

DREAMS COME TRUE

DISCOVERING GOD'S VISION
FOR YOUR LIFE

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CONTENT

Acknowledgments.....	7
Introduction	11
PART I: EMBRACING GOD’S DREAM	
1. Appreciating You & God.....	23
2. Blind Love	37
3. God’s Dream	46
PART II: DISCOVER	
4. Joy to the World	63
5. Your Gifts and Talents.....	71
6. Five Questions	78
PART III: DREAM	
7. Understanding God’s Dreams	99
8. Time to Dream	108
9. Responsibility.....	125
PART IV: DESIGN	
10. Design a New Life	139
11. Where Does it Hurt?.....	153
Conclusion.....	157
Epilogue.....	161

INTRODUCTION

Aren't you tired?

Isn't it exhausting, always settling instead of excelling?

Are you living your dream life, where you wake up most mornings excited for the day? Or, do you drag along, serving out a life-sentence in an unrewarding job, or in unappreciated relationships?

Do you feel disconnected from God, your life lacking inspiration and joy? Perhaps you even feel overwhelmed, burdened by life's pressures and obstacles.

There has to be something more.

Looking within and looking out makes clear the many injustices of our divided society.

From the refugee searching for safety, to the adults and children forced into sexual slavery and labor, to the veterans living on the streets—cruelty haunts our human family.

You may feel anger, helplessness, numbness, grief.

Where is God?

At every moment God is trying to enter into our world and into your life. As with the disciples on Pentecost, who shared these same feelings and emotions, the Holy Spirit is moving, inviting you perhaps even charging you, to live a new life guided by Christ.

Still, each day— especially reading or watching the news, passing those hurting on the corner, feeling greatly for those wounded at your own table or in your own mirror—offers little comfort.

But comfort isn't the goal, nor is ignoring or accepting the distractions that pop up at every turn. Our emotions are

speaking to us, calling us to respond. The Spirit is nudging us to, as the familiar saying states, “be the change we wish to see in the world.” Transform your comfort into action. Turn to God to be that instrument of change. Change the world—starting with *your* world.

Now is the time to be that change, to be one with the Spirit. St Paul reminds us, “If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit” (Gal 5:25). The Holy Spirit is inviting you to grow greater spiritual growth, to increased service and justice to those most in need, and to bring unity to a divided world.

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You are meant to do more, to be your true self. Each day you are meant to wake up with a purpose, a purpose that God intended. You are meant to help solve the problems of this world. You are meant to live the life God intended when you were formed in your mother’s womb.

This book can change your life. Just writing it has changed my life (I will explain more soon). These pages describe, as the title suggests, a dream— God’s dream!

Your dreams can come true. Embrace them now, bring them into reality.

You are reading this book because a spiritual force is inviting you into your life’s next chapter. Your rearview mirror reflects your life—its bumps and broken roads, as well as its sunny days and smooth paths.

Today and tomorrow offer opportunity. Every road, even a rocky one, can lead to a dream coming true.

Deep within I believe that God has a dream. God has over 7.4 billion dreams, instilled in every person living and breathing at this moment in history, in every day that came before and in every day yet to come.

God’s dream includes you. Yes, You!

Can you, will you, believe this?

Now is the time to embrace God's dream for you.

That dream is both deeply personal and also communal. God's dream is exclusively for you, but also that you bring justice and peace to those who need your voice, your ears, your talents, and your time.

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In a world so divided, division seeming to grow by the day, look to Jesus just before he is arrested, tortured, then executed on the cross.

Jesus turns to his Father and offers a prayer that God be glorified, a prayer for His disciples, a prayer for every believer.

This is Jesus' prayer:

I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (Jn 17: 20-23)

This is Jesus' dream. It echoes down through the generations. Can we be the ones who finally let Jesus unite our divided world?

This rich prayer speaks to Jesus' desire that all his followers unite. Like a parent at the moment of death, he expresses his final wish just before his life will end. This is the mission of the Focolare Movement, an effort launched during a time of war and great suffering.

This desire for unity brings great hope—hope that by our unity, others will be attracted to Jesus, and to the unity of love. Tertullian noted what Romans said about the early Christians in Carthage: “see how they love one another.”¹

In this prayer, Jesus gives us the same glory that God gave Him. This glory is meant for us to change the world—to be one with God and to be one with one another. We are equipped with this glory by our very nature, a concept to be explored throughout this book.

Jesus’ prayer is a love letter to God as much as it is a love letter to you. These pages will direct you to look within at your own gifts and to look without at the needs of the external world. May your life become a love letter back to God that shows how God’s glory shines in you, and through you, in an effort of unity and love.

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You are made in God’s image. You, all of your gifts, talents, joys, and yes, complexities, are of God.

An inventor creates an instrument to address a problem.

God, the greatest of inventors, made you—made each of us—to address the world’s problems, the greatest being its lack of love.

You hold the power to bring your love, God’s love, to another person, group, or situation.

But how?

Together, we can find the answer in your dreams.

These are not the dreams when you are sleeping, although those too can be helpful if you learn to remember and process them. Rather, it is the dreams of your heart that I invite you to discover.

But that invites another question: *what are your dreams?*

I am not talking about the superficial dreams, like perfect skin, or six pack abs, that society places on a pedestal and make you feel inferior when you don't measure up. I am not speaking of the size of your car, your home, or your savings account. I am speaking of your interior dreams, the ones at the core of your true identity as a reflection of Jesus.

These dreams, when you devote time and energy to them, make you feel excited and fill you with sudden joy.

These dreams keep you up at night, give you such a rush of energy that you can barely contain it, make you believe that all is possible.

These dreams guide you to become who you are meant to be, not just for you but for everyone else, too. By living your best life, using your God-given gifts, you will give love and model passion and that makes those around you better.

This book will guide you through a process, illustrated with lessons of spiritual teachers and life experiences, to recognize and live God's dream for you.

This process follows an organizational development model called Appreciative Inquiry. Although this model is typically used in corporations and in educational support services, this book applies it in guiding you to a more abundant life, a life that brings you joy, a life that brings joy to others in need.

Surely some aspects of your life are going well. Certain parts of your life may be filled with blessings, and you are using your gifts and talents in fruitful ways. Thank God for such blessings, and those who make them possible. You will be invited to increase these gifts and talents, to use them for God's glory.

Surely some aspects of your life are not fulfilling, or leave you yearning for more. Some situations that you see in the world and within your very self may require a new, creative response to uphold and affirm human dignity. You and your dreams can do that.

My writing this very book is one such example. After fifteen years of working with and supporting college-aged, junior high school, and high school students, I felt a calling to put pen to paper. I saw and continue to see so many young people (and people of all ages) chasing false dreams of fame and fortune rather than sharpening their God-given tools to help those most in need. The more division grows in the world, the greater the need to build unity. This book offers a strategy to do just that.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus asks His disciples, “Do you also wish to go away?” (Jn 6:67). In asking this, Jesus seems heartbroken. His ministry and His purpose required his friends to accept this invitation of life of love, and he does not know if they will stay or if they will go.

Will they preach and live this gospel of love?

Will they heal the broken, bring together the divided, and love the unloved?

Today Jesus asks you this same question.

Will you leave too? Or will you stay?

Will you let Christ be your inner guide to true freedom and to unconditional love?

Will you be the answer to someone’s prayers?

Will you allow your dreams to come true?

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This book is the result of one of my dreams. I always felt that I was meant to write it, but it wasn’t easy. My journey took me down many broken roads. Through it all, I knew deep within that I was born to write. That sense did not always captured my attention and my time, but it in the depth of my heart a steady, quiet voice was calling me, urging me, to write of God’s love for us, and how we can express that love in many ways and vocations.

At a young age, I knew my vocations. A voice deep within called me to be a spouse, a father, a writer. At times, none of it seemed possible. Now, all are have come about.

I felt a steady, sometimes nagging, yet empowering invitation from God telling me that this is what I was meant to do. I was created for this. And the universe provided nudges along the way.

Recently, as I was struggling to write an earlier version of this Introduction, I was feeling down. At a brewery in Brooklyn I saw a man wearing a t-shirt that said: "Write like you're running out of time." That message was random, but urgent. It was just the shove I needed to get back on course. Later that week, I came upon something that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said to junior high school graduates in Philadelphia in 1967: "When you discover what you are going to be in your life, set out to do it as if God Almighty called you at this particular moment in history to do it."²

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While writing this book, I faced several social and personal challenges. They allowed me to discover my voice in a deeper way, one that I could not have anticipated or imagined. At one time I had found peace in being an empathetic listener, holding back in the gray of life. But personal, national, and global issues forced me to move from a comfortable middle to what was right. Family tragedy forced me to look deeply within and without, and so learn more about myself and more about God's unconditional mercy and love.

A random message, a personal tragedy can open up for us a point of departure. We discover a road to something more.

Joseph Campbell writes:

The adventure of the hero represents the moment in his life when he achieved illu-

mination, the nuclear moment when, while still alive, he found and opened the road to the light beyond the dark walls of our living death.³

You are called to be a hero, and so a hero for others. You set off on the road to the light by recognizing your dreams and accepting them as a mandate. At times you finally welcome these dreams because a crack opens up in your armor. At other times, you pursue your dreams because you are finally ready to be your true self. The dreams discussed here are not external, but internal. They are the dreams God has for you and for all of God's beautiful creation.

God does not dream that we succeed as society might suggest. God's dream is that we succeed in being our true self. God knows what we are made for; although we may not yet see the path for which we are made, it lies before us, waiting for us to see the light and pursue it.

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This book provides strategies for envisioning your unique path. These pages help you recognize what you are truly called to be, what you are truly called to do for others.

Part I (chapters 1-3) identify who God is to you, and how God is calling you to bring to life God's dreams, found in the depth of your heart and soul. These three chapters will help you name who God is to you.

The rest of the book uses the wisdom and strategies of Appreciative Inquiry to outline clear and exciting steps to identifying and fulfilling God's dreams for you and for the world. The steps of Appreciative Inquiry include reflective activities to identify your gifts and talents, discover your dreams, and put them into action. This process makes up *Part II (chapters 4-6)*, *Part III (chapters 7-9)*, and *Part IV (chapters 10-11)*.

As you prepare to set off on this journey, it is critical to recognize a fundamental principle of this approach. That principle is love. And this love is God.

The core of who we are is love. Many faith traditions and spiritualities believe that we are made in the image and likeness of God. And God is love.

Our own life experiences provide insights into this love. They reveal God's unconditional and deep love for each and every person.

Consider moments when you felt an overwhelming sense of love for another. These moments provide glimpses of God's love for you, for each and every person.

It could be in a new relationship, where you can think only about that individual. It could be in a sacred ritual where you pledge yourself to that person. It could be after fifty years, when you watch that partner take his or her last breath.

It could be when a woman feels a child growing within her, or when a new baby holds your finger for that first time. It could be when you see your loved one truly happy, or when you can do nothing but simply be with loved ones as they mourn. God's love could be reflected in the encounter with a man living on the street, or a senior citizen sitting alone. It could be the moment when someone you love leaves or is taken away, or when you are struck by the pain of a person's poverty or illness.

Love captures all of this. It is what made Gandhi, in his desire for peace and justice, refuse to eat. It is what made Jesus cry when his friend Lazarus died. It is what brings us to sacrifice our own life, in small and big ways, for another person.

All such experiences let us see the love of our true self, a self that is divine. Recognizing that such love is courageous can change our life's narrative. Love reveals itself in many ways, but distractions constantly confront us, noises that

prevent us from being free, from seeing the face of God within one another and within ourselves.

In *Here and Now* Henri Nouwen notes, “Spiritual reading is reading with an inner attentiveness to the movement of God’s Spirit in our outer and inner lives. With that attentiveness, we will allow God to read us and to explain to us what we are truly about.”⁴

Allow these pages to let God explain to you your very existence. Consider this book as a gift to discover what you are truly about, to discover God’s dream for you. That is a dream for all of us in our universality and connectedness. And as I was reminded in Brooklyn by a t-shirt, we have no time to lose.

PART I

EMBRACING GOD'S DREAM

CHAPTER 1

APPRECIATING YOU & GOD

Every fall semester, I teach a first-year seminar course at St. John's University in Queens, New York. My initial lecture begins with the following question: "Why are you here?"

Every year the students are puzzled, and seek clarification by asking their own questions, such as:

- "Why are we here in class?"
- "Why are we here on earth at this time in human history?"
- "Why are we alive?"

The last clarifying question has the greatest implications.

"Why are we alive?"

It is a question that ancient philosophers wrestled with, that all religions attempt to answer. We all struggle with this one, yet how you answer drives all other questions and answers.

For eighteen-year-olds on their first day of college, such a question can be overwhelming. It is a question that we revisit throughout the semester as they are form their identity and future.

As challenging as the question is, the answer is quite simple.

The answer is to love God, ourselves, and others.

The Golden Rule

This love that guides us is formulated in the golden rule, true to all faith traditions. It is what Jesus responded with when asked about the greatest of the commandments (Mt 7:12). Greek philosopher Isocrates, over 300 years before Jesus lived, said “Do not do to others that which angers you when they do it to you.”⁵

From the Hadith in the Islamic tradition, the prophet Muhammed said, “That which you want for yourself, seek for mankind That which you want for yourself, seek for mankind.”⁶

Buddha, in the sixth century BCE, said, “Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.”⁷

In Sikhism, the Golden Rule is similar: “Precious like jewels are the minds of all. To hurt them is not at all good. If thou desirest thy Beloved, then hurt thou not anyone’s heart.”⁸

The Tao Tè Ching in the sixth century BCE, wrote, “The sage has no heart of his own, but takes the heart of the people as his heart.”⁹

Similarly, Confucius said, “What you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others.”¹⁰

Throughout history, we find the common thread of this similar rule or guide. No wonder it is known as the “golden” rule.

We are connected more than we can imagine. It is heartbreaking that wars are made in the name of religion when this commandment of love is at the core of who we are as people of faith.

We must start holding this rule as a sacred truth that can heal and unite our world.

Loving our God, ourselves, and one another is the answer to why we live. Throughout the centuries, and woven through our faith traditions, we find our purpose.