

Next Chapter

The Courage to Let God Turn the Page

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NEXT CHAPTER — FREE SAMPLE

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Introduction

Turn the Page

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." — Jeremiah 29:11

We don't gather here to celebrate a finish line. We gather to recognize something far more powerful — the turning of a page.

Maybe a chapter of your life just closed. A school. A job. A marriage. A ministry. A season you poured yourself into, for better or for worse. You remember when it began, and you remember the day it ended — the lessons it taught you, the friendships it gave you, and, if we're honest, the challenges that nearly took you out. Some of those chapters you closed on purpose. Some of them closed on you. Either way, you know the strange ache of standing at the end of something and not yet seeing the beginning of what's next.

And that's exactly where I want to meet you. Because what comes next — that part hasn't been written yet. What comes next will be shaped by your faith, your courage, your decisions, and your

willingness to believe one thing above all: that God is not done with your story.

I know that's hard to believe when you're standing in the gap between the life you're living and the life you sense you were made for. I've stood there. For years I felt a pull I couldn't name, ran from a call I didn't think I qualified for, and nearly talked myself out of the very thing I was put here to do. This book is the story of how I finally turned the page — and an invitation for you to turn yours.

So let me tell you why I wrote it, and why now. When I look back over my life, I can see I'm standing between seasons — and for a long time I didn't understand where I was headed. Here is what I've learned about those in-between places: when you can't see where you're going, the most important thing you can do is look back at where you've been. Because when you look back, you start to knit things together. The pieces that made no sense on their own begin to connect.

I once heard Bishop T. D. Jakes preach it in a sermon, and it has stayed with me ever since: we live life in retrospect. We don't understand what's happening at the beginning, while we're still living it. But after a while we turn around, we look back, and we finally see — *that* happened to me, and it happened *for* me. Once you can see it, you can piece it together, and that understanding will propel you into where you're going.

So this book is for the person standing in that gap, trying to figure out what's next. Maybe you just graduated, certain a sports career was coming, and the offer never came. Maybe you just lost a job, and you can't see what's on the other side of it. Maybe you're newly clean, fighting for your recovery, and "what now?" feels heavier than the addiction ever did. Maybe you just walked through a divorce, and the future you had planned is simply gone. Wherever you are — hear me: your next chapter is already written. Look back over the chapters you've already lived. Pull the lessons out of them. And as you gather those lessons, you'll find the needle — and you'll start to knit the whole thing together and move forward into your next season.

I know it works, because it's how I'm living right now. I pastored for more than fifteen years. I coached basketball. I spent my life pouring into people in a dozen different ways. And when the pastoring was done, and the coaching was done, I discovered the passion to pour into people hadn't left me — it just needed a new vehicle. That's how IAM University was born: a place to take all of it — every past experience, every gift, every hard-won lesson — and pour it into the next person, so they can turn their own page and become who God created them to be. I didn't lose my purpose when those chapters closed. I carried it forward. And so can you.

Here's what I've learned, and what these pages are built on: **you are not the author of your story. You are the one living it — but God is the One holding the pen.** Before you were formed, He knew you. Before you saw the light of day, He had already set you apart. The same God who began a good work in you has promised to complete it. That means the chapter in front of you isn't starting from scratch — it's continuing a story that began before you ever showed up.

You'll notice this book reads more like a testimony than a textbook. I'm going to take you through the real arc of my own next chapter — the call, the running, the conversation that broke me open, the cost of finally saying yes, the people God used to equip me, and the season I had to release so He could build something new. Along the way, you'll meet some familiar company in the Scriptures: Jeremiah, who said he was too young; Moses, who said he wasn't enough; Jonah, who ran the other way; Elijah and Elisha, where the mantle passed from one generation to the next. I tell my story not because it's remarkable, but because I believe you'll recognize *your* story somewhere inside it.

And I don't want you to just read this. I want you to *work* it. Every chapter ends with a short page I call **The Next Page** — a question or two to sit with, a verse to carry, and a prayer to pray. Don't rush past it. The reader who answers honestly will be in a

different place than the reader who only nods along. That's where the real work happens — not in what I wrote, but in what you bring to it.

A word of grace before we begin: wherever you are right now is a perfectly fine place to start. However late it feels, however many false starts are behind you, however unqualified you think you are — none of that disqualifies you. Forget the former things. *Behold, He is doing a new thing; now it springs up, do you not perceive it?* The new thing is already beginning. The only question is whether you'll turn far enough forward to see it.

So this isn't a book that says "congratulations." It's a book that says: **turn the page — because the next chapter starts now.**

And the best part? It hasn't been written yet. God is holding the pen.

Let's begin.

CHAPTER ONE

Before the Light of Day

*"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
before you were born I set you apart." — Jeremiah
1:5*

Before God ever called me into ministry, He had already been writing my story. I just didn't have the language for it yet.

I grew up in the Boyd Hill Projects. I tell more of that story in *A Better Me*, so I won't relive all of it here — but there's one thread from those years I need you to see, because it's where this chapter actually begins. Even as a kid, I felt *different*. Not better. Different. The neighborhood had a gravity to it — I watched drug dealing, fighting, real violence, and I watched that gravity pull friends of mine all the way down. I even watched a friend get arrested in the sixth grade. And while so many were drawn deeper into that environment, something in me kept leaning the other way. I felt like I was here to be something else, to do something else.

And I wasn't entirely alone in it. Right in the middle of that neighborhood, God gave me two friends who carried the same different vibe I did —

my cousin, Terrance, and Michael, the man who would one day stand as the best man in my wedding.

I still remember how Michael and I met, because it's the kind of thing that only looks like coincidence until you've lived long enough to know better. It was the summer before my fourth-grade year, and we had just moved into the Boyd Hill Projects — 240 Fargo Street, a neighborhood I had never so much as set foot in before. I didn't know a soul. No friends, no familiar faces. Just a new kid in a new place, trying to figure out where he fit. One afternoon my mom sent me out to take the trash to the dumpster. And as I walked up, there was another boy carrying his family's garbage out too. We nodded at each other. He asked me my name; I asked him his. *Michael Kirk*. That was it. That was the whole beginning.

From that day on, we met at the bus stop every single morning. We walked to the basketball court together. We played after school together. In a neighborhood where nobody else had bothered to introduce themselves, the friendship that would anchor me for the rest of my life started with two boys hauling out the garbage at the same time.

And I don't believe that was an accident. Look at how God works: He didn't send Michael to me in a sanctuary, or a classroom, or some lightning-bolt spiritual moment. He sent him at the dumpster — in the most ordinary errand of the day, doing the very thing I was doing, serving his family. Hold onto that

if you feel alone in a new season right now. The person God has set aside to change the trajectory of your life may not arrive with any fanfare at all. They may just show up at the curb, on an ordinary afternoon, taking out the trash. Don't despise the ordinary moments. God has a habit of hiding lifelong gifts inside them.

We sheltered each other, Terrance and Michael and me. We protected the difference in one another when the environment would have happily snuffed it out. And here's the part that still amazes me: decades later, those same two men stand beside me still — they work alongside me now in the business I lead, IAM University. The friendships that protected the calling became partners in it.

I didn't have a word for it back then. It wasn't a voice. It wasn't a plan. It was a *knowing* — quiet, persistent, impossible to shake — that my road was supposed to bend in a direction the streets around me weren't bending. Looking back now, I understand what that was. Before I ever knew God had set me apart, He already had. The knowing came before the calling, because the One doing the calling knew me before I knew myself.

For years I even tried to talk myself out of that knowing. I spent much of my life trying to force myself to fit — forcing friendships, squeezing myself into boxes other people had ready for me. But every time I forced it, it rang hollow, because none of it

was the thing I was actually made for. The "different" I kept sensing wasn't something I could manufacture by fitting in. It was something I would have to be *drawn* into.

I wasn't without an anchor, though. My grandmother — Maggie L. Robinson — made sure of that. In her house, church on Sunday was nonnegotiable, and not just the service. She would have us there a full hour early for what she called prayer service, teaching us the power of prayer and why it mattered so much. I can still see myself as a boy, kneeling beside her in a near-empty sanctuary while she prayed. I didn't appreciate it then the way I do now, but that seed went deep, and it never died. To this day, prayer is a core of who I am, and it began on those early mornings kneeling beside her.

The Sunday Before My Twenty-First Birthday

If you asked me to point to the morning the *knowing* finally became a *decision*, I would take you to one Sunday before my twenty-first birthday.

It was a revival — an afternoon service, around two o'clock, with a guest evangelist I can still see in my mind. Our sanctuary was laid out in three sections: one on the left, one in the middle, one on the right. I was on the right side, about seven rows back. And let me be honest with you, because this book is no good if I'm not: by then I was more than

just the "different" kid. I'd grown up. I'd done some teenager things. I'd gotten tangled up in a few things I shouldn't have and made some mistakes I'm not proud of. I wasn't sitting in that pew as a saint. I was sitting there as a young man carrying a pull he had never resolved.

Then the evangelist began to preach, and it was as if the whole room emptied out until it was just him and me. He started asking questions that landed like they had my name on them. *Are you ready to make a change? Are you ready to turn over a new leaf? Are you ready to turn the page on where you've been and walk into where you were made to be?*

Turn the page.

I didn't have the language for it then, but I have it now: the title of my life was being preached over me, and I didn't even know it.

I felt it before I understood it. Something rose up in me I could not sit still underneath. Before my mind had decided anything, my body was already moving. I got up out of that seventh row, walked down to the altar, and I began to weep. We were an AME Zion church, so there were kneeling benches at the front — and I knelt down on one, and everything I had been carrying came up and out of me. I could not contain the crying. I wasn't performing. I wasn't deciding to be emotional. I was a young man finally answering a pull he'd felt his entire life.

That was the day the page turned. Not into ministry yet — that fight was still ahead of me. But it was the morning the lifelong *knowing* finally became a *yes* to God.

That altar was the foundation. But God wasn't finished building on it.

Not long after, my daughter was born — before my wife and I had even married — and her arrival changed the temperature of everything. That same lifelong knowing showed up wearing a brand-new face: I knew, deep in my chest, that I was supposed to be an amazing father to her. That conviction lit a fire under everything. It pushed me harder to press into being different, to being better, to becoming a man worth following. In time I married the woman I'd loved since high school, and together we set out to build a family on purpose.

The problem was, I didn't know *how*. My parents weren't married, so I never grew up with a model under my own roof of what a husband or a father was supposed to be or do. My own father and I had a strained relationship back then. (It has since been mended, and I thank God for that.) And yet the very thing I most wanted to give my wife and my daughter — a solid foundation, a home that was steady — was the very thing I felt I'd never been handed myself.

So I went looking for it in the only place that had ever quieted that knowing. As my wife and I started building our family, I joined her church, and I started

serving. Just working. Just showing up. But the more I served, the hungrier I got. I pressed my way into Bible study. Into Sunday school. I went from wherever I had been sitting all the way up to the front row — because I did not want to miss a single word the pastor was preaching. I had a thirst I couldn't explain and couldn't satisfy.

I didn't know why God was drawing me closer. I only knew I couldn't stay where I was. What I couldn't see yet — what I would only understand much later — was that the chapter carrying me from where I was to where I was going had already begun to be written. And the hand holding the pen was not mine.

Maybe that's where you are right now: feeling a pull you can't name, a hunger that nothing quite satisfies, a quiet sense that you were made for something the life around you doesn't fit. Don't rush to label it, and don't force it into the boxes that have never held you. That restlessness is not a malfunction. More often than not, it is the first evidence that God is drawing you toward your next chapter — and that He began writing it long before you ever noticed the pen moving.

THE NEXT PAGE

- Where in your life have you felt *different* — drawn toward something the people around you weren't drawn to?

- What have you been trying to force that has never felt authentic — and what might that restlessness actually be pointing you toward?
- **Carry this verse:** *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart."* — Jeremiah 1:5

Keep Reading

*This is the free sample — the Introduction and Chapter One of **Next Chapter: The Courage to Let God Turn the Page.***

The rest of the story is waiting: the years I ran, the conversation at my grandmother's kitchen table, the manuscript pulled from my hands, the church I built at two in the morning and the one I had to release — and the truth that held all of it together.

When you feel like you're walking away from something, you are actually walking toward something.

Be first to get the full book — and more from IAM University — at **iamdemorrious.com/nextchapter**.

Turn the page.