

UNCOVERING GOD'S
PURPOSE WHEN LIFE
DOESN'T GO AS PLANNED

Tracy Steel



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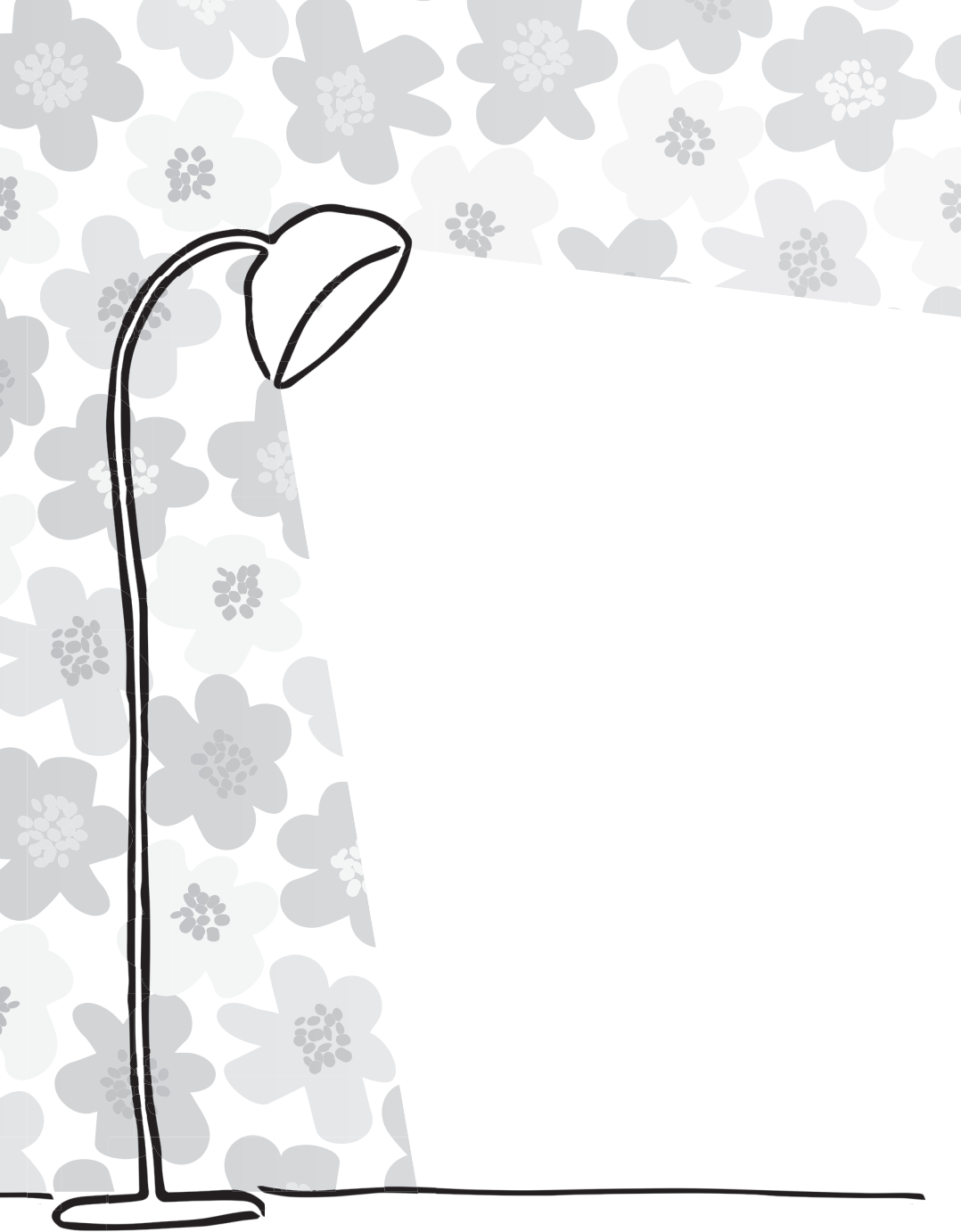


In memory of Foxy Roxie

I miss you, Mom.

Thanks for all the smiley faces.







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Foreword

When I'm tired or discouraged, or even when I'm feeling successful and maybe a little too full of myself, taking time to pay purposeful attention to God's hand and guidance grounds me. I love to examine the work he has done in my life.

Actively looking for God's design of my days and my years gives me a peace that passes my finite understanding during moments of frustration or bewilderment over current circumstances. So many of my struggles are rooted in my tendency toward self-sufficiency and a desperate need to control my circumstances. But in the times when God rips these delusions from my tight-fisted grip, amazing things happen.

My career looks nothing like I dreamed or anything I planned, but it's so much more beautiful than what I would have designed.

I wanted to be a writer and assumed I'd write things about which I was confident. God had a different idea. He set me clearly (and begrudgingly) on the path of writing about the one thing I would have sworn I never could: organizing. Or more specifically: organizing as my personal ongoing struggle.

Though I resisted this direction for years, when I finally embraced God's design for my life, my family, my home, and my

career, I was able to take a step back and see the beauty of his plan. God's design allows me to relax and be open and honest, and these are the core components of the personality he gave me. By accepting and eventually appreciating God's design, I have found my home in Christ and my place in the world.

I was so ready for Tracy's words in *A Redesigned Life*. Tracy's eye for design and her passion for beauty allow her to eloquently explain concepts in a way that I can apply to my life. Her formal training as an interior designer makes her the ideal teacher.

But most of all, Tracy has a passion to help those whom God has placed in her path. I'd known Tracy online for a few years before meeting her in person at a conference in 2017. I'm not even quite sure how it happened, but within minutes of recognizing one another, we were in prayer—the kind of prayer you long to experience with a heart friend. We prayed for this book, for the words you're about to read.

I've learned so much from Tracy. She explains principles of design as created by God (the original designer) and uses them to guide my understanding of how God works within my life. Movement, emphasis, pattern, contrast (and more) are not concepts I naturally understand, but as I learn them from Tracy, I also learn how to identify God's love, purpose, and design in the world and in me.

Be ready to understand yourself and your life more as you read *A Redesigned Life*. Whether you realize you're living in a "hallway season" or learn to embrace the beauty of space within your home and your heart, you'll be changed.

Dana K. White, ASlobComesClean.com (Reality-Based Cleaning and Organizing), author of *Decluttering at the Speed of Life* and *How to Manage Your Home Without Losing Your Mind*

Introduction

Everybody has their thing. Some are passionate about creating art, traveling the world, or major league baseball. I love decorating and anything beautiful that nourishes the soul. One of my “things” is looking at different colors and textures of fabric, which I realize is kind of weird.

But what I’ve come to notice is that fabric is rather blah when left on its rectangular cardboard bolt. Something happens to cream chenille or golden silk whenever a seamstress or designer grabs hold of it, cutting it from its cardboard bolt. As the designer cuts, arranges, and stitches portions of material together, the fabric is given shape and purpose. The same is true of us. Our lives are textiles in our divine Designer’s hand.

Without him we’re left on our own cardboard bolt—and, well . . . blah. God is not into blah. He’s designed a specific set of plans for each of our lives using a set of principles. God cuts, arranges, stitches, and applies these principles, giving the fabric of our lives shape and purpose.

We go from blah to brilliant.

But sometimes we aren’t feeling that brilliant, are we? To be honest, I don’t always think a specific shape or purpose God

designed for my life is all that flattering or beautiful. Life is turning out differently than I planned. And I bet the same is true for you too.

Maybe you are teaching algebra to a roomful of rowdy seventh graders when others promised you would make it as an actress. Perhaps you're grieving the loss of a friendship you assumed would always be there, or you're unpacking boxes in a place you swore you would never live. Or maybe you're thinking that you're supposed to be married by now, that you're supposed to weigh a certain amount so you can feel good about yourself, or that you're supposed to have more followers on social media. Maybe you think you should be a mother, or have a cancer-free body so you can watch your grandchildren grow.

I know women who are living through and wrestling with the things I just listed. This book is for them, and it's for you if parts of your life are not turning out the way you expected or hoped. All of us are living a life we did not design. So what do we do? And what about God? Where is he when life doesn't make sense? Together we'll explore these questions as we reconnect with God in the midst of our surprise or discouragement.

*All of us
are living a
life we did
not design.*

The truth is, I'm living a life I didn't design but that God designed for me. I am me. A girl born and raised on the flat and humid plains of Kansas. I'm not a supermodel, celebrity, or accomplished athlete, and the world yawns at me.

But then . . . God. He is redesigning me.

Some seasons of my life are turning out as I had hoped. Other parts of my life surprise me in a hilariously awesome way, exceeding anything I could plan for or dream up myself. In fact, I'm supposed to be living in New York City making

millions of dollars and owning my own interior design firm. But now I'm involved in women's ministry making way less than a million dollars.

From redesigning homes to redesigning hearts. From one kind of interior design to another kind. This is the essence of my story and why I am adding a designer's touch to the application of biblical teachings that will challenge and encourage you throughout the pages of this book. God is in the middle of every season of your life and is hand sewing your life into a one-of-a-kind, high-end couture masterpiece.

From blah to brilliant.

From obscure to couture.

God's movement in our lives is purposeful and perfectly timed. He's in the business of turning people who are discarded, misunderstood, and overlooked into accepted, known, and celebrated masterpieces.

Like a human interior designer or artist uses a set of design principles to help them create, God uses his own set of codes to create a couture life for each of us. Recognizing what these are is key to uncovering the purposes of God when life doesn't go as planned.

Let's consider six principles of design—God's use of **movement, emphasis, pattern, contrast, balance,** and **space**—and learn how these apply to you. These principles will enable us to uncover something spectacular about the purposes of our creative God.

In addition to these six principles, I've included design tips for your heart and home throughout this book to help you create beauty within and around you. Design is in the details. And good design is more than just picking a cute pillow or making sure the paint color complements the fabric on your couch. It's

about using the elements and principles that make good design possible. Our God uses principles, so we should too.

But in the end, what truly makes a home beautiful is not the finishes or furnishings but the people who inhabit it. So create away, beautiful one, and settle in somewhere comfy.

Welcome home to your redesigned life.

I think you are about to be quite taken by its beauty.



see
DESIGN TIP
for Your Home and Heart

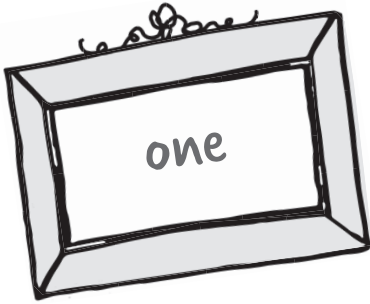
Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.
(Col. 3:2)

While perusing Pinterest the other day, I stumbled upon a picture of my dream bedroom. It wasn't the furnishings that caught my attention. It was the ceiling, which was painted a pale blue color. Whoever designed this room "looked up" and saw the ceiling as an opportunity to add extra beauty to the room.

Don't forget to look up today—around your home and within your heart. Where is the focus of your heart? On earthly things or on the things of God? And what about your literal ceilings? Looking to spruce up a room in your home? Then add a pop of color to your ceiling. Remove some of those cobwebs from the corners, or the dust bunnies from your ceiling fan. Do not allow whatever is around you to take the focus off what is above you. Don't forget to look up.

Move

ment



Making God Your Focal Point

The older I get, the more I realize I have a lot of learning left to do. The world around me keeps changing. For example, I remember using a disposable camera with actual film in it to capture the moments and faces I didn't want to forget. I had to wait days to see if any of my pictures were any good. Appalling, isn't it?

I remember when MTV came out with something called a *music video*. Whoa. I even remember cursive handwriting and stores full of VHS tapes with movies on them. Heavens, I also recall getting my very first car phone. The thing came in a black leather bag that was about the same length as our bread box. It only worked while plugged in to my car's cigarette lighter, which was kind of a bummer. The

thought that I would one day use this type of phone outside of my car and use it for pretty much everything *but* making phone calls in an emergency situation never crossed my Kirk Cameron—crushing adolescent brain.

But now we use our cell phones for multiple reasons and enjoy various social media apps like Instagram and Pinterest. We like these platforms because we are visual beings. All of us love to see and create pretty things, don't we? This is by design. God created us to be moved by what we see—to be drawn toward order and beauty. When we give in to our internal longing to create, organize, or “spruce things up,” we are mimicking the creative attribute of God, whose image we bear.

Like Father, like daughter.

Imagine the towering Rocky Mountains, a fluorescent pink-and-purple sunset, or the wrinkled and smooshed face of a newborn baby. Grandness, brilliance, innocence. We are in awe of these things and moved by them because their beauty expresses parts of the divine nature of God.

We, the created, long to see glimpses of God, our Creator. The more we look for God, the more we will see him (Jer. 29:13). The more we see him, the more he becomes the focal point of our lives. And the more we focus on God, the more content and peaceful we become in the middle of life's surprises and detours.

God knows this. It's why God allows us to witness specific events or feel particular emotions that result from his movement in our lives, satisfying our need to understand the people and places we see. The

The more we focus on God, the more content and peaceful we become in the middle of life's surprises and detours.

world around us will continue to change. But thankfully, we have a God who is in control and who helps us through this life whenever it doesn't go as we had planned. So let's uncover something about our God that you may not have realized and consider how the principle of movement causes him to become the focal point of your life.

Movement: Winding Lines, Shapes, and Curves

Movement is the principle of good design which gives the artist control over what the viewer sees next. Using this principle, the artist can create the path our eyes will travel as we look at a work of art. For example, our attention is first captured by the main focal point and then it proceeds to move around the composition as one element after another catches our attention.¹

Speaking of your cell phone, if yours is nearby, ask Siri (or Alexa or Cortana or what's-her-name) to show you an image of the famous painting entitled *The Scream* by Edvard Munch. When I look at this painting, my focus lands immediately on the screaming figure's face. From there my eyes may move to the left and up the bridge to where I notice two other figures standing. Or my eyes may move to the right of the screaming figure and follow the river up and across the painting. From there my eyes travel back across the orange-and-yellow sky and down to the mysterious figures on the bridge, and then back to the screaming figure.

In *The Scream*, Munch used the design principle of movement to control what my eyes see as they move throughout the painting. He used curved brush strokes, straight lines, and color to guide my eyes around the painting. No matter which

direction my eyes move, I always come back to the screaming figure, which is the intended focal point of the painting.

Similarly, God directs what I see next as I move from one season of life to another. Like an artist in control of his painting, God is sovereign, or in complete control, over all of creation and over my life as well. God uses his own “principle of movement” so that no matter how many figurative bridges I travel across or orange-and-yellow skies I look upon, the eyes of my heart always come back to him, the focal point of my life. The specific ways God loves, stretches, heals, takes away, or gives are like the elements of curves, straight lines, and colors that artists use to catch our attention. All of these direct the eyes of our heart back to God as we move from one season of life to another.

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. (1 Cor. 15:58)

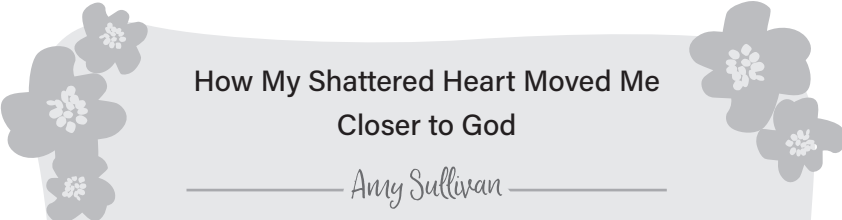
In 1 Corinthians 15:58, the apostle Paul is saying that we do not need to look like the screaming figure in Edvard Munch’s painting as we go through our days. But I bet that my children will tell you that on some days I do look like a screaming figure (more on that later).

I pray this book helps you stay steadfast and immovable in your faith whenever God’s movement in your life surprises or challenges you. I long for us to stay close to the God who loves us whenever things do not go our way.

The world wobbles. Let’s be people who stay steadfast and constant by focusing on the Person who *is* our constant. God’s gracious and loving hands are persistent, sewing everything

together for our good. Yes, the mending may hurt. Yes, the stitching may not make sense yet—or perhaps ever, this side of heaven. That’s an uncomfortable reality I understand and am living. Yet God is worthy of our praise as our artistic Creator. He will use a figurative “straight line” of scriptural truth, or the “curve” of surprise, or the “edge” of rejection to move us to where we need to be for our greatest good and his greatest glory.

My friend Amy has experienced an “edge” of rejection that ultimately moved her closer to God. She is living her own re-designed life and, like the other ladies you will meet in the following chapters, is doing so beautifully. Here’s what a broken heart and God’s movement in Amy’s life have taught her.

A decorative border featuring stylized flowers in shades of grey and white, framing the central text area.

How My Shattered Heart Moved Me Closer to God

— Amy Sullivan —

Benji Halley was my sixth-grade crush. In math class, Benji shot rubber bands at me, and I was certain this was a sign of his undying love.

It was on the bus when Benji asked if I was going to the middle school dance, and on the bus where I managed to mumble an extended “ummmm” in response to his question. It was also on the bus that Benji said, “Well, I guess I’ll see you there,” and with a flip of his long, straight hair, he adjusted the volume on his Walkman, put on his headphones, and strutted down the aisle.

If twelve-year-old me knew anything, I knew this was love. It was the kind of love that made my heart beat out of my newly purchased, fake Guess sweatshirt.

But at the dance, I spent the night watching Benji talk to the popular girl who wore two Swatches. He didn't speak to me, and instead of my heart beating out of my sweatshirt, my heart felt as if it would shatter onto my white Keds.

That shattering was rejection, and even in sixth grade, I was a veteran when it came to rejection: my parents' divorce, yearly moves to new schools, new step-siblings, former step-siblings, the year I waited for the coveted invite to the cool girls' table, and of course, all the times in PE when I was chosen last or not at all.

I couldn't wait to grow up because I was certain adults never dealt with this kind of rejection.

But time passed, and no longer was I rejected by a long-haired boy in a dark gym. Instead, rejection happened out in the open for the world to see. Rejection was when the ring fit the finger of another girl, the baby went to the couple who already had three children, and the job was awarded to someone more qualified. Regardless, rejection still felt as if my heart would shatter and fall onto my shoes.

But what twelve-year-old me never knew and adult me tends to forget is that even through life's nos, God still moves.

I scheme and flail, desperate for my prayers to be answered. I beg God to help me avoid pain and loss. I call out for him to use me or answer my questions. I rationalize that what I ask for is reasonable and good. I focus on what I need as opposed to who he is, and I forget. I forget God tells people no, and he tells them no often.

God told Moses no when he wanted to enter the Promised Land (Deut. 3:25-26).

God told Elijah no when he prayed God would take his life (1 Kings 19:4-8).

And God tells me no (daily).

The uncomfortable edge of no isn't God's rejection, it's his plan to move me to a different place, a place that may not look as I envisioned, but a place closer to him.



As Amy shared in her story, God has a loving purpose for each of us and is using things like rejection from boys named Benji to move us closer to him. However, when hard and hurtful things happen to us, it doesn't always feel like God loves us. Know this: our God does not support or create whatever evil comes into our lives. The Bible teaches that Satan and mankind itself take what God creates and use it for evil (Mic. 2:1; John 10:10; Rom. 3:10–18; 1 Pet. 5:8). Can God use evil and pain for something good and useful? Yes (Gen. 50:20). But God is never the source of evil, nor does God delight in it or tempt us to do evil things (Ps. 5:4; Job 34:10; James 1:13).

Movement within the Pages of Scripture

Okay, I need to confess something before we go further. I like to ponder. My mind never stops. I am not sure why, but I have a theory. Brace yourself.

Once upon a time, my mother let me crawl around in the dirt at my dad's softball games and eat cigarette butts that littered the ground. Oh yes, 'tis true. Why she felt the need to share this hideous story with me and find it hilarious, I will never know. But the bigger issue is that as a wee tot, I ate used cigarette butts while in my mother's presence.

It was the 1970s. Moms did not have hand-sanitizer bottles clipped to their diaper bags, and they must have figured that babies had immune systems or something. I do not know. I am still appalled by this truth from my childhood. I am convinced recycled nicotine accumulating in the tissues of my young, absorbent brain made me hyper-wired for pondering.

So . . . surprise! I've been thinking and I want you to join me in doing the same, but as it pertains to your own life. God has a

set of plans he designed with your name written all over them. And the way he carries out his plans for your life is purposeful and providential.

God's Providence

The providence of God means the continuing action of God in preserving his creation and guiding it toward his intended purposes. . . . It means that we are able to live in the assurance that God is present and active in our lives. We are in his care and can therefore face the future confidently, knowing that things are not happening merely by chance.²

God is with us and involved in our lives. This is why we can confidently and even joyfully live out a life we did not design. Each of the design principles mentioned in this book refers back to what theologians call God's providence. In fact, the word *providence* comes from a Latin term that means "to foresee."³ This concept is a pivotal one.

God's providence means that he knows the future because he already designed it. God's movement in our lives is not random. He prepares and matures us, readying us to receive what he's already planned. If we miss this, we will wobble. The life we're living will seem like a continuous game of roulette, making us feel nervous, depressed, or queasy. Yes, a rush of adrenaline comes with playing the real game of roulette. But I don't want to live on adrenaline; I want to live on *assurance*.

Whether life surprises us in a wonderful or painful way, we can know that what is happening is part of God's movement. God did not create the world and then leave it. God doesn't play roulette with our lives. What he has planned will come to pass, for he said it would (Num. 23:19; Isa. 46:9–11). This

What he has
planned will
come to pass.
... This is not
assurance
based on
impersonal
odds, but
assurance
based on one
personal God.

is not assurance based on impersonal odds, but assurance based on one personal God.

What Providence Means

Several verses in Scripture support the assurances I mentioned and teach that God is moving and is intimately involved in our lives. This is wonderful news! Here's why:

God is unstoppable.

“I have revealed and saved and proclaimed—
I, and not some foreign god among you.
You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “that
I am God.
Yes, and from ancient days I am he.
No one can deliver out of my hand.
When I act, who can reverse it?” (Isa. 43:12–13)

God is eternal.

But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever,
the purposes of his heart through all generations.
(Ps. 33:11)

God is righteous.

So listen to me, you men of understanding.
Far be it from God to do evil,
from the Almighty to do wrong. (Job 34:10)

God is holding everything together.

For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Col. 1:16–17)

Scripture is full of additional verses like these that prove God is present in our lives and he cares for his creation. God is omniscient or all-knowing. He knows what he is doing. It's up to us whether we live on our adrenaline or on his assurances. Adrenaline leads to wobbliness. Assurance leads to steadfastness. It is one or the other.

So don't give in to discouragement. God uses the principle of movement to bring himself into focus so you can see him more clearly and love him more fully. May we remain steadfast in our faith with our eyes ever fixed on God when life doesn't go as planned.