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## Chapter 1

# MASTERPIECE



Only You Can Be You

For we are God's masterpiece.  
He has created us anew in Christ Jesus,  
so that we can do the good things  
he planned for us long ago.

**Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)**

Instead of trying to reshape yourself to be like someone else,  
you should celebrate the shape God has given you.

**Rick Warren, The Purpose Driven® Church**

*You are a masterpiece.*

During my freshman year of college, I took an art class—not because it was my major, but purely for the fun of it. (Well, to be honest, I took the class because of a cute girl who also had signed up for it!) One of our assignments was to study works on display at area art museums and galleries. So one day a classmate and I drove to an art show.

The director of the gallery was an interesting woman with a genuine enthusiasm for her job. When she introduced us to a local artist, I was struck by the deep passion he had for his work. He had complete confidence in his own ability. He spoke highly of his creations, pointing out that each was a custom-made original. I was amazed by his keen attention to detail. To an artist, each piece is unique, formed first within the artist's mind before it is actually produced. The artist thoroughly explores every inch of the creation before he calls it complete.

There is another Artist—a Grand Master—whose attention to detail and whose interest in his creation far outweigh that of any artist you will ever meet in a gallery. The Scripture says, “Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—and how well I know it. You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed” (Psalm 139:14–16, NLT).

The Bible says you are the special creation of God Almighty, made in his own image so your life could make a significant difference for his kingdom. The God of the entire universe began making a masterpiece of you even as you were taking shape in your mother's womb. God himself is the one who breathed life into you.

God doesn't create anything without value. He is the ultimate craftsman. And he designed you specifically to fulfill a unique role in his ultimate plan to establish his kingdom on earth. Even though each of us has made mistakes that make it more difficult for him to perfect, we still are a special work of the Creator's hands. He even takes time to know about

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our day-to-day lives. In fact, he is smiling right now, rejoicing as you seek to discover the masterpiece you are to him.

The Bible says, “For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago” (Ephesians 2:10, NLT).

This verse helps us understand that if we want to discover our mission or purpose in life, we first need to look at the masterpiece God has made us to be. While self-help books tell you to *look within*, I’m saying the key to living the life you were meant to live is to *look to God* and ask him to help you discover your uniqueness. Once you discover *who* you are, then you can start figuring out *what* God has planned for you, the specific way he designed you to make a difference in the world for him.

Another translation of Ephesians 2:10 uses the word *workmanship* to describe our uniqueness. It’s from the Greek word *poiema*, which literally means “work of art,” and is the root of our English word *poem*. You are a work of God—and nothing but the highest and best comes from his hand. Like the artist who takes scrap metal and turns it into an amazing sculpture, God takes our lives and fashions them into a masterpiece.

### One of a Kind

You are not only a masterpiece shaped by God’s own loving hands, but you are a unique work of divine art. Like an original painting or sculpture, you are a one of a kind. There is no one else like you, which is why your heavenly Father longs for you to discover just how special and unique you are. As Rick Warren says in *The Purpose Driven® Life*, “Only you can be you. God designed each of us so there would be no duplication in the world. No one has the exact same mix of factors that make you unique.”

Perhaps that was one reason you picked up this book. You long to discover how special and unique you are. You’re excited by the thought that God is creating a masterpiece of you, but you just don’t see it in the reality of your life.

I want you to know, you are not alone in those feelings. As a pastor, I have worked with so many people who share the same longing. I have discovered that people truly *want* to be who God made them to be—and genuinely desire to do the work he is calling them to do. Most simply don’t have the tools to get there.

## Uncovering Your S.H.A.P.E.

The book you hold in your hand is designed to take you through a proven process, guided by the Holy Spirit, to discover who God created you uniquely to be—so you can start finding and fulfilling God’s specific purpose for your life.

Our family has a Christmas tradition in which all the kids get to pick a favorite book for me to read to them. After I read what they have chosen, I read my choice—Max Lucado’s engaging children’s book, *You Are Special*. I love this book for many reasons, but especially because it reminds my children that they are unique in God’s eyes.

Lucado tells the story of the Wemmicks, a community of painted wooden people. The conditions of their paint vary widely—from shiny and new to chipped and peeling. Each day, stickers are distributed in Wemmicksville. Some Wemmicks receive gold stars, while others are given gray dots.

One day, Punchinello, the main character, realizes that it’s the pretty, shiny Wemmicks who get the stars, while those with tired, chipped paint receive the nondescript gray dots. He notices his own dots are all gray and concludes he must not be worth much, as Wemmicks go.

Then Punchinello meets Lucia, who wears neither stars nor dots. When she explains that the labels just never stick to her, Punchinello decides he wants to be “free” of stickers too. Lucia takes Punchinello to meet Eli, the creator of all Wemmicks, and Punchinello is amazed to learn that Eli loves him just the way he made him. Eli explains that the stickers only stick to those who allow them to remain stuck.

*You Are Special* is ripe with the meaning of unconditional love. Although intended for children, I’m encouraged by it myself. I appreciate how Eli, the loving woodcarver, took time to help Punchinello see just how special he was, regardless of what others thought or said about him. Like Punchinello, we all need to take time to visit with our Creator. How else can he demonstrate to us how we stand apart from all his other works of art?

God wants you to truly understand and accept who he has made you to be. He longs for you to experience the release that comes with simply living as the person he created you to be.

When it comes to being unique, I love how my mentor Tom Paterson describes it:

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The fascinating thing to me is that literally everything God makes is unique—every human, animal, flower, tree, and every blade of grass. He didn't clone anything. Even identical twins possess their own individual uniqueness. That ought to tell us that our individuality is a sacred trust—and what we do with it is our gift to God. Our best contribution in life—our “utmost for his highest”—can only be made as we allow God to finish his work in progress and perfect our uniqueness. To live without discovering our uniqueness is to not really live. I think God is heartbroken when his children miss out on the potential he has placed inside of them.

Or consider what Max Lucado says about uniqueness in his book, *Cure for the Common Life*:

Da Vinci painted one *Mona Lisa*, Beethoven created one *Fifth Symphony*, and God made one version of you. You're it! You're the only you there is. And if we don't get you, we don't get you. You're the only shot we have at you. You can do something no one else can do in a fashion no one else can do it. You are more than a coincidence of chromosomes and heredity, more than just an assemblage of somebody else's lineage. You are uniquely made....

But can you be anything you want to be? If you are uniquely made—now stop and think about this—if you're uniquely made, can you really be anything you want to be? If you don't have the sense that takes care of numbers, can you be an accountant? If you don't have a love for the dirt, can you be a farmer? If you don't have an appreciation and a devotion to kids, can you really be a teacher? Well, you can be an unhappy one, an unsatisfied one. You can be one of the 87 percent of the workforce that doesn't like their work—one of the 80 percent of the people that says “I don't use my talents on a daily basis.” You can be a statistic.

Lucado ends his comments with these powerful words: “Can you be anything you want to be? I don't think so. But can you be everything God wants you to be? I do think so. And you do become that by discovering your uniqueness.”

Friend, I hope your heart beats with anticipation and excitement knowing that God is going to start revealing your uniqueness to you as the pages ahead unfold.

## Your Unique Purpose

God created you as a unique masterpiece because he has a specific purpose for your life—a specific and unique “contribution” that only you can make.

What does that mean? Your contribution is the unique service God created you to make, a ministry only you can perform. It is the specific mission God has given you to fulfill for him on earth. It is what I like to call your unique *Kingdom Purpose*.

I define Kingdom Purpose as ... *your specific contribution, within your generation, that causes you to totally depend on God and authentically display his love toward others—all through the expression of your uniqueness*. The Bible says, “Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits” (1 Corinthians 12:7, MSG).

Your Kingdom Purpose is way more than a career. It is a special commissioning from God to make a significant difference on this earth. It's the banner of your life that you carry and wave for God's glory. Now don't get me wrong, your career could provide you the platform to direct your Kingdom Purpose, but it doesn't *define* it.

I have discovered that most people, myself included, tend to define their purpose in life by one of three things ... *trends*, what others *tell* them, or by *truth*. When we let trends guide our life, we simply are living to fit into the current styles of the world. When we let others tell us what we should be doing, we are living to please them and win their approval. However, when we let God's truth define our Kingdom Purpose, submitting to his authority and desiring to please only him, we are able to lead a life of lasting significance, fulfillment, and Kingdom impact.

In fact, your Kingdom Purpose is very much a reflection of your faithfulness to God. The Bible defines faith as the confident assurance that what we hope for is going to happen (see Hebrews 11:1). The more time we spend with God, the more we learn of his goodness and faithfulness—and the stronger our faith in him becomes. We learn from God's Word that it is impossible to please God without faith (see Hebrews 11:6).

That very chapter of Scripture—Hebrews 11—lists many ordinary people who by faith accomplished extraordinary things for God, among them Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and Rahab. Over the years, I have

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had the privilege of personally seeing thousands of ordinary people live out their Kingdom Purpose through their confident assurance in God.

One of those people is John Baker—an ordinary man God has used in extraordinary ways. For many years, John battled an addiction to alcohol. It almost cost him his marriage, his family, and his life. Thankfully, John found God through his local church. That turning point led him to write his senior pastor a lengthy letter, outlining the vision for a ministry he believed God was nudging him to start. He also confessed his feelings of inadequacy about taking on such a task. Not long after, the pastor challenged John to go after his dream.

The next year, John launched a new ministry called Celebrate Recovery, a biblical process to help people find freedom from addictions through the love and grace of Jesus Christ. For the next ten years, God used John to deliver hundreds of people from the grip of destructive lifestyles. In 2004, President George W. Bush publicly recognized John for bringing hope to hurting people. Today, Celebrate Recovery is an international ministry helping millions of people overcome painful pasts and harmful addictions through the merciful, powerful love of Jesus.

If you were to meet John Baker, you would see an average guy who took everything God had made him to be—the positive as well as the painful—and chose to use it for God’s glory. With God’s help and leading, John has made and continues to make a kingdom difference by fulfilling his unique Kingdom Purpose.

God is continually looking for ordinary people such as John who are willing to let him use them to make a difference for his kingdom. From business executives to bus drivers, from teachers to techies, from stay-at-home moms to traveling musicians, from dentists to deli owners, God longs to use ordinary people in extraordinary ways. That includes *you*!

Will you accept the challenge to find and carry out your Kingdom Purpose? Remember, the Bible says, “Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9).

With this encouragement, challenge yourself to invest in God’s kingdom in a way that will last long after you are gone. Be a contributor, not a consumer. For some people—like John Baker—that means trading in a career for a full-time ministry. For most of us, however, finding and

## Uncovering Your S.H.A.P.E.

fulfilling our Kingdom Purpose means discovering how God wants us to minister in the paths and relationships of the daily lives he has given us. For all of us, it means determining that we will let God use us to impact eternity and leave a heavenly legacy on earth.

### Your Special S.H.A.P.E.

As one of God's custom-designed creations, your potential for significance and excellence is revealed by the S.H.A.P.E. God has given you. The S.H.A.P.E. concept was developed by Rick Warren, who writes, "Whenever God gives us an assignment, he always equips us with what we need to accomplish it. This custom combination of capabilities is called your S.H.A.P.E."

The word S.H.A.P.E. points to five specific characteristics:

- ***Spiritual Gifts***: A set of special abilities that God has given you to share his love and serve others.
- ***Heart***: The special passions God has given you so that you can glorify him on earth.
- ***Abilities***: The set of talents that God gave you when you were born, which he also wants you to use to make an impact for him.
- ***Personality***: The special way God wired you to navigate life and fulfill your unique Kingdom Purpose.
- ***Experiences***: Those parts of your past, both positive and painful, which God intends to use in great ways.

Rick continues:

When God created animals, he gave each of them a specific area of expertise. Some animals run, some hop, some swim, some burrow, and some fly. Each animal has a particular role to play based on the way they were shaped by God. The same is true with humans. Each of us was uniquely designed, or shaped, by God to do certain things.

Wise stewardship of your life begins by understanding your shape. You are unique, wonderfully complex, a composite of many different factors. What God made you to be determines what he intends for you to do. Your ministry is determined by your makeup.

If you don't understand your shape, you end up doing things that God never intended or designed you to do. When your gifts don't

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meet the role you play in life, you feel like a square peg in a round hole. This is frustrating, both to you and to others. Not only does it produce limited results, it is also an enormous waste of your talents, time, and energy.

Another assignment I remember from that college art class involved using a potter's wheel to create something from clay. I spent three weeks trying to master the use of the wheel, with little success. My pitiful excuse for a bowl resembled nothing that could be called "art." The cute girl in the class, however, *could* make beautiful pots. The clay seemed to come alive in her hands, as her skillful fingers molded it into any shape she desired. She was able to make the wheel spin at the perfect speed and apply just the right pressure to the clay.

I remember the art professor telling us that when clay is pliable it requires just a small amount of pressure to shape it. The opposite also is true—when clay is stiff and resistant, a lot more pressure is needed to mold it the way the potter desires.

That very truth is evident in a passage from the book of Jeremiah:

The LORD gave another message to Jeremiah. He said, "Go down to the shop where clay pots and jars are made. I will speak to you while you are there." So I did as he told me and found the potter working at his wheel. But the jar he was making did not turn out as he had hoped, so the potter squashed the jar into a lump of clay and started again. Then the LORD gave me this message: "O Israel, can I not do to you as this potter has done to his clay? As the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand" (Jeremiah 18:1–6, NLT).

Here God gives us a clear, beautiful picture to explain his relationship to us. He is the master craftsman; we are like clay in his hands. His role is to carefully shape us; ours is to remain pliable, allowing him to do so. It's amazing how well the process works when we cooperate! As the prophet Isaiah emphasized: "And yet, LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, and you are the potter. We are all formed by your hand" (Isaiah 64:8, NLT).

As we allow God's hands to lovingly mold us, we submit ourselves to his purpose in creating us. God specially designs each of us for doing his will on earth. Each one of us is intentionally shaped to fulfill the specific

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plan he has for each life. According to the imagery of 2 Timothy 2:20, some of us are made of gold or silver, others of wood or earthenware. A glass may be designed for daily use or just for special holidays. But each of us, as God's special creation, is honored and lifted up by our Master, not taken for granted or dismissed as unimportant. Understanding this amazing concept should produce in us a desire to humbly and gratefully accept the role God has created us to fill.

When we reach this position of heart—when we become pliable and welcome the loving pressure of God—we understand that his purpose is to handcraft us for a special role only we are able to fulfill.

### Just Be You

If you could press a rewind button on my life, you would see that for many years I was running away from who God created me to be. I wanted to make a lot of money before making an eternal difference. I'm forever thankful to the people who helped me replace my confused and cluttered life with the clarity and confidence of God's truth. While the world shouted at me to look and live like other people, God's voice rose above all the noise with a clear message: "Erik, just be you!" Today I live with the freedom to be who God created me to be. That freedom gives me incredible focus and lasting fulfillment.

I'm not special in this regard. I believe with all my heart that God has the same message for you.

You were not created to conform. You were not created to compare. You were not created to compete. You were not created to compromise. You were created to contribute to God's kingdom and make a significant difference with your life. You were created to *just be you!*

God is saying to each of us, "Just be you. Be who I shaped you to be. I gave you new life—Christ's life—so you could make a significant difference in the world. Do what I planned for you to do. Serve beyond yourself. I'm waiting to bless your life on earth and reward your efforts in heaven." The question is, Will you receive the greatness God has for you? Will you fulfill his special assignments for your life?

As you get ready to discover and maximize your unique God-given S.H.A.P.E., I want to take you back once more to the art gallery I visited during college.

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There were many famous reproductions in that studio. On one wall hung one of Henri Matisse's most important masterpieces, *The Dance*. Although Matisse had painted the theme of the dance before, only this composition reached his full passion and expressive resonance. The power of the dance is captured in a stunning frenzy of red, blue, and green—uniting man, heaven, and earth.

On another wall hung Claude Monet's masterpiece, *Water Lilies*, in which the artist experimented with the interplay of light and water. Sunlight erases the boundary between objects and their reflection. Though decorative on the surface, the *Water Lilies* series embodies a philosophy far deeper.

The last masterpiece I saw was Vincent Van Gogh's *The Starry Night*, perhaps his most loved work. The scene depicted in the painting literally jumps off the canvas—with rockets blazing yellow and planets spinning like pinwheels above hills that undulate and heave.

Now, let's imagine for a moment that a portrait of your life hangs next to these others. What does it look like? What are the unique details? What is the title? Is the canvas full of beautiful colors, or is it confused and cluttered? Would you rather see a painting of your life as it is, or would you prefer the masterpiece God wants to create?

It doesn't matter that your life doesn't look like God's masterpiece yet. Great art takes time. God's Word promises that "He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6b, NASB). He promises that he will keep working on you until the artwork of your life is just as fine as that of Jesus himself! (see Ephesians 4:13).

I hope you will launch into this discovery process with excitement and anticipation, filled with the confidence that clay or a paintbrush inspires in the hands of a master artist. Think of each of the following chapters as a specific color God will use to bring your masterpiece to life. Let him bring out the details in your life that he wants to use for his glory. As your masterpiece takes shape, see it as a gift from God—and realize that what you do with your life is your gift back to him.

Enjoy the time with your Master!

## GRABBING HOLD

At the end of every chapter you will find this special section, designed to help you move from *information* (what the Bible says about you) to *application* (how you will change your life because of these truths). If you are journeying through this material with another person, this is a great place to share your learnings. And if you're going through the material with a group of people, check out Appendix 4: Grabbing Hold Together.

Furthermore, I encourage you to take advantage of the additional online S.H.A.P.E. resources available at [www.shapediscovery.com](http://www.shapediscovery.com). This interactive website is full of helpful tools, tips, and ongoing training, all dedicated to ensuring you can start finding and fulfilling your unique Kingdom Purpose. See Appendix 6 for more information.



Every journey has a starting point. Today is the starting point of your life-changing journey of discovery. Before you begin, take a moment to mark your starting place. Where are you today, right now, at the beginning of your adventure with God? The list below will help you mark the spot. Read each statement and indicate your current status by circling the appropriate number: 3 = yes, 2 = somewhat, 1 = no. When you have finished, add the numbers for your score.

My unique God-given purpose in life is clear.	3	2	1
My spiritual gifts are being expressed.	3	2	1
My passions are being utilized for God.	3	2	1
My natural abilities are being used to serve others.	3	2	1
My personality is helping me serve others.	3	2	1
My purpose capitalizes on many of my experiences.	3	2	1
My life is completely surrendered to God.	3	2	1
My attitude and actions reflect a servant heart.	3	2	1
My accountability to others is consistent.	3	2	1
My schedule shows how I'm investing in others.	3	2	1
My plan to fulfill my purpose from God is set.	3	2	1

Total: \_\_\_\_\_

***Where Are You Today?***

**A Clear Kingdom Purpose** (25+ points) – Based on your answers, your God-given strengths seem clear and your specific purpose from God is concise. Your life is in balance and providing lasting fulfillment. You strive to live surrendered so you can find freedom in your role as a servant. You have a solid accountability team in place that offers the encouragement and support you need to be faithful to God’s design. You invest in the lives of others on a regular basis. Your master plan is on target for maximizing your God-given strengths. You feel you truly are living the life you were meant to live.

If you scored in this range, this book will help you further clarify what God has given you and give him the opportunity to affirm what you already are doing on his behalf.

**A Cluttered Kingdom Purpose** (15–25 points) – Based on your answers, your God-honoring purpose seems cluttered. Your strengths are somewhat confused due to the fact that you are overextended in many areas of your life—something we can all relate to. There are times when you feel you are using your gifts for God’s glory, but there also are issues, emotions, and desires in your life that you still need to surrender to God in order to live the life he has in store for you. Your accountability to others may not be as consistent as God—or you—would like. You desire to invest in others, but have not committed the time. You have a few goals in place, but no master plan to ensure your purpose for God is completed. The result is intermittent fulfillment. You occasionally feel you are living the life you were created for, but you long for greater clarity.

If you find yourself here, this book will help bring greater clarity to your God-given strengths and the specific purpose for which God made you.

**A Confusing Kingdom Purpose** (Less than 15 points) – Based on your answers, you are confused about your specific purpose in life for God. You lack a clear idea of who you are and you have few clues about what God made you to do. Your specific God-given strengths are unknown. Surrender and servanthood are not themes you have engaged at this stage of your journey with God. You don’t feel safe making yourself accountable to others. Investing in others is not currently a priority of your life.

## Uncovering Your S.H.A.P.E.

Overall, your life is not as balanced as you would like it to be. Fulfillment is hard for you to find. You admit you don't have a clear-cut strategy for your life. You may even feel most of the time that you are just surviving.

Many people walk through life confused. If you are here, thank God for putting a tool in your hands that will replace your confusion with his clarity and confidence.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Now that you know where you are today, the next question is, Where would you like to be by the time you finish reading this book? What is the one thing you long for God to do in your life as you spend time with him?

To capture this moment, write God a note in the space below, asking him to help you see how special you are and the specific purpose he has just for you.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

*Dear God,*

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(Don't forget to sign your name and date it.)