

A TEENAGER'S GUIDE TO FINDING THEIR TRUE CALLING

THROAT PUNCH NORMAL



JOE ELLIOTT

WITH ZAC TINNEY

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Additional chapters by Zac Tinney
Book Layout by Faithe Thomas
Illustrated by Jeff Macpherson at www.JeffryMacpherson.com

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A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

This book would not be possible without the faithful support and encouragement we have received by so many over the years.

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

Much of my hesitation in going all in with Jesus came from the fact that I just didn't feel like I had much to offer. I had felt average my entire life. I did a lot of stuff but I never really excelled at anything. I didn't know what my passions were or even what made me unique. I became content sitting on the bench watching other Christians in action. This book not only chronicles the pathway I went on in going from your 'average Joe' to discovering and owning my God-given gifts and passions, but it is also a collection of some of the most impacting tools and exercises we have ever seen students, like yourself, respond to.

My co-author, and partner in crime, Zac Tinney, has done a brilliant job in offering his insight and wisdom throughout this book. As a Millennial himself, Zac is on the frontlines shaping some of our most innovative programs and content at Catalyst. Having found and embraced his own unique identity through building this ministry with me, Zac can also attest to the power of these exercises.

We wrote this book together because we feel that your generation has the potential to model Jesus to the world better than any other generation in the last century. Reading books may not be your thing but we hope that living a life that truly impacts others is. Put in the work to go through each chapter and we promise it will radically open your eyes to how God has intentionally shaped you and why it matters.

A little something about me (Joe) that you might relate to

The first thing I do when I pick up a book from an author I have never heard of is to flip to the back, because I am interested in only two things: what this person has done with their life and what I stand to gain by listening to them. While some authors write from their observations and opinions, others write from their experiences. There are those who like to think and talk, and there are those who like to roll up their sleeves and do. I tend to have more respect for the latter.

As a teenager, you have a natural nose for hypocrites, liars, frauds and anything that doesn't seem 100% authentic. Your friends are probably pros at talking a good game but not delivering. If you grew up in church, then you probably have seen your fair share of folks that can quote Bible verses like a champ yet their actions often don't match what they preach. They are like religious bobbleheads agreeing with the Bible in word and theory yet their bodies are frozen stiff, unable to live out with any sort of consistency what they believe.

This is nothing new. The church, which is a collection of very broken people, has always struggled in this area because, after all, our bar is Jesus. Although we recognize the life we are called to lead, sin keeps getting in the way. Being like Jesus is something we continually work toward but will never fully achieve in this life. As a teenage Christian, this really bothered me.

Suppose on your next math exam your teacher gives you five problems to solve. You are already panicking because you know if you miss two, you fail. To make matters worse, she tells you that each problem is only

worth ten points each and that she would like for you to all get 100s on the test.

What?!?! If the highest possible score is fifty, then how would she expect someone to reach 100?!

This is exactly how I felt when I was introduced to Christianity. I felt as if I was being asked to spend my entire life sacrificing, grinding, loving, serving.... all in an effort to be like someone I could never fully be like!

“This sucks” was a recurring thought I would have growing up in Youth Ministry.

On top of that, questions about whether the Bible was true and trustworthy piled up during my years in college. Eventually I met another Christian who patiently walked me through my doubts and helped me find reasonable, rationale answers to all my questions. After investigating the evidence behind each world religion, it was clear that the claims of Jesus were a thousand times more supported through history, archaeology, prophecy, literature, miracles, science, and the evidence of changed lives than any other theology on Earth.

But just because I accepted Christianity as truth, it didn't mean I was also desiring to follow it.

I had grown up around all of those spiritual smack talkers and few of them impressed me. Church scandals seemed to always fill the evening news. And anytime you saw a Christian in action it appeared they were yelling or shouting at someone in protest. I could roll with Jesus, but the rest of these clowns? Sitting in a pew listening to bad music, trying to stay awake during long winded lectures, being pressured to volunteer,

giving 10% of my money to who knows what and having to get up early on the one day of the week I could actually sleep in?

No thanks, I'm good.

That one Christian who I actually got along with in college, who took the time to listen to all my complaints and objections with her faith in God, I ended up marrying her 6 months after graduating. We moved to Austin, TX; bought our first house; and, while she attended church on Sundays, I was out playing basketball with my boys in the neighborhood. Then I experienced something that I had not felt in a very long time. Conviction.

As my wife and I sat out on our porch one evening, we took note of the number of troubled teens that surrounded us. The two teenage boys next door were in and out of juvenile services, battling drug problems, and more. The teens across the street from us were always home but we rarely saw their parents and noise from their wild parties each weekend would keep us up at night. We had met others who lived in nearby low income housing units and were on the brink of foster care.

"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few," my wife said.

I knew she was quoting Jesus but I had never really thought about the implications of Jesus' observation in this passage. Could it be that even in Jesus' time there were more thinkers than doers? That there were more religious bobbleheads than there were people of action? Had I become the very thing I had despised? A Christian on paper but an atheist in reality?

The truth is I was a hypocrite trying to avoid other hypocrites. I knew that if I was to step up and attempt to really go all in following Jesus, it was going to be the most difficult process I had ever endured and the ‘sanctification’ would not end until my life here on Eearth was over. Jesus called it the narrow path.

Despite the temptation to stay complacent, I went all in.

I would spend the next few decades working on the front lines with teens and young adults in ministry. In 2011, I launched an organization called Catalyst Teen Center, now known as the Catalyst Collective. Our mission was to create an environment where every young person could bring their unique purpose to life. What started as a ministry science experiment, continued to grow year after year. As of 2017, Catalyst has connected with and served thousands of students in the Austin area and beyond through after school programs, internships, community service, classes, events, camps, mentoring, and more.

In short, we found the ultimate life hack for teens who earnestly desired insight into how God uniquely made them and why it matters. This book is that hack. The easy path is to remain a normal teen, kinda clueless about what you really have to offer the world and not doing a whole lot that anyone cares about. Or, you can choose to punch normal in the throat by venturing down a narrow path that is filled with great risk and reward.

My prayer is that God awakens within you the very purposes He created you for in this life and beyond.

Joe



SECTION 1

YOUR POTENTIAL

Potential is only a measure of what can be, not a measure of what will be. Most of it tends to be wasted, while a fraction of it gets realized. The secret to capturing and fulfilling potential is found piece by piece in each section of this book. The Apostle Paul is a great example of potential that was almost wasted until Jesus not only captured his heart, but taught him how to embrace his unique design. We will continually refer back to Paul and his teachings throughout this journey and provide more detail about his background because God used him to set a standard for how all Christians are to embrace their gifts, talents, passions, and purpose. For now, it's important to note that this is the dude that helped start the first churches all over the Middle East and Europe and wrote most of the letters that make up the New Testament. Much of what we know about what it means to be a Christian comes directly from Paul.

In this section, our goal is to help you evaluate the times we live in, what your role is, and what it will take for you to live a life of meaningful impact. You may feel like just another average teen at times but it's important to note that in God's Kingdom, there is no such thing as average.

CHAPTER 1

THE MODERN INVENTION OF THE TEENAGER

Several years ago I read a book written by two high schoolers that was a catalyst to how I would engage with teens forever. The book was called *Do Hard Things* by Alex and Brett Harris. It was the first time I ever thought to look into the history of how the term “teenager” came about. I’ll recap a few things I learned that I hope will be just as eye opening to you as they were to me.

The Invention of the Teen

Let’s consider that the concept of a “teen” is still less than 100 years old. The term “teenager” did not even pop into our vocabulary until the 1940s! A brief look at the world of young people from before the time of Jesus to until the early 1900s reveals that two types of human phases existed for almost all of history: children and adults.

In this period of history, you will find no such thing as mandatory public school, career guidance counselors, Little Leagues, or limitations on how old you had to be to hold a job, earn money, or even carry a weapon. Your car was likely a horse and you didn’t need a permit, just the ability to not get yourself killed while riding one. By the age of seven,

you already knew how to cook, farm, fire a weapon, repair stuff around the house, remedy illnesses or wounds, and take care of infants. By the age of twelve, the world treated you more as an adult than a child and began to talk to you about things like marriage, taking over the family business, and how to defend your home in times of war.

By sixteen or seventeen you were married, or were soon to be married. Drugs and alcohol were legally at your disposal and by the time you reached the now magical age of twenty one, you had the maturity and composure of a modern day forty-year-old. Your youth had well prepared you to be a productive member and leader in society and you were using your skills to produce great stuff for your family and the community around you.

Now let's fast forward to the early 2000s.

By age seven, you were being diagnosed with ADHD for not being able to sit in a chair at school seven hours a day, getting yelled at for not having your helmet on while riding your tricycle around the cul-de-sac, and receiving trophies for coming in dead last in sports. By age twelve, you felt your parents were complete idiots. They couldn't even figure out how to change the ringtone on their phones much less have any wisdom to provide you. You had no choice but to go to school, were too young to get a job, were still seen as a child to the adult world, and had no expectations over you aside from staying out of trouble and getting decent grades.

By sixteen or seventeen, with graduation looming, you were faced with your first adult decision: how to live life on your own. Your parents were not rushing you out of the house so you figured you have another

decade before you REALLY need to do the whole ‘adulting’ thing. Now, you reason, is the time to have some fun, travel, try out college, spend a ton of time with friends and meeting new ones. There’s not really a plan, just a confidence that things will all work out and you’ll find your path eventually. The world expects little from you and you are happy to live up to the embarrassingly low expectation.

So what happened?

In short, society forgot what young people were capable of. A series of labor and education reform laws in the early 1900s raised the age in which “children” could work and mandated kids stay in school until they were older. The invention of the automobile also meant a teen could travel further to hang out with people, date, and embrace a new kind of independence without carrying as much of the burden to be a productive member in society. Teens became consumers instead of producers. The world adjusted its expectations and wrote you off.

And you loved it.

Action: This will take five minutes, tops. I want you to Google the phrase, “Invention of Teenager” and explore the history on your own. Read at least one article from a legit source on the topic and then share what you learned with someone.

I’m serious, do it.

Your age bracket is enslaved by low expectations and it’s going to take young leaders like you who are willing to awaken others to the truth and emancipate them from this tyranny of mediocrity.

C O N T A C T I N F O

We WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Seriously, we'd love to connect with you and look forward to hearing how this book is helping you to find your true calling. If you have questions about different parts of this book, or if you found a typo, or if you just need to talk with someone, please connect with us!

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- ✓ Email: joe@catalystteencenter.com