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Rechecking Your Alignment

Only when your intent and actions are in alignment can you create the reality you desire.

—STEVE MARABOLI

While I don't personally know what Michelle Obama dreamed of being when she grew up, I suspect that First Lady of the United States probably wasn't at the top of her to-do list. First of all, when she was born in 1964, the fight for civil rights in the United States was in full swing and the possibility that an African American president would one day be elected seemed remote—perhaps impossible in our lifetime. Second, she had other plans for her life—plans that were revised and realigned numerous times as she listened to the calling of her God.

Michelle LaVaughn Robinson was born and raised in Chicago, and she grew up in a one-bedroom, one-bathroom apartment with her father, Fraser—who worked for the Chicago water department as a pump operator despite living since the age of thirty with the tremendous physical challenge of multiple sclerosis—her mother, Marian, and older brother, Craig. According to Michelle Obama, “My father was a blue-collar worker.... My mother stayed home to raise me and my brother. We were the first to graduate from college in our immediate family.”¹ Her family attended worship services at South Shore United Methodist Church, just a couple of blocks away from her home.

Early on, Michelle was a standout in school. She skipped second grade at the segregated Bryn Mawr Elementary School (since renamed the Bouchet Mathematics & Science Academy) and she was named salutatorian of her graduating class at our shared alma mater, Whitney M. Young Magnet High School—Chicago’s first public magnet high school. It was here that she took the Advanced Placement classes that would help propel her to an offer of admissions from Princeton University, where she enrolled in 1981 (and where her brother, Craig, had enrolled two years prior).

When Michelle started at Princeton, she had set her sights on becoming a physician, but those plans quickly changed. Says Obama, “I wanted to be a pediatrician, until I realized science wasn’t much fun.”² She felt out of place at Princeton—the rare black student in a very conservative and predominantly white Ivy League institution—and the mother of her white college roommate reportedly demanded that her daughter be moved to a different room. To its credit, the university refused her demands. Michelle went on to major in sociology with a minor in African American studies, and she graduated with a bachelor of arts degree cum laude.

Instead of going on to a career in some sociology-related field—perhaps as a social worker or community advocate or rehabilitation counselor—Michelle made another pivotal decision in her life: she chose to attend law school and become an attorney. She was accepted by Harvard Law School and graduated with her JD degree in 1988. While at Harvard, Michelle served the community by helping low-income clients navigate housing issues as a volunteer at the student-run Harvard Legal Aid Bureau, and for some time she edited the *BlackLetter Law Journal*, a publication of Harvard’s Black Law Students Association.

After graduating from Harvard Law School, Michelle made the decision to practice corporate law, and she accepted a position at the high-powered Chicago-based law firm Sidley Austin. It was here that she would meet her future husband, Barack Obama, a summer associate whom she was assigned to mentor. Although she remained at the firm for three years, she knew something was wrong: her purpose and her chosen career were out of alignment. Reflecting back on her decision to pursue a career in corporate law, Obama explains that her Harvard experience naturally pushed her in

that direction—perhaps so loudly and so persistently that the voice of her Caller was drowned out. Says Obama:

*The thing about these wonderful schools is they can be surprisingly narrowing to your perspective. You can be a lawyer or you can work on Wall Street; those are the conventional options. They're easy, socially acceptable, and financially rewarding. Why wouldn't you do it?*³

Michelle left Sidley Austin in 1991 to pursue opportunities that would be in better alignment with her purpose. In an interview, a partner at Sidley Austin—Quincy White, who was instrumental in recruiting Michelle to the firm—offers his assessment of why she left. Says White, “I couldn’t give her something that would meet her sense of ambition to change the world.”⁴ And if anything, Michelle was driven by a strong desire to change the world.

According to her profile on the White House website, “After a few years, Mrs. Obama decided her true calling was working with people to serve their communities and their neighbors.” During the next few years, Michelle worked in a variety of different positions—an assistant to Chicago mayor Richard M. Daley, assistant commissioner of planning and development for the City of Chicago, and the founding executive director of the Chicago chapter of Public Allies—preparing young people for careers in public service. Says Michelle about her time at Public Allies, which she built within two years into an organization with a \$1.1 million annual budget, mentoring up to forty clients a year, “I was never happier in my life than when I was working to build Public Allies.”⁵ She and Barack Obama were married in 1992.

In 1996, Michelle accepted a position as associate dean of Student Services at the University of Chicago—charged with building connections between the greater Chicago community and the university. While in that position, she founded the University Community Service Center (UCSC), which, according to the organization’s website:

*prepares students to become productive, thoughtful citizens and effective, inspiring leaders in their communities and professions by providing them with service and social change opportunities that complement UChicago's rigorous academic experience.*⁶

She eventually migrated over to the University of Chicago Medical Center, in 2002 accepting a position as executive director for community affairs, and in 2005 becoming the organization's vice president of the Office of Community and External Affairs. Her work at the University of Chicago Medical Center brought her high school ambition to pursue a career in medicine back into her life, if only in an administrative role.

In the meantime, in addition to his career as a civil rights attorney and professor at the University of Chicago School of Law, Michelle's husband, Barack, decided to pursue political office—creating a hybrid career closely aligned with his purpose. He was elected to the Illinois Senate in 1996, where he served through 2004 (while still working as an attorney and professor), and he was elected to the United States Senate in 2004. In 2008 he was elected the forty-fourth president of the United States.

Mrs. Obama was First Lady of the United States throughout her husband Barack Obama's two terms in office, from January 2009 through January 2017. During this time, she led four major programs: Let's Move!, launched in 2010, which brought together parents, medical professionals, community leaders, and educators to address the problem of childhood obesity within a generation; Joining Forces, launched with Dr. Jill Biden in 2011, which called on Americans to support service members, their families, and veterans in securing opportunities in education, employment, and wellness; Reach Higher Initiative, launched in 2014 with the goal of encouraging young people to complete an education beyond high school—in a professional training program, community college, or four-year college or university; and Let Girls Learn, a 2015 initiative aimed at encouraging and aiding girls to attend and stay in school.⁷

As First Lady, Michelle Obama had a unique opportunity to closely align her purpose with her daily work—making a tremendous difference on people's lives across the nation and around the world. All because she was

willing to listen to the voice of her Caller and then follow His direction. As she said in a 2007 South Carolina speech:

When I listened to my own voice and cast the cynics aside, when I forged ahead and overcame the doubts and fears of others about who I was and what I could become, I found that their doubts and fears were misplaced. Funny thing, the more I achieved, the more I found that I was just as ready, just as qualified, just as capable as those who felt entitled to the seat at the table that I was working so hard for. And I realized that those who had been given the mantle of power in this country didn't have any magic about them. They were no better, no smarter than me. That gnawing sense of self-doubt that is common within all of us is a lie. It's just in our heads. Nine times out of ten, we are more ready and more prepared than we could ever know.⁸

Change Happens

A vocation is not something that we can set and forget; it requires periodic checks to ensure that the path on which we are walking is still aligned with our calling. As I briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, our understanding of our calling can evolve over time—gaining greater dimension, depth, and breadth as we evolve and as we experience more of what life has to offer.

As your understanding of vocation grows, so too must your responsibility for stewarding your vocation. To whom much is given, much is required. So if you have been given a little clarity, then you are responsible for stewarding that: you're ultimately responsible for what you do with this knowledge. Happiness, fulfillment, meaning, and passion all come from this.

PROFILE IN COURAGE: *Mark Pawloski*

One of my former students, SoFi Entrepreneur Program member Mark Pawloski, started his career with a lucrative job in the banking world, but he soon left the amazing compensation behind to create impact—as an educator with Teach for America and then for charter schools and after-schooltime nonprofits. Frustrated by what he witnessed in the education sector, he decided to marry his background in banking with his passion for education reform. Instead of taking the safe road, Mark launched himself into entrepreneurship and cofounded Upkey, a “student incubator that helps connect ... students with potential employers.”⁹

Rechecking that you are aligned with your calling requires getting in touch with your Maker. But what if your connection is fuzzy, or what if you feel like you’re no longer in contact with Him?

I like to think about this situation in much the same way as being in a conversation with someone on a mobile phone and the connection fades in and out or gets cut off. This happens to me all the time when I’m talking to my wife after a long day at work. Invariably, she will walk into a tunnel or get on an elevator, or I will drive through a dead zone on the expressway, and the communication gets interrupted. When this happens, it does not mean that my wife or I have stopped speaking. It just means that the connection is weak or cut off because we have gone out of range of the phone signal.

If you embark on the process of rechecking your alignment and you can no longer hear the voice of your Caller, it’s not because the Caller has stopped speaking. Your Caller is God, and sometimes we can no longer hear His voice because we have gone into places where we have moved out of the range and cut ourselves off from hearing His voice. He’s still speaking, but we’re not hearing.

How does this happen?

It happens when we are no longer in a position to receive. It could be because we feel completely self-sufficient and believe we no longer need God’s help, or because we are comfortable right where we are and no longer listen to the voice of our Caller. Comfort is a complacent feeling in

which you're settled in and satisfied with the status quo. Comfort is a place where you rest on your laurels and enjoy the ride. Comfort is a place where you cling tightly to your career because you and your career and the perception of your professional success are intertwined.

But the call of God is to care more about being faithful to Him than to a prescribed career trajectory. Some people cling so tightly to their careers and the applause that comes with success that they miss the voice of their vocation. As a result, they begin to get absorbed in *what* they're doing, not *why* they're doing it. Vocation is far more about a greater *why* than it is about a particular *what*, because the what will shift with time. It has to.

After earning his MBA at the Kellogg School of Management in 1991, John Wood accepted a position at Microsoft, where he served as an executive, including positions as director of business development for Greater China, director of marketing for Australia, and director of marketing for the Asia-Pacific region. While Wood was on the fast track for success at Microsoft, he knew something wasn't right. The technology industry was growing by leaps and bounds during the 1990s, and according to Wood, "the only way to keep up was to work crazy hours."¹⁰ His life was increasingly dominated by stress and pressure to perform.

After seven years of the crazy hours—and constantly flying to meetings all around the globe—Wood's relationships with family and friends deteriorated, and some crumbled entirely. He began to wonder if it was all worth it. Says Wood in his book *Leaving Microsoft to Change the World*:

*Seven years in, though, that nagging question continually popped up: Is this all there is—longer hours and bigger payoffs? I had adopted the commando lifestyle of a corporate warrior. Vacation was for people who were soft. Real players worked weekends, racked up hundreds of thousands of air miles, and built mini-empires within the expanding global colossus called Microsoft. Complainers simply did not care about the company's future.*¹¹

After a particularly tumultuous set of business-review meetings with Steve Ballmer, Microsoft's president at the time (which were said to

typically involve much shouting and haranguing), in 1998 Wood and a colleague decided to take a much-needed, three-week trekking vacation in Nepal. They would hike the two hundred miles along the challenging Annapurna Circuit, reaching altitudes higher than seventeen thousand feet and mentally and physically remove themselves just about as far away as they could from the hard-charging Microsoft culture.

During the course of the trek, after a particularly difficult ascent, Wood and his companions arrived in a village, Bahundanda, where they visited a school. The school was packed with 450 students divided into eight classrooms. The trekkers met the headmaster of the school, who led them to the school library. According to Wood, there were no books in the library. When he asked the headmaster where the books were, he unlocked the cabinet where the books were kept. Says Wood:

*The headmaster explained. Books were considered precious. The school had so few that the teachers did not want to risk the children damaging them. I wondered how a book could impart knowledge if it was locked up, but kept that thought to myself.*¹²

Concerned that the students were being deprived of such a basic thing as a book, but not wanting to insult his host, Wood wondered what he could do to help. He received his answer when the headmaster suggested, “Perhaps, sir, you will someday come back with books.”

One year later, Wood returned to Bahundanda with three thousand books donated by family and friends, and when he returned to the United States, he resigned from his executive position at Microsoft. Thus was born Room to Read, a nonprofit cofounded by Wood, Dinesh Shrestha, and Erin Ganju.

Says Wood about his decision to leave behind his lucrative corporate job to start up a nonprofit organization with no guarantee of success, but which would align him with his purpose:

One library is a drop in the ocean in the world of 780 million people who are illiterate. I faced a dilemma—I could go back to Microsoft where I was in charge of business development for Greater China,

*and I could make Room to Read my hobby. But the problem is hobbies don't scale. I wanted to do this in a big way—go big or go home. I'd have to quit my job and do it full time. I literally threw myself off the Microsoft plane and prayed the parachute would deploy.*¹³

In the years since Wood made his first trek through the towering mountains of Nepal, Room to Read has distributed more than twenty million books, trained almost nine thousand teachers and librarians, partnered with more than 19,500 schools, and benefited more than ten million children through its literacy programs. In addition, the organization's Girls' Education Program has enrolled more than forty-seven thousand girls with a dropout rate of just 6 percent.¹⁴

In his book *Purpose, Incorporated*, Wood suggests that the classic four Ps of marketing—product, price, promotion, and placement—have recently been joined by a fifth P—purpose. He describes how companies large and small have begun to use a sense of corporate purpose as a competitive advantage to win new customers and differentiate themselves in the marketplace.

And while customers get excited when they find a company that they share a purpose with, so too do employees—and prospective employees. This is especially the case for millennials. According to a study conducted by Cone, Inc., and AMP Agency, 79 percent of millennials surveyed report that they want to work for employers that care about how they impact/contribute to society, and 44 percent said they would actively pursue working for a company after learning about its social commitment.¹⁵

Just as it's important for people to align closely with their purpose, so too is it important for organizations to align with *their* purpose. More on that in chapter 9.

Approaching a Transition Zone

Falling out of alignment with your calling doesn't typically happen all at once. It happens in stages, one small step at a time, until you approach a transition zone—a pivotal time in your career and life. Depending on the

choices you make as you enter, navigate, and then exit the transition zone, you may more closely align with your calling or you may find yourself further from it than ever.

But how can you tell that you might be approaching a transition zone? One sure sign is a restlessness that you might feel—a feeling that whatever career you may be engaged in, it isn't where you belong. You don't feel like you're in the right place or the right role. You might feel that the impact you're making on the world around you is insufficient or not channeled in the right direction. You might also have a feeling that you have been successful by someone else's standards—your parents', your spouse's, your boss's—but you can see that the “success” you've achieved is meaningless compared to what you know you were created to do.

In a *Forbes* article, Philippe Gaud—an affiliate professor at HEC Paris—tells the story about how in his mid-fifties he decided to pivot from a twenty-five-year career as a human resources executive for high-profile, international companies, to teaching. Says Gaud, “I had no real reason to abandon a career that was developing very well. No real reason, that is, except one, crucial one. I wanted something different.”¹⁶ While he doesn't explicitly say it, I would guess that Gaud had been called to this new career for some time, and it became so loud and so insistent that he couldn't *not* do it.

According to Gaud, there are several ways to help ensure that you successfully make it through the transition zone. One is to consider making a major career change when you are at the pinnacle of your career. This might seem counterintuitive, but Gaud says when you're at the top of your game, “your all-important self-confidence will be at its strongest, you're upbeat and ready to tackle new challenges.”

Gaud also warns that your primary motivation shouldn't be trying to escape a bad or unsatisfying work situation. I couldn't agree more. You should be drawn to an opportunity because it is better aligned with the vocation that God has uniquely designed you for. Moreover, as Gaud points out, sometimes we put on blinders, looking only at career opportunities within the organizations at which we currently work. He suggests that it's

important to look outward as well, keeping an eye out for opportunities that might arise outside of your current company or context.

When is the right time in one's life to make a change? There's no particular age, says Gaud. It's time "when you can't answer the question: what did I learn today?" Ultimately, when it's time to go, it's time to go. Instead of dragging your feet and hemming and hawing, when God lights the path of a new course for you, your job is to just go. Hear His voice calling you, trust Him and His plan for your life. Make the leap in faith, knowing that God will work out the details as you follow His direction.

There's certainly a degree of impatience that many people talk about when it comes to, for example, millennials wanting to be promoted quickly into jobs of greater importance or with greater impact. And in the case of millennials, this youthful impatience can be quite real. According to a Gallup report titled *Millennials: The Job-Hopping Generation*, the belief that millennials—people born between 1980 and 1996—are less tied to their jobs and companies than other generations is generally an accurate one. The report reveals that "21 percent of millennials say they've changed jobs within the past year, which is more than three times the number of non-millennials who report the same." In addition, 60 percent of millennials report that they are open to new job opportunities.¹⁷ But youthful impatience is not the same as the restlessness you might feel that the career you have chosen or the job you have accepted is not where you belong.

What's missing for many of us is taking the time to be still, to find a quiet place to contemplate and to listen for the voice of our Creator. Many of us are addicted to busyness and the feeling of being overwhelmed. There is almost a cultural value that prizes being busy even more than being productive. In the face of such overwhelming levels of busyness and the stress that comes along with it, we are less mindful and less reflective. We try to cope with this busyness and stress by going on autopilot—taking time- and effort-saving mental shortcuts to navigate our day-to-day lives.

Such mental shortcuts are called *heuristics*—"simple, efficient rules which people often use to form judgments and make decisions."¹⁸ However, these shortcuts—educated guesses, rules of thumb, intuitive feelings—can

lead to cognitive biases that do not work in our favor, nor in the favor of those around us.

Take the April 2018 example of two African American men who were arrested in a Philadelphia Starbucks. Starbucks, as a company, has long promoted itself as a neighborhood meeting place and a workspace away from the office. I imagine that millions of informal business meetings have taken place in all the Starbucks stores around the world. Of course, the company hopes that you will buy a coffee or two and perhaps some food while you're occupying their space, but there's no formal companywide policy that says this has to be the case.

When the two black men (who were waiting to meet a white business colleague) told the store manager they were not interested in purchasing anything, police were called and the two men were arrested and held for more than six hours before they were released with no charges filed. When the incident blew up in the media, Starbucks CEO Kevin Johnson made many public apologies—and apologies to the two men who were arrested—explaining that the company's employees erred in calling the police, inferring that their unconscious bias was to blame.

In the United States, some people unconsciously make the implicit racial association between black and bad, and white and good—black threatening, white good. Of course, in reality, such heuristics have no basis in fact, and they have led to tragic consequences—namely the tragic and senseless loss of black lives. These are the kinds of mental shortcuts we can't afford to take.

Have You Missed Your Exit?

Similarly, I would argue that being on autopilot in terms of our daily work and being successful and being praised and applauded is a shortcut we can't afford to take, either. Just because someone else is applauding you for the work you do and calling you a success does not mean that you are doing what you are uniquely designed to do at this time of your life. In fact, it's quite possible that you are not—especially if you have not been in touch with your Maker lately.

The leaders I've spoken with—including recently Northwestern University Kellogg School of Management's Sally Blount, as she approached the end of her almost decade-long tenure as dean—confirm that there comes a very deep sense of knowing when it is time to transition. In almost every case, it's better to do it on your own terms—with you in charge of where you'll go and when. But some people become comfortable where they are, and they overstay their welcome.

In September 2017, Sally announced that she would step down from her post as dean at the end of the 2017–2018 academic year—deciding that it was time to exit this chapter of her career on her terms and on her schedule. According to the announcement, Blount launched four key strategic initiatives during her tenure as dean. She also led Kellogg's Transforming Together campaign, which raised \$350 million (surpassing the previous fund-raising record for the school by \$15 million) and presided over fund-raising for the Kellogg Global Hub, a new 415,000-square-foot building for the school, which opened in 2017.¹⁹

By every measure, Blount was at the top of her game when she decided to take the exit ramp from her tenure as dean of the Kellogg School. But during a silent retreat in Rhode Island in the summer of 2017, Blount rechecked her alignment and she heard the voice of her Caller loud and clear. Says Blount about her decision and the vocational courage that was required to make it:

*While on retreat in July, I realized that this inflection point creates an opportunity for me to start thinking bravely about my own life in the ways that I have about the institutions I have led. I have long dreamed of taking a sabbatical year to travel, to write, and I want to spend some time thinking about my own final chapter in education as the pace of transformation accelerates in our workplace. As my daughter once said to me long ago, "This is what the person I want to become would do."*²⁰

In a *Forbes* article, Blount explains that when you do make the decision to exit from a career, the last ninety days of your job are just as important as

the first ninety days. Says Blount, “Despite its importance, the truth is that many senior executives botch their exits, often because they don’t control the timing.” The antidote to a botched exit is, according to Blount, “leaving well,” which includes coaching “the team on performance right up to the end, while setting their successor up for success.”²¹

If you’ve ever been unceremoniously dismissed from a job, or you know someone who has, that is an indication that you drove too far and missed your exit. And how does this happen? It happens when you’ve muted your GPS, which was trying to tell you to prepare for your exit. It happens when you’re on autopilot or cruise control, not paying attention to what’s going on down the road. There could be a wreck ahead or a traffic jam. You might even be asleep at the wheel. Before you know it, you’ve missed your exit and will need to make a U-turn and try to get back on track. Or worse, you might miss your exit and get caught up in a crash that will take you much time and care to recover from.

Life is short, and you owe it to yourself to ask these questions. You don’t have time to waste. Every day is a gift. Why spend even one day off purpose?

Asking for Help

One thing to consider about rechecking your alignment is that you don’t have to carry the burden all by yourself. In fact, it can be extremely beneficial to get others involved. This is where mentors and coaches, coworkers and colleagues, spouses and life partners, and others who have your best interest at heart come into play.

While the people who help you gain perspective should know you well, they should also be willing to be completely frank and honest with you—to hold no punches. They should also be able to take the fifty-thousand-foot view of your life and tell you what they see, for example: “I’ve tracked the narrative arc of your life for years now, and I’ve lately been hearing a degree of dissatisfaction and joylessness in your voice. I think it might be time for you to reconsider the career you’re in and think about leaving for something that better suits you now.”

Maybe you've been in the wrong job all along, or perhaps the job or you have changed and your work and your purpose are no longer aligned. Or maybe you've accomplished exactly what your Maker planned for you to accomplish and He has other plans for you. Whatever the reason, when it's time to go, you should go.

Besides friends and family and coworkers and colleagues, there's someone else you should be sure to consult: God. Prayer is a powerful tool for asking your Maker for direction and receiving advice from Him. I personally know numerous CEOs and other executives who take themselves out of their busy, day-to-day activities for a period of time to engage in silent retreats at which they have the opportunity to disconnect from the demands of the workplace, unplug from their smartphones and social media, and simply listen for God's voice—some for weeks at a time. It's remarkable how clearly you can hear God's voice when you slow down, reflect, and listen for Him.

A lot of people view this as a privilege, and they are right. It *is* a real gift to be able to leave the mundane cares of the world behind to listen for God's voice. Whether you're able to unplug for weeks at a time, hours at a time, or even just minutes at a time, listening clearly for the voice of your vocation is a necessity if you are going to receive your calling—what it is you are meant to do with your life. Not all of us will be able to go on a silent retreat and completely detach ourselves from our families and our everyday lives, but all of us have the opportunity to still our minds in a quiet place to hear God speak to our hearts.

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, Sally Blount—former dean of the Kellogg School of Management—made the decision to step down from her position as dean after engaging in a silent retreat in July 2017. According to Blount, she has gone on silent retreats at least once a year for the past decade. While some of these retreats are fairly short—just two or three days—others are significantly longer, up to two weeks spent in silent contemplation. Blount says that she has learned three important leadership lessons as a result of her retreats: how to let go of connection, how to balance input with reflection, and how to build “leadership muscle.”²²

Let's explore each of these in turn:

LETTING GO OF CONNECTION. Although, says Blount, being completely alone with your thoughts while letting go of your dependence on virtual and social attachments can be difficult and even unsettling, it becomes easier the more you do it. “Even more importantly,” says Blount, “you start to feel and think in new ways.”

BALANCING INPUT WITH REFLECTION. Says Blount, “While asking for input and ideas is essential to leadership, you gain even more insight when you reflect deeply on that input.” According to Blount, transformational thinking requires that we step away from our day-to-day habits and status-quo thinking. Silent retreats invite us to disrupt these well-worn behavioral patterns, generating new solutions for old problems.

DEVELOPING “LEADERSHIP MUSCLE.” Blount says that although the silent retreats in which she participates were at first purely spiritual in nature, the retreats she engages in now not only nourish her spirit but “also nourish [her] work life in important ways.” Blount provides an example of a time when her senior team wasn’t hitting its goals. She engaged in a silent retreat for a few days and had an epiphany that provided the solutions she was looking for, resulting in a dramatic improvement in the team’s performance.²³

When I think about vocational courage, it is very much about clarity, which requires stillness to hear, but it is also the personal commitment to do what you hear. You can’t do what you hear if you’re not listening. The fact that you’re not listening or not hearing God’s voice does not mean that God is not speaking to you or that He is not ready to speak to you. God is faithful and is always ready to speak into the life of a willing listener. You may be in a dead zone because you’re moving too fast or because you’re incorporating too many of the wrong voices into your decision-making.

Remember the question I asked earlier in this book: Who do you ask when you have a question about your car’s intended design or

functionality? You don't ask just anyone; you ask the car's manufacturer—the organization that employs the people in whose minds it was conceived.

The same thing is true of us. Our society moves so fast today that most people think they're too busy to pray. I would argue that we're actually too busy *not* to pray. Each of us has so much potential and purpose in us that we can't afford to not pray. We have to slow down in order to accelerate—and for many of us, that's a paradigm shift.

There is much interest today in what is known as *mindfulness*, which is a modern name for the ancient spiritual practice of silence and solitude in which one is able to focus one's attention on what they are experiencing in a given moment. Silence and solitude in fact comprise a valuable spiritual discipline, and it is a valid approach for quieting your mind and clearly discerning the voice within you. In my experience, mindfulness is an effective way to slow down and to be prayerful and reflective. If “mindfulness” is the label someone needs to be prayerful, then I'm all in favor of it.

Regardless of what you call it, remember that prayer is a two-way conversation with God. Pray for answers to your questions. Pray for guidance and wisdom as you approach and enter the crossroads of your life. Pray for others who are in the same place in their own lives that you are in, that they too will receive the guidance and wisdom they need to make the right decisions moving forward. And when you pray, open yourself up to God and listen to the answers that He provides to you.

You may not understand why you have been called, or why now. We can always wonder why, but the truth is that it will become clear along the journey. We can't wait for the answer to the question of why before we decide to respond to the call. It's not your job to question God's wisdom.

It's your job to say “Yes.”