

STOP WAITING FOR PERMISSION



UNCORRECTED
PROOF

STOP WAITING FOR PERMISSION

Harness Your Gifts,
Find Your Purpose,
and Unleash
Your Personal Genius

**STEPHEN
CHANDLER**



WATERBROOK

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Hardback ISBN 978-0-593-19423-2

Ebook ISBN 978-0-593-19424-9

The Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file with the Library of Congress.

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

waterbrookmultnomah.com

2 4 6 8 9 7 5 3 1

ScoutAutomatedPrintCode

First Edition

Book design by Diane Hobbing

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This book is dedicated to my beautiful mother, Denise Chandler. You are my hero. I do not fully understand the patience it took to educate five children and to constantly keep us on track, all while building a church with Dad. But you did. From an early age, you trained me not to wait for permission but to maximize all that God had placed inside of me. Thank you for speaking purpose. I know you're rejoicing in heaven with the biggest smile on your face. As your self-proclaimed favorite child, I dedicate this book to you.

F O R E W O R D

My friend, I'm so glad you're here. I truly believe this book is going to help you. Stephen Chandler has done what he set out to do—provide a pathway to “harness your gifts, find your purpose, and unleash your personal genius.” I can hardly wait for you to read it because I know it will impact the lives of those around you when you apply what you learn.

I've had the opportunity to get to know Stephen personally over the last few years and have seen firsthand the impact of his leadership. Not only is he a man of great character, but he has also successfully led thriving organizations at the highest level. He has truly reached what I call “the Pinnacle” of leadership, where others follow you because of who you are and what you represent. His voice is trusted by many, and he has earned it.

One of the things I love most about Stephen is his passion for helping those around him succeed and grow. He is committed to seeing others step into new levels of purpose for their own lives. And that's why he wrote this book. *For you.*

Stop Waiting for Permission is an engaging, accessible, and powerful handbook to unlocking that deeper purpose and gifting that's inside you. If you're reading this book, chances are, you already know they are there. Maybe you hope to someday chase a big, audacious, or even scary dream.

Or perhaps you're here because you want to realize greatness in some area of your career or personal endeavors. Wherever you are today, this book is the catalyst you need to jump-start that goal. Today is the day.

In this book, Stephen helps us understand that greatness is not only okay to pursue but that greatness is also godly! So many people feel anxious or downright bad for wanting to be good, *let alone great*, at something. But you weren't born for average. You weren't created to be merely *enough*. You were created by greatness for greatness.

If you want to achieve *true* greatness, there's a good chance you'll upset someone along the way. That's why the title of this book is right on point: Stop asking for permission to get started on that dream, and take the first step right now. Remember, that desire, that vision, and that purpose deep inside you aren't there by accident. They were placed there on purpose, for a purpose. The people who change the world are those who want to and don't wait to. My friend, it's time to take action.

Now, the road ahead won't be easy. In fact, you'll likely face challenges and struggles more often than you might believe. But on the journey, you may also discover your own personal genius—the thing you were uniquely created to do. And if you keep going and don't stop—and when you get knocked down, you get up again—greatness is within your reach.

I'm confident this book will be the map you need on that road ahead. And my friend Stephen Chandler will be an amazing guide for your journey!

—John C. Maxwell
Founder of Maxwell Leadership and EQUIP Leadership

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**STOP WAITING
FOR PERMISSION**

**OUR BIG GOD
DOESN'T MAKE
SMALL PEOPLE.**

1

Why You Should Want Greatness

There is a place where everything that makes you who you are is welcomed and celebrated, where your gifts, passion, and purpose collide to leave a mark beyond your wildest imagining. In this place, you experience fulfillment by using your unique personal genius—yes, it exists!—to bless your family, friends, community, and world. I call this place *greatness*.

How do you find that place? When can you step into that season? Do you sit back and wait for an opportunity to fall into your lap? Or do you start knocking on (or kicking in) doors?

When it comes to greatness, some people are full of potential but short on drive. Others are driven but lack direction. Still others have direction but also have debilitating fear and doubt. Many people I meet have potential, drive, *and* direction, but for some mysterious reason, they're still waiting around for greatness to just kind of . . . happen. Maybe they

feel they don't deserve it. Maybe they think there isn't room for them at the table.

Whichever scenario is true for you—whatever is holding you back from living fully in the greatness God has placed inside you—I want you to know this today: When it comes to greatness, you don't have to wait for permission.

But you do have to take action. You can't just stand in line and wait for it to happen.

Take Action

Picture this: You get all dressed up for a night on the town. You've been waiting for this moment for what feels like forever. Since this restaurant opened, everybody who's anybody has been talking about the unforgettable cuisine and sumptuous, senses-inspiring atmosphere. You're expecting the dining experience of a lifetime.

You stroll up to the host's podium with your significant other and request a table for two, preferably by the window so that you can enjoy the view—and maybe enjoy being seen enjoying the view by people walking by.

"Name, please?" the host says in a cold tone that makes the *please* disappear into thin air.

With a sinking feeling, you tell her. She scrolls through the list on her tablet and doesn't find your name. She looks up and stretches her mouth in what must be meant as a smile. "Unfortunately, it appears you don't have a reservation with us tonight. You are free to wait here by the door on the off chance someone else cancels, but our tables are fully booked for the evening."

Your partner shoots you the "you had one job" look (you

know the one), so you swallow what's left of your pride to see whether you can negotiate with the frosty host—but before you can choke out a word, another couple glides through the door.

“Name, please?” the host intones.

“Smith, table for two at seven-thirty.”

“Right this way, Mr. Smith. We have a table waiting for you by the window.”

Your excitement deflates like one of those shiny foil balloons after the party is over, slowly sinking to the floor. For the next ninety minutes, you and your date watch with barely concealed envy (and growing hunger) as party after party approaches the podium, gives their name, and are shown immediately to a table set aside for them.

A few other hopeful diners, like you, request a table without a reservation. They are given the same options: Leave, or wait by the door and cross their fingers for a last-minute cancellation. One or two groups join you in the tiny waiting area squeezed between the wall and an exotic potted plant, but most head back into the night, opting for a less exclusive dining experience.

Finally you've had enough.

At the podium once again, you inform the host that you're leaving.

“While you're here,” she offers, “would you like to go ahead and make a reservation? We're currently booking six to eight weeks out.”

“Yes, I would. I'd like to make a reservation to celebrate this beautiful lady's birthday,” you say, smiling at your date. “Please save us your finest table for two at seven o'clock on the second Saturday of March. We'll see you then.”

As you're putting on your coat in preparation to leave, you hear another customer without reservations arguing with the host. "We'll come back tomorrow night, when things have slowed down a bit."

She looks at him like he has two heads. "Um . . . we are definitely going to be busy tomorrow and for many evenings after that. Literally every table is booked for weeks. I strongly recommend a reservation."

"I'll take my chances," he says. "At some point someone will cancel. We'll just keep coming back and hope for the best."

"That is a terrible idea," his date says. "I don't want to spend every night for the foreseeable future standing by a plant, wishing for a steak. These shoes are killing me."

You smile at your partner as you walk out the door into the cool night, thankful you're no longer leaving your plans up to chance.

Your Place of Greatness

So what does this allegory have to do with greatness? *When it comes to greatness, too many people are just waiting to get lucky.* They stand around day after day in the proverbial waiting room in the hope that someone else will fail to show up and forfeit their position inside.

Why would you do that when you can reserve your own place of greatness? There *will* be a seat at the table with your name on it, if you only call ahead and give your name. This book will show you how to prepare your life for the greatness God has planned for you.

THERE *WILL* BE A SEAT AT THE TABLE
WITH YOUR NAME ON IT, IF YOU ONLY
CALL AHEAD AND GIVE YOUR NAME.

You may have already accomplished some things other people consider great. They're impressed. Your influence is wide, your responsibilities are significant, and your list of accolades is long—but you still feel unfulfilled. You find yourself standing around in uncomfortable shoes, wondering, *Is this it? Is this all there is?* This book will help you orient your drive and gifts toward the deeper purposes of God, where true greatness awaits. And it's a biblical message, complete with a few laughs along the way.

As a pastor, I spend a lot of time reading the Bible, and I love it. Like, *love* love it. Not only because Scripture holds life, truth, and keys to unlock God's miracles in my own life—though that's the main reason—but also because there is comedy gold in its pages. One such comically awkward account is found in Matthew 20, where two of Jesus's disciples tried to make their reservations for greatness.

The first mistake these brothers made was simply one of poor timing. James and John wanted to be the second and third most powerful people in God's coming kingdom, seated to the right and left of Jesus's throne. But they asked for places of greatness right after their Lord explained the excruciating level of pain He would have to endure to accomplish His own great purpose:

The Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the

Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified.
(verses 18–19)

James and John's response to Jesus's shocking announcement was, essentially, "Cool, okay, neat, but we'd like to be famous."

That's just awkward. Hilariously awkward. *Read the room, guys.*

But the second of James and John's mistakes was even cringier: They sent *their mom* to ask for greatness on their behalf.

(I'm confident I don't need to spend time explaining why, but if you're an adult and need your mother to maximize your God-given potential, greatness doesn't lie in your immediate future.)

Jesus was planning to leave everything He built to these men, and they didn't even have enough confidence to ask for themselves. This is what I suspect: James and John sent their mom because they were ashamed of their ambition, ashamed that they even desired greatness.

They're not alone in wrestling with shame. Many Jesus followers I know wonder, *Am I even allowed to want greatness? Isn't it all up to God anyway and up to me just to accept what He gives and be grateful?*

If that line of inner conflict sounds familiar, I have good news for you: Jesus didn't get angry at James and John for desiring to be great.

The not-so-good news is, the other disciples did get angry. They were *furious* that James and John would make such a shameless, self-centered request. *How dare they?*

If you desire greatness in some area of your life, you must

prepare for this kind of reaction. Someone will inevitably get upset when you believe for more, desire more, or strive to get more out of life. When David, the youngest of eight brothers, expressed his desire to fight Goliath, the Philistine giant, his oldest brother, Eliab, called him “conceited” and “wicked” (1 Samuel 17:28). He demeaned David’s work as a shepherd, which disqualified his baby brother, as Eliab saw it, from the *real* work of fighting Israel’s enemies. *And why aren’t you at home taking care of those sheep right now, by the way? Get lost, kid.*

When God planned your future, He took into account the inconsistencies and missteps of your past and supplied all the grace you would need to fulfill your destiny. When He penned the story of your life, He considered the doors He would open and the people of influence He would bring across your path. He didn’t consult or ask permission from anyone else—including, if you’re David, your envious older brother. David made a reservation, and Eliab got bent out of shape about it.

When I became the senior pastor of what would eventually become Union Church at the ripe old age of twenty-three, I couldn’t stop talking about all the great things God was going to do through our church. Oh boy, did that rub some people wrong! Our fifty-person-strong worshipping community wasn’t influential or even promising—you might say we were the upstart kid brother—and my audacity was more than enough to send some people into a tailspin.

If you dare to believe God for more, it will rub people the wrong way. But if you’re in the middle of God’s purpose for you, you’ll live. More than that, you’ll thrive. No one attains greatness without also acquiring thick skin.

When James and John’s mama asked Jesus to make her

very special boys the second and third most powerful people in His kingdom, the other disciples had a fit—but *Jesus told James and John how to do it!* This blows my mind. He didn't chastise them for being conceited and wicked nor mock them for being fishermen with delusions of grandeur. He didn't tell them just to be grateful they were part of His kingdom at all. Instead, He gave them instructions on how to make their reservations for greatness:

Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:26–28)

Desiring Greatness Is Godly

Your longing to win, to build something of significance, to leave a lasting mark on this earth—none of these desires are offensive to God. In fact, look at Genesis 1:27: “God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” Male or female, each of us is handcrafted as a reflection of God's image.

Let me ask you this: Is God small? Powerless? Average or mediocre?

No, no, and a thousand nos more! Human beings are made in the image of a great God, a holy God, a powerful God, the Creator and Sustainer of all that we see. How in the world could we imagine that longing to be great, like Him, is ungodly? If God made powerless or insignificant people, they wouldn't be made in His image. Our big God doesn't make

small people.

IF GOD MADE POWERLESS OR
INSIGNIFICANT PEOPLE, THEY
WOULDN'T BE MADE IN HIS IMAGE.

I'll go even further: Shooting for average and seeking mediocrity is ungodly. Yes, the Bible teaches us to live quiet lives of humility (see, for example, 1 Thessalonians 4:11), and Jesus told His disciples that serving others is what opens the door to greatness (see Matthew 20 in the previous section). But humble service isn't the same as smallness, mediocrity, or insignificance. Far from it.

There are a thousand legitimate reasons we humans settle for mere survival when we're created for so much more. My heart breaks when I meet extraordinarily gifted people who have been beaten down by life for so long that they're afraid even to imagine a new season in a place of greatness. They're survivors—of childhood trauma, of a health crisis, of an abusive relationship, of the loss of a loved one or business—who haven't yet healed from very real emotional, mental, and spiritual damage. In some cases, they may have lost or buried their ability to dream of more than surviving another day. All their potential still exists but remains unrealized.

Wounds from trauma are real, but they don't have to define us. God didn't send His only Son to die on the cross for our mere survival. Jesus didn't lay aside His glory in heaven for life with us so that we could barely squeak through our trials. No! He died for our complete redemption and was raised for our full restoration. He sacrificed His life so that we can share in His glory and spend eternity with Him. John 10:10

says, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” A full life—a *fulfilled* life—is God’s purpose for you on earth.

This reminds me a bit of home-renovation shows, which I love to watch. The pastor in me can’t get enough of broken things made whole. Designers start with some beaten-down old house that’s one step away from collapse and expertly transform it into a crown jewel of the neighborhood. On one episode I saw a few years ago, the original builder of a seventy-year-old house had hidden treasures for a future renovator to discover. As the design team knocked down walls to create a more open, modern concept, they uncovered original architectural drawings and a number of other valuable items tucked away for eventual discovery.

What a stunning picture of what God does in our lives! As the original Builder, He hides greatness in each of us. It’s our job, with His Spirit’s help, to knock down the walls of fear, insecurity, and false humility that keep our treasure hidden from ourselves and the world.

Proverbs 25:2 says, “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings.” Wow . . . *kings*. That’s us! *By searching out what God has hidden, we increase our influence and fulfillment—our glory.*

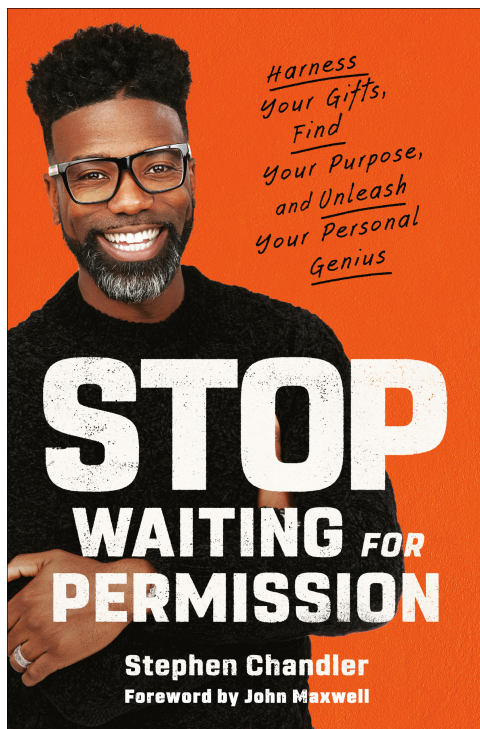
There is glory from God in you, just waiting to be uncovered. It’s the pursuit of a lifetime to discover all the greatness He intends for you, which is the reason your greatest days still lie ahead, no matter your age or level of success.

Stop waiting for permission. Make a reservation, and let’s discover your greatness together.

CHALLENGING THOUGHTS

- Let's do a quick check-in: Take a minute to reflect on the ways you've allowed—or not allowed—yourself to desire greatness.
- Assess the following areas: relationships, career, finances, and family. As you consider the last five to ten years, think about the ways you've aimed for greatness or settled for average.
- If you dare to believe God for more, it will rub people the wrong way. But if you're in the middle of God's purpose for you, you'll live. More than that, you'll thrive. What you truly believe about God and His purpose for you defines how you'll seek greatness in every area of your life.
- Wounds from trauma are real, but they don't have to define you. To shoot for greatness, the first thing to do might be to seek healing from the wounds that hold you back.

***AVOID FAILURE* ISN'T
A STRATEGY FOR
GREATNESS.
OVERCOME FEAR IS.**



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