

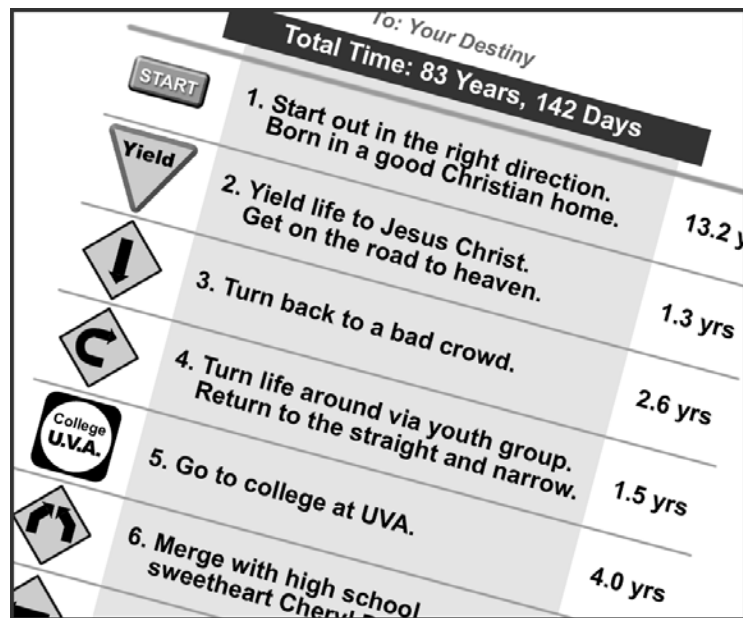
# The MapQuest Paradigm

## Finding Your Way to Your Calling Even When You Feel Lost

Excerpted from [A Leader's Life Purpose Handbook](#) by Tony Stoltzfus

Just because you know what your calling in life is doesn't mean you know how to get there. In fact, some people see the journey of following the call as akin to tiptoeing through a minefield. One false step and it's over—you've missed your call. I call this way of thinking the *MapQuest Paradigm*. It sees pursuing a call as following a list of turn-by-turn directions like you'd get off of MapQuest.com. If you haven't used MapQuest yet, you go to the web site, type in the starting point and the destination, and it gives you back a complete list of each turn you need to make to get there.

The thing I hate about MapQuest is, without an actual map, if you miss a turn you are *totally lost*. (That's why I always print out the map, too.) A simple turn list doesn't help you visualize the twists and turns of the road, or show which compass direction you should be heading toward, or give you any landmarks en route. It's a sick feeling to figure out that you missed a turn somewhere



20 miles back (especially at night) and have no idea where you are or how to get back on course.

That's how many Christians operate. Each decision in life is a turn, and to get to the right destination you have to follow the directions exactly and get every turn right. If at some point in life you have taken a major wrong turn (say, bankruptcy, divorce or coming to Christ later in life), your calling is lost. In the MapQuest paradigm, there is

no way to get back on the highway once you miss a turn—the call has passed you by, and you’ve missed God.

I’ve coached several individuals who had a sense of call early in life, and for various reasons chose to go in another direction. When that fact resurfaces in their 40’s and 50’s, the question is, “What do I do? Have I completely missed my calling?” How do you coach someone who believes they have taken that big wrong turn?

### MapQuest vs. Map

The answer is to switch paradigms. If you have an actual map you travel by instead of just a list of turns, you can find many ways to get to the same destination. You can even make a wrong turn or change your mind along the way and re-plan your route based on your current location. There may be one way that is faster or more direct than the others, but the scenic route will get you there, too.

I think the map image gives a much more accurate picture of calling, because a map lets you base your route on principles (interstates are faster than county roads) rather than just blind adherence to a pre-determined plan. In other words, following your call is as much about knowing the ways of God (the principles) as it is knowing exactly where to be, when (the turns).

#### Coaching the MapQuest Paradigm

- *“What are some other courses of action that would take you to the same destination?”*
- *“What if there were many different routes to take that would fulfill your call? How would that change things?”*
- *“It sounds like you are thinking of your call as a set of directions you have to follow to the letter or you’ll miss it. Stop and evaluate that: does that sound like the God you know?”*
- *“What do you think God might do to bring glory out of that failure?”*

The MapQuest paradigm is rooted in a worldview that says that life is a series of right and wrong choices—if you make the right ones you are blessed, and if you make the wrong ones, you lose. It’s a pre-Christ worldview: grace and redemption are not part of the picture. In the reality of God’s grace, there is always a future and a hope. No matter where you are starting from, *today* (and each day) God will take your life and make something great of it.

When you are coaching this legalistic worldview, techniques that bring grace

into the picture can be very helpful. For instance, you might ask, “Since Jesus was all about redeeming us from our failures, how does that principle fit with your understanding of following your call?” Another method (which I am stealing from Jesus) is to compare the situation with parenting. “If you gave your son a set of step-by-step directions for cleaning the garage and he messed up a step, how would you handle it? Would you say, “That’s it—you are never going to amount to anything?” Or would you correct him, do a reset, and have him start again?” Sometimes I’ll simply describe both the Map and MapQuest paradigms, and then ask which approach describes the way they are thinking.

### **Learning through Failure**

The biggest practical shortcoming of the MapQuest model is that it doesn’t acknowledge how God grows us into our calling through failure as well as success. Years ago I finally left my long-time professional role and moved across the country to make a new start. The last few months in the old role felt like being squeezed out of a toothpaste tube. My right-hand man at work left and I had to take over most of his responsibilities, train his successor and train mine all at the same time. In the midst of that, I also lost my secretarial support. Meanwhile, the house was up for sale (which meant constant extra chores to keep it show-able) and things had gotten very frustrating at church. I basically lost it attitude-wise for about three months. I grumbled, I stewed, I let myself get angry, and I was on the point of refusing a fair-well banquet from the church until my sister got in my face about it. Not my finest hour.

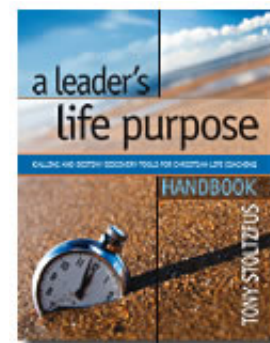
Two months after we finally moved, I was taking a walk one day when suddenly God showed me how I had handled those three months. I was mortified at how poorly I’d responded. After repenting and dealing with it, it occurred to me that I had still learned the lesson about attitude that Jesus wanted to teach me—I had just done it the hard way!

The lesson I took away from that experience was that if God is trying to teach you something, you can get the lesson whether you initially respond poorly or well. You can fail and still get to where God wants you to be, because where you are supposed to be is more about who you are becoming than being in the right place doing the right thing at the right time.

If the primary thing God calls you to is to embody a certain quality of Christ, there are myriad ways to express that incarnation. In fact, when you become like Jesus, the message of your life comes out in *everything* you do, whether you are functioning in your calling task or not. So not only are there many ways to get to the destination, but no matter how you get there, *your calling can be expressed through your being along the way.*

One challenge I often give to clients is to create “A Call for All Seasons” (see box). The action step is to express one’s call in a way that no change in external circumstances can hinder. It’s rewriting the call in being terms. This exercise forces us to remove the external trappings of a role or project and get down to the guts of the message God has planted in our hearts that we are called to communicate. Calling is about being more than doing; and being is communicated not through projects but through life messages. Helping clients tune into and value the messages of their life instead of only the projects they dream of completing is a powerful tool for staying on course with the call even when circumstances stand in the way.

*This article is an excerpt from the life purpose coaching manual, [A Leader’s Life Purpose Handbook](#) by Tony Stoltzfus*



### **A Call for All Seasons**

Can you state your call in a way that is completely independent of external circumstances or what modes of expression are available to you? This means putting it in “being” terms. Can you pose your call in a way that you could fulfill it even if you were...?

- Debilitated
- Laid off
- Imprisoned
- Become seriously ill
- You must become a primary caregiver for a relative