

# CHAPTER 1

**“There is no greater emptiness than success without fulfillment.”**

— Tony Robbins

## AN INVITATION

### Is This All There Is?

“Is this all there is?” Caleb’s inner voice startled him in the dark office.

The sun had not yet risen. A second cup of coffee cooled beside the stack of closing documents he had signed earlier in the week. His laptop hummed in front of him.

144 doors. His biggest purchase yet.

He should be riding high. It was a solid win—a clean close, the kind of deal that reaffirmed everything he had spent years building.

In the margins of his ever-present notebook, he wrote the same two words, over and over: “What now?”

Caleb had a 90-minute drive ahead of him this morning, from New Smyrna Beach to the far side of Orlando. Yet he leaned back in his chair and let his eyes drift to the window. The faint light of dawn and the birdsong outside could not lift the heaviness that lingered in the room.

He loved the hunt, the numbers, the strategy, his team. He enjoyed creating wealth for his family.

His eyes dropped back to the closing statement.

Ping! A message **popped** up on his phone, breaking the silence.

It was from Nathan, a fellow real-estate entrepreneur—the kind of man whose quiet smile always seemed to carry deeper wisdom—so he opened it.

I saw you across the room at Rod Khleif's conference yesterday. Let's be sure to connect this morning. I have something to share.

Caleb checked the time. If he didn't get moving, he would miss the opening session of Day Two.

Memories surfaced of the first time he met Rod Khleif, years ago in Tampa. Khleif—one of the leading teachers in the multifamily world—had launched Caleb's venture into the space.

After a quick call to his project manager to green-light the unit turns on the new property, Caleb topped off his Yeti with hot coffee, slid his iPad and notebook into his case, and grabbed his keys.

He bounded upstairs two at a time to kiss Sarah goodbye. She was scrolling through e-mails in bed. One quick kiss, and he was out the door—heading for Orlando and something he didn't yet understand.

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## Rod Khleif

Caleb kept the radio off during the drive on State Road 44 and I-4. For once, he welcomed the silence.

Images and thoughts threaded through his mind as he threaded through traffic:

- a fruit tree lush and green from a distance but barren up close;
- Patrick Lencioni's line in **The Advantage**—"It's not about strategy, innovation, or finance; it's about purpose and clarity";
- Sarah's quiet observation about a missed T-ball game: "Josh kept looking for you";
- the dry, unexpected lack of joy in this latest purchase.

He made it over the bridge and past Sanford as the traffic began to build.

Nathan's text resurfaced, recalling an early morning at a Lake Mary Starbucks when Nathan had asked, "Why do you do what you do?" The question had slipped in gently but lodged deep.

Right out of college, Caleb had taken a job as a financial advisor with Edward Jones. The pay was good; he loved the numbers and the client relationships. Yet, over time, something chafed.

Twelve years ago—not long after that first Khleif conference—he stepped out on his own as a multifamily investor. The growth was fast, the success real, but the *why* never quite caught up.

He scooted past downtown Orlando in the express lane, turned onto International Drive, and slipped into a garage behind the massive Orange County Convention Center.

Emerging from his car, Central Florida’s humidity wrapped around him, even in early spring. Sliding glass doors parted, and a cool rush of air-conditioning hit his face.

The lobby buzzed with chatter. The aroma of fresh-brewed coffee and pastries filled the air. Investors clustered at high-top tables, lanyards flashing their names. Caleb felt the pull of it—energy, ambition—while something quieter still stirred.

Then he spotted Nathan.

“Glad you made it,” Nathan said, shaking his hand firmly. “I have an offer for you—not a deal, something different. Join a mastermind I facilitate.”

A mastermind? Caleb hadn’t expected that. He knew the model; years ago he had joined a national group with quarterly retreats and big-name speakers. Helpful, yes, but right now bandwidth was scarce, and desire even scarcer. His gut reaction was *No*.

The ballroom doors opened. Without another word, they found seats on an aisle. Screens lit up with images of Rod Khleif’s properties.

“Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Rod Khleif, the master of the multifamily market.”

Applause thundered as Khleif strode onstage.

He opened with a story—backpacks filled with school supplies for the children in one of his complexes. Caleb leaned in. These weren’t metrics or margins; these were lives. Rod wasn’t just a deal-maker—he was building something better.

Khleif pivoted to economics: market cycles, the Great Recession, how he lost everything—over-leveraged single-family homes, bankruptcy, starting over. He spoke plainly about failure and resilience, about rebuilding smarter, with greater purpose. Caleb respected that. Success plus scars equaled depth.

When the session ended, Nathan leaned over. “Do you have lunch plans?”

Caleb shook his head.

“Let’s walk to the sandwich shop next door.”

## Lunch with Liz

Outside, bright humid air shimmered with oak pollen and butterflies. They found a table under a sprawling live oak. Nathan noticed and flagged down Liz Hernandez, inviting her to join them. Liz ran a large property management firm in Orlando; Caleb knew her from deals they had done over the years.

A waiter took their orders for the half-sandwich-and-soup special. Nathan leaned back, iced tea in hand. “I just invited Caleb to our mastermind.”

Caleb shifted. Interest wrestled with resistance.

“That’s great,” Liz said without missing a beat. “You’d bring so much to the rest of us. I do hope you’ll join, Caleb.”

“Are you in it too?” he asked, wondering if her appearance was serendipity or a setup.

“I am,” she said. “Meeting with these other successful entrepreneurs is amazing. We talk business, yes—but also life, family, faith.”

Caleb’s heart jumped at that word. He hadn’t been inside a church since his wedding. Was this a Bible study? A prayer meeting?

Liz went on. “It’s brought me more peace, more purpose—and even more money.”

*More peace. More purpose.* The words hit something tender and unnamed.

Nathan’s phone alarm buzzed; the afternoon session was about to start. They paid the check and headed back. The jasmine-scented air felt bright and loud, yet something inside Caleb had gone still—not empty, but open.

He couldn’t stop thinking about what Liz had said—*more peace, more purpose.*

It landed like both a whisper and a dare. More than deals, more than numbers. *What if the more was peace? What if it was purpose?*

They re-entered the convention center, a blast of air-conditioning sweeping away the sidewalk heat. Caleb followed the crowd toward the ballroom, but his inner world moved at a different pace now. He wasn’t just attending a conference anymore.

He was listening—maybe for the first time in a long while—to something inside.

Nathan and Liz headed into the ballroom for the afternoon session. Caleb lingered among the sponsors’ tables, slipping into his usual conference routine. He worked the lobby with practiced ease, reconnecting with former contacts, introducing himself to new faces.

He was good at this; it came naturally. His confidence, posture, and handshake all said, *I know what I'm doing*. And he did—on the outside.

He kept the rhythm: shake hands, trade cards, jot a note in his notebook. He checked in with his team to be sure everything back home was running smoothly.

When the final session ended and the crowd trickled into the parking garage, Nathan caught up and handed Caleb a folded note.

Caleb was tired, but not in the way he expected. His mind felt full; his heart, stirred.

He found his car and settled behind the wheel. The garage was dim and quiet—an abrupt contrast to the buzz he had just left. He sat a moment before starting the engine, staring at the dashboard, pondering Liz's words again.

He called home. "Hey," he said when Sarah answered. "I'm pulling out now. GPS says I'll be home around 6:45. How was your day?"

Sarah told him about a client who had hired her to redecorate a newly purchased condo.

"You okay?" she asked.

"Yeah," he answered too quickly. "Just a long day. Tell Jake we'll do something fun together this weekend and tell Sophia I'm sorry I missed our time to kick the ball around before dinner."

He left the garage, merged onto the toll road, and—because rush hour was building—took the 528 past the airport, then the 417 eastern bypass to avoid the logjam on I-4. Caleb queued up a jazz playlist; the familiar, fluid notes let his shoulders drop, but peace still kept its distance.

*What if Liz is right? And how do I find this "more"?*

## **Back Home.**

The question tugged at him all the way into Volusia County. He reached his beach-side driveway in New Smyrna at 6:50—only five minutes later than promised.

Inside, the kids were already gathered at the table. Sarah met him at the door and handed him a warm plate. He slid into his seat and joined the conversation, laughing at Sophia's joke, listening to Josh describe his science project, sometimes staring out the window at the waves splashing on the beach.

After dinner, the kids went upstairs for baths and bedtime. Caleb and Sarah fell into their usual rhythm at the sink—Sarah washing, Caleb drying. He dried the same dish three times.

She set the sponge down. “What’s going on?”

Her question turned like a key in a lock he hadn’t wanted to open. His back stiffened. “What do you mean?” The words came out sharper than intended.

She didn’t flinch. “You were great at dinner, but I know you. Something’s on your mind.”

He breathed. Her presence softened him. “You’re right,” he said, quieter now. “It’s Nathan.”

She nodded.

“He invited me into a mastermind—weekly Zoom meetings. I didn’t answer. I’m stretched already: business, kids. I don’t need another commitment.”

She waited, eyes kind and steady.

Clutching the dish towel, he met her gaze. “But something about today... it got under my skin. We just closed the big deal. The numbers are great—should cash-flow quickly. It ought to be a home run.”

He paused, brow furrowed. “But I’ve wondered all day—*is making money all there is?*”

The words felt heavier than he’d expected.

Sarah didn’t rush in. She simply listened.

Caleb glanced at her and saw no judgment, no advice—just presence. That steady love made it safe to go on.

“We’ve done well,” he said. “Everything I dreamed of—you, this house, the kids’ education, vacations, freedom to say yes to almost anything. I love our life. I love my work.”

He stopped.

“But?” she prompted gently.

“But... Rod talked today about backpacks for kids in his apartments. What does that say about me?”

“I had lunch with Nathan and Liz. They spoke about something deeper. Liz said she’s finding more money *and* more peace, and I just...”

He rubbed the back of his neck. “It’s like I’ve been climbing a ladder, and I’m not sure, as they say, it’s leaning against the right wall.”

Just then Josh and Sophia bounded downstairs, hair still damp, books in hand. “We’re ready for stories!”

Caleb smiled. This mattered—his family. But so did whatever was rising within him.

“Think it’s my night with you, Josh.”

Sarah took Sophia’s book, and the four of them headed upstairs.

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### **Caleb Decides**

Later, after two stories and whispers about weekend plans, Caleb kissed Josh’s forehead, pulled the blanket up, and waited for his son’s breathing to slow before slipping out.

Downstairs, he switched off the hallway lights. The house was still; Sarah and Sophia must have finished.

His office greeted him with the scent of polished wood and old books—dark paneling, built-in shelves, a single lamp glowing beside the desk. The folder holding the latest closing statement sat untouched where he had left it that morning.

He walked past it.

Instead, he sank into the leather reading chair—his thinking chair. The room, usually a command center, felt like a sanctuary tonight.

He sat motionless, letting the silence settle.

A beach photo on the shelf caught his eye—Sarah, Sophia, and Josh laughing in last summer’s sun. His family. This is his why, isn’t it. Yet even that didn’t fully name the stirring inside.

On the side table sat *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Stephen Covey’s warning flickered in his memory: getting trapped in busyness without deeper values and goals.

The question *Is there more?* had an answer, he realized. The answer was yes. He wasn’t sure of the specifics yet.

Grief surfaced—grief he’d felt after his father’s death, the ache of unspoken words and time slipping by. Only now the grief wasn’t for someone lost; it was for something not yet found.

A tear surprised him. He wiped it away, reached into his bag, and unfolded Nathan’s note:

“If you’d like to join us Tuesday at 6:00 a.m., let me know. I’ll send the Zoom link.”

“Dad?” Sophia’s small voice floated from the doorway.

Caleb straightened. “Sweetie, what are you doing up?”

She climbed into his lap. “Are you sad?”

“Not sad, exactly—just thinking about what matters most. Making sure I’m doing things that count.”

Sophia nodded. “Like when I spend all day coloring the wrong picture.”

“Exactly like that.” Something opened in his chest. “How did you get so wise?”

She shrugged. “Mom says I get it from you.”

After tucking Sophia back in, Caleb returned to his office. He stared at Nathan’s note, thumb hovering over his phone. He had no answers—only the sense that he needed to step into the unknown.

He typed one word: **Yes**.

He didn’t know precisely what he was accepting, but he knew what he didn’t want: more success with less satisfaction. He trusted Nathan, respected Liz, and was drawn by the possibility the mastermind promised.

Caleb opened his calendar and tapped in an event:

*Tuesday, 6:00 a.m. – Mastermind.*

He set the phone face-down, leaned back, and closed his eyes.

He wasn’t chasing *more*. He was opening himself to it.

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PRINCIPLE: Achievement without purpose leaves a hollow space that success can’t fill. Begin every goal with a deeper “why,” or the win will never feel like a victory.

Difficult feelings may be trying to tell you something. Listen to them.



Jesus warns disciples in Matthew 16:26 “What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul.” (NRSV)