

# THE CALL WITHIN

Other books by J. G. Johnston:

*Thriving on Collaborative Genius*

*The Art of Bringing Organizations to Life*

*The Way*

*The Religion of Jesus Before Christianity*

*Jung's Indispensable Compass*

*Navigating the Dynamics of Psychological Types*



# THE CALL WITHIN

Navigating Life with Inner Guidance

J. G. JOHNSTON

mse  
PRESS

The Call Within

Second Edition

First Edition 2001

Cover design by Lindsey Anne Johnston

Copyright © 2010 James Graham Johnston

All rights reserved.

ISBN: 1451502176

ISBN-13: 9781451502176

For correspondence or permissions, please contact: [jgjohnston](mailto:jgjohnston@giftscompass.com)

@ [giftscompass.com](http://giftscompass.com)

For Lindsey and Kylee



# CONTENTS

PREFACE IX

AWAKENING TO THE CALL 1

THE WAY OF THE SPIRIT 30

THE VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY 49





# PREFACE

It took a long time to write this short book. It would have been written more quickly if I had not started writing it when I was so far from my own center.

I had much trouble finding my “voice” and writing what I felt to be true. Not until it occurred to me that I should write this book as a letter to my daughters—as a summary of what I would want them to know about life should I not be around—did I finally find my voice.

Finding my voice also required finding my own call within. I had found it early in life, then lost it, then through a personal about-face that was about as nimble as turning the Queen Elizabeth around, I found it again.

The many iterations of early drafts of this book would provide a useful overview of that anguished personal process of transformation. Each of the early attempts at a manuscript were themselves anguished and clumsy. My wife, Chris, patiently read and insightfully critiqued them all.

Later, when I started to find my voice, Lynn Stratton provided much helpful guidance in matters of word choice and grammatical structure. She edited the first edition, published in 2001. For this second edition, Judy Ludwig provided a very thorough, precise, and thought-provoking editorial review. If a point is made well or an insight well spoken, either Judy or Lynn deserves much of the credit.

In the nine-year interim between the first and second editions, I became well acquainted with the psychology of Carl Jung and the philosophy of Quaker mystic, Rufus

Jones. They affirmed, each with his particular framework, that the way of the spirit is real and of utmost importance in human experience. Their enormous bodies of work enabled me to more confidently produce this small edition.

Early in the journey of my life, I awoke amidst the noisy streets and quiet ruins of Rome where the trusted way was lost. I was fortunate to meet Richard Callner, the director of the school of art where I was enrolled. He became a compassionate guide for me; if I had not known him, I might have gone back to sleep.

I have also been fortunate to know Jim Bacik, a Catholic Priest and inspiration for many, who merges humility, compassion, and decisiveness in a life devoted to the welfare of others. His commitment to truth and goodness illuminates the way of the Divine in a querulous world.

I am indebted to each of these people, and to many others, who have immeasurably contributed to my life, to my understanding of what is most vitally important, and therefore, to this book.

*Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you  
have imagined.*

THOREAU





## AWAKENING TO THE CALL

*There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.*

ALBERT EINSTEIN

WE LIVE ON A PLANET in a seemingly isolated corner of the universe. We neither know for certain how we got here nor what the future holds. Our world is held by a mysterious force that keeps us on track, poised and balanced with other colossal orbs, as we hurl concentrically around a blazing sun. Despite our restricted understanding of this force, we have given it a name: *gravity*.

Giving a mysterious phenomenon a name downgrades the nature of the mystery, pigeonholing it in a mental compartment that we might call “the known.” Considering the wondrous to be known alters our perception

of it. It cheapens the phenomenon, makes it ordinary, and dulls our sense of wonder. It leads us to believe that the miraculous is not truly wondrous at all.

No one really understands how or why gravity occurs, yet it is considered known nevertheless. When the mysteries of life are superficially categorized this way, a grand charade begins that renders the wondrous ordinary. In the same way, if we characterize the miracle of our own lives by some narrow and constricting self-concept, we, too, debase the wondrous and render it ordinary.

When I attended university as a young man, I used to walk to a vast cornfield at sunset to watch the sun sink beneath the horizon. It was a daily pilgrimage for me, a tribute to an astonishing event. I could almost feel the earth turn as the sun left my view. All of life seemed a great miracle, and I felt fortunate to be alive to experience it.

I have too often forgotten to take that pilgrimage as I have matured. Forgotten? Well, not exactly. Most often I have just been “too busy.” I have been besieged by the tyranny of what appeared to be “urgent.”

As our lives become more complicated, we often tend to have better things to do than to make pilgrimages to open fields. We have places to go and appointments to keep. There is just a lot of “stuff” to “get done.” If there aren’t critically important meetings to attend, then there are vitally important errands to run. The paper must be read, the money earned, the bills paid, the deal done, the promotion obtained, the calendar filled, the career established, the influence gained, the toys accumulated, the goals accomplished. The dizzying, ordinary, obsessive

play must go on, and there is little time for wondering about the miraculous.

Yet, if we do not take the time to connect to the wondrous, to the beautiful, to the true and the good, our lives become flat and one-dimensional. Life hardly seems worth living. We lose the inspiration, the passion, and the enthusiasm that normally sustain us. We lose our grasp of the immense phenomenon of *life* and its staggering, relentless movement through time.

Pause for a moment to see life in this world from a larger perspective. In your imagination step beyond our world, as though you were stepping into the black unknown of space. Now imagine turning to look back. Can you see our world? Do you see the ethereal clouds, the deep blue oceans, and the green and terra-cotta land masses? Our planet is fresh and alive—a marvel of color and life against the black unknown. There is some inconceivable, breathtaking miracle at work on this floating globe, suspended in the heavens by seemingly nothing—a miracle in which we are all participants.

From this larger perspective, you may begin to get a hint of an extraordinary, inexpressible purpose underway here. There is a momentous story unfolding on this world, a drama of growth and evolution toward some awesome destiny that cannot quite be touched or seen. Every creature and every particle of every atom perform their roles in this celestial theater of *life* marching through time.

Consider the possibility that you were placed in this world to play a significant part in that drama of life, that you, too, are here to begin a special purpose. Consider that your contribution is important and meaningful for the

outworking of the universal mystery underway. Consider that what you do and how you live your life *matters*, and that it matters not just to the people you encounter from day to day, but that it matters to *life*. Consider that your existence here has a purpose that is being silently but surely called forth into this remarkable theater.

I am not talking about a purpose you may have grown accustomed to, an *ordinary one*, one that may have stealthily asserted itself, one that may have you caught up in the bustle of daily routine or one that defines you as some mechanical cog in social machinery. I am not referring to the one that may demean your life and your sense of calling, nor the one that says you should do what everyone else does and strive for the things everyone else wants, nor the one that has you inextricably bound to the culture you live in, nor the one that keeps you from being the individual you were created to be.

I'm talking about a different one—*the other one*.

Consider that there is another purpose, one that you carry within you, one that has an *extraordinary* quality about it, one imbued with a faint but compelling luminosity, one you may keep suppressed for fear of what may happen if you let it out, one that might call you to some noble purpose. *That one*. The one that would take all the courage you can muster. The one that is not common yet feels more natural than anything you have ever known.

That one.

What is that special purpose for which you were created? What is the calling that would consume your life and demand your highest integrity? Seek it, and out of the mystery of life, it will be *given* to you.



In that quiet, sacred place known as the “inner life,” your calling awaits. It is known by many names: *passion, dream, vision, purpose, vocation, mission*. These words all attempt to articulate what can never be adequately described—a unique destiny that quietly lures you like an ancient siren and begs to be discovered.

## DISCOVER YOUR CALL

Sometimes the journey of discovery seems direct and clear. Some people know very early what they want to do in life. At the age of eight, they may say, “I want to be a doctor,” and then they spend the rest of their lives becoming and living the lives of doctors. Their calling readily finds expression in their work. Others, though, are given to a long, arduous struggle. Nothing satisfies them for long; they bounce from one pursuit to another. “Dreamers,” they are called, or “job-hoppers.” Their journey is fraught with frustration, even embarrassment, but the calling lures them on, seeking to be more fully expressed.

A calling often starts as a small hint of an idea, an urging echo of an un-lived destiny. It is like the purposeful *élan vital* of an acorn that *must* become a full-grown oak. Unlike the acorn, we have a choice: We can nurture the calling, or we can avoid it. Either way, the calling will have its say. The persistent call within, urging us to our destiny, will not simply vanish because we ignore it. We may grow dull to it, but it is still embedded in the soul. The call will not cease, one way or the other, to make its presence known.

When life is lived as an expression of our call, it produces an abiding anticipation and a peace of mind. It satisfies the urge to be about something significant and to make a difference in some way. We feel that we are on the right course. The calling gathers us up like an ocean swell and delivers us to a coast that feels perpetually new, original, and robust.

A call ignored or demeaned also has its consequences. Life can become dull and hollow. The ocean swell passes and we are left floundering in the ebb of an inauthentic life, safe perhaps temporarily, but not sound. The call will not leave us to our small lives undisturbed. The relentless haunting of an unlived life, dying within us, plagues us everywhere we go. A yawning void gapes ever wider within us and all the trinkets, toys, prestige, or drugs in the world cannot fill that empty chasm.

Sometimes we are afraid to follow a calling, afraid of where it may lead us, and our fears are often well founded. A calling may transport us to a more strenuous life. It may require a great deal of work. Following a calling does not guarantee a life of ease or uninterrupted bliss. The rain will fall on the just and the unjust, the good and the evil, as it has for millennia, but following a calling does provide the assurance of living a *deeper* life, a life that is rooted in the soul. It engenders an abiding joy and feeling of fulfillment.

St. Francis of Assisi was allegedly asked, while tending his garden, what he would do if he learned that he had only a short time to live. He simply replied that he would continue tending his garden. Einstein was still pen-

ciling out attempted solutions for a unified field theory—on his deathbed.

A calling becomes the reason for living. It is the *morning star* that orients life's direction. It is the perpetual "place" in life that is constant and dependable. Once found, no other place seems as fulfilling or whole.

Yet following a calling, by definition, means following something beyond your ability to manipulate it, and that can also be threatening. When you are in control of your life, you may readily imagine how things will turn out. You have your bags packed and you know where you are going. You may even think you know when you are going to die, and you may already be planning how to spend your final years. You may have an idea about how you will be living next year (usually very much the way you lived this year). You may think that you can see the end from the beginning. Even if your life has been a miserable failure, you at least know that you will probably continue to fail miserably—*and that can be comforting*. At least there is a sense of predictability about it!

When you follow the morning star of your calling, you cease to be so certain of your future. Each day is a new adventure of discovery, for you have entered into a partnership with what is *real* and beyond you. Your primary role is to have *faith* that you will get the guidance and assistance you need as you progress.

Faith goes against many natural instincts for self-preservation and of the desire of the ego for control. Yet when you step apart from your need to control, you discover a new self that is stronger, more vital, and more committed than the old self ever could be. Pursuing a

calling is engaging in a partnership with a venerable inner guide—a “still small voice” within.

Living with faith in that unseen guide may require courageous commitment from you, but the fruits of that courage spur you on. Each day feels more substantial and alive. The calling that started as a vague feeling of a new direction seems to expand and take shape as you pursue it. You discover a growing passion over which you exercise little control—and then you find that you do not want to control it. You do not want to put the fire out!

## FROM ORDINARY TO EXTRAORDINARY

A calling may be very compatible with a common walk of life. It is not what people *do* that makes it extraordinary, but *why* and *how* they do it. As Mother Teresa observed, we can do no extraordinary things, only *ordinary* things with great love. A calling often leads to a life filled with great love—a love for life, a love for work, a love for people—and *that* is what makes it extraordinary.

It is also true that a calling can lead to some remarkable accomplishments. Florence Nightingale, who felt “a call from God to his service” at age eleven, went on to transform deplorable conditions of health care when she founded the profession of nursing.

Anwar Sadat became president of Egypt and courageously pursued unprecedented initiatives for peace with Israel. He found his calling during a period of imprisonment and solitary confinement, about which he wrote, “Once released from the narrow confines of the ‘self’ . . . a man will have stepped into a new undiscovered world

which is vaster and richer . . . I came to experience friendship with God—the only friend who never lets you down or abandons you.”

Winston Churchill found a calling in political life, one that dramatically unfolded during the dark days of the Second World War. He wrote of that period, “I felt as if I were walking with destiny, and all my past life had been a preparation for this hour and this trial.”

Few of us are called to play such significant roles in history. Yet each of us is *called*. But called to what and to where? Those are the questions for which each of us must find our own answers.

It is not necessary to make a huge contribution to the world. We do not need to win a Nobel Prize or emblazon our names in the book of human history; but it is necessary to make a contribution. The calling does not urge us to a life of selfish ease. It moves us to effort, to work, to adventure, to exploration, to something beyond our own self-absorption.

It moves us to grow, to become unique individuals, to differentiate ourselves. It moves us to make steady, incremental progress along our journey, to grow in character and in competency. The calling is unfinished music: We hear only the first few bars, and we are called to complete the rest of the opus with our lives.

That composition need not be an epochal, paradigm-shifting symphony. Sometimes the music is just simple, easy, and light.

I remember talking with a young physical education teacher in Denver, Colorado, who was driving a shuttle bus for a rental car company over the summer. She was

the happiest, friendliest, most enthusiastic shuttle driver I had ever met. She found humor in everything and took an interest in our lives. By the time we arrived at our destination, we knew her as well as we knew some of our friends, and she knew us. We were family. The mayor and the entire membership of the Denver Chamber of Commerce could not have given us a warmer welcome to the city. She was creating happiness for thousands of people, just by driving a shuttle bus. She may not have been *called* to drive a shuttle bus, but she did seem naturally called to something simple, easy, and light: to bring warmth and friendliness to others.

A young girl, born with a mental disability, had been mainstreamed into a public school. She had been anxious about getting a part in her school play. On the day parts were given out, she came home very excited. "I have a part!" she exclaimed, as she rushed through the front door. "My part is to cheer and clap for all the other children in the play!" Simple, easy, and light.

What is that purpose that calls you to step outside yourself? What brings you joy and enthusiasm? What do you feel passionate about? It may be a political career, or it may be working with three-year-olds in the neighborhood preschool. Maybe it is just to cheer and clap for others. Whatever it is, it can draw you from an ordinary life into an extraordinary one filled with purpose and passion.

## NOTICE THE CUES AND CLUES

How do we find this elusive, invisible calling? Why were we not given an owner's manual for its care or a roadmap for finding our way? In many ways, we have been given both. We will review the owner's manual in the next chapter. The road map, and even the road and all of its directional signs, are often magically right in front of us, day after day, to be noticed or not, depending on the bent of our purposes. If we are attentive, we will find our way.

Each day is full of clues, symbols, signposts, and compass headings we too often miss. When we experience a surge of enthusiasm, are stopped short by an uncanny series of coincidences, or are drawn to a certain passage in a book or line in a movie, our calling may be speaking to us. Life is full of informative cues and clues. It is for us to pay attention, to listen and watch for what they are telling us.

Where do we start? How can we alter our lives to attend to this invisible yet compelling call? Sometimes, we start *right where we are*. Heeding a call often begins by doing what we have already been given to do, *with a whole heart*. "Whatsoever your hand finds to do," wrote the author of Ecclesiastes, "do that with all your heart." The situation we are now in may have been delivered to us as part of the call. It may be cultivating needed growth. If we bring a downcast spirit to our circumstances, we may miss all the inherent value.

Going the extra mile—being willing to do more and to do it more willingly—has a powerful effect, not only on us but also on the people around us. Bringing enthusiasm to

life often leads to the next thing—to the next progressive opportunity to discover the life that awaits us. As Martin Luther King, Jr. once recommended, “If you are called to be a street sweeper, sweep the streets as Michelangelo painted . . . Sweep the streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause and say, ‘Here lived a great sweeper, who did his job well!’”

The way to a calling may also appear as a circuitous path. I spent much of my early life moving from one pursuit to another. I was often terribly frustrated that I couldn’t seem to settle on some final career, but my enthusiasm just kept whisking me from one new adventure to another. Just as I was feeling that I was achieving mastery in some work, I would be conveyed to something else.

Now that my calling has become clearer and I am on a steadier, less serpentine journey, I can see the value of almost everything I did and how it can support the life I am choosing. All of those experiences gave me an opportunity to *grow down*, to reach in and experience some aspect of my resources that would not have been developed if I had gone straight to the life I now pursue.

Your calling may arrive early and then consume the rest of your life. It might subtly tap you on the shoulder one day, along the way to doing something else. You may have to struggle and fight to find it. One way or another, if you seek your calling, *it will find you*.

The chief task is to notice when the call arrives. Cues, clues, insights, passions, and epiphanies abound. We seldom notice more than a very slim fraction of those that are given to us, for we tend to relegate them to the



*ordinary* experience of life. Among those daily clues are our *interests*.

## TRUST YOUR INTERESTS

When we look to the interests that draw our attention, we are seeing the hazy outline of the call. Interests shape the riverbed through which the calling flows. If we try to force a calling to flow outside that riverbed, it can be rough going. We lose energy; everything seems more difficult and forced.

Interests can appear very early in life but can sometimes be smothered by social pressures to do or become something else. An interest may run too much against the grain of family or cultural values. A natural artist born into a conservative family may be encouraged to pursue a “more practical” career. A working-class, patriarchal community may suppress the aspirations of a talented, young male ballet dancer.

Sometimes interests don't fully mature until mid-life. James Michener's interest in writing did not seem to mature until he was about forty, when he wrote his first book. Anna Mary Robertson Moses (“Grandma Moses”) did not start painting until she was in her seventies and painted for the remaining years of her long and prolific life. Her paintings were exhibited and bought in galleries around the world, from New York to Tokyo.

People who have pursued their strongest interests have found themselves immersed in projects of service. George Washington Carver pursued his interest in botany and revolutionized agricultural practices. Marie Curie at-

tended to her interest in science and became the first person to be honored with two noble prizes. Margaret Thatcher, a grocer's daughter, followed her interest in politics and became the first female prime minister of Britain.

Interests can also provide balance. You may have to choose which of your interests to include in your work; other interests may need to be pursued more casually. They can provide refreshing respite, helping to keep your career pursuits in a healthy perspective.

Plants naturally turn toward the sun for nourishment. Birds instinctively migrate to beneficial climates. Every cell in your body is "minded" to know its mission and carry it out for the benefit of the whole. By some instinctive consciousness, every living thing seems to *know* what to pursue for its highest well-being. Trust your interests and feed them with your attention. They will do right by you.

## DO WHAT YOU LOVE

Gifts help to define our unique attributes, and they guide us to our call. Gifts are those natural talents or aptitudes that come easily. With practice or training, they can be developed and refined into specialized skills. An architect, for example, may be a very highly skilled designer, but his skills in architectural design sprang from underlying analytical and aesthetic aptitudes. These underlying gifts were present before the learning began.

We are given gifts for a purpose. If our gifts are discarded or ignored, our inner lives may erupt in frustration and turmoil. A calling invariably uses our best gifts; they

abide together like shore to ocean. When we cultivate our gifts, they lead us to a deeper sense of calling; they illuminate the horizons of our individual destinies.

Our best gifts can be oddly elusive; we may blithely take them for granted because they are *too* familiar. They have always been part of our identity, even from early childhood. Like the very air we breathe, they are essential to our well-being, though we may seldom be fully conscious of their value. Some people listen well to others, always willing to “lend an ear,” but they would hardly recognize that willingness as a special gift. Yet it *is* a gift, just as the willingness and ability to talk is a gift.

Identifying your best gifts is often a matter of paying attention to what you do naturally and gracefully, virtually without thinking. It consists of simply noticing what you most *enjoy* doing. What is it that you love to do, regardless of whether you are being paid? What brings you “bliss” and invigorates you? Doing what you love fosters your best gifts while orienting you to the course of your unique call.

## REVERE YOUR IDEAS

Ideas can also be lodestars to the call, leading us to the next step, to the next area of growth. We do not have the power to create ideas nor force them to appear. They are not widgets to be manufactured by us at will. They are *given* to us. They arrive in response to our individual quests and serve us along our way.

When Thomas Edison was involved in his creative struggle to develop a functioning light bulb, he met a

problem: The filament burned too quickly and the light bulb would not last. He struggled with this problem, and then after one of his famous twenty-minute naps, awoke with an *idea*. He remembered lying by a fire as a small boy, watching embers smolder in the fireplace. It occurred to him that the embers were smoldering because they were buried—deprived of oxygen. Then he realized that he had the clue that would solve his problem: Remove oxygen from the light bulb! When he created a partial vacuum in the bulb, his problem was solved.

We might call Edison's epiphany a *practical* idea. Practical ideas enable us to negotiate the many daily dilemmas that require practical solutions—the best route to work, the most appropriate birthday gift for a friend, where to buy the food for the evening meal. Practical ideas are an essential part of the process of managing life in the world at large; they are useful and productive. Deep ideas, though, seem to come from somewhere else, someplace, well . . . *deeper*.

Deep ideas resonate. They echo within us. They are imbued with a transcendent quality as they express a deep longing or a call to some noble expression of life. They arrive without warning, often when we least expect them. A deep idea might express itself as a thought like this: *I do not want to die without making a difference in the world.*

Deep ideas may appear as dreams or visions from within. We may see a brief glimpse of an ideal life appearing as a vague inner image, one that shadows our consciousness with its subtle persistence. It hazily delineates a destiny, a way of life that we feel compelled to

move toward. These deep ideas are beneficent, intervening thoughts that disturb the clatter of consciousness. They may haunt, jar, disturb, gnaw, and pull at us, but they possess underlying qualities destined for wholeness.

Ideas may also unexpectedly arrive from the world at large. A word or paragraph in a book could inspire us. We could be awed by another's life story. We might admire someone else's commitment and feel motivated to adopt a similar purpose for ourselves. Like the ideas from within, these ideas arriving from experience in the world are also elements of the majestic mystery of life; we must acknowledge them with the reverence they deserve.

## ATTEND TO SYNCHRONICITIES

Modern physics has uncovered some remarkable and unexpected properties of matter that seem to defy conventional assumptions. Matter, at the atomic level, is *not* just mechanical; it is also *relational*. Every atom of every molecule may be connected to others in ways not readily explained by accepted theories.

Similarly, cells in the human embryo know how to cooperatively form the human heart and when to *stop* forming that organ. They are inexplicably connected to one another for the benefit of the whole. Their relational ties defy our understanding.

We, too, are inexplicably connected to a beneficent fabric of relationships. The living fabric of relationships partially reveals itself in *synchronicities*—the meaningful coincidences of life.

Carl Jung coined the term “synchronicity” to refer to those coincident outer events and relationships that are packed with significant meaning for an individual’s inner development. Synchronicities are sometimes most visible in those unusual personalities whose call becomes manifest in some significant public role of leadership. The biographies of inspirational leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Eleanor Roosevelt, or Abraham Lincoln can be rich in synchronicities.

Lincoln’s path to the White House, for example, seemed synchronously orchestrated. Some of the synchronicities that delivered him there arrived as love relationships.

As a vulnerable young man, Lincoln fell in love with a sensitive young woman, Ann Rutledge. She was the light of his life, as well as a comfort to his introverted soul. She became very sick and died before they could be married. After her death, he fell into deep, nearly catatonic grief. A friend said, “The shadows of a burning he had been through were fixed in the depths of his eyes,”

Yet, she had illuminated a vision of possibilities in him that transcended his limited self-image. He ventured into a political career and set out anew to find a spouse. As an Illinois legislator in Springfield, Illinois, he met, through a friend, Mary Todd; she had come to Springfield hoping to find a husband. Her ambition seemed synchronized with Lincoln’s future; she intended to marry a future President of the United States.

From an eager group of attractive and well-heeled suitors, she chose Lincoln—the least likely candidate—against the protests of her family. She must have appre-

hended in the shy, homely Lincoln a potential for greatness.

Lincoln was stirred by her unlikely affection—so nervously stirred that he could not bring himself to the wedding. He backed out at the last minute without mustering an explanation. He may have intuitively seen that his marriage to Mary would propel him into a career that would consume his life.

He seemed to try, as so many do, to *avoid* the call, fearful of how it might alter the course of his life. Like Jonah who sought to avoid the call to Nineveh, Lincoln found himself in the belly of the whale—the “whale” of depression, confusion, and despair. He wrote during the months of withdrawal that followed, “I am now the most miserable man living. If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole of the human family, there would not be a cheerful face on earth.”

When Lincoln found his way back from the depths of despair, he again asked Mary Todd to marry him. Their marriage invigorated that series of events that would eventually propel him to the presidency. By way of various crucial events, this reserved, lanky country lawyer became one of the most admired men in history.

Our own lives may not be as historically momentous, but we too live lives rich in these kinds of meaningful coincidences. We may be seldom conscious of them, but as our attunement to the call grows, so does our awareness of guiding synchronicities.

## BE WILLING

We are born into this unusual world without much explicit guidance. The great religious traditions of the world do provide important direction, and we will look more closely at that guidance in the next chapter, but we do not get individual instructions for our particular lives. There is no owner's manual for our specific life circumstances. At first blush, we seem to have been left adrift to navigate our journeys unaided.

Yet upon closer examination, we learn that we have not been abandoned; we are not without guidance. We are given our *call within* and its many resonant reminders to chart a course to our individual destinies.

Follow your calling, no matter how dimly you may now perceive it. Do something. Act. Find some interest or activity that you can pursue right now, right where you are, and you will begin to move along a seamless web of relationships and events in the direction of your fondest dreams. Serendipitous events and relationships will support you and help to keep you on course.

Whether your calling starts large or small does not matter. Whether you have been sent into this world to cheer and clap for others or to save a democracy, pursue your calling with all your heart.

You may not feel that you are sufficiently equipped for your calling. Do not let that stop you. You will become more fully equipped as you go along. It is far better to aim too high than it is to aim too low, never feeling pressed to develop your full capabilities. A story about a golden eagle illustrates the point.



A young Indian boy, for a prank, removed the egg of a golden eagle from its nest and placed it in the nest of a prairie chicken. The eagle hatched about the same time as the chicks of the prairie chicken. It spent the early months of its life living like a prairie chicken. It learned to scratch like a prairie chicken, cackle like a prairie chicken, and scrounge for food with the rest of the prairie chickens. Then one day the young eagle looked up and saw a beautiful golden eagle soaring in the sky above it.

“What’s that?!” exclaimed the young eagle.

“*That* is the golden eagle, the most noble of all birds,” said one of the prairie chickens. “But don’t give it a thought. *You* could never possibly be like a golden eagle.”

The young eagle took the advice of his prairie chicken friend and returned to scratching for food. He grew old and died, never considering that he, too, was a golden eagle.

A small self-concept too often stops us from discovering our true selves. We do not fathom the full resources that we could bring to bear until we take the constraining lid off our tightly compressed self-esteem. It is not a happy feeling to approach the end of life regretting that we did not have the courage to fulfill our own promising potential.

Reach for the most that you can imagine. If you fail, that’s okay; failure is part of the process. Failure is success in disguise, for it provides abundant opportunities to successfully *learn* and *adapt*. While the reasons for success may not be clear, the reasons for failure are usually obvious. Fail early and often so that you can succeed sooner!

Feeling that you do not have the necessary resources may also feel limiting; yet, you have access to resources that may go untapped if you underestimate your full potential. Your gifts are drawn from a deep well of resources. The depth of that well cannot be realized until you become committed to a purpose that is greater than your own self-interest. If you feel called to a large undertaking, then large resources begin to appear, either from within you or from others who may feel motivated by your purpose.

Personal history, too, may stop you from pursuing the call within. You can spend much time brooding about what went wrong in the past. That is as disastrous as attempting to drive a car by looking through the rearview mirror. A calling pulls you forward into new, uncharted territory. Leave the past behind if it does not serve you. Allow yourself to become new, to be reborn with a new consciousness of your larger identity and why you are here.

Other people may try to stop you. People who do not have the courage to pursue their call may not want others to pursue theirs either. They may derive comfort in knowing that you, too, have chosen to follow *their* standards. Choices are always easier and less challenging when following the crowd, but the herd does not hold the compass of your individual destiny. The call within is a call to differentiate your life, not to conform to the judgments of others.

Be bold. Find your unique way. You are individually brilliant and noble in some way that your calling will make clear. Find friends who admire and support your unique

qualities. Find strength in your growing connection to the germinating call within you, and gain support from others who have also courageously launched their lives in pursuit of that sublime adventure.

What is your calling? What calls you out of the ordinary into the extraordinary? What is that purpose that would require leaving self-absorption behind? Look for it and step forward, willing to let go of your tight control. Being committed to a calling larger than your individual well-being will provide a confident and stabilizing direction. It is a direction that may separate you from the current conforming herd, but that will also align you with the liberating relationships of eternity.

There is a special purpose for your life, if you are willing to heed the call. Willing is the key word. You must be willing. You may not feel worthy or fully equipped. Seldom does one feel fully equipped or deserving at the onset. That comes later. More importantly, are you willing?

*Nobody sees a flower—really—it is so small it takes time—we haven't time—and to see takes time, like to have a friend takes time.*

GEORGIA O'KEEFE

*Every heart longs to be part of something big and sacred.*

MATTHEW FOX

*For what is lost in so many lives, and what must be recovered: a sense of personal calling, that there is a reason I am alive. There is a reason my unique person is here and that there are things I must attend to beyond the daily round and that give the daily round its reason, feelings that the world somehow wants me to be here, that I am answerable to an innate image, which I am filling out in my biography.*

JAMES HILLMAN

*This is a call to service that will take great courage—to leave what we have and move out, not without fear, but without succumbing to that fear.*

JOSEPH JAWORSKI

*The free man is he who wills without arbitrary self-will. He believes in destiny, and believes that it stands in need of him . . . He listens to what is emerging from himself, to the source of being in the world; not in order to be supported by it, but in order to bring it to reality as it desires.*

MARTIN BUBER

*Just as there are no little people or unimportant lives, there is no insignificant work.*

ELENA BONNER

*You are here to enrich the world, and you impoverish yourself if you forget the errand.*

WOODROW WILSON

*This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one . . . the being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.*

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

*There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening, that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and will be lost.*

MARTHA GRAHAM

*We don't invent our mission, we detect it. It is within us, waiting to be realized.*

STEPHEN COVEY

*In work, do what you enjoy.*

LAO TSE

*There comes a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance, that imitation is suicide, that he must take himself for better or worse as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through the toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given him to till . . . Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string.*

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

*Most of us go to our graves with our music still in us.*

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

*The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.*

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

*Whether you think you can or think you can't, you're right.*

HENRY FORD

*The outward work can never be small if the inward one is great, and the outward work can never be great or good if the inward one is small or of little worth.*

MEISTER ECKHART

*We like to pretend it is hard to follow our heart's dreams. The truth is, it is difficult to avoid walking through the many doors that will open.*

JULIA CAMERON

*. . . as if from nowhere, comes the guide: something or someone to help us toward the threshold of adventure. This may take the form of voices within or people who guide us to see the way.*

JOSEPH JAWORSKI

*When a woman falls in love with the magnificent possibilities within herself, the forces that would limit those possibilities hold less and less sway over her.*

MARIANNE WILLIAMSON

*I had a sense of destiny, as though my life was assigned to me by fate and had to be fulfilled . . . Often I had the feeling that in all decisive matters, I was no longer among men, but was alone with God.*

CARL JUNG

*Everyone should carefully observe which way his heart draws him, and then choose that way with all his strength.*

HASIDIC SAYING



*If you deliberately plan to be less than you are capable of being, then I warn you, you will be unhappy for the rest of your life. You will be evading your own capabilities, your own possibilities.*

ABRAHAM MASLOW

*We must not allow other people's limited perceptions to define us.*

VIRGINIA SATIR