

Chapter One

You Were Not Created to be Tiffany Star!

Do you ever wonder why you are who you are? At some point in our lives, almost all of us become philosophical for a moment; even if just long enough to ask ourselves that one question. Life is a journey, and each of us has a purpose that begins at birth. But what is our purpose? Who and what were we created to be?

As a child of around seven years of age, I recall being at my grandmother's house in the country and sitting by the stove in a chair between my mother's knees while she pressed my hair with a manual hot comb and revealed the first and middle names she'd chosen for me as she approached her date of delivery. I don't even know how we got on the subject, but I clearly remember her telling me that my name was all set to be Tiffany Star. When she revealed that little known fact, I loved the sound of it so much that it nearly brought me to tears to hear that she'd chosen, instead, to call me Kendra Michelle, a combination that had been built from family suggestions.

I always liked the name Michelle, which was given to me by my Aunt Joyce, who is also my godmother. But at that tender, impressionable age of my life, I absolutely hated the name, Kendra; so to discover that there had been another option that was ruled out only made matters worse.

At the time, I had one older sister (Crystal Ann) and one younger sister (Cynthia Arlene), and secretly, I'd envied the fact that their initials spelled

something, and mine didn't. It all sounds so ridiculously trivial now, but at the age of seven, that was vitally important to me. Their initials were C.A.N., and mine were KMN, which spelled absolutely nothing . . . and that just wasn't fair. If my parents couldn't give me a name with initials that spelled something (even something as insignificant as "can"), at least they could've given me a cool name like Tiffany Star! A burn from the hot comb probably would have been less painful.

It was never that I thought mine was an unappealing name. It was the mere fact that I didn't know anyone else that shared it that made me dislike it. I was the only child at my church named Kendra. I was the only child in my class named Kendra. I was the only child in my neighborhood named Kendra. Somewhere on the face of God's green earth, there had to be someone else with the name, but I didn't know a single one. *Not one.* Almost every time I would meet other kids for the first time and introduced myself, I would get peculiar looks. Apparently they didn't know another Kendra either.

The rarity of my name probably should have made me feel pleasantly unique, but I was far too young and naïve to reason on that level. So instead of feeling like a special, one-of-a-kind original, I felt like some sort of weird oddball.

In the 90's, the popularity of my name began to rise (a lot of good that did me since I was all grown up by then). At the writing of this book—according to *HowManyOfMe.com*—there are roughly 59,931 people in the U.S. whose first name matches mine. However, during the mid 60's, the era in which I was born, the number was substantially lower, and in the 70's, during my earliest school years, mine still wasn't a common name.

On the other hand, the same couldn't be said for Tiffany. It was a popular name for which parents—black and white alike—apparently shared a common adoration. For a while, as a fourth grader, when my family temporarily moved back to my birth home of West Palm Beach, Florida, I shared a classroom with three girls named Tiffany. Oh, how I envied them! I just wanted to be like everyone else.

My mother was full of untold information that she began sharing with her children as we matured. When I was twelve or thirteen years old, I remember her saying that I and my older sister could have possibly had a career in modeling. As a young mother, she had been out and about one day and was approached by an executive of one of the largest department stores in the country, and they asked her if she would allow my sister and me to model children's clothing for their popular mail-order catalogue. My mother graciously declined the offer.

SIGH! *Why, Mama? Why??*

Can't you just imagine an adorable little chubby cheeked model in pigtails named Tiffany Star? That has "Hollywood, here I come" written all over it! But regardless of how appealing it sounds, modeling wasn't my purpose and Hollywood wasn't my destination. No doubt, Tiffany Star's life would have taken her to *a* destination, but not to *my* destination. Only Kendra Michelle could fulfill God's calling for Kendra Michelle. Certainly, Tiffany Star would have gone a lot of places, met a lot of people, seen a lot of things . . . but not the same people, places, and things that were ordained for Kendra Michelle. In order to fulfill *my* purpose, I had to walk the path that God had carved for Kendra Michelle. I wasn't meant to be Tiffany Star. My mother may not have had the foresight to know that, but the God she

serves did, and from the very beginning, He was molding me.

Over the years, I have come to believe that Mama's decision to give me a name, not shared by many at the time, was just the first brick on the pathway that God had strategically laid out for my life. The origin of the name, Kendra (according to *ThinkBabyNames.com*) is Welsh, and it means "greatest champion." Wow! I've never viewed myself as a champion, but when I consider the long and sometimes painful path that ultimately led (and continues to lead) me to my purpose, I wonder if I should buy a card for my cousin, Barbara Atkins, and express my appreciation for the name she gave me. The name that I disliked for so long, but now love so much.

The meaning of "Kendra" has significant relevance to what was to come, and since my height maxed out at 4'11", not even close to the average model's stature, it would have only been a matter of time before my modeling career would have likely faced a hurdle too high for my short legs to conquer.

I'm certain that I represent the majority. Almost all of us have something about ourselves that we don't like, or didn't like at one time or another. We wonder why God made us a certain way or gave us a particular trait. We find ourselves wishing that we were somewhere else or even *someone* else. We think that if we had been born into a different family, raised in a different community, educated in a different school system, chosen a different career path, married a different person; then we would have fared better in life. We believe that had we been better looking, had we been thinner, had we been taller, had we been born of a different ethnic background, then we would have been afforded better opportunities.

Whatever your “Tiffany Star” is, realize that you weren’t meant to be that. God designed us to be the person that we are. Before He formed us in our mothers’ wombs, He knew all about us. And despite the faults we can so easily find in ourselves, God handcrafted us for our divine purpose. Yes, we may even veer from His will at times, but God is not taken by surprise by any of the missteps that we make in life. He knew long before we stepped out of line that we would stray; yet our deviation doesn’t have to cancel out our destination. Wrong turns don’t have to change our path or our purpose. Like the GPS devices that many of us have in our vehicles, God knows how to recalculate and redirect us so that we can still fulfill the assignment that He handpicked just for us.

In life, it almost seems natural to compare ourselves to others. We see where someone else is and visual evidence indicates they are much further along than we are. They share our same profession, but they appear to have obtained far more success. They are our same age, but they’ve accomplished so much more than we. Their background parallels with ours, but somehow they’ve gotten so many more breaks than we have. And if that person isn’t genuinely serving God in spirit and in truth, that tends to make it all the more frustrating.

As difficult as it may be, we have to learn to take our eyes off of others. That, in and of itself, is enough to lure us off the path God has for us. If we focus on obeying and pleasing God, and then trust Him to do all that His Word promises, we’ll find that God is giving us a testimony that is uniquely ours, and in order to have that, we can only walk the path that is uniquely ours.

You were given your name for a reason. You were not created to be Tiffany Star!