



DREAMING IN **3D**

Finding and Following God's Amazing Plan for Your Life

DOUG CLAY



Influence

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1 The Source of a Dream

The thing is to understand myself, to see what God really wants me to do; the thing is to find a truth which is true for me, to find the idea for which I can live and die.

—Søren Kierkegaard

People discover their dreams by discovering God. His creative work didn't stop when He finished the days of creation. He's still helping men and women of all ages uncover the most rewarding purpose life can offer. We aren't limited by our financial condition or family background. In fact, God delights in overcoming obstacles and fulfilling the dreams of people who might be passed over by others. The only raw materials we need to find and follow God's dream for our lives are faith and creativity. I believe God has incredible things for each one of us—if only we'll pursue Him passionately, listen carefully, and walk courageously in the direction He leads.

Too often, however, people live in the gray twilight of empty hearts and small (if any) dreams. Author Kenneth Hildebrand explained:

The poorest of all men is not the one without a nickel to his name. He is the fellow without a dream. . . . [He is like] a great ship made for

the mighty ocean but trying to navigate in a millpond. He has no far port to reach, no lifting horizon no precious cargo to carry. His hours are absorbed in routine and petty tyrannies. Small wonder if he gets dissatisfied, quarrelsome, and “fed up.” One of life’s greatest tragedies is a person with a 10-by-12 capacity and a two-by-four soul.¹

When I speak on the topic of dreaming in 3D, people sometimes ask, “Is it really possible to dream this way and experience the fulfillment

One of life’s greatest tragedies is a person with a 10-by-12 capacity and a two-by-four soul.

of our dreams?” Yes, it certainly is. I’m confident of this answer because I’ve lived it. In fact, my life has surpassed my greatest dreams. My father died when I was nine years old, and my mother devoted herself to raise me. Both of my parents modeled a life of discovering and fulfilling God’s dream

for their lives. I watched carefully, and their example inspired me. As I often say about them, “They threw me a catchable pass.” I missed my father terribly, but my mother never lost an opportunity to give me the support, encouragement, and direction that I needed in order to find myself, first as a boy and then as a young man. Today, my relationships with my wife, Gail, and our daughters, Ashley and Kaylee, are great delights to me, and the role God has given me challenges me to give my very best each day. I’m thrilled to be where I am, and I look forward to each day’s joys and struggles because I know I’m living out God’s dream for my life.

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God’s dream for me, though, isn’t like His dream for anyone else. Oh, there are some similarities, but God doesn’t use a cookie cutter when He

designs our dreams. Each of us has a common calling to know and follow Christ, but beyond this universal invitation, God has carefully crafted each of us in certain ways for specific roles that no one else can fill. In his letter to the Christians in Ephesus, Paul wrote, “He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing” (Ephesians 2:10, *Message*). Another translation says that we are “God’s masterpiece” (NLT), put on display for all to see. God created and crafted each of us for a divine and unique purpose. Our task—our high privilege and deep responsibility—is to uncover God’s purpose for our lives, unpack the gifts and talents He has built into us, and then live each day in reckless abandon to His will. Rick Warren, best-selling author of *The Purpose Driven Life*, commented, “You were made *by* God and *for* God—and until you understand that, life will never make sense.”²

In our culture, we compare almost everything: beauty, investments, cars, vacations, body shape, clothes, gadgets, and every other conceivable characteristic. But when we think about God’s dream for us, we need to realize it’s one of a kind, not one size fits all. Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel observed, “When you die and go to heaven and you meet God, God is not going to say to you, ‘Why didn’t you become a saint? Why didn’t you discover the cure for cancer? Why didn’t you change the world?’ No, all God will ask you at that holy time is, ‘Why didn’t you become you?’”³ In a similar vein, the Danish theologian and philosopher Søren Kierkegaard reflected on God’s plan for his life: “And now, with God’s help, I shall become myself.”⁴ God’s purpose isn’t to bypass us, but to transform us. Isn’t that one of the greatest challenges in life—to become the person God wants us to be? That’s where true fulfillment is found, and it’s the pursuit of a lifetime.

For me, a healthy view of God's dream and of becoming His masterpiece begins by avoiding comparison—in fact, carefully defining who I'm not. I can certainly learn by observing the talents and failures of others, but God didn't call me to be a carbon copy of them. He created me to be an original edition. If I spend my time comparing my status to others and checking where I am on the acceptability scale, my focus is entirely on me, not on God and His purposes. Most of the time, comparison produces either pride (if I think I'm doing better than others) or discouragement (if I'm not doing as well). In other words, comparison kills. The only measuring stick I need is Christ's pure devotion to the Father's will. Men and women whom God is using in big ways inspire me, but I always have to realize that God has a tailor-made curriculum and plan designed just for me. In a beautiful psalm of confession and trust, David wrote,

The LORD says, "I will guide you along the best pathway for your life.

I will advise you and watch over you.

*Do not be like a senseless horse or mule
that needs a bit and bridle to keep it under control"*

(Psalm 32:8,9, NLT).

Some of us don't pursue God's dream because we're deeply disappointed that He hasn't already come through like we hoped He would. When my dad died, it sure seemed like the end of a dream, but God had other plans. In His wisdom and grace, God used that tragedy as an important thread in the tapestry He was weaving for my life. Today, I keep a picture of my father in my teaching notebook to remind me of

his example and inspire me to be the man God wants me to be. As we'll see in many stories in this book, our kind and creative God will use anything—absolutely anything—to get our attention, teach us rich lessons, and put us in a place where He can use us in magnificent ways. One of the joys of my life is that God regularly gives me connections with kids of single parents. I understand them because I've been there, and they instinctively know that I “get” them. In the hands of God, the greatest loss of my life has become a source of my greatest usefulness—to touch the lives of single parents and their children. I wouldn't have chosen that painful path, but God turned tragedy into compassion, love, and powerful words of hope for these dear people. I have no doubt that I wouldn't have the impact God is giving me today if I hadn't suffered the loss of my dad. Through the pain, I had to dig deep to trust in God as my Heavenly Father, experience His love, listen to His direction, and become His partner in the family business of changing lives.

Of course, learning life's richest lessons is a tough curriculum, and like many students, I struggled with the assignments. When I was nineteen and in college, I was furious with God. I accused Him of letting my dad die because He didn't care. I told Him He was uncaring and unjust, and I'd had enough. At a critical moment, God sent a man who had known my father—Coach Forrest Arnold. Coach Arnold didn't know that I was thinking about bailing out on God and His dream for my life. He simply put his hand on my shoulder, looked into my eyes, and said: “Doug, your father would be very proud of you. As long as you're in school here, I consider you to be my own son.” My heart melted. That's what I longed to hear, and God sent a friend of my dad's to give me that message. Coach Arnold kept me from aborting the dream. At that moment, I began to see that God had been at work—mysteriously and

silently behind the scenes—to make me the person He wanted me to be. I began to trust God with my past and my future. It made sense to trust God with my future. Not only does He live outside of time, but He is in the future and already knows what’s going to happen for all eternity. In fact, I now believe that God often uses our deepest wounds and biggest failures to shape our lives and propel us to fulfill His dreams for us.

To be sure, a walk of faith protects us from some of life’s difficulties, but certainly not all of them. Some Christians believe God owes them blessings and peace because they’ve gone to church regularly, quit cussing, given generously, or done some other good deed. We need to remember that the ultimately faithful One, Jesus, wasn’t exempt from suffering. In fact, He was “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” *because* He was faithful to the Father to go to the cross (Isaiah 53:3, KJV).

God sometimes airlifts us out of the storms of life, but far more often, He walks with us through them. He promises blessings, but financial wealth and physical health aren’t the only ways He blesses. Far more important, He blesses us with a sense of His nearness and strength as we endure times of difficulty and darkness. We need to have a richer, deeper, more robust view of the character of God. The example of faithful men and women in Scripture and in history shows us that true greatness is often shaped in the crucible of suffering and heartache. God’s classroom is full of tests, often severe tests. When we encounter them, we don’t need to wonder if He’s left us. He’s right beside us, cheering us on and offering an arm to cling to.

Two Sauls

Some people are afraid they’ve missed out on God’s dream because they’ve failed so badly in the past. Their memories are haunted by family conflict, abuse, abandonment, sexual sins, divorce, addictions, or other

painful experiences. The good news is that God isn't limited by our past. He always has a dream for our future—if we'll take His hand and follow Him. The Bible tells stories of two men named Saul. One started well, but missed God's dream; the other began poorly, but later found and followed it.

To understand the role of the first Saul, let's start a few centuries before he appeared on the scene. The nation of Israel had a magnificent heritage. Around campfires and kitchen tables, they reminded each other of stories of faith. God called Abraham, and He promised the old man a son and a land. Eventually, God miraculously gave Abraham and Sarah the son they longed for. A couple of generations later, God rescued the family from famine and death when one of their own was betrayed and sold into slavery in Egypt, only to rise to become the prime minister of that nation who administered its food supply so people didn't starve during a famine. The people of God multiplied when they lived in Egypt, but they became slaves. Centuries later, God sent Moses to confront Egypt's stubborn Pharaoh and lead the people to freedom and the land of Promise. There, the people planted gardens and vineyards, and they tended livestock, but they had a continual war against their enemies. Finally, they'd had enough of God ruling over them. They cried out for a king, and reluctantly, God granted their wish. He sent His servant Samuel to anoint as king the tallest, most handsome man in the land—Saul.

At first, the new king led his people to great victories. But he hid a tragic flaw—he was, as Samuel put it, “small in [his] own eyes” (1 Samuel 15:17). His insecurity caused him to doubt God and God's purpose for him. Instead of basking in God's love and purpose and living to honor Him, Saul “set up a monument in his own honor” (1 Samuel 15:12).

God sent him to wipe out a brutal nation, the Amalekites. God instructed Saul not to wage war for profit and keep the spoils of battle, but to be an arm of God's judgment and wipe out every living thing. Saul wanted a victory—not to honor God, but to pad his résumé. He allowed his soldiers to keep the best livestock, and he brought Agag the Amalekite king to his camp. To Saul, the insecure king, all these actions made perfect sense. He could offer a huge sacrifice to God and kill the foreign king to look good in front of all his people. But there was a big problem—he had disobeyed God's clear directives. When Samuel confronted him, Saul made excuses and blamed his soldiers, but the prophet would hear none of it. He told Saul:

*Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices
as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD?
To obey is better than sacrifice,
and to heed is better than the fat of rams.
For rebellion is like the sin of divination,
and arrogance like the evil of idolatry.
Because you have rejected the word of the LORD,
he has rejected you as king (1 Samuel 15:22,23).*

At that point, God sent Samuel to anoint another man, David, to be the king of His people. The story of Saul is a sad tale. He had everything going for him. He was tall, dark and handsome; he was wealthy; and he had all the power as the nation's king. But his self-perception betrayed him. He was "small in [his] own eyes," so he spent his life trying to win approval from others. Eventually, he fell on his sword and ended his life.

The second Saul is a mirror image of the first one. After Jesus died, rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven, His ragtag group of followers waited in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit fell on them at Pentecost, and they spoke boldly about the saving grace of Christ to everyone they met. At every point, they faced fierce opposition from the same religious leaders who had stood in Jesus' way. The priests and Pharisees arrested Peter and John, and soon they drew blood by stoning Philip, the first martyr for the cause. As the men who wanted to stone Stephen took off their cloaks to join in the execution, they laid them at the feet of Saul of Tarsus. But Saul wasn't content to remain a passive bystander. He was a rising star in the Jewish community, trained by Gamaliel, one of the foremost rabbis of the day. To squash the movement before it could spread very far, Saul went from city to city to arrest Christians, throw them in jail, and execute them. Stephen may have been the first martyr of the Christian church, but Saul was the first terrorist against it.

When Saul was traveling to Damascus to capture and kill believers, Jesus appeared to him, blinding him with grace and truth. When Saul entered the city, he gave a very different message than the one Jewish leaders expected to hear. He told them that Jesus was, indeed, the long-awaited Messiah, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. From that time, Saul became God's man to take the gospel to the Gentiles across the Roman Empire, and he began using his Roman name, Paul. Did Paul find and follow God's dream for him? Perhaps as much as any human being who ever lived. He traveled thousands of miles to tell people about Jesus. In his wake, churches sprang up all across the empire, and countless people trusted in Christ. Why was Paul so passionate and tenacious? He filled his letters with specific references to how Christ had gripped his heart by His grace. In his first letter to the Corinthians,

he told them that he had been “bought at a price” of Christ’s blood (1 Corinthians 6:20, 7:23). In his second letter to them, he explained his motivation: “For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again” (2 Corinthians 5:14,15). And as he was on his way back to Jerusalem after a grueling trip to visit the churches, he told the leaders of the church in Ephesus, “And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace” (Acts 20:22–24).

For Paul, living in 3D wasn’t always sweet and smooth. He enjoyed the richest blessings in his walk with God and in wonderful relationships with those who found Christ as he spoke to them, but he also endured open hostility from a host of opponents. He was beaten, flogged, imprisoned, stoned, shipwrecked, and forgotten. Still, he knew he was in the center of God’s dream for his life. As he approached the end, he wrote to Timothy, “For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:6–8).

Every day after he met Christ on the road to Damascus, Paul kept himself in the middle of God’s dream for his life, and at the end as he

looked back, he could say, “It’s almost over, and it’s been a great ride.” The blessings of living in 3D don’t end when we die. As Paul mentioned, the most incredible blessings begin when we take our last breath. Living in the center of God’s purpose stores up a crown Christ will put on our heads when we see Him face to face.

Sadly, I know a lot of people like the Saul of the Old Testament. They have incredible advantages of health, wealth, technology, and opportunity, but they sit around complaining that they need more before they’re willing to take a step to honor God. They go to church, but they’re just checking it off their list of things “good people” do. There’s no passion, delight, joy, or gratitude that drives them to love God with all their hearts and serve Him in any way they can.

But thankfully, I know plenty of wonderful people like Saul in the New Testament. If you ask about their stories, they all have checkered pasts. Some were thieves, some were addicts, some had been devastated by abuse, some had sexual hang-ups, some were bitter and selfish, and some endured broken relationships and shattered trust. But they all had a life-changing encounter with Jesus—their own Damascus Road experience—which radically changed them forever. No matter what happened to them in the past, and no matter what sins they committed, they simply can’t get over the astounding fact that Jesus Christ loves them and paid the price to rescue them from sin, meaninglessness, and hell. And their hearts sing for joy.

Putting on Our Glasses

Significant parts of God’s dream for us are universal. They’re in the owner’s manual for every believer. God has transferred all believers from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. Our task each day is

to love God with our whole heart, listen to the Spirit, walk with integrity, and touch the lives of others with compassion. This is God's dream for Billy Graham, and it's His dream for a Christian who works at the car wash; the bank executive and the oil field worker; Wall Street, Main Street, and the pastures; those who are the face of the faith in our communities and those few people ever notice. In his excellent book, *The Call*, Os Guinness defines *calling* this way: "*the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion and dynamism lived out as a response to his summons and service.*"⁵ That's the general dream for all believers, but as we saw in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, God has a specific dream for each individual believer.

How do we find our specific dream? We need to put on our spiritual glasses so we can see more clearly. God uses a combination of factors to show us what He wants us to do. These factors are desire, talent, and opportunity. Dreaming in 3D always involves the interplay of those three things.

Desire

Few of us last long in any endeavor that fails to capture our hearts. When we watch people play professional sports, we sometimes hear them say, "I love this game so much that I'd pay them to let me play!" In the same spirit, some of us go to work each day with a heart of eager anticipation. We love what we do, and we've become good at it. Desire, though, may come from the opposite direction. A few years ago, Bill Hybels, pastor of Willow Creek Community Church near Chicago, said that God's dream is often the product of "holy discontent." We notice that a need isn't being met, and something stirs in our hearts. We want

to do whatever it takes to meet that need. Hybels reminded his readers of the great philosopher, Popeye. When confronted with a problem that cried out for attention, Popeye flexed his muscles and exclaimed, “That’s all I can stands, and I can’t stands it no more!” He then downed a can of spinach and launched into the task.⁶

Our hearts may be gripped by a need at work, in church, at home, in the community, or overseas. Our hearts may break when we see the plight of unwed mothers, the homeless, addicts, earthquake victims, prisoners, sex slaves, victims of other kinds of abuse, or people who haven’t heard the gospel. In response, we can’t sit by and watch. We feel compelled to do something. We may weave our passion to help into our normal schedule, or we may use time after work, on weekends, or in the summer to dive in. We aren’t constrained by the walls of our churches. The Good Samaritan didn’t find the beaten man between the pews; he found him on the side of the road, and he cared for him in every way.

What are things that capture your heart? What needs are going unmet that you feel anxious about? What heartaches in others’ lives keep you up at night? When you watch the news, what brings a tear to your eye? Those may be signs God is uncovering a desire that is connected to His dream for you.

Talent

When we look at great paintings, we notice that different artists use different techniques to paint. In the same way, God has given each of us different talents and abilities to use in fulfilling His dream for us. The list is almost endless. The Scriptures have four lists of spiritual gifts, but they list different sets of abilities (Romans 12:3–8, 1 Corinthians 12:7–11, Ephesians 4:11–13, and 1 Peter 4:10,11). This means that

If several trusted people tell you the same thing—positive or negative—take it to heart.

either the writers needed an editor or the list is bigger than these four lists. I believe the talents God gives us are incredibly varied and almost limitless. We discover them in two ways: trial and error, and feedback. We may not

know what we do well, so we dive in to counsel a troubled friend, lead a small group, take care of a neighbor's kids, administrate a project at work, care for an elderly person, or a hundred other things. Gradually (or not so gradually) we realize, "Hey, that went pretty well, and I really enjoyed it. I could sense God's presence as I did it." That's a sign we're in our sweet spot. Honest feedback from others confirms our perceptions, or in some cases, gives us needed encouragement to keep going. Occasionally, people lack self-perception so much that they think they're doing great but get negative feedback from others. If this happens to you, ask others to give you an objective analysis of what you're doing. If several trusted people tell you the same thing—positive or negative—take it to heart. The focus, though, isn't on our gifts; it's on God. Os Guinness notes, "*God normally calls us along the line of our giftedness, but the purpose of giftedness is stewardship and service, not selfishness.*"⁷

Opportunity

Investing our talents in all kinds of projects implies that we have ample opportunities to try them out. In most families, businesses, and churches, people are more than happy for you to volunteer for a role. If you experience fulfillment and success, everybody wins. If you don't, try something else. Some of us are convinced that we have great talent in an area, but no opportunity surfaces. It's like the lady who is sure she has the gift of singing, but no one around her has the gift of listening to her. To be sure, some roles require a little more effort to find opportunities, but don't expect

them to knock on your door and beg. If you have the desire and you think you have talent in an area, ask for an open door of opportunity.

Alignment

When a gifted artist wants to produce a beautiful sculpture, he doesn't just throw the clay onto the table and hope it works out. When a painter wants to create a masterpiece, she doesn't sling colors on the canvas and hope everything will look good. Artists—especially the most skilled ones—invest time and attention in aligning every feature of their work so that it goes well. In the same way, we need to devote energy and resources in organizing our lives to fulfill the dream God gives us.

In my life, when I sensed God was leading me to vocational Christian ministry, I considered where I might go to college, whom I would date and marry, my choice of friends, and the types of experiences that would equip me. I needed to align my ambitions, talents, and resources with God's dream. Today, years later, I still do the same thing. I'm most fulfilled as I align my daily decisions with God's calling, purpose, and dream for my life. As I have made major decisions that involved ministry and career changes, I have kept a scorecard that reads:

God's man: Does the role fit me?

God's time: Does the timing fit my family and my sense of direction?

God's place: Is God leading me to that particular place with those people?

If those criteria don't line up, I know which choice won't lead me to a 3D dream.

Here's another example: An attorney had been an alcoholic for thirty years, and he had committed adultery with a woman in his office. He

came close to losing everything he valued, but like the Prodigal Son in Jesus' story, he "came to his senses" (Luke 15:17). The attorney met Christ, joined a recovery group, and went through months of counseling with his wife to begin to rebuild trust. Over the course of several years, he uncovered God's dream for him. He desired to help alcoholics find Christ and turn their lives around, and he became a leader in a recovery ministry at his church. By his own admission, he had been "a self-absorbed fool" when he was addicted. But today, he is known for his humility and generosity. As desire, talent, and opportunity have become clear, he has aligned his time and money for a more powerful impact on his clients, co-workers, friends, and dozens of people in his community.

People sometimes make a category mistake and rank a pastor's dream above a plumber's dream, but there is no sacred/secular dichotomy, no higher or lower order of dreams, no 3D or rabbit ears. God's dreams for each of us are equal in His sight. When Martin Luther launched the Protestant Reformation in the early sixteenth century, he focused on the power of grace to change lives, but he also revolutionized our understanding of the meaning of work. For centuries, the Church had taught that being a pastor, monk, or nun was valuable to God, but being a farmer, carpenter, or mother had little, if any, meaning. Luther disagreed. He wrote:

The works of monks and priests, however holy and arduous they may be, do not differ one whit in the sight of God from the works of the rustic laborer in the field or the woman going about her household tasks, but... all works are measured before God by faith alone. . . . Indeed, the menial housework of a manservant or maidservant is often more acceptable to God than all the fasting and other works of a monk or priest, because the monk or priest lacks faith.⁸

In fact, Luther turned the false teaching upside down because he taught we are all priests who love and serve God in our vocations. The question every church must answer is not, “Is the pastor fulfilling God’s dream?” but, “Are all the people in the church finding and fulfilling God’s dream?”

Never Too Late

One of the most powerful and consistent principles in the Bible is that it’s never too late to get in on God’s dream. Over and over again, we find men and women who blew it—big time—but God graciously restored them and used them. God isn’t looking for perfect people. He’s looking for repentant, responsive people. We could look at many different examples in the Bible, but Peter stands out. He was the chief spokesman among the twelve disciples who walked with Jesus. As Jesus ate His last meal with them before His death, He told them that He would suffer and die. Peter insisted, “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death” (Luke 22:33). But, of course, a few hours later as he warmed himself next to a fire, he denied that he even knew Jesus. His failure crushed him. As the rooster crowed, he “went outside and wept bitterly” (Luke 22:52). A few hours later, Jesus was killed cruelly. In the days that followed, Peter concluded that he was washed up as a disciple, but Jesus had other plans. When Peter and some others went fishing, probably because they had given up on the cause, Jesus appeared on the shore and cooked them some fish. The smell of a charcoal fire that morning undoubtedly reminded Peter of his worst failure, when he denied Jesus by another fire days before. But Jesus gently restored him. Peter had denied Jesus three times, so Jesus asked him three times, “do you love me?” (John 21:15–17). The fisherman received assurance of Jesus’

forgiveness, and he soon became the mouthpiece of the Church, leading thousands to faith on its first day of existence (Acts 2:41).

If it wasn't too late for Peter—or Abraham or Jacob or Rahab or Samson or David or Josiah or many others in the Scriptures—it's not too late for us. If we'll let Him, God will use our greatest failures to soften our hearts and fill us with compassion for others who similarly suffer or sin. The Son of God is fully aware of our flaws and our capacity to fail, but He still says, "I have a dream for you." That gives me a world of hope.

Ultimately, God's dream isn't an easy life, but a rich and meaningful one. If we're willing to take His hand, it's the ride of a lifetime. Theologian J. I. Packer gives us hope and encouragement about our most painful experiences:

This is what all the work of grace aims at—an even deeper knowledge of God, and an ever closer fellowship with Him. Grace is God drawing us sinners closer and closer to Him. How does God in grace prosecute this purpose? Not by shielding us from assault by the world, the flesh, and the devil, nor by protecting us from burdensome and frustrating circumstances, nor yet by shielding us from troubles created by our own temperament and psychology; but rather by exposing us to all these things, so as to overwhelm us with a sense of our own inadequacy, and to drive us to cling to Him more closely. This is the ultimate reason, from our standpoint, why God fills our lives with troubles and perplexities of one sort or another—it is to ensure that we shall learn to hold Him fast.⁹

“Here’s the Church”

We don’t find and follow God’s dream in a vacuum. We need one another to point us, prod us, and protect us. We are all more effective and fulfilled when others step into our lives to help us uncover our potential and share the wisdom we need when we get stuck. And sometimes, we just need a smile and a hug.

I heard a story about a little girl who had lost her arm in an accident. Her family moved, and she had to go to a new school—a private school at a church. The little girl was anxious about how she might be received. A few kids stared at her empty sleeve, but the teacher welcomed her warmly. Later that morning, the class recited the familiar rhyme,

*Here’s the church, and here’s the steeple,
Open the door and see all the people.*

As the class did the hand motions, the teacher looked at the little girl. The boy next to her leaned over and smiled. He put his hand with hers, they did the motions together. All it took was a little love and creativity to make a little girl’s dream of being included come true. We have that same opportunity many times each day as we pass by people. If we notice them, we might play a key role in helping them find and follow God’s dream.

At the end of each chapter, you’ll find some questions. When I read books, I get far more out of them if I take a few minutes to reflect on the principles the author presents. These questions are designed for two purposes: for individual reflection and, if you use this book in a group, to stimulate discussion. The goal isn’t to rush through them to fill in the blanks. Take your time, pray, and ask the Lord to help you uncover His dream for you, your family, and your friends.

What's Your Take?

1. Who are some people you know (maybe only one) who lives a life of purpose and meaning? What about their lives is most attractive to you?
2. Read Ephesians 2:10. How does it encourage you to think that you are God's masterpiece? What difference would it (or does it) make to see yourself that way?
3. What are some reasons people miss God's dream? How does missing it affect them spiritually, emotionally, relationally, and physically?
4. How would you describe the differences between the two Sauls? Which one best represents your life today? Explain your answer.
5. Describe how people uncover their dream by paying attention to desire, talents, and opportunities. Where are you in this process?
6. On a scale of 0 (not clear at all) to 10 (crystal clear), how clear is God's dream for you? Explain your answer.
7. How does it encourage you to think of Peter's example that it's never too late to find and follow your dream?
8. Can you articulate God's dream for your life, or are you still in process of defining and describing it? If it's already clear, state it here. If there are still some pieces of the puzzle that aren't in place yet, take some time to pray, think, and write the answers to these questions:

Desire: How do you want God to use you? What kind of impact excites you? What are some evidences of "holy discontent" in your life? What needs in others' lives capture your heart?

Talent: What do you do at work, at home, and for the church that “feels right,” like God’s hand is on you when you do it? What are the abilities others identify and affirm in your life? What are some skills that you want to develop even more?

Opportunity: What are some roles you’ve already stepped into that are fulfilling and fruitful? What are some roles that are interesting to you? Where have you been asked to take more responsibility?

9. As you’ve considered these three factors (desire, talent, and opportunity), has your dream gotten any clearer? If not, what are some steps you can take to identify these factors more clearly? Don’t be alarmed if it’s not clear yet. Finding a 3D dream takes time, experience, feedback, and tenacity. I trust that as you read this book, God will reveal His direction to you.

Prayer of Commitment

Lord Jesus, thank You that it’s never too late, and You’re more than happy to show me Your dream for my life. Thank You for Your goodness and grace. Lord, I’m open. Show me who You want me to be and what You want me to do. I’m Yours. Amen.