



THE  
**FULL TANK LIFE**

FUEL YOUR DREAMS, IGNITE YOUR DESTINY

BEN  
**TANKARD**

THE  
**FULL TANK LIFE**

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IGNITE YOUR DESTINY

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New York Nashville

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*To Jewel, my lovely wife and best friend.*

*When I first met you I said to myself, "The Lord is my shepherd; I see what I want!" I never dreamed life with you would be so glorious. You are my love, my biggest fan and cheerleader, and my most trusted adviser. You are so pretty, sweet, and loving that every day with you is like celebrating our anniversary.*

*To our children, Marcus, Brooklyn, Britney, Benji, and Cyrene; as well as my two daughters-in-law, Tish and Shanira; three grandkids, Diamond, Micah, and Billie (Benja-Mina); and one grandpuppy, Buddy. You all inspire me to be the man God intended me to be. I am honored to be your "paw-paw," and I am so thankful for our blended family and legacy of love.*

## INTRODUCTION

# DESTINY—Accelerating toward Greatness

*A map is only good when you know your starting point. Tell the truth about where you are without diminishing where you want to be.*

**H**ave you ever driven a car with the low-fuel light on? What a nervous ride! When you know that at any time the car could run out of fuel and force you to walk, it makes for a very uncomfortable trip. Most of us would rather have a full tank of gas even if our journey is not that long. There is a special confidence that comes from knowing you have more than enough fuel for your drive. Your fuel level becomes even more important when flying a plane (there are no gas stations in the sky) and absolutely critical when applied to your life.

Do you have a Full Tank Life?

There are countless books written on topics such as happiness, success, and personal fulfillment. The people writing these books are super smart and many have more degrees than a thermometer behind their name! Yet the secret to enjoying

the uniqueness of who you are, where you are, and where you're going seems to elude most people. Obviously, there's no one-size-fits-all formula with three easy steps. We each have a variety of gifts and talents, dreams and aspirations, as well as experiences and opportunities that we bring to life each day. From my experience, the secret to success is simply getting all these items in alignment. Which I know firsthand is not always easy—especially when life seems to place obstacles in your path on a daily basis.

In fact, roughly eight out of ten people in our country are not content with their present lives. In other words, only about 20 percent of the population would say they're enjoying their lives to the fullest, living what I like to call the Full Tank Life, which is basically just doing what you were born to do. The happiest people in the world seem to be those who have tapped into their God-given talents and inner passions. They've grown from their past, they're engaged with their present, and they're excited about their future. If people notice how much I enjoy my life right now, it's because I'm happier than I've ever been, pursuing the goals that express who I am at the core of my being. I'm loving my wife and leading our family, making and producing music, pastoring and mentoring our church, speaking and acting, piloting my plane, and doing a host of other activities that bring me joy because they're vital to who I am, to the way God made me.

Another big part of what brings me joy is inspiring others to find their purpose and live their best Full Tank Life. And that's what this book is all about. Nothing would make me happier

than to sit down and have a conversation with you about who you are and what you want your life to be about. But since we may not get that opportunity face-to-face, I hope that we can begin a different kind of conversation through these pages. Although we may be separated by distance, our hearts will be united in the pursuit of our shared goal: filling your life's tank and igniting your dreams. My job is to show you how to uncover those suppressed gifts and to set goals to experience a constant path of growth and fulfillment for the rest of your life. I'm convinced that once you know your assignment in life, it will strengthen and lengthen every area of your life.

The good news is that the keys to your Full Tank Life are already in front of you. Yes, all the answers you're looking for have already been found. There are no secrets to your success (just because you don't know something doesn't mean it's a secret!). You simply haven't discovered how to activate and implement what you already know about yourself. Information is like a radio station broadcast. The music is in the air all the time, but you won't be able to hear it until you tune in your radio receiver. If you cut the radio off, the music is still playing; you just don't hear it. But just because you're not tuned in to a certain channel of information doesn't mean it's a secret. This data was there all along; you just were not tuned in.

So it's time to awaken the sleeping giant inside you, the one named Destiny. "Hello, this is Ben Tankard down at the front desk in the lobby of your dreams. My friend, this *is* your wake-up call!" It's time to tune in, tank up, and take off!

And before you make excuses or dismiss me as just another

pep-talk motivator, let me share a few things about what happened when I woke up and began living out my Full Tank Life. You see, my Destiny has wings. It has taken me to every corner of the globe. I have been able to see the world, pilot my own airplanes to many of these locations, dine in fine restaurants, meet extraordinary people, perform concerts with people I admired for years who are now my friends, smooth jazz and gospel greats like Yolanda Adams, Kirk Whalum, Jonathan Butler, Kirk Franklin and CeCe Winans, and the late, great Wayman Tisdale.

My Full Tank Life has brought me into fellowship and friendship with great men and women, presidents of state, awesome speakers, pastors, and mentors like Creflo Dollar, Joel Osteen, and Bishop T. D. Jakes. I have been blessed to speak to crowds of over twenty thousand people. Living with a Full Tank has opened doors for me to live the good life, call a modern palace my home, relax in exotic locales, and have my own reality show on TV. But the biggest blessing of all is I get to help people. When you tap into your true calling in life, then you will automatically be in the business of helping people. Everyone has a certain place to fit in on earth. You are a piece of the ultimate puzzle. You have a part to play in other people's Destiny, and you can only do it by walking in yours.

There are many books out there on life fulfillment, but I sincerely believe what I have to share will reach a place in your heart that will excite you and motivate you toward change. Believe me, I do not claim to know everything (in fact, I am a college dropout); however, what I've learned I will gladly share with you.

If you're reading these words right now, then you've already tapped into something it takes to awaken your Destiny—desire.



You obviously want more from life than you've got right now or you wouldn't have read this far!

So let me make a few recommendations about how you can best use this book. First, you do *not* have to read the chapters in sequential order. I've organized what I know about the Full Tank Life around seven areas based on what I consider the key parts of your Destiny. Each chapter of the book explores one of these seven—dreams, environment, subconscious, time, inspiration, network, and you—which together form your Destiny. Once aligned, these will help you tap into your life purpose, fill your motivational tank, and ignite the power to be all that you are meant to be.

Within each chapter you will find some homework assignments to help you put in practice what we've been exploring in that particular area. You will also discover some blank lines at the end of each chapter called "Your DESTINY Diary" where you can respond to my final questions designed to help you both summarize and personalize what you've just learned. In addition, you will notice quotations from some of my favorite mentors, teachers, and role models, along with some of my own, all identified as a "BENspiration" to fill your mental, emotional, and spiritual tanks.

I believe that in order for any "self-help" to have a lasting impact on you it must be read at least three times. In fact, I've heard it said that one has to hear a message seven times before one decides to act on it. With the power of repetition in mind, I have restated many of my key points across all chapters and have tried to help you see my big ideas from multiple angles.

So I encourage you to read this book more than once, to skip

around in it based on what jumps out at you, to mark up favorite chapters and highlight key areas. So grab your yellow highlighter and a pen or pencil (or your phone or tablet), and let's dig in and create a flight plan for the journey of ascension on which you're about to embark. It's time for you to begin pouring into your Full Tank Life!

### **BENspiration**

Even if you are on the right road, if you don't move you  
will be run over! Let's go!

THE  
**FULL TANK LIFE**

# Flying on the Wings of DESTINY

## *Getting Ready for Takeoff*

*You're where you're supposed to be—but not where you're going.*

I don't get it.

Every year I witness family, friends, colleagues, and fans getting caught in the New Year's frenzy of setting new goals and resolutions. Everyone is talking about what's coming *next*, and the thought of these dreams coming true creates its own energy and excitement. Many of these goals are related to their physical health, their weight, and their lifestyle habits.

During those first days of January each year, the number of new memberships at gyms and health clubs skyrocket as people make the decision that *this* will be the year their resolutions finally endure and produce the intended fruit of thinner, leaner bodies. This will be the year when they finally dig deep and make it happen. This will be the year when they change old habits, commit to new ones, and discover something within themselves that they know is there but hasn't come out yet. This will be the

year when they fulfill their dormant potential and transform their opportunity to change into who they want to be, who they believe they're meant to be.

Their hopeful exhilaration is almost like having your name called on *The Price Is Right* game show to “come on down!” I'm always amazed at the prospective contestant whose name gets called. They get so excited, jumping and screaming and rushing down front—and they haven't even won anything yet! They've only won the *opportunity* to win something. But simply the *thought* of winning, the possibility in itself, gets them into a frenzy, and nothing can stop them from running to the front of the auditorium.

But what's so special about January 1? Does something change in the atmosphere that makes it easier to exercise and lose weight? Do old habits suddenly peel away as easily as the December page from last year's calendar? Of course not!

So what if you made a point on a daily basis—starting right now, right here, wherever you are—to create the expectation for positive change to begin in your life? What would happen if you knew nothing could stop you from succeeding and bringing your dreams to life? What would it feel like to know you absolutely could not fail? For your life to take flight in thrilling ways you can barely imagine?

*Can you feel it?*

God has made you the CEO of your own life. He has created you with unique gifts that no one who has ever lived throughout history has had. Your Creator has instilled within your DNA the very essence of His own divine image and holy imagination.

You're not God—neither am I, thankfully—but we're all created by the Master Artist and carry within us His divine design.

Just consider all the incredible beauty of God's creation. A desert sunset sinking into its gold-orange-pink horizon. The lush Amazon jungle teeming with a symphony of sounds and colors. The shape of an elephant's trunk. The smell of roses wafting from a bride's bouquet. The architectural marvel of form and function that is the human body. All of these gifts and countless others stagger our senses with their beauty and complexity. And all of them originated from the divine imagination of God—*just like you!*

You don't have to wait until January to start your new life. You don't have to wait until you have more money. You don't have to wait until you finish your degree, get married, start a family, or launch a website. You don't have to know all the answers or even all the questions.

You only have to make one decision. A choice to stop settling for life on the ground when you know you were meant to fly. A choice to seize the opportunity God has placed before you.

The choice to live a Full Tank Life.

## **Getting Your Dreams Off the Ground**

When I decided to pursue my dream of becoming a pilot, I realized that it would mean overcoming some of my fears. It would mean stretching outside my comfort zone and pushing myself beyond my normal limits. And I learned early in my training that in order to have a smooth takeoff, you have to do a lot of preparation on the

ground. In order to ever get off the ground, you have to know your present location as well as where you're going.

Launching your dreams toward your Destiny requires similar ground preparation before you soar to new heights. We'll unpack all the facets of a Full Tank Life throughout the rest of the book, but before we begin, you have to want to begin. You have to want to make a change and to start *right now*. Not tomorrow, not next week, not after the holidays or when you get that big promotion. As my friend Joel Osteen is so fond of saying, "Your time is now!"

You picked up this book for a reason. Maybe you're a fan of my gospel jazz music. Or maybe you love watching the antics of my crazy family on *Thicker Than Water: The Tankards* on Bravo. Or maybe you've never heard of Ben Tankard but you're intrigued by the title, curious about what it takes to have a Full Tank after running on empty for so long.

Whatever the reason, it's no accident my book is in your hands.

It's time to go after your dreams as if your life depends on it. Why? Because it does!

So many people feel trapped in their lives. They had big dreams when they were children, but as they got older and experienced the ways the world works, their dreams started to evaporate. By the time they were teenagers, young adults making plans for their future, they began to bump against limitations.

Can you relate? Maybe you didn't get to go to the college you wanted because your family couldn't afford it. Maybe you couldn't afford to go to college at all. Or maybe an unplanned pregnancy rushed you into parenthood before you were able to grow your dreams. It could be taking care of your parents

or another loved one that's made it necessary for you to hit the pause button on your future. You might have an illness or injury that's been chronic and debilitating, derailing your dreams. Perhaps you feel trapped in a dead-end job.

Believe me, I understand all of those circumstances—because I've lived through them! I've been a garbage collector, a chicken farmer, and a college dropout. I've gone through detours, divorces, depression, and disappointments. But through them all, the spark of my dreams has never been quenched. Oh, I tried sometimes to snuff that tiny flame. Because when you can't see a way to move forward, when you feel stuck and trapped by your circumstances, then it can be too painful to think about your dreams. Thoughts of them mock you and make you feel foolish for ever hoping, let alone trying to be more than you are at the moment.

But your story is not over. Your game is still in play. The last chapter has not been written.

Even with all of life's limitations, setbacks, responsibilities, and obligations, it's never too late for you to still experience the Full Tank Life. Your dreams are the key to unlocking that feeling of being trapped by your past choices or your responsibilities to others. When you commit to making your dreams a reality, then you will be surprised how quickly you will feel liberated and fulfilled. When you're riding with a Full Tank, the journey is just as joyful as the destination!

And it all starts with resuscitating your dreams. Like a life-guard dragging a drowning swimmer to shore and performing CPR to revive them, you must find the spark of life still burning within. You must dare to believe and to step out in faith. You must bring your hope back to life.



**BENspiration**

“There are two primary choices in life: to accept conditions as they exist, or accept the responsibility for changing them.”

—*Denis Waitley*

**Hope Floats**

If you feel silly resurrecting your dreams because they seem grandiose and farfetched, then you're probably on the right track. Because God wants your dreams so big and so impossible that you absolutely have to live by faith. He wants you taking risks and depending on Him in order to accomplish the dreams He's planted within you, the impossible kind of goals that you could never achieve in your own power. In fact, the Bible tells us, “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Heb. 11:6).

One of the most dramatic stories of being faithful to an impossible dream comes from a guy who ended up being the world's first sailor. Actually, he was the world's first boat builder and zookeeper as well. Noah was an ordinary person called to do extraordinary things. We're told he “found favor” with the Lord at a time when hardly anyone else honored God (Gen. 6:8).

He lived in times every bit as turbulent as ours. Almost

everyone on earth had forsaken God and started to live like there was no tomorrow—partying, pillaging, and polluting, doing whatever they wanted or felt like doing. They mocked the few people who still had faith in God, like Noah’s family, and felt like they were on top of the world. But that all changed when the rain began to fall.

You see, God became sick and tired of the way men and women—His own creation—had abused the gift of free will by abandoning Him and His ways. People were so violent, greedy, lustful, and selfish that God did something He had never done before, something so extreme that He promised never to do it again: hit the reset button on the human race and start all over again. Here’s how it’s described in Genesis:

The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. So the LORD said, “I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them.” But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

*Genesis 6:5–8*

The favor Noah found in God’s eyes resulted in the building of the ark. And the Lord was very specific about how Noah was

to build it, outfit it, and stock it with a pair of every kind of animal in existence (see Gen. 6:14–21). The level of detail in God’s instructions to His chosen dreamer rival those from a gourmet chef cooking a seven-course meal! I tease my wife Jewel about never cooking, and if she had to follow instructions like this, then I’d be a starving man!

But your dreams are in the details. Are we told whether Noah had any carpentry skills or construction expertise? No, we’re not, because when God gives you a dream—in Noah’s case, a dream that was literally going to save his life and the lives of his family, not to mention the human race—it doesn’t matter. God will provide everything you need and teach you on the fly how to be ready, resourceful, and resilient.

However, that doesn’t mean the process will be easy. I’m guessing Noah faced his share of critics, hecklers, and haters. And he probably had to be very patient as he went about crafting a vessel unlike anything that had ever sailed the seas at that time. Don’t you wonder if Noah worried about a boat that big springing a leak? Or maybe that was just one more thing he had to prevent as best he could and then leave to God. Maybe Noah was the first person to coin that old saying, “Hope floats!”

His faithfulness in fulfilling God’s dream for his life certainly gives us all hope. Because I find it very encouraging that when the rains began and the floodwaters rose, Noah was six hundred years old (see Gen. 7:6). I can’t imagine building a ship in a bottle at one hundred, let alone building an ark at age six hundred! If Noah had to wait that long before he saw his ark set sail, then you can rest assured it’s never too late for you to finish and launch your dreams.

## Color Your Dreams

During the time when Noah was building the ark, however many years that must have been, I'm guessing he had some kind of blueprint he had devised based on God's instructions. Or maybe he didn't need one because God allowed him to remember it all as precisely and accurately as it needed to be. But I suspect most of us need to begin the process of saying yes to our Destiny by expressing our dreams in words.

I'm a firm believer in the power of writing down your dreams. It's the first step in taking them seriously and acknowledging your belief that they will come to life. Something happens when you put your dreams on paper. Your vision and goals begin taking shape in concrete form. The Bible gives us a major success key in Habakkuk, "Then the LORD told me: 'I will give you my message in the form of a vision. Write it clearly enough to be read at a glance. At the time I have decided, my words will come true. You can trust what I say about the future. It may take a long time, but keep on waiting—it will happen!'" (2:2–3 CEV).

Once you have your dreams in written form, I encourage you to start adding images and illustrations. Cut out pictures from magazines, draw and sketch, take pics on your phone—whatever you feel inspired to do that provides visuals for your dreams.

There's no right way to create what I call a "vision map." You just need to experiment and capture as many expressions of your dream as your imagination can produce. Words, images, videos, music, clothing, colors, crayons—whatever works! Let yourself feel like a kid again. Get in touch with that part of

yourself you may have had to shut down and lock away because of your grown-up responsibilities. You may be surprised by who you find inside.

In fact, I recently noticed several coloring books for adults on the *New York Times* best-seller list. Apparently, psychologists and doctors have determined that the act of coloring pictures is a great stress reliever. Maybe it makes us feel like children again, but whatever the reason, it's very popular right now. Tap into this same kind of creative, anything-goes, no-right-way energy as you go about describing and illustrating your dreams.

If you struggle to let yourself do something so childish and fanciful, then stop thinking about it and just do it. No one should be watching as you mine the treasure within your heart and create a map to its location. Unleash your imagination and step out of the rational, logical box you live in 99 percent of the time.

Remember when you were a kid how you could finger paint and make the sky green and the grass blue? How you could make up new species of animals or design an outfit for your doll out of aluminum foil? The way you could transform a cardboard box into a spaceship, a beauty parlor, or a clubhouse? Liberate your childhood imagination and discover the color of your dreams.

Here's one example of how this practice works for me. Whenever I am dreaming about my next airplane or car acquisition, I will purchase a small collector's model of it and set it on my nightstand, my desk, or the bathroom counter—wherever I will see it most often. Through this miniature version of my next “big boy toy,” I am sending a message to my mind and heart that this item is in my future.

For example, I recently purchased a red “monster truck” that I have been dreaming about for seven years. But I'd had it

growing in my imagination long before I made my actual purchase through the small collectible version sitting on my desk. Every time I looked at the model I would smile and remind myself that my wonder toy was on its way to my driveway. At the time that I started dreaming about the truck, it was light-years out of my budget! But that did not stop me from test-driving it, taking a selfie with it, and putting a desktop model within my eyesight. Over time the truck came down in price, and my income rose, and I was able to buy my dream truck for pennies on the dollar.

### **Discovering Your DESTINY**

- What did you love to do as a child? Play sports? Draw pictures? Read stories? Bake cookies? Make up your own songs? Brainstorm a list of activities, hobbies, and topics that you enjoyed while growing up. Choose one of them to do today as a way of unlocking your imagination and reconnecting with your dreams.
- Make a “vision map” that captures words, images, colors, and textures that reflect your dreams. You can draw, paint, sew, sketch, and glue pictures from the Internet and magazines. You can make a digital version as a Pinterest page or create a hard copy out of poster board. The goal is to begin creating something that you can use as a reference, a treasure map, to inspire you to forward-moving action. Keep it handy so you can look at it throughout your day or add to it as new ideas come to you.

This process of expressing my dream goals is something I practice regularly. As a result, I have my vision map that I carry around with me, both in hard copy form in my briefcase as well as a digital version on my phone. This keeps them in front of me on a daily basis and reminds me of their importance. At this stage of my life, I have many dreams on my list that have already been realized, but I replace them with new ones as soon as I can. These are usually goals so big I can't even imagine how they could ever come to pass. But my job is just to dream—and take the next step of faith as God reveals it to me and opens opportunities before me.

My job is to give myself permission to dream, just as your job is to give yourself permission to dream. No one else can do it for you. If you're waiting on your parents or your spouse or your kids or your siblings or your pastor or your boss to give you permission to dream, then you'll never go anywhere. Yes, you need their support and want their encouragement—and we'll talk about that in chapter 7—but permission to dream only comes from within.

You don't have to know how you'll do it or even what the next part of the process looks like. You simply have to be faithful to own your dreams, name them, and give voice to them. You have to listen to God and when He speaks to you—through His Word or certain circumstances or certain people in your life—then you must follow. He placed the seeds of your dreams inside you, and now you're responsible to nurture and grow them until it's harvest time.

**BENspiration**

What you discover in your imagination will soak  
into your subconscious, increase your faith,  
and fuel your actions.

**Sleepless and Successful**

I once heard a story about Jeff Arch, a high-school English teacher and part-time karate instructor for many years before making the choice to pursue his dream of being a writer. Apparently, Arch couldn't sleep one night and ended up staying up channel surfing in front of the TV. Around four in the morning, he was flipping stations and paused on one of those paid infomercials where a motivational speaker was challenging viewers to tell themselves the truth about their dreams.

Something happened inside Arch in that moment as he heard the speaker's challenge—the spark of his dream was fanned into a flame. Arch said in that moment it dawned on him that he was not where he wanted to be in life. He had a good life, a family with two kids, and he loved teaching the sport of tae kwon do. But he had never wanted to run a karate studio or grade high-school essays; it sort of just happened.

So sitting there in front of his TV at four in the morning, Arch vowed to pursue his first love—writing movie scripts. Deep in



his heart he had always longed to be a scriptwriter and create screenplays for the movies. But we all know how impossible it is to get a movie made, right? How could a thirty-eight-year-old guy from Virginia get Hollywood to make one of his movies?

Arch had always let the odds keep his dream at bay. But that morning, he made two promises to himself. First, he was going to do something he previously would never have considered and buy the motivational speaker's material. Obviously, the speaker's words resonated and inspired him, so Arch considered this purchase an investment in his dream, in the future life he wanted to live. Second, he vowed to follow through and make himself read books, listen to CDs, and attend seminars by the speaker and any other motivational gurus who would fuel his dream.

He kept those two promises and every day took to heart the messages surrounding him. Within a month, he quit making excuses and wondering how he could ever manage to beat the odds and started writing. Arch had a great story idea and drafted a screenplay, which he then bravely risked sending out to producers in Hollywood. Less than a month later, he was cashing a check for a quarter of a million dollars for his screenplay, a now-classic romantic comedy called *Sleepless in Seattle*. If you haven't heard of it, just ask any woman over forty!

His screenplay went on to be nominated for an Academy Award and led to Arch's dream of becoming a full-time scriptwriter and movie producer. He beat the odds by listening to his heart on a sleepless night, and it's not a coincidence that his movie's main character does the same. "Don't let anything stand in your way, be the first," Arch advises.

## **Dreaming into Doing**

Success stories like Jeff Arch's remind us to risk our hearts and be honest about what we really want in life. They remind us God's plan for our lives is far bigger than we usually imagine (see Eph. 3:20). It's just a matter of exploring within yourself and examining what gets you excited and identifying your unique gifts and talents. As you explore your likes and dislikes, your passions and persistent pursuits, think about what fans that pilot light inside the furnace of your soul. Chances are good that even the things you loved doing in childhood reflect your purpose.

At the age of three I was banging on my mother's pots and pans and created my own little drum set. Mom says she knew I was a born musician and never complained about the loud noises I created with the pans. Later on in life she got me a mini drum set for Christmas. In school I excelled in the band as a drummer and tuba player, and received almost two dozen college scholarship offers for music when I graduated high school. Because I was also a six-foot-six-inch gifted basketball player, I had just as many offers for athletic scholarships. Consequently, I got distracted from my true love—music—and accepted a basketball full-ride scholarship in an effort to “go pro” and go after the big money.

My story took a tragic turn, which I'll share in detail in the next chapter, and my NBA career got cut short before it really started. As I struggled to overcome this major disappointment, I eventually heard something inside myself—a new kind of hybrid

music that's now called gospel jazz. I had never heard anything exactly like it, and I didn't know how to go about establishing a music career or even beginning the process. But I knew I had a big dream tethered to my passion for music. So I began to do my part by honoring what God has given me by just taking the next step.

Looking back, I see how the dollar signs of playing pro ball clouded my vision. Plus, I received tons of attention and affirmation from my family, friends, and coaches to pursue a career in the NBA. Pretty soon, I was telling myself that it was what I wanted because my love of music had been pushed aside.

This is often the challenge we face growing up. Usually we don't know ourselves well enough to identify and pursue our greatest passion. So we listen to those around us and try to do what they tell us we should do. Or we listen to the message that we can do anything and everything we want, which is simply not true. We may have lots of options, but reality has to be factored into the process.

In fact, I don't think we should tell our kids they can grow up to be anything they want to be. I think we should give them the tools and support to discover what they were designed to be by God. If God made me to be a musician, I would have wasted years trying to be a basketball player. Once my purpose was clear, it empowered me. It's not uncommon for me to compose and record music for twenty-four hours straight and have to drag myself out of the studio for meals and a shower.

When you are pursuing your purpose, you are naturally happier, sharper, more forgiving, and expectant.

So what is the deepest desire of your heart? Just go do that, because what the world needs is you . . . the real you. Expectation gets you out of bed in the morning. It causes you to focus on where you are going and not where you came from. What is the deepest desire of your heart?

If you can't answer that question there's a good chance you're living your life merely as a reaction to what happens around you. Too many people are thermometers in life instead of thermostats. I have learned that successful people all share these important distinctions: They know what they want. They are sure of it. They live it on purpose. They know what makes them tick, and therefore they know where their GPS points are.

What is that one thing that, when you are doing it, causes you to lose track of time? What do you do that gives you great pleasure and a sense of purpose without regard to what you are getting paid? What are you a natural at doing? When do you feel alive in the process of doing something you're good at doing?

If you want to live out your God-given Destiny, then you need to know. And once you know, then it's time to turn your dreaming into doing!

### **BENspiration**

"We must let go of the life we have planned, so as to accept the one that is waiting for us."

—*Joseph Campbell*

## **Become an Imagineer**

No one embodies the combination of dreaming and doing, of imagination in action, more than the legendary Walt Disney. A creative goal had to seem impossible before he would consider it worth pursuing. He would often come into his studio with an idea for his team only to have them shake their heads and say, “But, Walt, that’s impossible—nobody’s ever done it before!” Disney took this as a stamp of approval that it was worth exploring. On the other hand, if his creative team liked his idea and explained how they would bring it to life, he would often scrap it as not worthy of his standard of excellence.

Disney coined a term for the way the creative process requires both imagining and engineering. He combined the two words to create what he called the “Imagineer,” a hybrid of both artist and technician, of dreamer and doer. He knew that it didn’t matter how amazing the dream was if there was no follow-up to bring it to life. So he surrounded himself with team members who embodied both a creative spirit and a strong, can-do attitude and work ethic. The results? Iconic cartoon characters, timeless and classic films, and destination theme parks, the “happiest places on earth” where it seems dreams can indeed come true.

Our time together within these pages is about empowering you to enjoy a Full Tank Life. Before you can do something, you’ve got to imagine yourself doing it. Before you can have something, you’ve got to imagine yourself having it. Before you can be something, you’ve got to imagine yourself being it.

Napoleon Hill said, “If you do not see great riches in your imagination, you will never see them in your bank balance!”

How do you use your imagination? You sit quietly and you think, you dream, you see yourself doing something that seems impossible or out of reach. You create descriptions, vision maps, and action plans for what your dreams are and how you will bring them to life. You begin the process of birthing your dreams into reality.

Can you imagine living in your dream house? Or driving your dream car? Can you imagine giving \$50,000 to a charity you believe in? What about vacationing in France, Italy, or Australia? Can you imagine publishing your book and having a book signing? Or performing a concert in front of ten thousand people?

If you *can* imagine it, you are one step closer to having it. The Bible tells us, “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18). Your imagination has the power to impact eternity for God’s kingdom and for the betterment of all the people around you.

If you can dream it, God can do it! Unfortunately, many people have stopped dreaming and resigned themselves to cruising on autopilot or to flying scared on an empty tank. We’ve stopped using our childlike wonder and the power of our imagination. I want to challenge you to devote time today to sit quietly and just think. Let yourself daydream. Imagine at least one area of your life being “dramatically” different. It could be your finances. Your job. Your relationships. Your start-up. Your novel. Your fashion line. Your movie. Your life with a Full Tank!

*Just imagine it.*

### **Your DESTINY Diary**

Make an appointment with yourself, for at least an hour, some-time during the next twenty-four hours. Honor your dreams by keeping your appointment and going somewhere you will not be interrupted or distracted by work, family, friends, and other responsibilities. Turn off your phone and unplug as much as possible for this sacred time with yourself and your dreams.

To get started, spend about fifteen to twenty minutes just relaxing and thinking about the dreams inside you that need rekindling. Then finish the following sentences as honestly as possible without stopping to judge your responses.

- The one dream that seems to rise to the top of my consciousness today involves...

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- This dream surprises me because...

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- The last time I thought about this dream was...

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- Thinking about this dream makes me feel...(Excited? Nervous? Afraid? Anxious? Discouraged? Inspired? All of the above? Other emotions?)

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- The one action I can take today toward exploring this dream is...

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## CHAPTER 2

# DREAMS—The “D” in DESTINY

### *Filing Your Flight Plan to Fulfillment*

*Spreading your wings still requires a flight plan!*

I can still hear the screams from the stands during my glory days as a star basketball player in high school and college. “Shoot the ball, Tank!” my friends and family would shout. Their enthusiastic support fueled my drive to be the best athlete on the court I could possibly be. I not only wanted to excel so our team would win, I wanted to win so that I could fulfill my dream of going pro.

When you’re black, poor—I mean seriously *poor*, and six foot six by the time you’re in sixth grade, your environment begins to suggest your future to you. As much as my parents loved me, times were hard for us in the rural ghetto of central Florida. Everyone I knew told me to pursue sports if I wanted a shot at a better life. As much as I loved playing tuba in the school band, I knew that I had to devote myself to basketball if I wanted to succeed (when was the last time you bought a tuba album?). And

I was determined to leave collecting aluminum cans, shoveling chicken manure, and washing dishes at fast-food joints behind forever.

By my senior year I was considered a star player for the Chattahoochee High School Yellowjackets. With my continued participation in band, decent grades, and exceptional athleticism, I was offered twenty-three different basketball scholarships to various colleges before choosing to play for Wallace State, a small college in nearby Alabama. I reasoned that I could get plenty of playing time on the court and still be close to home so that I could visit my family on the weekends.

My dream had always been to use my college performance as a launching pad for a professional career, either in the NBA or in a pro league overseas. After that first year of college, though, I decided to drop out for a shot at going pro right away. I began playing for a pro minor league team, which led me to a shot at the big time: I was invited to an exclusive pro combine where I would demonstrate my abilities and likely be drafted by a team in the NBA. I felt like I had an appointment with Destiny—my dream was on the fast track and about to come true!

The first day of the big event finally arrived and I performed well. Several teams expressed serious interest, and I was elated to realize that more than one team wanted me. After some physical tests of speed and strength, I was selected to play in a scrimmage game that would seal the deal. Virtually every player selected for the scrimmage would be signed to play in the NBA.

I was on my game and all was going well until I went up for a shot, got blocked, and came down hard on the gleaming court. As my knee hit the floor, I heard a *pop* and felt a stab of excruciating

pain. The next few minutes, maybe even hours, passed in a blur. But I knew as soon as I heard that *pop* that my dream had just been snatched away. Both my knee and my dream of being the next Michael Jordan were now shattered. There would be no NBA fans yelling, “Tank! Shoot the ball, Tank!”

### **Driven by Desperation**

With my hopes of playing pro ball dashed in an instant, and with no college degree to fall back on, I found myself facing poverty once again. After a few months, my knee began to heal, but I knew it would take much longer for my wounded pride to recover. Everyone back in Chattahoochee, including my family, was counting on me. I had been voted most likely to succeed my senior year—I couldn’t return home to Florida as a failure. So I soon found myself living in a little mobile home duplex in Dothan, Alabama. It had no running water and I could barely afford food, let alone electricity.

Up until then I had no real vices—I was too focused on going pro to smoke, drink, or party. But I had a weakness for the ladies, which kept me just as distracted as a drug would have. Where I once felt like I was sitting in a comfy seat in first class, I now felt like Destiny had ejected me from the plane without a parachute! Winter soon descended and I found myself sitting in a dark, cramped room shivering in subzero temperatures. I had no job, no purpose, no life, and no hope of anything changing.

As the old saying goes, “Desperate people do desperate things.” Desperate, for me, was deciding to attend a revival

service at a nearby Church of God in Christ. I went hoping for some peace, a little encouragement, and a hot meal (maybe these church folks would have some chicken!) but received more than I ever dreamed. Not only was there food and friendly faces, but the joyful worship music also filled something inside me.

Then the minister began to preach on Destiny, and he seemed to be speaking right into my soul. He concluded with an old-fashioned altar call, an appeal for those who needed God in their lives to come down front for prayer. I was the first one to the altar.

Now, you need to know that I had grown up in church; my father was an elder and my mother an evangelist. We had attended various services, meetings, and choir practices almost every day of the week. My parents kept us to a strict code of conservative conduct, which included no movies and modest dress. I'll never forget seeing my two younger sisters swim in blouses and jean skirts!

But something was very different about church on this night. Because I was out on my own and not able to fall back on my parents for support, I had to be a man and stand on my own two feet and take responsibility for my spirituality. That night I surrendered all my pain, disappointment, and frustration, and completely gave my life to God.

Down in front of the pulpit, I knelt as tears spilled from my eyes. While others prayed and worshipped around us, the minister came and prayed over me. He then said, “There’s a new Destiny in your future!” and led me to the keyboards behind the pulpit where the worship band had played. Despite my love of music and experience playing the tuba in my school band, I

had never played piano. But when I placed my hands on the keys that night something wonderful happened. I began to play like a seasoned professional!

### **Blessed beyond Measure**

Beautiful music came out of that organ that neither I nor anyone else in that room had ever heard. This music sounded jazzy and dynamic, a gospel sound but with funk! I knew I had been anointed by God with a special gift to share something new. Today this kind of music has been recognized as a new style that I call “gospel jazz.”

From that night forward I went on to become an instrumental gospel jazz recording artist and producer reaching millions of fans in my new Destiny. Over the years I have progressively discovered and developed many other gifts and skill sets—many of which I never knew were living inside of me. I’ve become a producer, a motivational speaker, a minister of my own church, an author, a pilot, and the star of my own reality show on Bravo. I’ve discovered the love of my life, my wife Jewel, and been blessed beyond measure with a blended family of five wonderful children.

Rather than being just a basketball player, now I am a career multitasker with interests and businesses spanning several different areas. I continue to discover that a full life, the abundant life that Jesus promised us (see John 10:10), emerges when you tap into your God-given inner talents and use them to make others happy.

With this concept in mind, I titled my most recent album *Full Tank*. Not only is it a play on words because of my nickname, but I’m convinced the “Full Tank” concept resonates with one of our strongest human desires—to live with peace, purpose, and passion. Fans and listeners apparently agreed since *Full Tank*, my eighteenth gospel jazz album, became my best-selling one.

After many sold-out national concerts, and thousands of testimonials, awards, and nominations, and chart-topping record sales, I decided to write this book, *The Full Tank Life*. While my music inspires you with a smooth jazz soundtrack for your life’s road trip, I want this book to serve as your GPS as you journey to your divine destination. I certainly don’t have all the answers or know any magic formula, but as I’ve already mentioned, I want to share seven keys to start your engine and fuel your dreams for a Full Tank Life. Let’s get started!

### **BENspiration**

“A dream doesn’t become reality through magic; it takes sweat, determination and hard work.”

—Colin Powell

## **Your Future’s Listening**

Destiny is a personal journey, not a destination.

There’s a big difference between deciding what you want to be when you grow up and discovering what you were created

to be on the earth. When you find out who you are, you will inspire people around you to be their best. Your relationships will improve as well as your quality of life.

After my injury and departure from basketball (which I had *decided* would be my Destiny), I *discovered* my true Destiny by attending that church service. Who would have thought I would end up at the keyboard that night, playing like a seasoned professional jazz musician! I knew right then that music was my life calling, something I was made to do, uplifting people through words and music.

As transformational as that night at church was for me, everything didn't improve overnight. I still had a lot to learn, and I'll share many of those educational experiences with you in the pages to come. But for now let me remind you of something you already know. If you're going to have a Full Tank Life, if you're going to be fulfilled and at peace, then it will be because of what *you* do, not what others do. No one can discover and experience the joy of living out your Destiny but you. Your future only listens to one voice—*yours!* As I frequently tell myself, "If this is to be, then it's up to me!"

No matter where you are in life, you still have choices. They may not be the options you want and they may not exist under the best circumstances, but you always have the power to choose how you will respond—to events, to people, to your own thoughts and emotions. Right now you have the power to choose what to do with the rest of your life.

You're reading this book at this time in your life for a reason—it's the collision with Destiny you've been waiting on! Don't settle for what you think you want when you can discover how to fulfill

your deepest longings—what God created you to do during your precious time on earth.

### **Determine Your Destination**

As a pilot I have learned many life lessons related directly to flying, and perhaps none is more important than the significance of having a flight plan. When I’m planning to fly, I have to notify air traffic control, the ATC for short (who I think of as “the boss”) about several things: the departure point, type of aircraft, registration number, destination, number of people on board, anticipated average speed, amount of fuel, estimated time en route, direction or flight path, and estimated time of departure as well as arrival. Sounds like a lot, I know, but every item is crucial to the success of a flight.

Virtually all of these areas correspond to the plan you need to make if you’re going to ever get off the ground from where you are now. You need to be honest about where you are and take responsibility for how you got there. You also need to be just as honest about where you want to go; your destination may sound impossible based on your present location, but don’t let that stop you from developing your flight plan. You need to think about how you’ll get there, what and who you need along the way, the kind of fuel that will sustain you, and how you’ll know when you’ve arrived.

Basically, you need to define success on your own terms. A good way to start is by answering the questions below. Your answers to these two questions should help you verify or clarify your God-given purpose in life.



### Discovering Your DESTINY

What makes you *tick*? In other words, what are you good at, what do you think of all the time, what is easy for you without having to think about it? For example, since I was a child, I've always loved music and the powerful way it can encourage and uplift others. No surprise then that music and motivation are huge parts of what makes me tick. How about you? What energizes, excites, and inspires you?

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What makes you *ticked*? What angers you? What agitates you? For instance, if you talked to some commercial cleaning service entrepreneurs, many would tell you they hate to see things dirty. For me, I hate the despair, despondency, and deprivation of poverty. I cannot stand to see homeless people hungry on the street, so a large part of what motivates my success is being able to help those in need. So what bothers you enough to do something about it?

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A flight plan is like your “vision map,” a way to see the big picture and how the smaller pieces all connect together. It’s no accident that a pilot’s flight plan follows a standardized format

so that any pilot or air traffic controller could read it and understand it. However, the pilot must determine the destination before the flight plan can come together. You have to figure out what you want out of life and what will make you happy and fulfilled. I can't decide what makes you tick, what makes your heart skip a beat, or what causes your imagination to run wild. Your family and friends can't decide what makes you smile. *You* have to determine your *what!*

Everyone's *what* is different. As they say, “One person's misery is another one's mansion,” and “One man's trash is another man's treasure.” If you determine your dreams, if you can see yourself a year from now, two years from now, five years from now living the life you want to live in accordance with how you are made, then you will know how to begin filling your tank. Once you get specific about your dreams, then you become the person who attracts those dreams to you. You will no longer have to chase after what you naturally attract.

Too many people get stuck on the *how* before they have actually defined their *what*. You have to learn to dream like a child again. When Jesus told us to become like little children in order to enter His kingdom (see Matt. 18:3), I believe he was including our imaginations. When kids start cutting out pictures and showing parents what they want for Christmas, they are not concerned with the economy, the availability of items, or the family budget. They are not in touch with the *how*. They just know *what* they want and *when* they hope to receive it (by Christmas).

Once you decide *what* defines your dreams, you will know what you need to achieve a Full Tank Life. I have a few steps that will help you get there no matter what your dreams are. If you

want a better marriage, better career, better body, better bank account, or just a better quality of life each and every day, then it all starts with knowing *what* you want so that you can create a flight plan for *how* to get there.

If you don't get honest and specific with what you want, what you hope, what your dreams are, then you might as well be a passenger on someone else's plane. To do better you must become better. As a kid you would automatically grow without trying—you didn't have to think about it because it just happened. However, as an adult you must be focused and strategic about growing on purpose. Ask the average person what their plan is for personal growth and you will realize why they are the average person . . . because they don't have a plan to become better than average.

### **BENspiration**

If you want to discover the secret of one's success,  
you only have to look as far as their daily routine.

Having no plan is a bad plan. The secret to your life's success is hidden within your daily routines. If I could spend ten to twelve days with you, I would know if you were fueling your life to run on a Full Tank by your daily habits. One of my own habits for the Full Tank Life emerged from my study of many successful people. I researched the lives of millionaires, looking for common denominators that would apply to anyone. One of my most important findings resulted in what I call "self-align by

7:59.” Most successful people accomplish more by 7:59 a.m. than the average person achieves in an entire day. This kind of early self-alignment works because it addresses all areas of a person’s well-being—spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional.

While you can adapt this to your own lifestyle, here is a consensus of what “Full Tankers” do before 7:59 a.m. each day:

**Pray and Praise**—fuel for your soul. Start the day fresh with gratitude and communication with your Creator, asking for His blessing on all your endeavors that day.

**Exercise and Energize**—fuel for your body. Commit to a regular physical activity suited for your abilities and aptitudes. It might be walking, running, biking, swimming, or stretching. In my case I go to the gym and play two or three games of full-court basketball at six a.m. each morning. Then I eat a healthy breakfast to refuel my body.

**Read and Reflect**—fuel for your mind. I try to read one book a week but at least one a month. If you invest just twenty minutes a day into reading some kind of stimulating educational material, you will bank ten hours a month toward your personal growth. Don’t tell me you don’t have time for it. Most people spend at least that much time each day surfing the net or checking social media.

**Dream and Direct**—fuel for your heart and emotional well-being. Each day I listen to some kind of motivational or inspiring CD as I get dressed. Since I have to get ready anyway, I use this time to suit up both physically and emotionally. You might use your time commuting to listen to speakers, teachers, preachers, artists, and writers who speak to your dreams. Most people are in their cars fifteen to thirty minutes to and from work each day. That’s over a thousand hours in your car over a

four-year period—the equivalent of a college education! Why not make the most of your time to grow toward your Destiny?

It's what you do *every day* that moves you closer to your goals. It's what you save from each paycheck that builds your savings and increases your assets over time, not just one whole check. It's your daily movement and exercise that builds your body strength, not just one workout. I firmly believe 25 percent of your activity produces 75 percent of your results, so if you self-align by 7:59 each day, then you have the most important areas covered!

### **SELF-ALIGN by 7:59**

Think through these categories and what you could do differently each morning:

- Pray and Praise—fuel for your soul:

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- Exercise and Energize—fuel for your body:

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- Read and Reflect—fuel for your mind:

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- Dream and Direct—fuel for your heart and emotional well-being:

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### Cleared for Takeoff

Even if I have a flight plan on file for my trip (meaning ATC has a record of my intentions), I can't just take off into controlled airspace without permission. I have to get a clearance from the tower, which usually includes instructions as to how I can begin my flight and initiate my plan. Then I have to *write* down the clearance and read it back to the controller to verify accuracy. So a typical call may go something like this (notice we use the NATO phonetic alphabet—"Alpha, Bravo, Charlie," etc.—to avoid confusion over letters that may sound alike, which means my aircraft number, N401BT, gets read aloud accordingly):

BT—Good morning, November 401 Bravo Tango has information Charlie and requesting clearance to ATL Atlanta Hartsfield.

ATC—November 401 Bravo Tango is cleared to ATL as filed. Climb and maintain 3,000 feet, and expect 10,000 feet within 15 minutes. Clearance frequency is 126.8 Squawk 5657, over?

(I am now required to read back what was given to me. In other words, the controller is not sure I heard him correctly unless I read it back in its entirety. I can't just say "Okay" or "Uh-huh.")

BT—November 401 Bravo Tango is cleared to ATL as filed.

Climb and maintain 3,000 feet, and expect 10,000 feet within 15 minutes. Clearance frequency is 126.8 Squawk 5657.

ATC—November 401 Bravo Tango your readback is correct. You are cleared for takeoff. Time now 21:35 Zulu. Clearance VOID if not off by 21:45 Zulu.

Did you catch all that? In other words, I'm cleared to take off and fly to three thousand feet and can *expect* higher within fifteen minutes. Notice that I did not get *all* I wanted just because I asked for it. I was given a conditional clearance. That means if I take off now (within the next ten minutes), I have permission to fly to three thousand feet and can expect to be cleared for the altitude that I filed for (ten thousand feet) within fifteen minutes. In other words, sometimes the boss wants you to get started on your flight plan, even though you are not cleared for everything that is on the plan... *yet*. You may have to start out slow and then pick up speed and climb to a higher level or altitude.

Notice that another part of the clearance says, "VOID if not off by 21:45 Zulu." This means there is a time-restricted window for me to take off. If I don't take off within the time limits given, my entire clearance will be voided, and I'll have to start over. When planning how you will rekindle, pursue, and achieve

your dreams, you have to make sure that it’s the right time for each step along the way. If you miss certain windows of opportunity, then you may have to wait and start over again. Timing is everything.

You definitely want to seek and follow God’s timing. If you are truly living out the purpose He has given you, then His timing is crucial to your ability to exercise your talents and enjoy your life. The Bible tells us that there’s a time for everything to happen according to God’s purposes (see Eccles. 3:1–8). We tend to grow impatient and have to remember to wait on His appointed time for every harvest. Usually we think of patience as simply enduring the wait time until we get what we want, but Scripture tells us patience means to hold steady and to remain consistent in our faith, believing with confidence that God’s promise will bring forth fruit (see Heb. 6:12, 15; Luke 8:15).

When your timing seems off—or more likely, when you’re out of sync with God’s timing—then it’s tempting to quit and resign yourself to disappointment and old thought patterns of defeat. But you can fight the temptation to quit by learning how to wait on the Lord. God’s Word tells us, “Though it tarries, wait for it because it will surely come” (Hab. 2:3 NKJV). By waiting, you’ll receive your promise in due season (see Ps. 145:15; Ps. 104:27; Job 14:14).

How do you wait on the Lord? Waiting doesn’t mean you remain idle. It’s like being a waiter in a restaurant—giving God your complete attention and devoted service. While you’re waiting, you serve Him with worship and praise. You pray and remain alert for the sound of His voice and what He wants to tell you. And keep in mind that just because He hasn’t revealed



the right time for your flight to take off doesn't mean He doesn't want you to fly! "But those who wait on the LORD shall renew *their* strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles; They shall run and not be weary; They shall walk and not faint" (Isa. 40:31 NKJV).

### **Your DESTINY Diary**

Write out a flight plan for your biggest dream, the one you've carried around inside of you for as long as you can remember, the one God planted in you and has made a core part of your purpose. Use the following categories to help you.

- Your present location/point of departure:

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- Description of your dream:

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- Resources needed to get started:

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- Resources needed to fulfill your dream:

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- People who support your dream:

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- Estimated time to fulfill your dream:

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- Ways to measure the success of your dream:

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- Other flight plan details needed for your dream:

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ben Tankard is the founder of gospel jazz music and has sold over four million copies of his award-winning instrumental albums and has written, arranged, and produced for other artists such as Yolanda Adams, Kelly Price, Fred Hammond, Take 6, and Shirley Murdock, with sales of their albums totaling over ten million copies. Reflecting his upbeat, life-enhancing message, Ben's book *Faith It 'Til You Make It* (FaithWorks/BENote, 2002) sold seventy thousand units. In addition to performing, producing, and writing, Ben pastors a dynamic, fast-growing church outside of Nashville, Tennessee, together with his wife, Jewel.

They also star in NBC/Bravo's *Thicker Than Water—The Tankards*, the network's highest-rated freshman reality show with over fourteen million viewers. Depicting their adventures as they lead what Ben calls their "blended, black *Brady Bunch*," the show just wrapped its third hit season with record-setting viewership.

A true renaissance man, Ben also serves as a motivational speaker for the NBA, designs a line of men's clothing, and pilots his own planes. With his faith-filled vision and street-savvy

wisdom, Ben loves unlocking the passionate potential in everyone around him. Whether composing, recording, producing, designing, preaching, teaching, speaking, or just laughing and chilling at home, Ben Tankard always runs on a Full Tank.

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Hachette Book Group

1290 Avenue of the Americas

New York, NY 10104

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First Edition: August 2016

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data has been applied for.

ISBNs: 978-1-4555-3829-4 (hardcover), 978-1-4555-3830-0 (ebook)

Printed in the United States of America

RRD-C

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1