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YOUR *best* DESTINY

Becoming the
person you were
created to be

WINTLEY PHIPPS
with James Lund

In *Your Best Destiny*, Wintley Phipps takes the problematic portions of life and exposes them as opportunities to create positive outcomes in your own life and the lives of people around you. It is a wonderful tool to encourage everyone to lead a more productive life that contributes to society at large.

BENJAMIN S. CARSON SR., MD

Emeritus professor of neurosurgery, oncology, plastic surgery, and pediatrics,
Johns Hopkins Medicine; president and CEO of American Business
Collaborative, LLC

What a wonderful service Wintley Phipps has rendered by reminding us that anyone can experience success God's way. If you plan to read only one book on success this year, I enthusiastically recommend *Your Best Destiny*.

BARRY C. BLACK

Chaplain of the United States Senate

Reading *Your Best Destiny* is a warming, encouraging, and enriching experience. It is in the heart and soul of our being, in the depths of our respective journeys, that we find strength and insight into what it truly means to love, hope, and abundantly live as we trust God with who we are created to be. This book awakens in the reader an understanding of the source of grace and abounding joy!

LT. COLONEL KENNETH W. MAYNOR

Salvation Army Territorial Program Secretary, USA Eastern Territory

Wintley Phipps has crafted a moving book of eloquence, insight, and biblical wisdom. It comes as a gift. This is a book to read and to share—never more needed than now.

KEVIN BELMONTE

Lead script consultant for the film *Amazing Grace* and author of *D. L. Moody: A Life*

Decisions create destinies, and Wintley's book will help you make wise decisions. His passion to help you reach your highest and best will take you through a journey of eight key pillars that will greatly aid you in navigating the challenge of making solid and wise decisions in today's constantly changing world. So pick it up, find a quiet place, and launch an adventure you'll be glad that you took time to have.

DR. BOB RECCORD

President/CEO, Hope for the Heart

Your Best Destiny is a must-read for all who seek to excel and achieve in life. Wintley illustrates that goals and achievements in life are important; but without empathy in the fullest sense of the word, we all fall short. Insightful and creative, *Your Best Destiny* will challenge you to protect the greatest piece of real estate you own—the six inches between your ears.

JODY VICTOR

Public speaker and Amway Crown Independent Business Owner

Wintley's friendship, wisdom, and discernment have steered me through many a dark season in this crucible of life, illuminating the countless treasures the Lord had hidden along the way—treasures I otherwise could have missed. His profound insight

into God's character makes him the perfect companion for a journey toward understanding why each of us is here on this earth. *Your Best Destiny* is an inspiring yet practical guide to seeing yourself as God sees you and discovering with confidence the unique path He's called you to walk. As Wintley writes, "The best version of ourselves that we can be . . . is not about what we *do* . . . but about *who we are* at the core." These words flow not just from Wintley's pen but also from his heart, for *who he is* truly embodies the principles and guidance that he shares.

MATT CROUCH

President of Trinity Broadcasting Network

Your Best Destiny is a life-changing book, destined to become a classic that will enable Christians and non-Christians alike to grasp a new vision of the life that God meant for each of us to live. Both visionary and immensely practical, it is one of the clearest, most insightful, and most engaging books on the steps to spiritual growth. Full of wisdom, optimism, and grace, it is a wake-up call from business-as-usual for contemporary Christians. It calls for a radical redefinition of what it really means to be a Christian in today's society, and it presents—in novel, compelling, and memorable ways—an in-depth but clear blueprint of timeless truths about finding one's true purpose in life. It is a must-read for anyone and everyone who wants to delve beneath the superficial and truly discover—with tested tools—what it takes to live a life that makes a lasting difference in the world.

DAVID R. WILLIAMS, PHD

Florence and Laura Norman Professor of Public Health, Harvard School of Public Health; professor of African and African American Studies, Harvard University

I've known Wintley Phipps for many years, and his is a story of small beginnings. He was born and raised on the island of Trinidad with nothing but a dream and a prayer. Yet God has used him to impact the lives of millions of people around the world, including kings, queens, and presidents. This book is for those who want to become the person they were created to be. Many Christians spend a great portion of their lives searching for answers to the question, "What is God's plan for my life?" If you are one of these people, you don't have to wait any longer. If you feel like your life is floundering or you are in a "rut" with no way out, then this book is for you. Wintley beautifully and methodically outlines the major principles set forth in Scripture to help you to realize your best destiny.

DANNY SHELTON

Founder, Three Angels Broadcasting Network

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Your Best Destiny: Becoming the Person You Were Created to Be

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Edited by Karin Stock Buursma

Designed by Mark Anthony Lane II

Published in association with the literary agency of WordServe Literary Group, www.wordserveliterary.com.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Phipps, Wintley.

Your best destiny: becoming the person you were created to be / Wintley Phipps with James Lund.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-4964-0794-8 (hc) — ISBN 978-1-4143-90307 (sc)

1. Phipps, Wintley. 2. Gospel musicians—United States—Biography. 3. Christian biography—United States. I. Lund, James L. II. Title.

ML420.P496A3 2015

248.4—dc23

2015008680

SC (ITPE) 978-1-4964-1198-3

Printed in the United States of America

21 20 19 18 17 16 15
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Introduction

IT IS NO ACCIDENT that you picked up this book. You're searching for something.

Perhaps you sense that your life is off-kilter. Maybe you've just noticed it, or maybe you've lived with a feeling of frustration for years. Perhaps you just closed a chapter in your life and aren't sure where to turn next. Whatever led you to this point, though, you now realize that you're not moving. You're not growing. You're unsatisfied and seeking more—but more *what?*

My hunch is that you're after something rewarding. Something transforming. Something lasting. Something that blows away old definitions of success and replaces them with truth you feel at the center of your soul.

That “something” you seek is God's best life for you. It is what you dream about in the corners of your imagination. It is everything good and right for you and your future. It is what I call your best destiny, and it means being the best *you* that you can possibly be. Your destiny is within your reach if you are willing to risk a few steps into the unknown.

How can I—a pastor, gospel singer, and family man—make

this bold promise? Because my solution for your life does not originate with me. It is based on timeless truths, on wisdom that has guided men and women since their beginnings. It comes from God.

Now, when it comes to God, I don't know where you stand. It could be you're a longtime believer who is feeling stuck in your spiritual life. Or maybe you've just entered into a relationship with Him and are looking to deepen your faith. Perhaps you are still in the process of defining your belief.

Wherever you are on the journey of faith, I invite you to take another step. No matter what you believe, you'll find material here that can help you. What I'm about to reveal can lead you to real, God-defined success. We're going to explore eight secrets that will enable you to discover who you are at the core of your being, and help you to frame a vision for the best destiny you could ever achieve. They will show you how to strip away the burden of beliefs and behaviors that hinder your every move so that God can refashion you into the person you were born to be. When you finally discard the crusty exterior of your old life and take the form you were created for, you will unveil greatness—a greatness you never knew was possible.

I have met some of the world's best-known people and studied their lives. They include Billy Graham, Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela, and Oprah Winfrey, as well as the last six American presidents. I've also met and observed people just as extraordinary whose feet will never walk the red carpet and whose faces will never appear on the cover of *Time* magazine. I could make the case that each of these people, whether famous or anonymous, has lived aspects of God's best life for them—a life that reflects greatness.

But what exactly does it mean to be great? We'll soon see that greatness has nothing to do with wealth, power, position, or fame, though these can be by-products of great living. Everything I have experienced as a person of faith, a professional vocal artist, a pastor, a founder of a nonprofit education program, a husband and father, and a man has shown me that greatness is not what we *do* but who we *are*—and its rewards are rich indeed:

- Confidence
- Hope
- Fulfillment
- Impact
- Peace
- A sense of purpose
- Joy

This book is designed to bring your life into clear focus and to open your eyes to your amazing potential as an extraordinary individual. It will summon you to greatness and show you your role in bringing God's best life to the world.

You won't be alone in this venture. To help you along, an interactive online experience will connect you with a community of encouraging, like-minded people who are on the same journey of self-exploration. Look in the back pages of this book for directions on where to find your *complimentary assessment code* so you can access the Your Best Destiny Personal Assessment Tool.

Each chapter includes study questions that you can answer on your own or discuss with your home group, Bible study, Sunday-school class, or friends over coffee. While you'll find that the concepts in this book apply to you as a unique individual, they also

work well in a group with joint accountability and focus. I encourage you to read this book with others. A shared journey increases motivation and camaraderie and can often lead to fresh insights.

Do you want to discover your God-given destiny—the life you were born to live? So do I. Let's step into it together.

Finding the Best *You*

By the time you've read this book, you will understand the importance of eight essential ethical “pillars” that will support your growth as you seek to become the best *you* that you can be.

After years of research, and with the help of Dr. William Sedlacek—professor emeritus of education at the University of Maryland and one of the nation's leading authorities on noncognitive assessment—my team and I have identified more than one hundred dimensions of God's character. From this list, we created a comprehensive questionnaire, the Your Best Destiny Personal Assessment Tool, that will help you identify your strengths and what you can do to develop a godly character. You will find this practical assessment tool in the appendix at the end of the book.

I encourage you to answer the questions and then go to our website—www.YourBestDestinyAssessment.com. From your answers, you'll receive feedback on where your strengths lie and where you might need to focus your attention to further develop your character. This assessment may be used individually or with a group.

Our website is also filled with resources based on the chapter themes in this book: questions, sermons, music, books, encouragement, and insight tailored to your individual needs. All of these resources are designed to help you assess, diagnose, prescribe,

and implement. They will help to transform you from the inside out. They will empower you, with God's help, to *resemble, reflect,* and *reveal* His character. When you do that, everything becomes possible.

Are you ready to move out of the mundane, pursue your destiny, and become the best *you* that you can possibly be? Let's get started.

DISCOVERING YOUR BEST DESTINY

How to Uncover God's Best Life for You

Every person's life is a fairy tale written by God's fingers.

HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN

ON A FOUR-LANE HIGHWAY, a traffic light changed from red to green. Like an eager racehorse bursting from the gate, a sleek red Chevrolet surged forward. One by one, the other vehicles on the road fell behind. Only a silver Lincoln presented any challenge to the speeding red streak that turned night into day with its powerful headlights. Soon the Lincoln faded into the background as well.

The Chevrolet ate up the miles as the motor throbbed and the driver's hands tightened on the steering wheel. A triumphant smile curved his lips. His dark eyes gleamed with delight. There wasn't an auto on the highway that could keep up with his. There also wasn't a better driver, not in the whole United States.

A warning sign signaled a bend in the road. The driver braked, his body leaning right as the huge car banked around the steep

bend. A glance in the rearview mirror showed a pair of headlights gaining on him. The driver's eyes narrowed. His foot pressed harder on the gas pedal. The driver watched his speeding car's quivering needle climb to eighty . . . ninety . . . one hundred miles per hour. He would push his mechanical monster as fast and far as it could go. No one would catch him. The driver released a low, exultant chuckle. *This* was living.

Suddenly a voice cut through the sound of the roaring engine and the driver's sense of satisfaction.

"Wintley? You come on in now. Time for supper."

The vision of the daring driver and the powerful Chevrolet vanished faster than a speeding race car at the Indianapolis 500. In the vision's place sat its creator—an imaginative, curly-haired five-year-old gripping a red tricycle.

That young "speed demon" was me.

I have always been a dreamer. As a boy growing up on the island of Trinidad, I often turned my dented and rusted red tricycle into a magic carpet. I flipped the trike on its side, gripped a back tire as if it were a steering wheel, and imagined myself controlling a fancy car or powerful transport truck. At other times I pictured myself wearing a leather helmet, gloves, and thick-lensed goggles as I peered at the instrument panel and directed my open-cockpit plane up, up into an azure sky.

Today, I live a short drive from Orlando, Florida—the home of Disney World, a place that cultivates and embellishes youthful dreams. Whether it's returning to a land of magic kingdoms and fairy tales or of pirates and space rangers, we enjoy revisiting the fantasies of our youth.

Can you remember your childhood dreams? Did you imagine yourself as a soldier, sailor, cowboy, fireman, or policeman? Were

you a princess, pilot, dancer, or animal trainer? Do you ever think about those dreams today?

Some people dismiss childhood hopes and dreams as silly delusions, unrealistic whims that are best buried and forgotten. I would argue, however, that they are more than just animated flights of fancy. They signal our beginning awareness of an amazing potential future that stretches beyond what we can now see or hear.

They are our first yearnings for our God-given destiny.

Something about those words should stir a shiver of excitement inside us. They connect us to long-lost visions, to the belief that a significant future awaits us.

Our dreams tend to mature and change as we grow older. We learn more about ourselves and our gifts. If we're fortunate, we develop our abilities and passions and discover new possibilities. Dreams give us the inspiration to keep pursuing our best selves.

A man once uttered these words at a speech contest in Atlanta:

We cannot have an enlightened democracy with one great group living in ignorance. We cannot have a healthy nation with one-tenth of the people ill-nourished, sick, harboring germs of disease which recognize no color lines—obey no Jim Crow laws. We cannot have a nation orderly and sound with one group so ground down and thwarted that it is almost forced into unsocial attitudes and crime. We cannot be truly Christian people so long as we flout the central teachings of Jesus: brotherly love and the Golden Rule. We cannot come to full prosperity with one great group so ill-delayed that it cannot buy goods. So as we gird ourselves to defend democracy from foreign

attack, let us see to it that increasingly at home we give fair play and free opportunity for all people.¹

The speaker won the contest. You may recognize the eloquence, the passion, and the cause for which the speaker fought. You may also know his name: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. What you may not know, however, is that, at the time of this speech, he wasn't yet Dr. King. He was a teenager, fifteen years old. Even at that young age, he was hearing the call toward his destiny. He was already moving into God's best life for him.

Maybe you know folks who have always understood what they were supposed to do with their lives. The door to their ideal future opened at just the right time and they sauntered on through. For the rare few, the road to fulfilling their hopes is marked by brightly lit traffic signs with giant letters: "NEXT EXIT: YOUR DESTINY."

For most of us, however, that's not how it works.

If you're anything like me, you've struggled to find your place and purpose in life. You have gone to school, studied books, observed the lives of others, sought wise counsel, and gained practical experience. More than once, you have embarked on a promising trail only to reach a dead end. You've searched and strained, yet God's best life for you has proven elusive.

How do you know? Because you sense it in your soul. You go through each day feeling unfulfilled. Deep down, you're sure you have untapped potential. You live with a nagging impression that you were made for more than this. And when that frustration persists over time, month after month and year after year, it infects your work, your relationships, and your faith. You begin to grow fatigued. Disheartened. Cynical.

Disillusioned.

I understand the feeling because I've known it myself.

Is This All There Is?

When I was ten, my family and I moved from our tropical home on the small island of Trinidad to the frigid big city: Montreal in Quebec, Canada. The dramatic change in environment opened my eyes to the world. I discovered that I had a talent for singing, and I saw myself flying around the globe, performing in front of thousands of adoring fans. That, I was sure, would be God's best life for me.

I found a crack in my picture of the best life, however, on the day I posed as a reporter and sneaked into the Montreal Forum. It was 1970, I was fifteen years old, and I was prepared to do just about anything to see Sly and the Family Stone perform. (Yes, I am that old, and yes, I had a lot of nerve back then.) At the time, Sylvester Stewart, better known as Sly Stone, was at the top of the music scene. He was a pioneer of funk and soul music. He'd appeared the summer before at the legendary Woodstock festival, and his band's latest single, "Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin)," was number one on the charts. Sly was one of my idols—that is, until the night of the concert.

Before the show, I was backstage with two cameras around my neck, doing my best impression of a newsman who actually belonged there. I was listening to the crowd chant "Sly-y . . . Sly-y . . ." when a limousine pulled up. My jaw dropped when Sly's handlers lifted out a frail, disoriented heap of a man and almost carried him into his dressing room. From there, they hustled the rock star into a shower stall and turned the water on him. Within seconds he was drenched and screaming as if possessed.

I was stunned. This was a rock star? This was my hero? Later I read about Sly's drug issues and conflicts with other members of the band. He was not a happy man.

I'd always assumed that money, influence, and adulation ensured a successful life. Now I wasn't so certain.

Have you had the same thought—that true greatness lies in acquiring wealth, power, fame, or the adoration of others? Most of us believe this at some level, even if it's subconscious. Whether or not we realize it, we shape our thinking, behavior, and careers by this belief. We say to ourselves, "When I earn that manager's job and the salary that goes with it, then I'll have it made," or, "If more people at my office, in my neighborhood, or at my church knew me and recognized my abilities, then I'd be happy with my life." So we keep pushing ourselves for that promotion and keep trying to amaze people who pay us little attention.

I've noticed something, though, about those of us who behave this way. Even if we eventually achieve our goal of riches or renown, we often find that it leaves us disappointed and disoriented, dissatisfied with our place in the world.

John D. Rockefeller founded Standard Oil Company and became the wealthiest man in the world. "I have made many millions," he said, "but they have brought me no happiness."² Henry Ford, founder and president of Ford Motor Company, once said, "I was happier when doing a mechanic's job."³

"The rich are never happy, no matter what they have," explains author Robert Frank. "There was this man who owned a 100-foot yacht. I said: 'This is a terrific boat.' He said: 'Look down the harbor.' We looked down the marina, and there were boats two and three times as large. He said, 'My 100-foot yacht today is like a dinghy compared to these other boats.'"⁴

Psychoanalyst Manfred Kets de Vries explains the problem this way: “For the super-rich, houses, yachts, cars, and planes are like new toys that they play with for five minutes and then lose interest in. Pretty soon, to attain the same buzz they have to spend more money. All the spending is a mad attempt to cover up boredom and depression.”⁵

Boredom and depression—hardly hallmarks of a successful life. Contrary to popular belief, money does not buy happiness; neither does power, popularity, or adoration. Maybe you’ve heard of an old country song, “Lookin’ for Love (in All the Wrong Places)”?

That is what so many of us do—look for God’s best life for us in all the wrong ways and all the wrong places.

Our twisted definitions of success can be even more destructive when applied to our view of God.

Think about this. If you have any kind of faith in a God who is responsible for your existence—and if you believe in your heart (whether you admit it or not) that He has created you for the purpose of amassing fortune, influence, fame, and the adulation of others—then what kind of God is He? What does that mean for your faith? How is that external, achievement-centered spirituality going to express itself in your life?

I’ll tell you. You will become more and more disappointed in God if He doesn’t give you what you think you deserve. Your increased cynicism may lead you to fall away from faith altogether, thinking that it’s not worth it if it doesn’t benefit you in tangible ways. Or if you remain part of a church, you may find yourself detached, singing the same songs and praying the same prayers and feeling bored by the routine. You may try to lead others to your faith just to add another notch in your evangelistic belt, or you may attend a church that’s more concerned with adding

members than with teaching what you need to know. You may read your Bible and other Christian books and follow their rules, yet feel disconnected from God. You may have learned to pretend, to tell people who ask that “everything is fine,” when in fact your faith is in crisis.

You will ask yourself, *Is this God’s best life for me? Is this all there is?*

The answer to both questions is *no*. There is more. But to discover it, you may have to dramatically adjust your thinking.

Is God Trying to Tell You Something?

My thinking was anything but clear after my Montreal encounter with Sly Stone. I was confused. Yet I remained convinced that my future was in show business. I still had big dreams for myself. I was ready to advance my singing career any way I could. When a man approached me about the idea of performing at a Montreal nightclub, the Penthouse Two, I jumped at the chance. Soon a friend and I were headlining there.

It was during this time that I almost destroyed my dreams. I’d seen one of the stars of rock and roll, Little Richard, put on an incredible performance at a concert in Montreal. I decided I needed to sound more like him, so I did my own screaming rendition of two of his songs at a school talent show. The crowd loved it, but when I woke up the next morning I could barely speak, let alone sing. A doctor said I’d damaged my throat and voice box. There was no guarantee I would recover. Fortunately, after I didn’t speak for a week, my singing ability returned—but my screaming days were over.

Sometimes it takes a near disaster for God to get our attention. That was certainly the case for me. It dawned on me after

the screaming episode that God might be trying to tell me something.

When I was very young, my father wasn't active in any church. My mother, however, was serious about her Christian faith, and she passed that on to her sons. As far back as I can remember, she took my younger brother, Wendell, and me to church every week.

I'd always believed in God. He'd always been part of my life. I understood, at least to some degree, that He loved me and had created everything in the universe, including me.

I allowed God and His wisdom to guide me—most of the time. But I hadn't surrendered to Him completely. I hadn't yet embraced the biblical idea that “everything got started in him and finds its purpose in him.”⁶ I wasn't ready to trust my future to Him. I was still firmly in charge of my life.

Maybe you can relate. Perhaps you believe in God and His power over your world. Perhaps you have faith that He loves you. But maybe you're also holding something back. Maybe you, too, have your own plan for achieving your best destiny, and you aren't sure if God is on the same page.

God's plans were increasingly on my mind after my failed attempt at becoming the next Little Richard. I wondered whether God was speaking to me. I'd been given a glimpse of the dark side of fame and been discouraged from adopting a rock-and-roll style. Was this more than coincidence? Maybe show business—at least the kind I was pursuing—wasn't the path to God's best life for me. I decided to give up my nightclub dreams and promised God that from then on I would sing only songs that helped people spiritually.

Is God trying to tell *you* something? Has He closed doors or discouraged you from a path you desperately want to follow? Is

that what led you to this book? Are you sensing that His picture of success is different from yours?

What I needed to realize back then, and what God may be telling you now, is that His view of things—including success—is not at all like ours. In fact, it may be the opposite. The Bible says, “You are always making yourselves look good, but God sees what is in your heart. The things that most people think are important are worthless as far as God is concerned.”⁷

We like to “look good”—but appearances can deceive, can’t they? A sports car for sale may shine from a fresh wash, but under the hood, its engine needs a complete overhaul. A house may present a beautiful yard and exterior, but inside its walls, termites are on the attack. An apple may look tasty on the outside yet be tainted on the inside.

Does this matter to us? Of course! No one wants a car ready to break down, a home infested with bugs, or a rotten apple. Yet when it comes to people, our attitude often seems to indicate the opposite. We act as if what’s inside isn’t important. We cheer for the superstar athlete and ignore his extramarital affairs. We fawn over the movie actress who regularly makes outrageous and untrue statements about others. We try to win the support of the business owner who won his or her wealth through shady deals.

Why do we admire these people? Why do we strive to be more like them? It’s because, from our vantage point, it *appears* they’re living God’s best life for them. We see the money and celebrity and wish we were in their shoes. What we don’t see, however, is that some of these people are tainted on the inside. Behind the glitz and glamour designed to impress us are pain, personal struggle, and poor choices.

Isn’t our plan for a fulfilled life also made up of things that will

impress people, whether that's money and the objects it buys, a job with a fancy title, or talent that earns the adulation of fans? God sees right through us. He knows we're trying to make ourselves look good so we can think of ourselves as successful. And He says these things are worthless.

But if all this is worthless, what *is* success? What is God's best life for us?

BECOMING YOUR BEST YOU

What dreams for your life did you have as a child? What dreams do you still have today?

What comes to mind when you think of a successful life? How much are money, fame, and power tied up with your definition of success?

Do you believe at some level that God has created you for the purpose of amassing fortune, influence, or fame? If so, what does that say about Him and what He is like?

What do you think it means to be the best *you* that you can be?

Dear God, You know the dreams I have for my life and my longing for something more. And You also know that some of the things I long for will just leave me feeling empty. Help me to consider Your definition of success as I begin to learn about the best life You have for me. Amen.