



FOREWORD

THE FIRST TIME I MET Joël Malm he made an offer I couldn't refuse:

“Do you want to hike the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu with me?”

How could I say no to that challenge?

I've been on several amazing adventures with him since that first offer. Every one of those trips has been a powerful experience. On every hike, the recurring theme is always take it one step at a time.

That's the message of the book you have in your hands.

I love the Vision Map concept because it focuses on going after the dream God gave you—step by step. Do what you can do, then pray and trust God to come through on the impossible.

If you've got a dream to start something new—a business, a ministry, or writing a book—then I think you will find this book invaluable. I can't think of a better person to walk you through the process of going after your dream than Joël Malm. He is a true entrepreneur and adventurer who has a heart to see you accomplish the great things God placed in your heart.

MARK BATTERSON

New York Times bestselling author of *The Circle Maker*



INTRODUCTION

THE CONVERSATION USUALLY goes one of two ways. I meet a new person and at some point they ask me: “So, where do you work?”

“Well . . . I lead outdoor expeditions with a spiritual focus.”

At that moment the person either:

A) Smiles and says, “That’s nice.”

B) Lights up. A fire comes to their eyes, and I can see they are one of *those* people. If they are, the inevitable next question is, “How do you get into that line of work?”

I tell them I started the organization. The fire gets brighter and they immediately ask, “How do you start something like that?”

My usual answer is, “Well. Just start.”

I realize that answer is unhelpful, and it may seem a bit cocky, but people rarely have time to hear me explain the circuitous, confusing, often frustrating, but fun-filled journey it’s been getting to this point.

This book describes that journey. It’s a response to the question, “How do you start something like that?”

It’s for *those* people. You people. (More on that later.)

There are no overnight success stories. Let me repeat that. There are no overnight success stories.

I believe God wants to make the dream in your heart a reality—even if it seems far-fetched. You aren't crazy. You are a visionary.

I hope this book helps you navigate the waters of getting something started.

I'll guide you through the process, step-by-step.

There's nothing more rewarding than watching God accomplish the goals He placed in your heart. I wish I could give you a simple answer for how to do this, but there isn't one. It requires time, hard work, and total dependence on Him.

There are no overnight success stories. Let me repeat that. There are no overnight success stories.

Every story is different. I'm convinced God does it that way on purpose. Otherwise we'd try to find a formula.

There is no formula. Let me repeat that too. There is no formula.

I've read tons of books by folks I would consider "outliers." Their stories are outside the bell curve of how things normally happen. They experience incredible, larger-than-life events. God has done truly unique things for them. Those stories are the exception. Most of us aren't going to fit into that outlier category. God will do miracles to bring your dream to pass, but in truth, I found the stories of outliers discouraging.

I've seen some pretty consistent things God uses to bring your

INTRODUCTION

dream to pass. I always found it encouraging to read the stories of how normal people like me got where they are today.

Here's my story and some of the important lessons I learned along the way. I hope you find it helpful.



1 } SO YOU'VE GOT AN IDEA?

IT ALL STARTED FOR ME ON a mountain in Russia. In a blizzard. At 16,000 feet. I could've written it off to oxygen deprivation, but something within me said it was more. God placed something big in my heart that day.

The blizzard pummeling our side of Mount Elbrus made our attempt to summit the highest peak in Europe an exercise in futility. We gave up for the day. Secretly, I was relieved. I realized earlier that morning when we pulled out the ice axes and roped our team together that I was in way over my head. This was above my climbing level; I had no experience ice climbing and only basic knowledge of how to use the axe in my hand. I was still loving it, but the situation made me remember there was some real danger involved.

On the way back down, we discovered that the blizzard was causing a whiteout that covered the trail markers. We stopped to reorient.

“Wait here. I find trail,” my Ukrainian guide, Oksana, said in her flat Russian accent.

I nodded and knelt down in the deep snow. Ahead there was a break in the storm. Through the clouds I could see the Cheget Valley far below us—an encouraging sign.

I looked at my watch. It was noon. I thought of my family, soundly asleep back in Texas. They had no idea how dangerous conditions had become.

In that instant something hit me. It was one of those moments of transcendence. I felt alive and alert. I realized just how much I loved this kind of thing. I loved the thrill of climbing mountains. It was a spiritual experience for me, a way of deepening my sense of dependence on God and feeling connected to the sheer power of the vast world He created.

Travel experiences like this shaped my worldview. They gave me a wider perspective on life and a greater appreciation for God’s amazing world—the people, the geography, the diversity.

I thought of my friends back in the US. They thought I was crazy when I announced I was planning to go climb a mountain in Russia. “Why would you do that? It’s expensive isn’t it?”

I tried hard to explain it, but they had no experience with mountain climbing, no frame of reference. I wished there was a way to show them how much they were missing. I thought of a favorite quote of mine from St. Augustine: “The world is a book and those who do not travel read only one page.”

In that moment of transcendence, I realized something. I finally knew what I wanted to do with my life. I was on track to go to law school. That’s what everyone said I’d be good at. I believed them, but I was never thrilled about the prospect.

In the midst of a blizzard hiding our way down the mountain, toward the safety of base camp, God placed a dream into my heart. He gave me a vision to start bringing people with me on these kinds of trips. I wanted to start helping others create spiritual adventures.

YOUR PROBLEM TO SOLVE

I'm convinced that God has given each of us a message to share with the world to bring Him glory. I'm also convinced that along with that message we all have a problem that God has uniquely equipped us to solve.

Let me establish something at the outset. God can solve any problem He wants to solve with the flit of an eyelash. He doesn't need us. For whatever reason, He chooses to let us participate in ultimate goal of bringing Himself glory. It's definitely not the most efficient method. I'm slow. I fumble the ball a lot. Inexplicably, God still chooses to use people like me. You are no exception. He wants to use you.

You may not have received a vision on a mountain in a blizzard. Your vision may have started by seeing a simple need. God works differently in each person. The circumstance surrounding how you got your God Idea isn't the important thing.

Doing it is.

Whether your goal is to write a book, go to college, pay off a huge debt, or start a business, never discount the dream God placed in your heart, however it may have come to you.

This book is about taking practical steps toward sharing your

unique message and solving the problem God has equipped you to solve.

This book is for *those* people. Those who are certain God has given them a vision or dream. If you've got it, you know what I'm talking about. It's a burning desire to do something for God. It doesn't have to be clear, but there is something within you that yearns to solve some problem or share a unique message you think the world needs to hear.

How do you know if you are at that place?

Well, when you have a dream or vision that God has placed in your heart, you are obsessed with it. It's what you talk about *ad nauseam* with all your patient friends at the dinner table. You think about it all the time. Working on it feels like a moral imperative. Conversely, not doing it would feel almost sinful.

If you are at that place, I think you'll find this book helpful.

If you aren't there yet, I hope this book will inspire you. Read through it prayerfully. Then keep praying, explore, read lots of books, and start serving. God wants to show you His unique calling for your life.

If you had a dream that now seems impossible, or you wonder if your moment has passed, I want to encourage you. If you are still alive, then the dream is still alive—no matter how dead or impossible it may seem. I pray this book will revive the vision in your heart.

I've started quite a few things in my life. It hasn't always been easy. At times it can be downright hard. It often takes years.

In this book, I want to share the process I stumbled upon for taking a God Idea that seems so overwhelming that you don't know where to start, and breaking it down into smaller steps. I'll tell a little of my story along the way.

One warning: If you don't have a God Idea, this book might still help you, but you'll probably think some parts of it seem a little too hands-off.

You see, this book is for folks who have a dream and vision in their hearts that is so big it will be impossible to accomplish without God's direct intervention and miraculous provision. That's how I define a God Idea.

One of my main focuses is making sure God is always in the center of the mix. If yours isn't that kind of dream, you probably don't need this book.

So if you've got a dream—a really big, crazy vision that is impossible to accomplish without God—I think you might find this book helpful.

Enough set-up. God has a plan for us. We need to get moving!

*“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus
for good works, which God prepared beforehand,
that we should walk in them.”*

—EPHESIANS 2:10



2 } GET A ONE-LINER

I MADE IT OFF THE MOUNTAIN and out of the Russian blizzard safely, but the fire that ignited in my heart was still burning. I started telling everyone about my idea. I was sure they'd all get excited about it too. Instead, I learned something crucial for every visionary.

I met with a prominent Christian leader to share my idea. I spent thirty minutes sharing my newfound life goal, my big God Idea.

The man listened attentively. I told him every angle. I shared everything I could think of that might get him excited about the idea. He seemed to like it. Then came the deathblow question.

“That’s great. So what *exactly* are you doing?”

Grrr. *I just told you, dude!* I thought, as I smiled graciously. I walked away from that conversation learning an important lesson for anyone who has a vision: you need a clear, one-line explanation of what you are trying to accomplish.

It took me weeks to bumble my way through it. I had to seek

I walked away from that conversation learning an important lesson for anyone who has a vision: you need a clear, one-line explanation of what you are trying to accomplish.

lots of counsel and share the idea with many people who gave me confused looks. But I finally came up with a simple, one-line explanation. The next time someone asked me what I was trying to do I had it down cold: “I want to take people on spiritually focused adventure trips around the world.”

The best way to refine a one-liner is to say it over and over and over. Talk it out. Watch how people respond. Tap into elements that seem to consistently bring out the “wow” response in people as they listen. Narrow the vision down to the clearest possible explanation.

I’ve heard it said, “If it’s a mist in your head, it will be a fog in the listener’s head.” It’s true. You need a clear, concise explanation of what you are trying to accomplish. It can’t be foggy.

I realized, after lots of talking it through, that my ultimate goal was to use travel to give people a bigger perspective on their lives. That was my problem to solve. Make sure you are very specific. Tell people what problem your vision is going to solve. You’ll refine it in the process.

Many people share their one-liners with me. I recently heard one that sounded something like this: *Create strategic alliances that empower synergistic approaches to complex problem solving.*

I read it a few times trying to figure it out. I didn’t want to discourage him, but I had to be honest. “That sounds amazing!

Lots of fancy, hip words. But what the heck does it mean? What are you trying to do?”

When I asked him some clarifying questions and we got down to the nuts and bolts it became clear that he still didn't know *exactly* what he was trying to do. His one-liner had some glamour, but if no one can understand his ultimate goal, it isn't serving its purpose.

I know lots of missionaries who send me newsletters about their work. I'm confident they are doing something of value because I know them. However, even though I support them, I still have no idea what they do. Even when I directly ask them I can't get a clear statement of their main focus. Some have shared that they're struggling to raise funds for very good projects. I wonder if part of their challenge is that they haven't taken the time to define their vision. If you can develop a clear picture, others will get on board. We follow clear visions.

When God gives you a dream or a problem to solve, it usually first appears in a general, overarching idea with very few specifics. You see a problem and want to solve it. I only knew I wanted to help people have experiences that expanded their perspective. It wasn't super clear.

I don't think anyone ever gets a vision for something amazing with all the details exactly laid out. It takes time. It takes talking it out. It takes homing in on exactly what you want to accomplish.

Don't be afraid if your one-liner sounds too big or even impossible. William Wilberforce, the man who is considered to be largely responsible for ending the slave trade in most of the British Empire, had a huge vision. On October 28, 1787, he wrote out his one-liner:

“God Almighty has set before me two great objects: the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of morals.”¹

Seriously, Will? Think about this. That was a huge dream. Slavery was so prevalent in his time that I’m certain this goal seemed absolutely impossible, bordering on ridiculous. It would be like saying, “I’m going to eliminate cigarette smoking!”

Guess what? It took forty-six years, but it happened. Wilberforce saw slavery abolished in almost the entirety of the British Empire three days before he went to be with the Lord for eternity. He worked his entire life on that dream.

A single mother I shared this concept with developed this one-liner:

Raise kids who love Jesus and people.

Have you seen this world we live in? Talk about an impossible dream! But God placed that vision in her heart, and she is pursuing it with all she’s got.

I don’t think there’s anything wrong with having a one-liner for every area of your life. In fact, I’ll be bold and say I think you *need* one for every area of your life. I have the guys in my Summit Life Coaching Program write one for family, finances, career, and ministry. It’s amazing to see what happens when people write out clear visions for their lives.

God wants to give you a vision for every area of your life.

Like we discussed, developing a one-liner isn’t necessarily easy. It will take some time, some thought, and probably a few bumbled attempts at explaining it to people. Don’t get discouraged if you are at this phase of the process right now. It will get clearer. As you keep explaining and exploring the problem you want to solve, you

will eventually get to a place where you can clearly articulate what you are trying to accomplish.

Once you've got the one-liner, run it past a few folks. See how they respond. Do they understand it? If not, you may need to keep honing it. There is a problem that God has placed you on this earth to solve. You have a unique message to share with the world that will bring God glory.

Pretty confident you've got a good, clear one-liner? Then write it down.

ON THE WALL

An African friend visiting the US pointed out how strange he thought it was that hospitals have a vision statement on the wall.

“Doesn't everyone know what a hospital is there to do?”

It's kind of funny when you think about it, but the fact is we all have a tendency to forget. I get into a routine and forget why I'm doing what I'm doing all the time. That's why it's so important to write out your one-line vision.

“Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it” (Habakkuk 2:2).

I think the best possible thing you can do is to write your one-liner out in a visible place. Make it large.

When I finally had my one-liner, I ran to the store and picked up a black marker and large poster board. This was the beginning of a process I stumbled upon that has helped me navigate my way through many projects and visions God has given me over the years.

I CALL IT A VISION MAP

The concept isn't complicated. But it really helps me clarify my vision.

Some people spend thousands of dollars on consultants, displays, and spreadsheets to explain their goal. Not me. No, I was a poor college student. I spent a few bucks, but it served the purpose. I stuck the poster board up on the wall of my bedroom. This was how my Vision Map began.

At the top I wrote out my one-liner in big black letters:

Take people on spiritually focused adventure trips around the world.

The vision greeted me every morning now. It was in front of me. It was clear. I had a tangible, one-line goal to run with.

Several people helped me nail it down. You'll probably need someone to help you do the same. I discovered early on that if I was going to pull off this dream God placed in my heart, I needed some trusted advisors. You will too.

Clarity is the most important thing. I can compare clarity to pruning in gardening. If you are not clear, nothing is going to happen. You have to be clear. Then you have to be confident about your vision. And after that, you just have to put a lot of work in.

—DIANE VON FURSTENBERG, Fashion Designer

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