

When **NOT** to Live Your Destiny

By Tony Stoltzfus

As life coaches, we are all about helping people find and follow their God-given callings. It is easy for us to assume that moving into a destiny role or task is a given -- that God's will is for every person (or at least every mature believer) to be doing what they were made to do.

So it may come as a surprise to hear that living your destiny is often NOT the will of God for your life. It is vitally important for life coaches to be able to help clients discern the timing issues of life purpose instead of just assuming that an active pursuit of it is the right thing to do.



Here are four often-overlooked principles that can indicate when in life it is time to hold our call lightly or even let it go:

1. When basic needs and responsibilities must be met

I just wrote a note to a friend supporting his decision to cut back on ministry involvements to focus on breadwinning. He lives in one of the hardest-hit areas of the country economically, and his business needs all the best of his time and energy right now. The reality of life is that you can't always pursue your dreams--sometimes you have to just put food on the table. And that's part of God's will. In fact, Paul states that those who fail to provide for their family's basic needs are "worse than an unbeliever and have disowned the faith."

In God's good will, you pursue your life dreams after you take care of your life responsibilities. If you have a parent who suddenly falls ill and moves in with you, you may not be able to pursue your destiny for a season. An economic downturn, being downsized, an accident or serious illness may take priority over your passions. Or you may coach someone who lives in a country where subsistence takes precedence over significance. God's will is big enough to hold all these things and bring greatness out of them all.

2. When you aren't at the appropriate life stage

This may seem a bit harsh, but you will not enter into your convergent destiny role in your 20's and 30's (and often even in your 40's) no matter how obedient and focused you are. At a younger age, you simply have not experienced enough to come into the fullness of what you are capable of. Again, God's plan accounts for that. Everyone goes through a series of stages in the development of their call. Your twenties are the times to collect a wide range of experience; your thirties (and often forties) the season

for inward refining. Overreaching for your life dream will not get you there any sooner! Relax, trust, and enjoy the ride. (For more on calling stages, try the [Stages in Calling Development](#) coaching CD.)

3. When it's time to sacrifice for your spouse's calling

I read a book recently where a well-known, influential pastor recounted how he went to his wife one day and "informed her" (his words) that since no one else in a church cared for the senior pastor, he needed to get that care at home. So he told her that she needed to let go of her own passion for ministry, stop leading and devote herself to taking care of him and the family. It grieves me to see such a terrible distortion of the biblical mandate for husbands. The most important thing a husband is supposed to do is to "love his wife as Christ loved the church *and gave himself up for her.*" Instead of laying down our own dreams and passions for the sake of our wives, male ministry leaders have made it standard practice to expect our wives to do the laying down so that we can pursue what is significant to us.

What a contrast to the story of a pastor friend of mine. His wife had sacrificed for him to go to seminary, so later in life he promoted her dream of getting a degree by finding a job in the town where her preferred school was, and then moving clear across the country to where *she* found a job that fulfilled her destiny. He spent several years substitute teaching and in other part-time jobs until he found a role that fit with his own calling. I think that is a much better model of being a Godly husband.

Both partners in a marriage will be called on to make sacrifices for the other person's call. You may have to put what you want on hold for a season to help promote your spouse. Or there may be times in life where one partner's calling journey takes precedence over the other's. If you are married, that's part of God's plan for your life.

4. When it becomes about you

Since by definition a calling is "from God, for others (for more on the definition of call, see [A Leader's Life Purpose Handbook](#)), your destiny is ultimately about helping other people. The whole reason you have a mission is to make a difference in the lives of those you are called to help. That means sometimes the program or the organization or the mission will have to take a back seat to the simply act of loving the people around us well.

When we are getting overly attached to pursuing our own destiny, or are making an idol out of our destiny, a clear warning sign is that the people we are supposed to help are ignored or even hurt in our pursuit of "the call". For instance, the church that cycles through or burns out leaders is usually guilty of being overly focused on mission or programs, to the extent that the people cease to matter much.

Another example is the father or mother who isn't around for the kids because they are out saving the world, or the leader who will make ethical compromises to get the Kingdom work done. That's not just being out of balance, it's idolatry: we've given our allegiance to our dream or our sense of significance or following our passions instead of our master.

I know some building programs that are great dreams, but ought to be put on hold until the organization is clear that serving people comes first. I've run into coaches who are so focused on being their own boss and having a flexible schedule and building multiple streams of coaching income that they've lost touch with the fact that making a difference in people's lives, for them, is the center, not the money or the lifestyle or even the sense of significance that comes from being a skilled people-helper.

Just because you have a call doesn't mean you should be running after it. As a coach, learn to look for these principles instead of just assuming that today is the day of destiny, and you'll be better equipped to help your clients discern God's timing and God's method for bringing their life purpose to pass.

Tony Stoltzfus is a well-known author, coach and coach trainer who focuses on character transformation through coaching. He runs an [on-line Christian coaching bookstore](#) at Coach22.com