaces. If you want to soar, then you must hone your hustle into the engine of an entrepreneur.

Fight for Your Flight

When I travel into inner cities where the economy has slowed to a crawl, I see people trying to survive. Some are selling illegal substances, others peddle black market electronics or designer merchandise, others take in cleaning, drive for Uber, haul garbage, help people move, or offer some other service they can provide. They're young and old alike, teens and trailblazers scrambling to keep their heads above water.

But such economic intensity occurs not only in the urban 'hood,

because when I travel to Manhattan and walk down Fifth Avenue or Wall Street, I pass well-dressed professional men and women rushing to advise clients and to meet with merchandisers, working late hours, and doing whatever it takes to reach optimum potential. I see vendors selling hot dogs, tacos, and roasted nuts from temporary carts, young street performers playing guitars and singing in the park or near the subway station with an upturned hat for donations.

They're all entrepreneurs in their own way, using what they deem most marketable in exchange for necessities, mortgages, and student loans or just to buy something to eat. Some have a vision that they want to build and may be striving to get ahead and enjoy luxury products and exotic vacations, to save for their retirement, or to purchase a nicer home. Some may even be desperate or misguided in their pursuit, but none are lazy or apathetic about human survival. They all have a reason for doing what they're doing—and that's where you, too, must begin.

If you want to shift from expending energy trying to get off the ground to actually flying as an entrepreneur, then you must identify your motivations. For many of us, economic advancement may seem the obvious goal fueling the internal engine of our ambition, but I must caution you that if making money is your primary motivation for launching a new venture, then you are automatically limiting how high you can fly. Yes, you can build your flying machine and get it off the ground, and you may even be able to remain airborne for a considerable amount of time. At some point, however, you will become so fatigued with jet lag from your journey that you will easily and quickly walk away.

Making a profit is certainly a major indicator of a healthy business, and entrepreneurs want to succeed financially as much as anyone. But they also want to create something, to build a new kind of product or service or invention that is uniquely their own.

Others will have gone before them and started similar restaurants, dry cleaning businesses, salons, and fashion boutiques, but none of their predecessors will have utilized the exact same combination of resources filtered through their one-of-a-kind blend of imagination, inspiration, and innovation. For the entrepreneur, making money only creates more opportunities for enhancement, advancement, and expansion.

There's nothing wrong with being motivated by the desire to make more money and elevate your family's lifestyle; however, when money becomes your primary motivator, you will typically stall out rather quickly. If you're only concerned about your profit margins and not the big picture of your business as a whole, you will cut corners for short-term gains and lose sight of qualitative aspects of your endeavor.

In the Bible we're told, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs" (1 Tim. 6:10). Notice it's not money that's the problem—it's our love for it above all else. Financial motivation must be tempered by a clear vision of what you want to accomplish and the sheer passion for whatever field, industry, cause, or product you hope to bring to the rest of the world. You must also have a passion for adventure, for discovery, for new people and places if you want your vision to keep a balanced perspective and to reach new heights.

Broken Wings and Busted Dreams

In addition to complementing the financial motivation to be an entrepreneur, your passion will also help you to take risks, learn from your mistakes, and practice perseverance. If you want a secure,

sure-thing, consistent career, then you should probably take a safe job in a field such as accounting, technology, or human resources in a well-established, conservative corporation. While there are no guarantees anymore, you can at least take the safest route possible if you know you are risk averse.

If your personal vision is to have more autonomy, freedom, and flexibility, however, then you may indeed be cut out for being a pilot of possibility in the world's entrepreneurial airspace. Make no mistake, you will probably work harder and longer as an entrepreneur than as someone else's employee. So once again, check your motives and make sure you're not expecting to retire to a tropical island as soon as your business becomes profitable. Entrepreneurs are willing to work harder than ever before as they pursue the fulfillment of something deep within them.

In fact, some unique issues make entrepreneurial flight harder for minorities, the impoverished, and those in underserved communities. None of us gets to choose the giants we must fight, and any obstacles were in place before we ever got here. The turbulence we're suffering at our present altitude may be the result of someone else's past piloting or temporary hijacking. The suffering of those crushed beneath the aftermath of Wall Street bailouts and the resulting debris of layoffs and downsizing left us all struggling to build on the equity of our parents' generations.

It doesn't help that recent political shenanigans leave us in the wake of economic uncertainty as we manage the traumatic despair that erupts when we are uncertain about tomorrow. Even those who have gainful employment do not escape the mounting stress. A whopping 76 percent of Americans live from paycheck to paycheck, according to a recent CNN report. Families who have easier access to capital have often used and abused debt to the degree that their

debt-to-income ratio has sunk so low that they now live with daily trepidation wondering if they will be next to walk the plank and be cast into the abyss of homelessness and despair.

This kind of insatiable anxiety can consume anyone. We are many ages, ethnicities, and intellects. We are atheists, agnostics, faith based or fear filled. We are right wing and left wing. The diversity of people who need additional income is amazing. Some are neither left nor right but feel like they have lost their wings altogether. And even if they've flown before, their past crashes have left them with broken wings and busted dreams, wondering if they have missed their only opportunity to reach the height of their God-given potential.

We have a responsibility to help our brothers and sisters navigate through the turbulence and find ways to achieve beyond traditional methods. I can't, in good conscience, ignore the extreme cry for more economic solvency coming from underserved communities in our country. While some people will always be exploitive and opportunistic, most are merely fighting every day for dreams deferred. They are people of faith and clarity, hopes and dreams, desires and decisions, all wondering how or even if they can harvest the unleashed potential waiting to be realized within them.

Some have resorted to petty crime; some are vulnerable to get-rich-quick schemes and the variety of scams that promise a quick win. Some have swallowed their pride and accepted low-income jobs, while others moved back home with their parents. We have college students flipping burgers with dormant degrees and with student loans bigger than the golden arches where they work. Americans come home at night exhausted from the pace around us, the fear inside us. We know we are grounded, out of balance, and operating in the red, trying to survive a deflated existence in an inflated income world.

Then there's Mr. and Mrs. Middle America who in previous times were economically productive and well able to see a brighter future. They, too, have to rethink themselves. They've traded their summer vacations for backyard picnics and gone from the mall to the yard sale for discretionary purchases as they strain within their shrinking budget. Going out to dinner has succumbed to "will work for food" signs of the times.

Undeniably, many of us have created our own chaos. We are reaping the harvest from no vision, poor choices, bad marriages, bankruptcies, poor investments, living beyond our means, the downsizing of a company, and other human maladies. Obstacles ranging from self-induced problems to systemic bias frequently deter the fulfillment of our goals. And regardless of background or ethnicity, I see all of us busier than we've ever been. The pace of life is fast and ferocious. Some of us are so busy trying to survive that we don't get a chance to rethink our goals and recalibrate our practices so as to be more fruitful and effective.

But those who sit back passively waiting on government funding or a start-up investor to knock on their door will be disappointed. Success doesn't trickle down. It springs up from inside a heart that beats to the drum of creativity until its gushing reverberation brings change to the entire community. Are you willing to fight to ignite your flight?

There is no better time than right now to rekindle the embers of long-abandoned dreams or to spark new ones. You can make different choices than the ones that have gotten you where you are now. You can take action and cultivate new habits that will transform your dreams into a business unlike any other, one that uniquely reflects the variety of facets in your extraordinary personality.

One that boldly dares to go where no one has gone before!

A New Model for Momentum

Taking responsibility for your own success must be foundational if you are to succeed as an entrepreneur. I was raised to believe that the goal of young adults is to leave the nest and test their wings—in other words, to go to school and graduate in the hope of landing a lifelong position. Or at least take up a trade and work the next forty or fifty years in the hope of ending up with a gold watch and a bakery cake at their retirement party. However, with 40 percent of our workforce remaining unemployed or underemployed, with a middle class whose shrinking base resembles the man with the withered hand, we need to draw on the creativity that lies in all of us to pull ourselves up as best we can with what we've been given to work with.

We cannot leave ourselves at the mercy of who will or will not hire us. This means that the wings you used to arrive at your present perch may not have the strength, stamina, and span to carry you to where you are going. Trying to soar on wings like eagles is exhausting when all you have left is a handful of feathers! Could it be possible that you've gone as far as you can go with your present wings? Changing times may require a paradigm shift in your vision and a major adjustment to your life's flight plan.

It may be time to chart a new course and engage a new model, to discover new fuel for your creative engines and test new materials, lighter and stronger, to lift you off the ground. What your parents modeled for you was acute wisdom for the era in which they lived. But our day requires untested methods, unexpected mentors, and unconventional models. We cannot fulfill our destiny by simply imitating our parents or repeating our mentor's model. This parakeet style of living where you repeat only what you heard leaves you trapped in a cage of past paradigms, unable to launch yourself into the freedom of exploring limitless skies above you.

If you believe in a power beyond yourself, then you can understand the power of faith to fuel the jet engines of your vision and the new ventures revving up inside you. We were created in the likeness of a creative God so that we can draw on that creativity for the innovation required to reimagine ourselves, reinvent our circumstances, and reinvest our gifts. Getting your vision off the ground and then soaring enables you to move beyond the breach of our times, close the gap between the so-called haves and have-nots, and offer your children a blueprint of passionate pursuit. Your flight pattern will not only assure your ascent, it will also lift your family and raise your community, which should be the inherent goal shared by all of us.

Divine Lift

As you assess your current location and motivation for being an entrepreneur, do not be discouraged by the size or number of obstacles in your path. If you can catch a vision for it then God can do it! There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that God provides the ultimate wind beneath our wings, the divine lift of a curious coincidence or conspicuous conversation. I have seen him open doors beyond my wildest dreams. I know what it is to sit in a seat in life that only a God who loves me immeasurably would provide. I have seen him elevate paupers into philanthropists and cashiers into CEOs, activists into actors and daydreamers into designers.

God is the ultimate strategist and opens doors that no human could have opened. But we must also remember the incredible responsibility and opportunity he reserved for us to create. Consider that God never made a table. He never created a chaise or a chair. He never gave us pencils to write with or paper to write upon. God Almighty never created a box for storage, nor a crate for shipping!

Did he not know that we would need them? Of course the omniscient God of the universe knew what we would need! Yet he never once stooped down to make any of the items we would need every day to survive. Instead, he gave us trees, beautiful, strong, majestic spirals that point ever upward toward heaven. He gave us trees because he knew that trees, if used properly, would provide us with the raw resource to imagine and create specific objects we would need, in the shape we would like, to fit the room we would live in, in the color of our choice!

Are you using all the resources God has placed in your life and dropped in your lap? I suspect most of us do not. Building your vision ever higher is about assessing the time, talents, and treasures we've been given in this lifetime and taking ownership of the choices, the relationships, and the opportunities we have been given. I want to challenge you to see tables in trees, boxes in bushes, and provision in problems!

Often when we are exhausted from dead-end positions, pointless relationships, and indifferent environments, we are forced to change our lives for the good. So don't become weary and faint. If you allow the times to defeat you, the circumstances to deter you, or the obstacles to derail you, it may be because your faith in yourself and even your faith in God has fainted. If any of this remotely sounds like you or someone you love, realize you may be on the precipice of a mighty awakening! It could be possible at this stage in your life, after all you've been through, that you have gathered enough experience from past blunders to set a new course and soar to greater heights!

Many people have succeeded in making this transformation, and I hope that if you have an entrepreneurial inclination you won't allow bad models that you've seen in the past destroy present moments of opportunity. Simply because you have the talent to get somewhere doesn't mean that you have the wisdom to run! You

need both the talent and the wisdom, the drive and the directions to reach your destination, and that's why you must make an honest assessment of what drives your desire to be an entrepreneur. You picked up this book for a reason, my friend, and I suspect the timing may be divine.

If you're tired of hovering in place and ready to expand your vision and fly to the next level, then it's time to make your vision a reality.