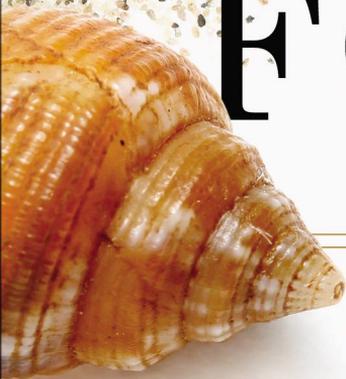


BILL PURVIS



MAKE
A BREAK
FOR IT



*Unleashing the Power
of Personal and Spiritual Growth*

MAKE *A BREAK* FOR IT!

*Unleashing the Power of Personal
and Spiritual Growth*

BILL PURVIS

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Make a Break for It!

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MAKE
A BREAK
FOR IT!

Dagger to the Heart

There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will.

William Shakespeare

When I was growing up in the small town of Eufaula, Alabama, thoughts about the future and faith and God were the furthest things from my mind. I did not have a plan for next week, let alone the rest of my life. And church? I just was not interested. I watched people walk into those buildings carrying Bibles and thought they must all be slow readers. Why did it take them so long to finish one book?

My interests were elsewhere, as in motorcycles and girls—not necessarily in that order. Back in the late sixties and early seventies, you could get your motorcycle license at fourteen in Alabama. I saved my money and bought a Harley-Davidson 250 Sprint. It was my first set of wheels, and I was proud of that thing.

I was the only boy in our family, but I had three older sisters—two who were grown and already out of the house and one who was three years older and still at home. My father hadn't wanted a boy and had little to do with me. Much later, I learned there was a name for his behavior: the “alpha male” syndrome. He was jealous and felt threatened by me, afraid I would displace him or somehow take the family's

attention away from him. To say my father and I failed to bond would be an understatement.

In my early teens, my father's abusive treatment of my mother left me feeling constantly torn between staying at home to protect her and staying away from home to protect myself. It was a lot of chaos for a kid to endure, but it was my "normal," so I did my best to adapt. The male figures I looked up to and tried to emulate were the older boys in my neighborhood and sometimes their fathers. Because our home was so dysfunctional, I often spent nights with friends or camped out with them on weekends. On one of those weekends, one of the boys brought a big ice chest filled with cans of Budweiser.

"If you want to be a man," he said, "this is what you drink." I was thirteen when I tasted my first beer that night.

The following year, a friend's brother came home from Vietnam and introduced my friends and me to marijuana. No one I knew had even heard of it. I was never addicted or a "stoner," but I did smoke with friends on weekends. When I was fifteen, an older, married woman seduced me into having sex with her. Once that door was opened, I began having sex with other girls. I'm ashamed to say it now, but if they were interested, you could be sure that I was.

Strangely enough, no one seemed to notice or be concerned that I was involved in all of these unhealthy activities. On the outside, I looked like one of the good kids. In fact, I was so good at keeping up appearances I was twice nominated as a "Best Dressed Student." We weren't poor, so I had enough money to buy all the basics. Plus, our family lived in a new home on Lake Eufaula, and we had a boat docked in our backyard. I was athletic and enjoyed sports. When I applied myself, my grades were mostly A's. I also had a lot of friends. As far as anyone could tell, I was a guy who had it all together.

What people couldn't see, however, was the emptiness inside me. I felt aimless. I had no guidance or direction. There wasn't much to do in our small town, so on most weekends I hung out with guys who drank, smoked

pot, got into fights, and chased girls. Looking for excitement and adventure, I kept trying new and more reckless things. When a friend threw a cherry bomb through the window of the principal's office, a group of us got suspended. My response was to ride my Harley up the front steps of the school and down a hallway—during class. With the engine noise echoing off the metal lockers, the sound was about ten thousand times louder than I expected. But I was already suspended, so what could they do?

The more I tried stunts like that, however, the less fulfilled I felt. I just had no purpose.

Have you ever felt like that? Or do you feel that way right now? Believe me, I understand what it's like to fool the people around you by pretending everything is great. You also fool yourself, which might work for a while, but it doesn't last. Deep down, you know something isn't right, that something in your life is missing.

All too often, that's how life seems to work, isn't it? Either we're drifting along with no sense of purpose or we're trying to find the answers but getting nowhere. We don't know where we're going, and we don't know why we're here. When we get frustrated and desperate enough, we may try to chart our own course, but we end up in a place that looks nothing like what we had in mind.

That's what happened to me in 1974, the year I was seventeen.

Something's Not Right

My life took two abrupt turns that year. The first was a sudden move to another state. My father started two businesses after he retired from the army: a flooring company and an ice-cream truck operation. They began well but eventually folded. Then he began selling mobile homes and did much better. I didn't know it, but he was in serious debt from the failed businesses, so when the home office for the mobile home company offered him more money if he'd move to Columbus, Georgia, he didn't take long to decide. When I got home from school on a Friday afternoon, my mother

was in tears. My father had announced that we were moving from Eufaula to Columbus—the next day. I never even had a chance to say goodbye to my friends. That following Monday, we were in our new town.

The second abrupt turn came on April 28, just a couple of weeks shy of my eighteenth birthday. I'd been cruising the streets of Columbus with a friend in my '69 Camaro late on a Saturday night when I suddenly got an idea. I'd just spotted a young woman standing on a corner. She had long black hair and wore a tight blouse, short black skirt, and high heels.

I turned to my friend. "Danny, you ever been with a prostitute?"

"Nope."

"Me either. Let's try it."

Danny protested, but I ignored him. I swung the car around and pulled up beside the woman.

"What are you doing by yourself on a street corner?" I asked.

"I'm looking for a guy," she said.

"Well, you don't have to look anymore."

As we talked, a man walked up from behind some nearby hedges. He was a couple of inches short of six feet, unshaven, his hair unruly, and had a strong smell of alcohol on his breath. Surprised by his sudden appearance, I briefly wondered if the man was as dangerous as the one he resembled: Lee Harvey Oswald. But I quickly decided that this was "how they do this."

"How much money do y'all have?" the man asked.

Between us, Danny and I had about fifty dollars.

"All right," the man said. "That'll do."

The man and woman got into the backseat of my car and directed me to a dark, run-down, one-story house in a poor neighborhood. The house sat away from the street on the same lot as a pharmacy. It was long and narrow, with an extra room that had been added to the back. We stopped in the gravel parking lot behind the house, where the woman—I didn't know her name—and I got out. We walked to the house's back door while Danny and the man I thought was her pimp sat in the car.

The back room was small, about eight by ten feet. The only furniture was a wardrobe and a bed. A feeble glow emanated from a single, naked bulb in the ceiling. Across the room was another door that led into the rest of the house.

I locked the doorknob and hooked the chain lock on the back door while the woman appeared to lock the door that led into the house, though I later realized she was unlocking it. I wondered what came next. When the woman began taking off her clothes, I did the same. The woman motioned toward the bed. I sat down.

We'd been in the room just a few minutes when she flipped off the light. I couldn't see a thing.

The floor creaked—strange, since the sound didn't seem to come from where the woman had been standing.

I stood up.

Then I smelled an overpowering stench of alcohol—close—the same odor I'd noticed on the pimp's breath.

Alarm bells rang loud and wild in my head. *Something's not right!*

The light suddenly switched back on. I was initially blinded, but then I saw that the pimp was in the room—and he was holding a twelve-inch butcher knife.

The man smiled, but it wasn't friendly.

"Now," he said, "you're gonna die!"

Before I could react, he thrust the knife hard at my chest. I winced and felt a hot surge through my body. I looked down and saw the knife blade plunged completely inside me, the handle stopped against my chest. The blade had missed my heart by a quarter inch.

The woman screamed and kept screaming.

The pimp yanked out the knife and thrust it at me again. The blow was aimed at my head, but I jerked back. This time the blade entered my neck and came out the other side. It severed my jugular vein. Though I didn't know it at the time, when the jugular is completely cut, most people bleed out in less than four minutes.

Adrenaline shot through me. *I've got to fight my way out of here!*

As my attacker jerked the knife out a second time, I punched with my left hand, hitting him in the upper chest and throat. He started to fall. With my right arm, I instinctively hooked the man's leg and pulled. His head hit the floor with a loud thud.

I saw my chance. I leapt over his body, which blocked my way to the back door and freedom. But he wasn't finished with me yet. As I jumped, he stabbed a third time. This time the blade sliced into my liver.

I continued my forward motion until I reached the door. I turned the handle, but it didn't give. *I'd locked it!* I was running out of time. The pimp was getting up from the floor, and I was too panicked to unlock the door and remove the chain lock.

Knowing I didn't have a second to spare, my adrenaline pumping, I stepped back, lowered my shoulder, and rammed the door with all the strength I could find. It broke from its hinges and fell down flat.

Half running, half stumbling, I raced toward the Camaro, where a horrified Danny sat in the driver's seat. Danny later told me he'd heard the loud noise and banging sounds from inside the room and didn't know what to think or do. As he squinted, trying to see in the darkness, the door suddenly broke loose and there I stood, naked and covered in blood, the lone light swinging from the ceiling behind me. He said it looked like something from a horror movie.

I made it to the car and stumbled against the hood, yelling, "Get out of here!" I ran across the street and into a parking lot next to a deserted theater, where I wrapped my arms around a metal light pole. Slowly, my strength fading, I slid to the ground, smearing the light pole with blood.

I stared up at the stars, gasping for breath, choking on my own blood. My heart was pounding so hard it felt like it would bust out of my chest. I'd suffered three devastating wounds. Any one of them was enough to kill me, and I had no doubt I was dying. A friend had died from a single ice pick wound to the stomach. I couldn't imagine I'd survive this.

Of all the things a dying young man might think of in his final

moments, a brief conversation with someone I barely knew is not what I would have expected. But as I clung to what was left of my life, one sentence from that conversation entered my mind, clearly and calmly. They were words I'd heard just two weeks before.

I'd been at home when there was a knock at the door and I'd answered it. There stood a slim fellow in glasses, maybe seventeen years old.

"B-B-Bill," the visitor stammered, "everything you're looking for can be found in Jesus."

I stared at him without speaking.

"I gotta go," he said nervously and ran away.

I hadn't known what to make of it. Only later did I learn that God had prompted this young man to come to my door and share his faith. He'd been in a church meeting when the speaker challenged the young people to witness to the most "lost" person they knew. Though he didn't know me well, this boy felt he had to talk to me. He wondered if anyone had ever told me about Jesus.

At the time, I just shook my head and tried to forget about it. But that boy messed me up. Have you ever had a song stuck in your head? That's what it was like for me. Every day, whenever it was quiet, his words kept replaying in my mind: *Everything you're looking for can be found in Jesus.*

As I clung to the light pole and anticipated the end of my life, the words from that strange encounter came back to me again.

I wasn't a churchgoing guy. I didn't read the Bible, and I'd never prayed in my life. But I decided it was now or never. "Jesus," I cried out as I choked on my own blood, "help me. Save me. Please forgive me of my sins. Help me, God. Please save me."

I heard Danny trying to start the Camaro. Tires squealed and the roar of the engine grew louder until he skidded to a stop beside me. I somehow managed to get to the car and dived in the passenger seat. "Get me to a hospital!" I shouted.

Danny raced to the Columbus Medical Center, which fortunately

for me was only half a block away. At the emergency room entrance, I used the last bit of adrenaline I had left to walk up to an orderly who'd stepped outside for a cigarette break. He had his back turned and didn't see me coming. I wrapped my arms around him and choked out, "I need some help, buddy."

The orderly grabbed me, ran inside, threw me onto a gurney, and rushed me inside the emergency room, leaving behind a trail of blood. Three doctors immediately came in. One was Philip Brewer, a renowned cardiothoracic vascular surgeon who happened to have stayed past the end of his shift that day. Another was Larry Brightwell, a trauma specialist who'd served in the Army Medical Corps in Vietnam. The third was Robert Lightenor, an emergency room physician.

One of the doctors examined my throat. "Get the district attorney up here," he said. "This boy's been stabbed to death. His jugular vein's completely cut. He's not dead yet, but he will be before the DA gets here."

I was still conscious and heard everything he'd said. I knew my time was almost up.

Doug Pullen, assistant district attorney, happened to be riding for the first time with a police officer that night. He showed up minutes later. He said it was easy to find the right room; he just followed the trail of blood. "It looked," he said later, "like someone had taken a bucket of red paint and poured it down the hallway." After being told I was about to die, Pullen asked me a few questions about what happened.

A doctor soon interrupted. "I have to start surgery now." Then the anesthesia kicked in and I was out.

Second Life

I regained consciousness eleven hours later. I didn't have the strength to move, but I could turn my head enough to take in my surroundings. I was in a hospital bed hooked up to all kinds of machines. Through

the open door, I could see policemen standing in the hallway outside my room and nurses walking by. Then memories from the night before came flooding back. It hadn't been a dream—I was supposed to be dead! But this didn't look like heaven or hell. It was the hospital. Somehow, I was alive. As I replayed the events that had led me here, I remembered. *You prayed and asked God to come into your life and save you.*

It was the only possible explanation for the fact that I was still alive. I was deeply humbled. I felt I didn't deserve to be alive. I also felt that I was too sinful and unworthy to have any favor or mercy from God. I always thought He loved only the good people. I prayed again: "God, thank You for what You did. Thank You for helping me. But You don't know what You got last night. You got somebody You can't use or do anything with. If You don't ever want to have anything to do with me or hear from me again, I understand. I won't bother You anymore."

The strangest feeling came over me in that moment. I felt both a peace in my heart and a sense of God's loving amusement, almost as if He were chuckling at my naiveté.

Then, to my surprise, I sensed a response to my prayer.

Bill, just do what I tell you to do from now on. Let Me do the rest.

It was a turning point, the beginning of my second life.

A few days into my recovery, I suddenly had the most intense hunger for the Bible. I wasn't even a reader of regular books, but once I found a Gideon Bible in the hospital nightstand, it was like the greatest gift I'd ever received. In another sign of God's surprising interest in me, a nurse who noticed my craving for the Bible asked me what I was reading one day.

"Spasms," I said.

"Spasms?" she asked.

We eventually figured out that what I thought was "spasms" was actually the book of Psalms. When it came to spiritual matters, I was totally clueless.

Over the next few days, she started to come in thirty minutes early

for her shift so she could spend time reading and explaining the Bible to me. When she got to the story about Jesus walking on water, I protested.

“Hold on,” I said. “What do you mean, He walked on water? Nobody walks on water.”

“He saved *you*, didn’t He?” she said.

I decided she had a point. “Read on.”

The more I learned about the Bible, the hungrier I was to learn more about God. It was the most amazing thing. The doctors were amazed too—not so much at my spiritual transformation, but because I was still breathing. The night of the attack, a doctor told the assistant district attorney, Doug Pullen, that I wouldn’t make it until morning. In the morning, doctors said I was still alive, but it was unlikely I would survive. The next morning, Pullen was told that I might live, but if I did, I would have no mental capacity. I’d been without oxygen for too long.

Instead, though I’d lost eight pints of blood and required over one hundred stitches, I made a complete recovery. I am one of a handful of people in the world who have survived a severed jugular vein.

Six months after I was stabbed, the pimp was arrested, charged with aggravated assault, and sentenced to ten years in prison. His plan, forced on his wife, had been to lure an unsuspecting teen to the house. While in the car with Danny, he’d said he was going to take a walk to have a cigarette. Instead, he moved quickly to the front of the house, grabbed a butcher knife as he passed through the kitchen, and waited for the signal from his wife. When the light went out, he slipped into the room through the unlocked door, intending to kill me and steal my money. But the would-be murderers didn’t count on my left hook, much less my deathbed prayer and miraculous recovery.

“The only reason I can give you for Bill Purvis being alive right now is that God had a purpose for him,” Doug Pullen later said in an interview recorded for our church. “He wanted him to fulfill that purpose. Even the doctors will tell you that this is one they can chalk up to God, not to anything they did.”

You Don't Have to Wait

I should have died that night in Columbus, but God healed me—physically and spiritually—and gave me another chance. Everything I have and cherish today—my wife, my children and grandchildren, my friends, my church, my home—is the result of what God did for me beginning that night. The only explanation for my continued existence is that God spared my life so He could show me His amazing grace. There is a beautiful passage from the Psalms that captures my story and always reminds me of that miracle when I read it:

He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the
miry clay,
And He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm.
He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to
our God;
Many will see and fear
And will trust in the LORD. (Psalm 40:2–3)

It took a violent attack and a miraculous recovery for me to realize that God holds my destiny in His hands. But you don't have to be like me. You don't have to wait until you're staring death in the face to discover the path to your purpose.

God loves you, and He really does have a unique and amazing plan for you, too. If you're willing to join me on this adventure, I want to help you break through the obstacles you face—outside of you and within you—to uncover the destiny God imagined for you before you were born. I can't tell you what your purpose is, but I can promise you that it's far more exciting and fulfilling than anything you've experienced in life so far.

Let's continue the journey together.

Insights for Inspiration

- When something is missing from your life, you may be able to fool others, but you can't fool yourself.
- If you're on the wrong track and traveling away from your purpose, you're headed for more frustration and more trouble.
- God loves you and has a unique plan and purpose for your life.

Verse to Review

“And looking at them Jesus said to them, ‘With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible’” (Matthew 19:26).

Getting Personal

- Overall, how would you describe your life so far—that you have had a strong sense of purpose, that you have had little or no sense of purpose, or that your sense of purpose comes and goes in different seasons of life? Which best describes your life right now?
- How have you handled the times when you felt little or no sense of purpose? What was the result?
- Do you have a sense of what God's destiny for you might be? If so, describe where you think God may be leading you. If not, what is it you most hope God might change in your life as you begin this journey of discovering your purpose?