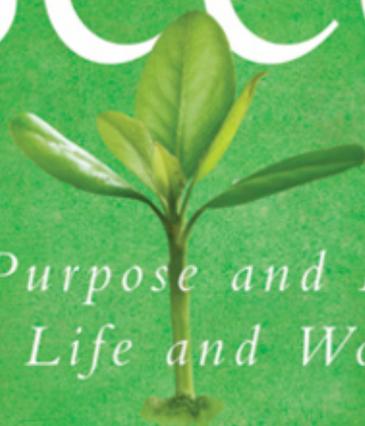


THE Seed

*Finding Purpose and Happiness
in Life and Work*



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Chapter 1

Two Weeks



Josh cruised down the country road with his foot pressed firmly on the gas pedal. He loved driving with the radio up and the windows down. He wasn't sure who enjoyed it more—him or his dog, Dharma. With her head out the window and ears flapping, she seemed to relish the smell of the fresh country air even as the strong winds battered her face. Not a care in the world, Josh thought, as he looked over at her and shook his head. She doesn't have to worry about jobs and bosses and paychecks. She doesn't have to care about things like “engagement” or “focus” or “employment.” Oh, to be so lucky.

They were miles from the city where Josh lived and worked—and far away from the challenges and concerns he faced. He wished he could just stick his head out the window and forget yesterday ever happened. He wished he could go back in time and take his father's advice. He wished he felt differently.

“I want to be you,” Josh yelled to Dharma. Her ears perked up after hearing his voice. She turned toward him,

letting her master know his words were more important than sunshine and fresh country air. Josh smiled at her. He was convinced she understood everything he said—whether they were taking a walk, going for a ride in the car, or sitting at home. She understood the creative ideas he shared while brainstorming in his “idea” room. She listened as he read books in bed and discussed life’s biggest questions with her. She put her head in his lap when he shared his innermost and greatest fears. She not only knew his thoughts, she knew what was in his heart. As Josh approached his destination, he wished she could tell him what his heart was saying.

A sign on the side of the road let him know the farm where he was headed was only a few miles away. He was looking forward to seeing his friends. They had invited him to join them for a fun day. He had never been to a corn maze before and didn’t know what to expect, but figured it had to be better than sitting at home feeling sorry for himself.

His friends knew what others did not. His life was not as perfect as it seemed. Sure, he had a great place to live, a great job with a well-respected company, and a bright future. Yet something was missing. He was no longer excited to go to work. It wasn’t that Josh hated his job. It was just that he didn’t love it anymore. And everyone knew it, including his boss, who had called Josh into his office yesterday, on a Friday of all days, to break the news.

“You’re not the same guy I hired five years ago,” his boss, Mark, had said. “You had the fire in your belly. You

were passionate and full of ideas and energy. Now it seems you don't even want to be here anymore. What's up?"

Josh looked down at the ground, not wanting to look his boss in the eye. He knew Mark was right, but hearing him say the truth made everything more real. He felt exposed and ashamed. "I don't know," Josh said as he looked up and shook his head. "I wish I had an answer, but I don't. I'm just not feeling it lately. I don't know why. I'm just not." He wasn't sure whether he should have told the truth, but his upbringing and his own experience told him an honest answer was always the best answer. Besides, he wore the truth on his face every day, and his body language over the past year spoke volumes.

"Well, you know that passion is a big part of what we do," his boss said. If we don't have passion, then we are like everyone else—mediocre—and that's not good enough for me, our company, or our clients.

"Am I being fired?" Josh asked. He always remembered when he was twelve years old and had broken his arm; the doctor had walked in, looked at the X-ray, then immediately grabbed his arm and made small talk. Next, without any warning—*crack*—the doctor had set his broken bone back in place. Ever since, Josh believed in getting painful or uncomfortable moments over with as quickly as possible.

"No," Mark replied, shaking his head, "I'm not ready to give up on you yet. We've invested way too much in you to just let you go, and I believe you've invested too much in us to give up now. I've seen this before, and I think you

need a break. So here's the deal: I'm giving you two weeks. Think of it as a reverse two weeks' notice. Instead of being fired after two weeks, my hope is that you'll be rehired. Sort of like a fresh start. You have two paid weeks off to decide whether you really, truly, and passionately want to be here. If, after two weeks, you decide this is not right for you, I'll be disappointed, but at least we'll both know it's time to move on and not go through the motions any longer. It's simple. You either want to be here and give 110 percent, or you find something else you want to do that, hopefully, will light the spark you once had here."

"Deal?" Mark asked as he reached out to shake Josh's hand. "Deal," Josh replied, as he shook his boss's hand and walked out the door, wondering whether he should be cheering or crying. While most people would love a paid two-week vacation to decide their future, for Josh there was nothing more frightening.

Chapter 2

Lost



Josh recalled the previous day's conversation with his boss as he drove through the entrance to the farm and felt the same knot in his stomach. It would have been easier being fired, he thought. At least the decision would have been made for him. It occurred to him that today, Saturday, was the first day of his two-week vacation before he would have to give an answer to his boss. He would have to make a decision by then, but not today. Today he didn't want to make any decisions. Today he just wanted to put everything out of his mind and have some fun.

The farm was larger than he'd expected. Giant stalks of corn seemed to grow everywhere along the long, winding road Josh navigated to get to the farmhouse and entrance to the corn maze. He arrived at the farmhouse, parked his car, laid out a blanket for Dharma to lie on for a nap, and cracked the car window for her so she could enjoy the cool October country air. Then he paid for his ticket and ran to greet his friends, who were waiting for him at the entrance to the maze. On his way, he passed a line of people waiting

their turn to board a propeller plane to see the maze and the countryside from the air. Not on your life, Josh thought. The only planes I fly are jets with pilots and flight attendants who serve peanuts, pretzels, and drinks.

Josh found his friends, and they exchanged hugs, high fives, and handshakes. After making bets about who would get through the maze first, they lined up to begin the race. It didn't take long for Josh and his friends to lose each other, since the maze offered many dead ends, forks, paths, and choices. When faced with a choice of two paths, some chose one path while others chose another. This continued until, eventually, the group was completely divided and Josh was alone and lost in the maze.

Ever since he'd been a kid, Josh had had a fear of getting lost, and, as he stood facing a wall of cornstalks, he became increasingly anxious. Should he take the path to the left or to the right? Should he go backward and take a different path? Should he shout to his friends? He closed his eyes to pray for direction, and when he opened them, he saw a tall, lanky, old farmer with long gray hair and a gray mustache standing in front of him. Startled, Josh nervously asked where he had come from.

"Oh, I came from the maze," the farmer said with a raspy voice. "This is my farm, and I like to walk the maze and help people who are lost find their way."

"That's great," Josh said, feeling more at ease, "I'm definitely lost. Can you help me?"

"That remains to be seen," the farmer replied. "First, can you tell me where you are going?"

“Well, I’m trying to get to the end of the maze,” Josh said, thinking the farmer’s question was weird and the answer obvious: “If I knew where I were going, I’d be there by now.”

The farmer took a deep breath and smiled, “Josh, I’m not talking about the maze. I’m talking about life. Do you know where you are going with your life?”

Josh looked around nervously and thought, “How does he know my name?” He looked for his friends and the hidden camera. Surely his friends were playing a trick on him. They knew he was going through a crisis, and perhaps they were doing something radical to slap him out of his funk. What better way than a practical joke? He called to his friends, and when no one came out from the cornstalks he felt strange.

“You didn’t answer the question,” the farmer said, as he stared at Josh with a slight grin on his face, “Do you know where you are going with your life?”

Josh took a small step backwards.

“How do you know my name, and why are you asking me this?” Josh asked forcefully, becoming more uncomfortable.

“I know everyone who comes through this maze,” the farmer said reassuringly. “I’ve found enough lost people to know when they are lost, and you, my friend, are as lost as they come. But don’t worry about it. Millions of people are lost like you. Many come to the maze in search of something. They come from all professions, all backgrounds, and all ages. Some are in search of their dream job. Some just want to find a little fun and happiness in their life. Some are looking

for more meaning in their work. Others are facing some kind of adversity and are filled with uncertainty and fear. They're searching for answers and wish someone would tell them what to do next. But then they meet me and I explain that the maze offers the lessons to create the life they want. As I said, I help people find their way. If you listen to me, I'll not only help you find your way out of the maze, I'll help you find direction for your life."

Josh scanned the old man's face. There was a calm, peaceful presence about him. He figured the farmer had learned his name from the booth where he had paid for his ticket and signed up for the mailing list. If the old man could help Josh get out of the maze, he was all ears. Direction for his life, however, was not on his list of priorities at the moment.

"Okay, I'm listening."

"You're lost because you don't know your purpose!" the farmer exclaimed. "Purpose is our ultimate guidance system that provides us with direction for our lives. Purpose fuels us with passion, and this passion gives us confidence and vitality to go after our dreams. To live without purpose is to wander aimlessly through life like dust in the wind. You become one of the walking dead, meandering among the living. But when you find your purpose, you discover the power that fuels all of creation. You find your reason for existing. You find the path you were meant to travel and the passion to thrive on your journey."

"And where do I find this purpose?" Josh asked. After hearing words like *passion* and *purpose*, he was now more

interested in what the farmer had to say. Just the other night, he had closed his eyes and asked to be able to know and live his purpose. It was a simple prayer he hadn't said in a long time. "Use me for your purpose. Guide me toward my purpose." And now, here he was, having a conversation about purpose with a stranger in a corn maze. He should have known better. Like the title of one of his favorite songs, he knew God moves in mysterious ways.

"I thought I'd found my purpose," Josh added, "when I got my first job after college. Now, though, I'm questioning everything: my job, my past decisions, my future. You're absolutely right, I am lost."

"Well you don't have to be lost anymore," the farmer said, as he grabbed a seed from his pocket and handed it to Josh. Josh looked at the seed while it rested in the palm of his hand. "What is this for?" he asked.

The farmer paused for a moment, pointed at the seed, and said, "Find out where to plant this seed and your purpose will be revealed to you."

Josh looked at the seed skeptically. "How can planting this seed help reveal my purpose?"

"I'm not sure how it works," the farmer responded, "I just know it works. It's one of those mysteries of life—where our belief in miracles allows us to see more miracles and where our imagination somehow creates our reality. I've given seeds to hundreds of people, and they have discovered their purpose. They all come back to tell me so, and I hope you will do the same when you find yours."

“What happens if I don’t try to find out where to plant the seed?” Josh asked, hoping there was another option he could try.

“Then you won’t find your purpose,” the farmer answered, knowing there was only one way. “Everyone must embark on a quest to find their purpose. It’s the one thing in life that truly matters, and if you don’t pursue it, everything else is meaningless. The journey is not easy. It’s filled with mystery, challenges, obstacles, and dead ends—much like this maze. But if you are willing to follow the path and learn from wrong turns and keep moving forward, even when you want to give up, you will eventually find the right place to plant your seed.”

“Where do I start?” Josh asked curiously. “I have no idea where to begin.”

“Begin where all knowing exists. Begin with your heart. And be careful of your mind. It will often play tricks on you and deceive you on your quest. But your heart never lies. It knows your *why*. It knows where you are meant to go and what you are meant to do. You just have to listen to it. And while you are following your heart, also look for the signs.”

“What signs?” Josh asked, knowing his heart certainly wasn’t forthcoming with information lately.

“The signs of grace that guide you through life,” the farmer explained. “These signs help you decide which roads to take. They come in many forms: advice from a stranger, dreams, eureka moments, songs, television shows, books, and even big signs on the side of the road. God uses all means to communicate with us to guide us on our journey.”

If we are open to these signs, look for them, and follow them, they will guide us in the right direction. The more we look for and believe in the signs the more they appear.”

Josh smiled. He knew about signs. His father had always talked about them, and Josh had seen them throughout his life. When he would walk on the beach as a teenager, he would ask for a sign and, sure enough, a flock of seagulls would fly overhead at that moment. He often saw 11:11 and 1:11 on clocks and his phone and whenever he did he knew it was going to be a great day. It happened too many times to chalk it up to coincidence. Signs had helped Josh make some of the most important decisions in his life. Lately, however, he had forgotten they existed and had stopped looking for them.

The farmer continued, “A quest for your purpose is like a cosmic game, and once you know how to play and embrace the game, it becomes an exciting adventure.”

The words *adventure* and *game* stuck in Josh’s mind. He used to think of life as an adventure. He used to see it as a gift, not an obligation. Lately, though, it didn’t feel like a game. It felt like a homework assignment. And, although he believed in what the farmer was saying, he wasn’t sure he had the energy or desire to play the game or embark on an adventure.

“If you don’t feel like playing the game,” the farmer said, as if reading Josh’s mind, “or if you feel like giving up after the game starts because the search seems futile, remember this: The fact that you have a desire to search for your purpose means there is a purpose to be found. Why else

would you and so many people be searching for it? The fact that you seek it means it exists. So, play the game, Josh, and don't give up. Follow your heart and follow the signs, and you will find where to plant the seed." And then the farmer added with a big smile, "Oh, and there's one more thing you must know before I leave you."

"What's that?" Josh asked, expecting to hear more profound advice.

"To get out of the maze, take this path to the right, follow it, and it will bring you to the exit. I've got to go help a few more people who are lost. Remember to come back and see me," he shouted as he disappeared down the path to the left.