

Do Something Great With Your Life

The Importance of Purpose Special Guest Speaker: John Rivers

Edited Transcript

Keith Thomas: John Rivers is our special guest today. You guys know that. And I hope you enjoyed the chicken biscuits. And let me give you a brief background about him. Yeah, thank you. Yes. Thank you. So, John's had a very successful career in the healthcare industry for 20 years. But he never set out to create the most successful barbecue restaurant in the South. He's not a graduate of a culinary school, but in Texas, he found the love of his life, his wife and the art of smoking brisket. So, John is probably most proud of his wife and two children, Jared and Cameron. Is that right, John? It is, yes. They are the four Rivers. But also in Genesis 10, it says out of the Garden of Eden four Rivers flow. So guys, now you know the history name. There you go.

So, his barbecue career began in a garage as a ministry in 2004, to help raise money for our young family's daughter who had cancer. In 2009, he opened his first restaurant in Winter Park on Fairbanks Avenue, and he now has over a 1000 team members in 14 restaurants, throughout Florida and Atlanta. John has won numerous prestigious cooking awards in the US and has appeared on NBC and Fox morning shows. In 2014, he authored the book *The Southern Cowboy Cookbook*. And his impact locally is centered on giving back to build a strong community. He started the Four Rivers Foundation by providing good food to those in need and is starting an urban farm project in the packing district in the next two years. So, please join me in welcoming John. Okay? Come on, John. You're among friends.

John Rivers: Thank you. Thank you, Keith. Thank you so much. Wow. Thank you.

You know, they always say if they stand when you come up to the stage, you could quit then. Call it a day. It was good. Thank y'all so much for having me here today. I truly do appreciate it. And I really appreciate all the food themes this morning, being prevalent all the way across. I almost feel compelled to share recipes with you of brisket and everything else that we're doing, but I'm actually going to speak about something a little more important than that, and something that's near and dear to my heart. And that is purpose. The importance of purpose in our life.

And quite frankly, I feel like I'm speaking to the choir because you guys are here for a reason because you're seeking what that purpose is. Let me ask you just hypothetically. Okay. What if I were to tell you that you were created for one specific reason? Okay. You are gifted, you were given things, the ability to accomplish that particular reason and that particular purpose. And then, what if I were to tell you hypothetically your single responsibility on this world and in this life was to find out what that purpose is and to live it.

Now, we got to put aside the jobs. Got to put aside family, got to put aside everything else. I'm just saying, you had one sole focus. God came down to you at the end of your life and said, "Did you find what your purpose is? And did you accomplish it?" What would you say? Did you do that?

Now, let me point out one thing. Neither of these two are hypothetical. It is very clear in the Bible that God created us for that purpose long before we were born. He knew the purpose of why he was doing. He gave us those specific gifts, and talks about it in Corinthians. Some of us are going to be a Pastor. Some of us are going to be leaders. Some of us are going to be healers. Some of us are going to go out and evangelize. That's a reason, he gave those to you. What's amazing about it, you and you alone are unique in those skills that allow you to accomplish that purpose. And what's really unique about it, you and you alone are the only reason why you can or can't accomplish that. You stop yourself from becoming that.

See, so many times, and I'm going to speak for myself by the way, as I say all these things today. This was me. So many times you come out of college or come out blazing on fire. We're going to pursue our passions, right? And we end up settling for pursuing a paycheck. Instead of making a life and an impact, we make a living. Somehow or another we get derailed from whatever those dreams are.

Now, I can ask people in this room, and I love to ask little kids. What do you want to be when you grow up? And you know, I hear the most beautiful things. I want to be a fireman. I want to be a pastor. I want to be a teacher. I want to be the president of the United States. I want to be a NFL football player. You know, what's beautiful about that? Nobody's told them what they can't do. Nobody's told him you're not smart enough. You're not fast enough. You're not big enough. You can't ever accomplish that. So much of what we become is determined by the story that we believe, what other people tell us. Because you are absolutely, and I will attest to. I'm here today after 20 years in Corporate America because I decided I'm going to pursue that dream.

And you can absolutely accomplish that no matter what it is. Now, you asked me when I was a little boy, what do you want to be when you grow up? And I came from a family full of doctors and attorneys and normal jobs that are out there, and I would say to my mom and dad, "I want to be a cook. I want to own a restaurant." And it wasn't in the family. There was no sense to it, and I couldn't explain it. But you know, what that response is from those little kids, that's what's in your heart. That's what God puts in there. And I remember, I'll never forget the day I turned 16. I cut grass growing up and do things like that, but the day I turned 16, back then you had to wait till you're 16 to legally work. I went and I applied up at this pizza place up in Jacksonville, called The Loop. It was my first job and I filled out the application, said position that you're applying for, and I put on there very clear, cook.

So, I get the phone call back and I get hired and I get brought in. Manager has me fill out the paperwork and he says, "All right. Let me introduce you to everyone and show you where the station is." I'm all excited. He walks me through the front of the house and meets everybody, goes through the kitchen and he introduced me to all the cooks. Then he brings me back to this back little corner. It's dark over here, where there is this old antiquated dish washing tub.

And I'm looking at him and he says, "Congratulations, this is your station. You're dishwasher." Now, I was so young, and innocent to be honest with you, I had the polite audacity to say to him, "Oh, I'm sorry, sir. I think there's a mistake, as clearly on my application I put cook." And he looks at me, thank goodness he was a kind man, and he said, "Son. You got to learn some lessons. You got to work for what you want. Sometimes you got to start at the bottom and work your way up."

I'll tell you what, I learned a lot of lessons at that first little pizza job being a dishwasher. Okay. And one of the first lessons that I learned, if you're not doing something you're passionate about, bring passion into what you're doing. You want to change your environment? You want to try to change your settings? Change your heart first. Change the way that you're looking at it. I talk to so many young men and women who they don't like their job. They don't like the position they're in. I'll ask them, "What are you doing about it?" "Well, this is wrong, that's wrong, this is wrong." I'll tell you what, best way to get out of something that you don't like, become the best there ever was at it. The more drag you head around and mope around, who's going to promote you from that. If you shine at it, you're going to get their attention.

You're going to show, "Hey, I want this person to progress." Well, I hadn't learned that lesson quite yet. My head was down like, "Golly." I'm 16 years old, and we didn't have a father and stuff, so I thought, wow, this is my station. I guess this is it for life. And my head was down for a while and I said, "You know what? This isn't me. I'm positive. I have lots of energy." So, you guys, y'all are about my age, y'all remember those old tape recorders we used to have and you have to push the play and record at the same time? I'd wait by the radio station, wait for the dang DJ to stop talking, to get those songs that you want.

And one time, my daughter is a teenager. She heard me do this speech and she came to me and said, "Dad. What are you thinking? Why didn't you just download the song?" I guess I was slow back then, honey. So, I made my tape and I was all excited about it. And I came to work the next day and I put my tape recorder on the little shelf above me, and I'm just listening to my own music, Jimmy Buffett and the Rolling Stones and stuff like that. I did it for my own countenance. Okay, I did it for just my edification to lift my heart.

Well, you know what? That's when the lesson started. Not only did I lift my spirits, but I brighten everything else around me, everything. And you know what? People started coming and that little dark corner all of a sudden had some light to it. And people were hanging out with me as the week would go on, and we'd be singing and I'm time everything now. I'm seeing how fast we can go and I reorganize everything.

Well, the next week I said, "This is so much fun." I brought these Tiki lights and I put these Tiki lights all around the dish washing machine. Yeah. Now I really had my boss's attention. He came up said, "Wow, John, you're doing fantastic. I'm going to give you that promotion." Like, oh, thank you Jesus. Now I can go cook. He brings me through the kitchen, one more time. Says hello to the cooks. He brings me out to the front of the house, and says, "Congratulations. You're our new busboy." Truth is, I had to work my way all through high school and I paid my way all through college. Okay. And I did it all working in restaurants. Okay. Never once was I allowed in the kitchen ever. And all those years to cook. The truth of the matter is I had to open my own dang restaurant so I could actually cook.

Now, I'll tell you what. You look back in a certain period of your life, it's clear what that purpose is, isn't it? It's clear what that passion is. And if I ask each one of you what was it that you wanted to be when you were a little boy, you could probably rattle it off just like that. Now, I ask you the question, why aren't you doing it now? Why aren't you doing it? It's amazing how we go down different paths and different roads in our life.

Okay, things take us for turns, but I will say this. I'm going to tell you my story, but no matter what that was, God put that seed in you. It doesn't go away. You live your life and you begin to bury it deeper and

deeper, but you know when you touch it again, because you come alive. And it doesn't matter what it is. But that's where you find happiness. That's where true happiness is. So many times we mistake happiness with being wealthy or successful. Well, I will be the first to tell you that true happiness has nothing to do with money, has nothing to do with status, and I tell you there's three things you get out of a job, what you're doing.

One is you're learning. You're progressing. You're moving forward. Number two, you're doing something you believe in, that you're passionate about. Number three, you're getting paid. You're making a living. Now sometimes in our seasons in our life we'll go through it. And we're blessed to have all three at the same time. Right? But a lot of us can attest in here, that's not all the time. There's many seasons in life we go through, we have two or we have one, and let me be the first to tell you. If what you're doing on a day-to-day basis, the reason that you're leaving your family, that you're going away, if it's not for learning and if it's not something you're passionate about, if you find yourself it's only for the money, that is a hole in your life and in your heart. No matter how much money you are making, will never, ever be filled. And I was that person. And I asked myself the same question that I ask so many young men and women that come and talk to me now. I asked them what their dream is and what they wanted to do.

They'll tell me. I said, "Why don't you go and doing it?" Well, you know what? I hear the same things that I said. And I was 40 something years old at this time and I was a president of a pharmaceutical company and I was successful, but I wasn't happy. I wasn't happy because that seed that got put in me, I just buried it, but it doesn't go away.

And I asked them, "Why don't you go do it?" Same thing I would say, "I'm too old. It's too late. 8 out of 10 restaurants fail. It's too risky. I have a mortgage. I have a house payment. I have kids in school." Excuses, excuses, excuses. You know what the common thread is between all of that? It's fear. And a fear of failure. And I will tell you that fear is a tangible weapon that the enemy uses to keep us away from what God intended us to be. He talks about it and second Peter 1:7 if I recall correctly, "For God did not give us a spirit of fear. He gave us one of courage and power and patience."

I'm still working on the patient's piece, but he gave us one of courage and power. And when you listen to that fear, that voice, you're not listening to God. You know what the onset of fear is? It's worry. You know what the onset of worry is? It's doubt. And when you start to listen to those words of doubt, you keep yourself away from what God intended you to be. And even if it's impossible, quite frankly it should be impossible because it's not something that you can achieve on your own. You need God. Someone told me a long time ago. If your dream doesn't require a miracle, you're not dreaming big enough. You're not dreaming big enough because it's not us. Four Rivers is not me. It's not my family. It's God and I'm just doing what he asked me to do.

Now, we go through our lives, and I was that one. When I came out of college and wanted to make this money because I didn't have any money and I wanted to have this position. And I think I was 42 years old and running a \$2.5 billion dollar business at the time. Okay. And you think you'd be happy, but I wasn't. I knew something was missing. And I knew it because I started complaining about my job, even though we were extremely successful and being happy. And I said to myself, why am I complaining when I have a fantastic job? I knew something was missing but I couldn't put my finger on it.

And then God came in. Okay, it happens in different ways. What's that old Theologian Kierkegaard? He says, "We live our lives moving forward. But we tend to understand our lives looking back. Things happen for a purpose and a reason. And when those things happen, the one thing God asks us to do,

"Don't worry about it. I'm going to set them all up. I just want you to listen. I want you to be ready, open your heart to my word and then have courage to step into it."

Well, my wake-up call literally was a phone call. This is back in 2005. I'm sitting at my desk, and on my desk I had a phone and it had two lines on it. It had a personal line, a private line that only four or five people knew, and then the other line went through my assistants, and they screened everything. Well, one Friday afternoon, that personal line rang. And I picked it up fully anticipating to speak to one of these four or five people. And it wasn't them.

It was a lady on the other line and she was crying. And I will remember the words so distinctly all these years later. She said, "Mr. Rivers, Mr. Rivers. I'm so sorry to hear about your daughter." Now, my daughter Cameron was in kindergarten at the time. And I said, "What's wrong? What happened to Cami?" And she says, "Well, her tumor, her terminal brain tumor."

Now I hung up the phone with this nice lady and it took me about 20 minutes to get ahold of Monica, my wife. And I say to this day those 20 minutes changed my life. For you see, never before, even though I was in healthcare and consequently the company that I was with treated cancer patients all over the world, and even though I was in that industry, okay, never before did I have any sense or semblance of what it must be like to be facing a problem that is so great that there's nothing that can control it. I always tell people, I just said it yesterday to my son when he ran into something, I said, "You know what son? If money can solve your problem, it's not a true problem."

When you hit something that no matter what your title is, no matter what your status is, no matter how much money you have, none of that matters. That's a problem. And you know what? When you get to that point, there's only one thing that's going to help you and that's Jesus. And you ever hear that old saying that sometimes you have to get to a point where you have nothing left except Jesus to make you realize that's all you need is Jesus. And then you kind of look at it and ask God, "Is there a reason you're doing this to me?" Which by the way, I'll tell you what. When you run into a problem, I used to ask all the time. God, why are you doing this to me? I've learned a lesson. Now I ask a question, God, what are you trying to show me? And when I change that perspective once again, it changes the circumstances. It changes what I'm looking at.

Well, thank God, it wasn't Cameron. I got ahold of Monica, but those 20 minutes of fear, of realization. Wow, there is nothing that I can do about this. It shook me up so much. I remember saying to Monica, "We're going to find out who this family is and we're going to help this little girl." We had no idea who she was. And I'll tell you what, it took us about a week to find her in this community. Her name was Meagan. Meagan Joyce, beautiful little girl.

Shoot, little Megan wasn't in Cameron's class. Little Megan didn't go to the same school as Cameron. We didn't go to the same church. We didn't live in the same neighborhood. We weren't in the same occupations. There is no reason. No reason that that phone call came to me on my direct line that day and I know it wasn't a mistake because the words I remember most distinctly were, "Mr. Rivers. Mr. Rivers. I'm so sorry to hear about your daughter." And I'll tell you this, what are we in? 2019? 14 years later, 15 years later, 14 years later. To this day, we don't know who the phone call came from. But had that phone call not come in at that very moment that I was sitting at my desk and picked up my private line and shook my heart so much, I wouldn't be standing here today telling you about what God's done in my life.

There is absolutely, absolutely no doubt in my mind. There is a reason and a purpose for that. We found that little girl. It's so funny. I had no idea what God was doing. We started pouring into that family, indigent care and insurance and drugs and I turned them on to our pharmacists and our nurses. And about two weeks in to it, I realized they don't need more drugs. They don't need more of that. Yeah, they need money. I know what they're going through. So, I called up the father. And I said, "Hey John, let me write you a check." And he said, "Absolutely not, won't take that". And we argued about it for a while and hung up the phone. And I tell you what, this was the first time, and I always say first because it's happened many times, first time I felt God push me. I felt that simple message, don't you give up? You just trust me. And people ask me all the time, what did it sound like, what was it like when God spoke to you?

I'll tell you two things. One, when the Holy Spirit God speaks to you, your life will change. There is no other outcome, but your life will change. The second thing, it wasn't a loud voice. It wasn't clarity. I wish God spoke that way. I wish he'd sent me a text. "All right, here's your agenda today. This is what I want you to say and do." It's not that. You know what it was? It was a feeling in here. It was a stir in my heart. It was a push. The word heart is used 892 times in the Bible. It's third only to God and to Lord. And there's a reason. That's where David was. He took God's heart and did us a favor. He speaks to us here. Our job is to align here and here, so that we can hear him. When our hearts line up to God's word and we listen for it, God doesn't stop talking to us.

Someone told me a long time ago, God is like a radio station. In a radio station, whether your dial is on it or not, it's always broadcasting, isn't it? Our heart is that dial. It is our job to align it so that we can hear that broadcast. And quite frankly, that's not the hard part. The hard part is once you hear that broadcast, you better have that courage to hear it and listen and do what it says to do. Well, I tell you what, I picked up the phone and I called him back and I said, "Hey John, it's me again." He says,, "Yeah. I know. I just told you no. I appreciate it." But hey, and I'm literally making this up. I was so off the cuff. I said, "Hey, I like barbecue and I've been traveling all over the country learning how to barbecue and I got me a little egg in my backyard. And how about if we do a BBQ for little Megan at her church and all the money from it will go toward her and go toward your family."

So, he calls his wife, comes back and says, "Okay, one condition. It needs to be within the next 10 days because little Megan is going to go on chemotherapy. She's going to take her next routine after that." "Hey, no problem at all. I'll light this up and you just tell me the day. And I've cooked for 10, 12, 15 people in my backyard. No problem at all. I said, "You invite anybody you like." Well, he did. Okay. 450 people RSVP'd for this. Okay. To say that we didn't have the equipment, we didn't have the know-how. I didn't know how to store this stuff. There's no way I knew how to cook for anything like that. I'm a Healthcare Executive. I'm not a caterer.

And I tell you what, you know it's from God when you can't do it on your own. And I can push that message over and over, don't you ever be intimidated by the odds against you, because it's not you, it's God. It's God. How many times has God done that in our lives and in the Bible? People, equipment, things just started showing up. I mean, out of the woodwork. We started getting volunteers from all over the place. One day in the 10-day span, Monica called me up at work. And our office is up in Lake Mary at the time, and she said, "You better get home." And I said, "What for?" She said, "You'll see." So, I get in my car, I raced down I-4. I remember coming in the home over here in Winter Park.

And I'm turning in my old driveway and I had to screech on the brakes because in my driveway from here to about the wall over there was this huge smoker on a trailer and it had a yellow sticky on it. This

is an honest, true story, had a yellow sticky on it and said, "Hey John, heard you might need this. Call me when you're done."

Okay. Not only that, refrigeration there. 10 days came and went. And I tell you what, this is a testament to the community that we live in, we fed all those 450 people. We raised a lot of money for this beautiful little girl and her family, and nobody got sick. Which gave me great inspiration.

I remember that night. I was laid out cold. I was so tired because there's a difference between Healthcare Executive sitting at a desk all day and what you have to do in restaurant and catering business. It's hard word. And I'm just dead. And remember Monica coming up to me, and she's doing one of these, "You okay there, Slim?" And I'm like, oh my God. I said, "I feel so alive." She said, "You don't look alive." I said, "I want to do this." And I couldn't articulate. She's said, "Do what?" I couldn't articulate at the time, but you know what it was? I woke up that old passion, that purpose that God put in my life. I had aligned my purpose with my actions and I did it to do good, to do God's work. You talk about finding happiness, finding success, when you line up your purpose with your actions and you do it for the right reason. There was no money involved. There was no title involved. There was no gain involved. It was just pure absolute delight and happiness.

And I told her, "We're going to do this." And we did. At that very moment, we started our barbecue ministry. And for the next four years out of the garage, any time kids or schools or churches needed money, I'd write them a check, I'd bring out the smoker. I'd say, "Hey, want me to cook for you? I will. All the money goes back to you." And we did and it grew. We never did a commercial. I'm doing this while I'm still working. And it grew and it grew and it grew. That last year out of the garage. Matter of fact, we grew so much, we serve 40,000 people out of the garage that last year. It became such a peace. Here's what would happen. Monday through Friday, I'm John at work, and I'm this person.

Friday night, Saturday, Sunday. I am John living in my purpose, running my ministry. And the disparity between those two people was too great. And I looked at it and I said I'm living a lie. You want to succeed, you want to find happiness and joy? One of those secrets is consistency. Consistency in who you are.

I went to a lesson a long time ago. And the challenge was is the person you are at work the same person you are at home? Is that person the same person on Sundays? If that answer is no, you got to get that in line. You've got to be that same person through and through. And the only bind between those three is Christ. It's God. That's the consistency. And when you go and you focus on that single bind, it is so much easier to be consistent. And if you're screaming your faith over here, well then live your faith over here. It doesn't matter what bucket, what part of time in life you're in. So, I left. I left. I retired.

And we were at the peak of our season. The business is doing great. But that disparity was too big of a lie, and I knew I was cheating myself in the process of it. And people ask me back then the same thing my beautiful wife asked me when I announce this. What are you going to do? And the answer is I don't know. I don't know but I knew I was in the wrong place. And how many times, how many of us, stay in that wrong place waiting for the perfect scenario and answer? My contention and my advice to you is the sooner you take yourself out of the wrong place, you allow God to show you and put you in the right place. And sometimes just taking yourself out of the wrong place creates that motivation.

If you think about it, you walk away from it you. If you're waiting right now and you're unhappy but you're complacent in a job, how motivated are you to find that next one? You take yourself out of it, and all of a sudden you got to make a living, you're going to find motivation. You're going to get up and you're gonna get going. How much time do I have left? I can either tell the second half of the story or I can bring it home.

All right. So, about two more hours. Let me finish up here. All right. The moment the business got too big, 40,000 people, we decided we got to get out of the garage. We've got to build this thing. So now, how many of y'all ever went to our first little smoke house on Fairbanks. Wow. I love this community. God bless you. It means you parked in one of eleven parking spots by the way. That place wasn't supposed to be a restaurant. I don't know if you know. I mean, everybody told me what an idiot I was for doing that. That wasn't supposed to be a restaurant. That was supposed to be a commissary that I could use to run the ministry out of.

And we had this grandiose idea. We put this line in the front of it, which really wasn't part of the original plan. I said, "Well, if we have some extra food left over on the weekends, I'll put it out just in case anybody wants to come in and buy anything." We really didn't think people would. Matter of fact, when we opened, we had a little bell on the top of it. One of those little hotel bells. We thought, well, I'd be in the back cooking. I wouldn't know if somebody actually walked in the front door or not. We had no idea what we're in store for. Now, we went into this. Now, I'd built pharmacies in almost every state. I'd launch drugs all over the world. I'm thinking how difficult is it going to be to convert this little 1100 square foot gas station, tire place, into a little commissary restaurant.

No problem at all. So, I went out and I got advice and we had plans drawn. All these experts, it was going to cost \$188,000. It's going to take three and a half months. Okay. Six months into it, over a half a million dollars of our family capital sunk into it. And God bless him. My contractor was upside down cash flow, walked off the job at an absolute stand still. And oh, by the way, I don't know if you caught this, this is in 2009. As many of you know, that was a peak of one of our biggest declines we ever had. All the money that I had saved up, I put into mutuals that were down 60%. And then, we built this great big beautiful house over in Winter Park. I hate debt, so I put a lot of cash into it.

The day we moved into it, we were upside down. For the first time in our 20 years of marriage at that time, we were down to 60 days of cash. 60 days of cash and no idea how to fix this. I'm not a builder. I'm not a restaurateur. I know how to build businesses and corporations. I don't know how to get out of this situation. And you ask yourself, "Wow, God. Why are you doing this to me? What happened? I thought I was doing what you asked me to do." And once again, he's showing me, he's teaching me you got to fight for it. I'll tell you what, once you step into what that purpose is, once you start to pursue it, you're going to wake up the enemy.

He doesn't want you to be successful at what God intended you to be, because that's where you have the greatest impact on the kingdom when you're doing that. He's going to do everything he can to stop you from becoming that person. And I tell you what, he threw everything at me. And not only the stopping of construction, but all of sudden everybody's telling me why I'm going to fail, how bad of a decision this was. Not only friends and family's asking me what am I doing, why are you pursuing this, but then the industry experts. Okay. And accountants and lawyers and everybody else. And 8 out of 10 restaurants fail. You're on the wrong side of the street. You're in a terrible location. It was a terrible location. You're gonna serve brisket?

This is the South. This was when Smokey Bones was closing down, because of the realization of barbecue, which is, by the way, bunk. We are now the country's largest distributor or buyer of brisket. And it's all in the South by the way. You're going to make people sit in picnic tables? You're going to serve them on trays? You're going to fail. And I'll tell you what, you got to be so careful not to listen to that. Not to listen that. And you know what? And I always tell people, just try it anyway. Was it Mark Twain that said, "20 years from now, you will regret more so the things that you did not try versus those that you tried and failed at."

Regret is a terrible, terrible thing to carry in life because you can never answer that question once you pass on that opportunity. Something happened. Okay. Something happened. I got a phone call from my old boss. He's in healthcare. He stayed in it. He's buying pharmacies, he's buying other companies. He's combining assets. He called me up and says, "John, how would you like to be considered to be the CEO? We're going to buy three specialty pharmacies, combine the assets right here in Orlando." And I'll tell you what, it seemed like a blessing. My spirit jumped up. This is on a Friday. And thank goodness I had the fortitude to say, "Let me call you on Monday after I speak about this with my wife and pray about it."

Okay. Something happened between Friday and Sunday night. My spirits went like that. You know why? Was I going back to learn? No, was I going back to do something I was passionate about? No. I was going back for the money. I tell you what, if you get to that crossroads in your career and your decision on what you're doing, ask why you're doing it? Have a purpose behind what you're doing.

And thank goodness for the strength of prayer of my wife, and this is important thing when you're going down that path. Well, you better surround yourself with people who share that vision and share that faith with you, because you're going to trip. You're going to fall. That's human nature. You got to have people who lift you up. Thank goodness for her faith. We prayed about it. And to her credit, her name's Monica, and to her credit, she says, "John, if this is what God intended you to be doing, I will stand by your side and encourage you to do it, even if we lose everything."

And I tell you what, you talk about weight hat was lifted off my shoulders? Clarity came, because all of a sudden, I'm not worried about the mortgage. I'm not worried about losing the house. I'm worried about doing God's will. And I called Steve up, dear friend of mine, my mentor. I said, "Steve. I'm going to pass on this." He's a little surprised because he knew the situation I was in. He says, "Why is that, John?" And I said, "Well, two reasons. One, I think that's what God wants me to be doing. And I'm going to see it out. And two, I got two teenage children. I'd rather them see that their father has the courage to pursue his dream and fail at it versus not even having the faith to take that step."

Now, I'm gonna tell you the rest of the story and bring it to a close. I'll tell you this first. Those three pharmacies, my dear friend was bringing together as a conglomeration, the deal fell apart 90 days later. It wasn't a blessing. It was a temptation. It was an easy way out. And I'll tell you what. When I said no to that temptation, I believe I opened the door for God's blessings to pour in. There is a correlation between obedience and blessings that go together. He's got all these blessings for you, like a treasure chest. And all you got to do is obey my word and I'm going to give them to you.

I got two phone calls. Okay, within a week. Okay. I'm not making this up by the way. First phone call comes from a buddy of mine who's running a Bible study up in Longwood. There's a guy in his Bible study who lives right over here at Maitland, has this fetish for some coffee place, gets his coffee on Tuesday mornings, goes up Fairbanks to get to I-4 to get to the Bible study. That particular Tuesday

morning, he's at the Bible study and he's all shaken up. And my buddy Kirk says to ... His name is Brad. He says, "Brad. What's wrong?" He says, "Something happened this morning. I drove by this little construction site on Fairbanks. And I think they're in big trouble. I felt like God told me I'm supposed to help them." And my buddy looks at him and says, "They're in big trouble. It's a buddy of mine. He doesn't know what he's doing and he needs lots of help." Okay.

This gentleman's name is Brad Watkins. Okay, Brad Watkins was a co-owner of a construction company called Friedrich Watkins. Friedrich Watkins has three clients in town. Okay. Two clients in town, Disney and Sea World. Right? Brad stepped into my life, got me to CO, got me to opening. You ready for this? 59 of the 60 days before we ran out of cash. Down to one day of cash left as a family. Second phone call came just a few days after that. We're in the car, we're driving back from the beach. We're coming on I-4 and I looked down. I didn't even hear the phone ring. I look down and there's a voice mail from a 404 phone number. I remember turning to Monica and the kids are in the backseat. And I said< "Who's calling me from Atlanta?" And I push it. I wish I still had this message. I push it. And this message was, "Mr. Rivers, this is Dan Cathy. I work at Chick-fil-A."

I remember I looked at Monica, "You don't work at Chick-Fil-A. You own Chick-Fil-A." "I just had your brisket and your sauce. That's the best thing I've ever had." He said, "I felt God tell me I'm supposed to reach out to you and offer help." So, he gives me his home number, his cell number, his assistant. Out of the blue. Okay, I'm not even in the restaurant business yet. Nobody has even heard of me. I'm thinking how in the world had he had my brisket and my sauce. Now, you ready for this? Friends of his were in town that weekend. They helped us do an event over at Dommerich for all the school and the kids, a volunteering event. And like I do at the end of all the events, "You take anything you guys want home."

So, they packaged it up. They were going to a dinner party. Okay. Up in Atlanta, hit traffic. The wife was going to cook something completely different. Hit traffic, didn't have time to cook it. So, she put our brisket in the microwave, put it on the table. And that's where Dan and Rhonda had it. And all these kids in college said, "How do you build this? How do you strategize?" You pray, buddy. You pray, you let God do it, because I couldn't do it. He walked into my life. He taught me one of the most important lessons. Okay, and this is if I can impart something to you. Okay. You want to make an impact in people's lives? One of the greatest things you can give them is your time, your encouragement, and share your lessons with them.

There was this father that said, "There's time, talents, and treasures that you give people." Man, give people your time and lift them up. And he stepped into my life and he gave me a thing I needed most. That was encouragement. It wasn't money. It wasn't. It was, "Hey, you can do this, stick it through. We all fight through this. Here's the answers how to do that." And as I tell my team on a day-to-day basis, you have an opportunity to make an impact in people's lives just by the way you treat them. Just by the way you speak to them. Just by the way that you look at them. He got me through those last couple of weeks.

And I'll never forget, I asked him, "I need to build a pro forma. What should we be doing in sales?" And he says, "Oh, 1,100 square feet, you do ..." What'd he say? About \$1,500 a day. And he said, if you do \$2,000 a day, you'd be doing great. So, it was October 26 and 2009. We were down to one day of cash. There were 12 of us total. I was a carver, Monica was down the POS. We didn't have any money for advertising. We didn't have any money for promotion. We couldn't do anything. All the equipment we had was used and it was breaking down even before we open that first door. All we could do was we got

around about 10:30 and we prayed. We prayed and we unlock that door at 11:00, just like we have every day since.

And that's when it started. In the beginning, it was people that knew us and what we were going through. They were coming in to support us> And then after that, it was people in the community that we had served. You talk about an important lesson about running a business, you embrace the community. You love them and they'll love you back. And it has to be sincere.

But then after that, it was people that we didn't know who they were and they started coming in and they started coming in. And the line was out the door. We were so flat-footed. We had no idea ... There was no way we could prepare for that. That first day, we did a \$3500 in sales. To this day, that stands as the lowest day we've ever had in sales in our history. That first year, just in that little place, we finished at an average of over \$12,000 a day. That much higher than the market average. And people ask me, "How are you doing this? Why are you doing that?" Because God has remained in the center of our business.

We still run the business today just like we did back then as a ministry in my garage. Any chance we have to help people ... and let me give you this encouragement. You don't have to build an orphanage. You don't have to build a school. You don't have to build a farm for that matter. You can do God's will to every single person you encounter just by the way you treat them with love and respect. You have the opportunity to make an impact on people's life every single day, if you take that chance and you just reach out and you do that. And never ever, ever underestimate the power you have on other people.

All right. I'm going to close you in this.

This is my favorite, favorite, favorite saying. It came from Nelson Mandela. He said in his acceptance speech, "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure and capable of doing all that we are called to do. It is our light not our darkness that frightens us the most."

I pray each and every one of you, you remember what that passion was, you remember what that purpose is, and no matter how scary it is, that you have that courage to go after it. You will make a difference in this world when you do. Thank you. God bless you.

Thank y'all. Thank you.

Patrick Morley: Oh, good morning, men. Again. My name is Pat Morley and John has asked me if I would give you the opportunity to respond to his message this morning. God has a purpose for each and every one of our lives. And he has a purpose for each and every one of our lives because God loves you very much. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever would believe in him would not perish but have everlasting life." Jesus Christ, John would have me tell you, Jesus Christ came to forgive our sins and give us eternal life. The Bible says, "Now here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And Jesus himself said, 'I came that you might have life and have it to the full,'" but it's not enough to know these two things. We must also personally ask Jesus to forgive us of our sins and to give us this eternal life and help us understand the purpose of our lives.

And so, in keeping with that, in case there are some of you who have had something stirred by God this morning through the remarks that John has made, John has asked me if I would give you an opportunity to pray, and either give your life to Jesus to become a follower of Jesus, whether that's for the first time, or the opportunity to reaffirm that faith and allow the Lord to awaken the resolve to pursue your passion and purpose in life. And so, let's pray together and I'll give you that opportunity.

Two prayers, this first one is for those of you if you have never before asked Jesus to come into your life, to put your faith in Jesus, to help you discover your purpose and plan and to forgive your sins and give you eternal life, there are 12 words that capture the essence of inviting Jesus in. And I'm going to invite you to pray those 12 words silently to yourself after me, if you've never done this before. Let me say them and then we'll pray them.

The words are, Jesus, I need you. Please forgive my sins and save my soul. And so, if that prayer expresses the desire of your heart, the heart that John was talking about this morning, then let me invite you to pray that prayer silently to yourself right now after me. Jesus, I need you. Please forgive my sins and save my soul.

And then, if you are already a follower of Christ, but you realize that you have gotten away from the pursuit of the purpose that God has for your life and you would like to reaffirm your faith, let me invite you to pray this prayer silently to yourself after me. Jesus, I need you in my life right now more than I ever have. Lord, I confess that I have not been pursuing my purpose. And I'm sorry. You created me for more than this and I am sorry. And I ask you to once again take your rightful place as the Lord of my life and help me become the man that you created me to be. Lord, we ask that you would hear these prayers of these men, which we pray now in Jesus name. Amen.

So, if you have been stirred or inspired by what you've heard this morning and would like to participate in any one or all of those, here is the four-week follow-up series: **Do Something Great With Your Life**. First, **In Your Work**. We'll follow on very specifically to what John has talked about this morning. That will be next Friday. **In Your Family** the following week, and **In Your Marriage**, and then **In Your Community**, and of course you heard John talk about the community as well.

And then, we're going to do now close with a prayer. And we have asked Marq Neasman to do that. Marq came to Orlando to be the quarterback at the UCF football team, and today he is the president of the Academy of Kings. And so Marq, I wonder if you would come up and close us in prayer this morning, and then you'll be dismissed and we hope you have a great day. So, thank you for joining us. Have a great day. And then, there again is the list of the follow-up series if you'd like to come back. We'd love to have you back. Marq?

Marq Neasman: Everyone, please give it up again for John, beautiful message

Thank you for having us again. Amazing to see y'all. For me personally, amazing to see all these men. I've dedicated my life to serving men, and now I need to get you guys out of here and sent on you're way. So, if you would, please bow your head in prayer.

Heavenly Father , we come before your throne right now in the name of Jesus, blessing you and giving you thanks, dear God Father. We thank you for this message, Heavenly Father, of making our work our worship, Heavenly Father. We thank you dear God. We don't turn away the trials and the tribulations

that come along with being men, Heavenly father, that come along with taking this journey of manhood, but instead we embrace them dear God. And we ask right now in the name of Jesus that you strengthen us, Heavenly Father.

Fill us with your Holy Spirit, Heavenly Father, that as we take this journey, Heavenly Father, that people see your glory Heavenly Father, and that they see your light. We give you all glory and praise, Heavenly Father. Be with us every step we take, in Jesus name. Amen.