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**CONNECT  
TO YOUR  
CALLING**

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T. D. JAKES



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# Introduction

“What’s my calling?” “How do I find my purpose in life?” “Why am I so unfulfilled?”

These are powerful questions packed with poignant terms. They are questions that demand answers, yet those answers can only come from within. Each of us holds the key to our own calling, purpose, and sense of fulfillment.

What is that key? Instinct.

Scientists tell us that even our cells have instincts. Imagine my amazement when I spoke with physicians who revealed the way our physical cells operate. They say even our cells function based on what has been genetically programmed within them. Instinct is interwoven into the very fiber of our DNA.

We all begin as a single cell, the product of an egg and a sperm. They unite to form a zygote, the result of the fertilized egg, the single cell that will evolve from a

human forming to a human being. This new cell undergoes a series of rapid divisions that produce a blastocyst, the initial ball of new cells. The blastocyst then multiplies into many daughter cells. One expert describes these cells as being “pluri-potential.” In other words, each of these cells has the potential to differentiate into new cells of many different varieties. Some “daughter cells” instinctively become skin cells, bone cells, spleen cells, cardiac cells, or brain cells. The inherent imprint of these cells activates them to become what they were predestined to be.

This inherent sense of identity based on function is truly astounding. Doctors explain that the cardiac cells are “autorhythmic” cells. They actually vibrate and beat together instinctively at the same tempo before they ever unite with each other and function as the heart! Even drummers in an orchestra need a conductor to set a rhythm, but these cells instinctively catch the same beat and have the same rhythm. They draw together and beat together to the same rhythm.

Learning about these “cell instincts” made me think of the old camp song taken from the Old Testament book of Ezekiel. You know: the foot bone is connected to the leg bone, and the leg bone is connected to the hip

bone, and so forth. Now, I'm not a doctor, and I'm sure not here to sing around a campfire. But what I want you to see is that the body develops from cells that find their rightful place because they know what they were made to do! These cells vibrate to the tempo of their purpose even before they're operating and performing their function.

So how about you: Are you in sync with your inner wisdom about your strengths, abilities, talents, and unique contribution to the world? Or is your life somehow off beat with your inner melody? Have you lost your rhythm because you have not found your place to define and activate your unique contribution? One of the great tragedies of life is not discovering the people, culture, and careers that are part of your tribe and moving to the same beat.

You may have experienced the discord that comes when those around you move to the beat of a drummer different from your own. Successful businesses, healthy relationships, and most collaborative endeavors require a syncopated alignment of roles, responsibilities, and rhythms. Entrepreneurs often need employees with a work ethic and flexibility similar to their own. It's frustrating when you have an urgent idea that requires

execution at midnight and a team member who cannot be reached until the following day. It's not wrong to set boundaries and limits on work, but people need to be on the same page of music so the orchestra can play together. Similarly, romantic partners often discover they're out of step because one desires a waltz while the other's leading a tango.

Contentment comes when you find the people, places, and events in life you were created to impact. Most individuals who lead rich, productive lives do so because they allow their instincts to guide them to the intersection of the head and heart, the place where their deepest passions and sharpest skills align with destiny. They succeed instinctively because they each know their own tempo and recognize it in the individuals and institutions with whom they collaborate.

If you have ever felt misaligned, this book is for you. If you have lost the rhythm, the passion, or the thrill of living in alignment that you once glimpsed, then keep reading. As he did with the very cells that make up our bodies and the dry bones that were joined together for new life, God has given us deeper instincts to be attracted to those things that fit a higher and better purpose.

Never settle for less than God's best for your life.

Some people have the courage to move beyond the ordinary, from the methodically mediocre into the revolutionary realization of where they belong. You can have this sense of belonging only when you connect to your core calling. If you believe in calling, as I do, you understand it's more than the motivation to minister that clergy experience. The calling to creativity, the calling to teach, to give, to build, are all part of allowing your instinct to guide you to the "something more" that you suspect is out there.

Who can deny that some people move into their life's purpose with the skill of a child prodigy when he first touches a violin? They're aware of a compelling sense of attraction and engagement that cannot merely be taught but can only be caught. I've known musicians who played the piano from childhood, many without lessons. They just sat down at the keyboard and felt connected to it.

It's a sad thing to live your life without this deep-rooted sense of connection to your purpose. Like a lightbulb without a lamp, this kind of disconnect fosters dark and foreboding feelings in the soul. Whether you are the manager or the employee, the homemaker

or the home builder, what matters most is that you have been awakened to your purpose and enlightened to the inner fulfillment that it affords.

Early in my life, I myself was haunted by feelings that I was created for more than I could access in my environment. The only reason I moved beyond the many potholes and pit stops I encountered is because of an instinctive allure pulling me toward something up ahead on the road that I had to find. I refused to stop and settle for less than the explosive exploration of what God had placed within me!

There is no secret formula for learning to listen to your instincts and connect with your calling. These pages before you merely offer my sparks toward kindling the blaze of your own incandescent, instinctive alignment, the deeper and fuller life you were created to attain. So as we journey together, let's remove the smoke and mirrors and ask the questions at the heart of our truest self. If we seek meaning in our motives, perhaps the answer will be not the voice of God shouting at us from the heavens but the whisper of our God-given instincts deep within.

You see, Scripture tells us that out of the heart flow

the issues of life (Prov. 4:23). The heart can't read. It can't draw and it surely can't drive. But if we will listen to its drumbeat, if we have the courage to be wooed by its wisdom, then we will find our answer. We could spend the rest of our lives in a rhythm so in sync that the melodious sounds we make transform all areas of our lives into an integrated, harmonic symphony of satisfaction.

As we grow and go forward, our master Creator may be wooing you instinctively into a place where your intellect can flourish and your heart can rest. If cells move until they connect and form the highly complicated and efficient beings we call humans, then maybe we need to put our ears to the heart of the matter and catch the beat.

If these words resonate with you and reverberate with what you know to be true, then it's time to decode your own instincts, increase your areas of advancement, and illuminate the dark corners of disappointment at the edges of your life. It's time to connect with your calling. I truly believe that following your instincts will transform your workplace, liberate your career, and enhance your relationships.

Make no mistake: these pages can only offer you clues to stimulate your own process of discovery. The answers you seek are already inside you. So if you're ready to unlock the confines of where you are to discover the freedom of where you were meant to be, then let's get started. Remember, your instinct is the key!

## CHAPTER 1

# A Safari Secret

**O**ur Creator designed everything he made to have a purpose. Yet most of us live our lives wondering what our purpose is. Worse still, there's an aching in our hearts as we sense that there has to be more in life, something beyond the monotonous compliance with convenient opportunities to which most of us have lived our lives. I encounter so many people who dread going to work—not because they are lazy but because they are unfulfilled.

Without understanding the guidance that our innate God-given instincts provide us, we simply adjust to the urgency of circumstances, all the while sensing deep within that we were created for so much more. Yet the

uncertainty or fear of pursuing this inner sense keeps us contained in the contrived cage of the ordinary. Simply put, we've never learned to rely on our instincts.

But regardless of where we are in life, it's not too late to align our lives with the inner wisdom of who we really are and what we were made to do. God, the master designer, has equipped us with a fundamental instinct that draws us to our divine purpose. This sense of potential being realized is more fulfilling than any paycheck. It is the feeling of fitting in, like a piece in a puzzle, to form a greater picture than what we may be doing right now. It is the innate satisfaction that comes from giving the gifts that you and you alone can contribute to the world.

How do instincts help us connect to our calling and find true purpose in life?

First, instincts provide us with information that has been synthesized through the filter of who we really are and our truest goals in life. Facts, data, information, and knowledge provide nourishment and stimulation for this capacity within us. Our powers of observation and of experience are stored here. Our creativity, resilience, and resourcefulness also abide within our instincts. Fused together, the basic instinct in each of

us compels us toward the unique fulfillment that is ours alone.

Second, please understand that the kind of instinct we're talking about here is not an uncontrollable urge, self-indulgent desire, arbitrary impulse, or compulsion. Instinct may seem similar to these other aspects of our humanity at times, but ultimately our instincts include an acute sense of timing along with an awareness of self and others that transcends selfish lusts and addictive desires. In other words, our instincts are not motivated by immediate gratification, personal gain at the expense of exploitation, or the pursuit of satisfaction untethered from conscience.

Third, since we are made in the image of our Creator, I'm convinced that our instincts bear the imprint of the divine. As human beings, we not only possess the instinct for survival, just as any other living creature does, but we also have instincts for purpose, fulfillment, and dominion. God made us to reflect his creativity, resourcefulness, and imagination. He wants us to see beyond the literal, above the bottom line, and beneath the surface of appearances.

There is indeed a great deal of difference between a job and a career, a place of employment and a rendezvous

with destiny. Finding the thing you were created to do can be a dubious task, highlighted by the fact that we generally don't have time to do the soul-searching required to find the hidden clues to unlock our fullest and best potential. Instead, we fill out an application, gain a reasonably good-paying job, and go to work for someone who found the thing they were created to do!

This inward urging or prompting is far too often underutilized, and consequently so many people feel stuck at a certain stage even as they long to be more productive. Beyond pursuing the direction of their instincts, as you may have done at times, the question remains: Have you maximized your findings or only stored the data and acquiesced to the mundane routine of fitting in with what has already been done?

Isn't it about time you activated what you've been given inside you?

## **Water for Elephants**

My own life-changing encounter with the power of instinct in action occurred on a safari in South Africa. Yes, the kid who grew up playing in creek beds behind

his house now felt an even keener thrill as I found myself lurching over open terrain in a Jeep! In fact, there was no way I could ever have imagined what a truly life-transforming event this safari would become, catapulting me into the “Aha!” moment that inspired this book. I wasn’t there to stalk big game but to hunt for insight into this new world of roaring lions, zealous zebras, and the creatures that have always, for some unknown reason, fascinated me: elephants!

The first morning I was up before the sun and enjoyed a delicious pancake breakfast on the lanai before donning my newly acquired khaki safari suit. We climbed into the Jeep and met our guide. He was a distinguished gentleman who was incredibly knowledgeable, and I listened intently as he unloaded priceless information about the habitat, eating and mating habits, and so much more concerning the beasts that inhabited the wild.

Honestly, it all felt a little surreal. Considering my background, I marveled at this “If my mother could see me now” moment. Without a doubt, we were entering a world that couldn’t be more different from where I grew up. The African wilderness has unspoken rules and regimens that the zoologist guide shared with us as

I oriented myself in this new environment so foreign to my background and previous points of reference. There were no street signs, traffic lights, or road manuals, just the voice of the zoologist guiding us along the way.

We saw gazelles leaping in the air like grease spattering in a cast-iron skillet at a fish fry. They skipped and lunged forward so fast that my camera palpitated in cardiac arrest while I snapped away as fast as I could. We spied on lions with their cubs, resting in the shade. Later we watched zebras move like painted horses loosed from a carousel. So much beauty, energy, and primal instinct came alive before us, more vivid and startling than any IMAX, HD, or 3D film could ever hope to capture.

As the sun hovered above the horizon like a scarlet ember, we looked for a place to make camp. It had been a good day, an unforgettable day. My only disappointment, which I kept to myself, was that we had not seen any elephants. The powerful pachyderms had eluded us all day, and as the sunset melted into twilight, I assumed that we had missed our chance. But then our zoologist guide casually mentioned that he looked forward to showing us the elephants tonight.

Had I heard him right? He planned to be out here at night! And for us to be with him? I swallowed hard and acted brave as we persevered deeper and deeper into the entrails of a world completely new and now even more foreboding, draped in shadows. Now, there were certainly a lot of animals I did not want to encounter in the dark of the African wilderness. And elephants remained high on that list. Nonetheless, as we continued bouncing along the dimly lit path that was our road, it was clear that our guide intended to save the biggest, if not the baddest and best, for last.

Soon our driver stopped the Jeep, and a man draped in loose native garb seemed to appear out of nowhere alongside us. Our guide told us that he was a Zulu and he would be assisting us this evening. I couldn't help but remember my history classes from junior high about Shaka Zulu the warrior, and I imagined that he might have looked like this stoic, dark-skinned man who proceeded to perch on the edge of our Jeep in a makeshift chair that looked as though it had been welded onto the hood to accommodate his small but muscular frame.

Apparently, he knew where to find the elephants. But based on his silent, impassive demeanor, I wasn't so

sure. We hadn't seen one all day. If our zealous zoologist couldn't locate them, how was our new addition going to find them?

As our journey continued, the zoologist began spouting a fountain of scientific information about the area. However, I noticed the Zulu seemed unimpressed by the intellectual prowess of the other man, who continued to lecture with impressive factual data about our surroundings. The ancient-looking warrior remained silent as we careened deeper into the bush, jostled by bump after bump, until suddenly he opened his mouth and proclaimed, "The elephant is ova dere!"

Seated between a zoologist and a Zulu, between intellect and instinct, I saw something more startling than I had seen all day. I realized that intellect can explain an elephant, but only instinct can find one! The zoologist had used hundreds if not thousands of words to describe the environment where we might find elephants, along with their eating habits, mating patterns, and fighting skills. And yet the Zulu waited quietly, listening to something even more powerful than his counterpart's knowledge, and uttered five simple words: "The elephant is ova dere!"

Moments later, his instinctive exhortation proved

true. Proceeding in the direction the Zulu was pointing, our driver careened over rocky roads into a clearing by a small lake. There, a herd of elephants lounged and frolicked like guests beside the pool at the Ritz. Throwing water over their heads with their long trunks, they ignored their new spectators and continued cavorting.

I was speechless. Such power and might. Such enormous grace and agility on such a gigantic scale. We took picture after picture and had an incredible time, but I couldn't get out of my mind that God had brought me all the way to South Africa to show me something. Through this simple encounter, he revealed a profound metaphor on how to position my life and career for the future.

You see, it was there that I realized that I must not only surround myself with talented, well-informed people in order to prepare for the future. I must also include those individuals gifted with what the Zulu had afforded us. He reminded me that most things are not captured or conveyed by intellect alone. In fact, intellect without instinct can only explain and explicate but not execute. Only instinct can successfully find what intellect explains.

This is the one thing that university degrees and

on-the-job experience cannot instill in you. Your professors and bosses can invest countless hours exposing you to critical information and inspire you with empirical historical data that will be invaluable as you trek through life. But the gift they cannot give you is the instinct to know when to do what only you can do and where to do it!

That gift is necessary when we strive to pursue our purpose and connect with our calling.

In order to harness your intentions with your actions, you must rely on instincts. Every visionary learns that they must be well-informed and well equipped to accomplish their targeted achievements. But they must also be in touch with their instincts in order to use their experience, education, and equipment to fulfill their expectations. Instincts can help connect the dots between where you're trying to go and how you will get there.

## **From Zoologist to Zulu**

The lessons of South Africa stayed with me.

I realized that my father certainly knew this truth as he built his one-mop, one-bucket janitorial business

into a fifty-two-employee company. Dad had instincts to increase. Great preachers experience this urge as they unload a biblical text. Gifted leaders recognize that knowledge and talent are not enough as they navigate through crucial decisions. Movie stars know the secret to being more than just an actor. Instincts separate the mighty from the mediocre!

How about you? Do you have the instincts to know when you are on to something or when you are just going for a ride? Do you trust your instincts when making a business deal or hiring a new employee? If not, you may attain a modicum of success, but you will never fulfill your maximum potential until you advance from being a zoologist to becoming a Zulu!

This insight changed my prayer life, altered my interview process, revised the way I evaluated effective friendships, and ultimately thrust my vision forward from the ordinary to the extraordinary. All of my life I had thought that some people had it and some people didn't. But I didn't really have a word to describe what my eyes had witnessed. Now I can tell you what "it" was, that crucial difference that makes magic out of the mundane.

Thanks to an encounter at the tip of a continent

thousands of miles from my home, I now had a term for the nebulous criteria for successful living. It wasn't just talent. It wasn't just intellect.

I had found the secret of champions. As I went back through all the people I had met in my life like a reel-to-reel tape stuck on rewind, suddenly it all made sense. From concert stages to corporate lunches, from church revivals to courtroom closing statements, the one thing each encounter had in common: instincts!

So if you are going after the big game of an idea, remember that elephant tracking requires instincts you may not have had to use when chasing rabbit ideas! It isn't just intellect or even understanding. It isn't just giftedness and opportunity. It is the gift of activated instincts. Where do they come from? How can we sharpen them? How can we utilize what our creative Creator has invested in our deepest parts? Yes, I said *invested* in all of us—to adapt, to transform, to create, and to sense moments of significance or danger. Moments to be wary and moments to be warring. When to cringe and when to capture. How to craft and not to crash.

It is the law of instincts that determines how we manage the moment, move into position and adapt,

resourcefully create, and strategically forge ahead without fear. The common denominator of instincts wins presidential elections, makes comedians successful, causes architects to build timeless monuments, and elevates engineers to artists.

Living by instinct elevates your ability to know where you're going and how to get there. It can help you know when to slow down and step back and when to accelerate and step up. And it can guide you to what you're ultimately looking for—whether that's the elephant in the room or the elephant ova dere!

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