

20 WAYS TO
MAKE EVERY
DAY BETTER

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MAKE EVERY
DAY BETTER

Simple, Practical Changes with
Real Results

JOYCE MEYER



NEW YORK • NASHVILLE

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I came that they may have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance [to the full, till it overflows].

John 10:10

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INTRODUCTION

“I’m just having a bad day.”

I can’t tell you how many times I’ve heard people mutter those words (or muttered them myself). Traffic is backed up, you spill your coffee before you even get a sip, the kids are driving you crazy, the kitchen faucet is dripping, your boss is in a mood, and the car is making that funny noise again. *I’m just having a bad day!*

While there aren’t many days when *all* of those things happen at once (thankfully), you and I both know that any *one* of those challenges can test our temperament, pollute our perspective, or hijack our joy. Far too often, we write it off as a “bad day” and give up until tomorrow. *Tomorrow will be better*, we hope, while subconsciously waving the white flag of surrender on today.

But the problem with “bad days” is they tend to pile up—have you noticed that? A bad day becomes a bad week. A bad week becomes a bad month. And before you know it, a bad month becomes a bad year. Many of us spend the last week of every December saying the exact same thing: “I can’t wait until this year is over!”

Well, if you can relate to that, if you’ve ever given up on *today*, waiting for *tomorrow*, I wrote this book for you. You see, I don’t believe for one moment that you have to go through life held hostage by your circumstances. It doesn’t matter what happens around you, if you’ve accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior, you have the Spirit of God *within* you. Peace, joy, strength, patience . . .

it's all yours in Christ. Your hope and happiness is not dependent on the world—the Bible says that “*He Who lives in you is greater (mightier) than he who is in the world*” (1 John 4:4).

Sure, there are going to be tough days when things don't go as planned. We all know what it's like to deal with difficulties over the course of the day. Sometimes it's minor (the interview goes poorly, the baby is teething, you cut yourself shaving), and sometimes it's major (you get laid-off from work, the doctor orders a CT scan, your marriage is in trouble). But *whatever* challenges each day brings, you don't have to let those challenges determine your outlook on life. There are things you can do to make your day better!

Sunny or raining, good report or bad, surrounded by friends or standing alone, on top of the mountain or down in the valley—you can enjoy every day of this life God has given you. It's not about what happens *around* you . . . it's about what is happening *in* you! Your decision on how to react to a circumstance is much more important than the circumstance itself. I am thrilled to tell you that you don't have to just *settle* for a bad day; there are many things you can choose to do that will make your day better! I don't like the feeling of being helpless, and I doubt that you do either; therefore, understanding that I have choices available that can make my day better is very encouraging to me, and I hope it will also be encouraging to you.

In more than forty years of ministry, I've noticed that most people don't even realize they are living lives far short of God's best. They've settled for “good enough” and “Oh well, it could be worse,” not realizing that God's will is for their lives to get better and better, shining “*more and more (brighter and clearer) until [it reaches its full strength and glory in] the perfect day [to be prepared]*” (Proverbs 4:18).

Is that you? Is it possible that you've set up camp in the land of "trying to make it through the day," when God wants you to move into the land of "truly enjoying each day"? If you're not sure, let me pose a few questions that might help you:

- Is your happiness each day determined by outside factors: How coworkers treat you? What kind of a mood your spouse is in? Unforeseen challenges or obstacles that appear? Or even the weather?
- Do you sometimes feel like you're on an emotional roller coaster—delighted one day but discouraged the next?
- Do you ever dread the day or week ahead, wondering what might go wrong?
- Is your life—marriage, career, family, relationships—semi-good, but you would like it to be much better?
- Do you sometimes feel jealous of the life someone else has?
- Have you settled far short of reaching your original goal?

If you answered yes to even one of those questions, I'm so glad you picked up this book for two reasons: (1) I know how frustrating those feelings can be (trust me, I've been there), and (2) I know how freeing it can be when you learn how to maximize each day and enjoy God's best. And that's what I believe God is going to do for you!

You see, I know God has something profoundly better for your life. And as you and I go through these pages together, I believe God is going to encourage, instruct, and inspire you to see and experience that better life.

The truth is, God wants you to enjoy your life *every* day. Not just occasionally. Not just when the air is clear and the birds are chirping. And not just on weekends or vacations. Every day is

a new day with God on your side . . . and that's a new chance to enjoy the unique, wonderful, destiny-filled life He has given you.

One of my favorite verses in the Bible is John 10:10, because in that verse Jesus promises, "*I came that they may have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance [to the full, till it overflows].*" This is a life-changing, hope-inspiring Scripture, because it clearly tells us that God doesn't just want us to be alive, He wants us to *enjoy* being alive. He wants us to live with joy—abundant, overflowing joy!

My passion as a teacher of God's Word is to help you learn how to live the life Jesus came to give you. That's why we've titled our television program *Enjoying Everyday Life*, and that's why I'm so very excited about this book! I've divided *20 Ways to Make Every Day Better* into four equally important sections: "When You Awake," "New Steps to Take," "Patterns to Break," and "Before It's Too Late." These sections are meant to systematically take you through your day and show you what God's Word teaches about making that day—and every day—count. I believe you can open any chapter, at any time, and apply the principle in that chapter to immediately make your day better.

So if you're ready to experience a new level of joy, contentment, and excitement about your life, get ready. This is a book full of biblical instruction, practical application, stories to inspire, and helpful observations. When you are done with our time together, I believe you're going to have the tools you need to make every single day of your life better. And instead of muttering, "I'm just having a bad day," you'll be shouting, "I'm having *another* great day with God!"

SECTION I

When You Awake

In the morning You hear my voice, O Lord; in the morning I prepare [a prayer, a sacrifice] for You and watch and wait [for You to speak to my heart].

Psalm 5:3

CHAPTER 1

Have a Conversation with God

To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.

—Martin Luther

Foundations are important. And they are important for this simple reason: A foundation determines how big, how strong, and how successful something can be.

For example, if you had the opportunity to build the home of your dreams—with a bedroom for each of your kids, several guest rooms so friends and family could come and visit, lots of space for hosting parties, a big enough kitchen for the family to hang out in and chat while you cooked, and, most important, big, big, big closets—you'd have to lay a large enough foundation to accommodate such a home.

First things first. The ground has to be leveled ahead of time, the exact dimensions of the home determined, all the plumbing has to be laid out, and the concrete has to be poured and tested. And guess what? All this has to happen before you can enjoy seeing any of the new home!

Well, the same thing that is true for building the home of your dreams is true for building the life of your dreams. The way you start each day (the foundation you lay) will determine how enjoyable and how successful your day is going to be. You can't expect

The way you start each day (the foundation you lay) will determine how enjoyable and how successful your day is going to be.

to have a day filled with joy, optimism, opportunities, and personal progress if you haven't given yourself the right foundation.

If you wake up grumbling and complaining, you've already set yourself up for failure. If you begin the morning dreading the tasks ahead of you, it's that much harder to be successful. If you laid in bed too long and had to start the day rushing around, frantically trying to get dressed and ready to go, you're probably going to feel stressed-out and running behind schedule all day long. Foundations are important.

This is why the very first chapter in this book is "Have a Conversation with God." It's the foundation for this book...and it can be the foundation for your day. And trust me when I say: A conversation with God every morning is the very best foundation you can lay! As a matter of fact, I have discovered in my own life that the only way I can have a good day is if I take time to have a conversation with God before I begin trying to "do" anything else. Take time to "be" with God before you try to "do" what needs to be done that day. That's what prayer is—a conversation with God! It is a comfortable (nonpretentious) conversation between two friends.

The Gospels tell us much about the miracles, the teachings, and the heart of Jesus, but they don't give us a lot of details about His schedule. But Mark 1:35 is an exception. This verse of Scripture says, "*And in the morning, long before daylight, He got up and went out to a deserted place, and there He prayed.*" What an important Scripture! It's a peek into the life of Jesus. Jesus spent time in the morning alone with God and praying. I can't help but think

that if it was important to Jesus to start His day conversing with God, it should be important for us, too!

Wait! Before you tell me you are not a “morning person,” let me simply say that even if you spend a few minutes conversing with God before you begin anything else, it will bring great blessing to the rest of your day. Then, if you need more time to wake up, or even if you prefer evenings for your “God-time,” that is fine, but at least begin with God! Let Him know that you want and need Him and His direction and help for your day and for each thing you do throughout the day.

Talking to God

I think some people don't begin their day talking to God because they don't realize what a great honor and privilege it is to be invited to do so.

I am purposely using the terminology “talk to God” and “have a conversation with God” in this chapter, rather than the word “prayer” exclusively, because that is what prayer is. I think we hear so often that we need to pray that perhaps we tend to over-spiritualize the idea and end up seeing it as something that is a job or an obligation rather than an honor. It doesn't have to be eloquent, or even necessarily long, but trying to live without it is foolish. Prayer is asking God to meet your need or someone else's. It's praising Him and thanking Him. It's about committing things to Him and honestly sharing your worries and concerns with Him. There is no subject off-limits with God—you can talk to Him about anything without the fear of being misunderstood, judged critically, or reproached for your faults.

When we talk to God, we open the door for Him to come into

our day—into our problems and situations—and do what we cannot do on our own. We are actually inviting the power of God into our lives. Talking to God about your life doesn't immediately change your circumstances, but it does change something in you and gives you the strength you need to go through your day with a smile on your face. It helps you believe that you are not alone, and that is important for all of us.

When you pray for others, it changes them. We are usually unsuccessful in changing people, even though they may truly need to be changed, but God is very good at it. I recently read something that was very interesting to me. When we pray for other people, God puts thoughts in their mind, thoughts that they would not have had otherwise! They may begin desiring a change in their behavior or choices and not even realize it is God leading them. When we try to talk people into changing, or try to force them to change, they resent us and often become more determined than ever to stay the way they are. When God talks to someone, He is much more persuasive than we are.

When Dave and I got married in 1967, I had many problems in my soul and behavior from the abusive past I had endured. Dave didn't realize how serious my problems were, or even that I had them. Like many people who get married, we knew very little about each other when we said, "I do." Thankfully, Dave was a man who understood the power of prayer, and instead of trying to talk me into changing my attitudes and the way I behaved, he talked to God about me! He confronted me from time to time about my temper or selfishness, but mainly he was a good example, and he trusted God to do what needed to be done.

He has shared that at times, he became so discouraged that he would take a drive and just cry about the situation. He didn't

know what to do, but he believed that God did, so he continued to trust and talk to God. He asked God not only to change me, but to help him be patient and not to give up.

Don't struggle and end up frustrated from trying to make things happen that only God can do. Invite Him into every area of your life and watch Him work. I not only suggest that you have a conversation with God in the morning, but that you continue talking with Him throughout your day. The more you talk to Him, the better your day will be.

Listening for God's Voice

Since a conversation involves talking and listening, I want to encourage you to believe you can hear from God, as well as talk to Him. There are many people who aren't sure if God really speaks to people. They may believe He did in biblical times, but they're uncertain if He still does today. And because of this uncertainty, they wonder:

- Is God really interested in my life?
- Does He care about all the little details and does He want to get involved?
- Can I ask God to help me after all the things I have done that are wrong?

I am happy to tell you from God's Word, and my own personal experience as well as that of others, that God talks, and He will definitely talk to you. But to hear Him, you must be listening.

As a young believer, I went to church for years without knowing that God talks to people. I sincerely loved Jesus, I observed all the religious rules and holidays, and I went to church every

Sunday. I was really doing all that I knew to do at that time. But it wasn't enough to satisfy my longing for God. No matter how many church services I attended, it didn't quench the thirst I had for a deeper fellowship with the Lord. I needed to talk to Him about my past and hear Him talk to me about my future. But at that time, nobody taught me that God wants to be intimately involved in the details of our lives and that He speaks to us in many different ways. No one offered a solution for the dissatisfied feelings I lived with.

Through studying God's Word, I learned that He does want to talk to us and He does have a plan for our lives that will lead us to a place of peace and contentment. I

Good communication is the basis for a good relationship!

began to see that a relationship with God is about more than doing all the right things and attending all the right events.

My relationship with God is deeply personal. And communication is an important part of any personal relationship. I think it is fair to say that good communication is the basis for a good relationship!

Not only could I talk to God about everything I was going through, but I could listen and expect Him to speak to me in whatever way He desired. And the same is true for you. If you want to see your life get better, it is essential that you believe that God will speak to you and learn the ways in which He does it.

When I talk about hearing the voice of God, people often ask, "Joyce, how do we hear God? Does He speak to us in an audible voice?" Well, God certainly *can* speak in an audible voice if He wants to (the Bible gives examples of this), but more often than not, God speaks to us in other ways. Let me show you some of the ways God will speak to you:

God will speak to you through His Word.

The number one way God speaks to us is through His Word. That's why it is so important not just to read the Bible, but also to study it. Instruction, promises, hope, direction, examples—it's all there! If you want to hear the voice of God, I encourage you to spend some time each day in the Word. Everything the Bible says is God's Word to you! Yes, it is for everyone, but I urge you to take it as a personal letter to you specifically. When you read it, believe it is God speaking directly to you about His will for your life.

God will speak to you through internal peace.

If you're asking God to help you make a decision, what is the option that gives you the most peace? Many times, it is this peace that is telling you the direction to take. Peace always accompanies God's instruction for your life.

God will speak to you through wisdom and common sense.

One of the most practical ways to hear from God is through wisdom and common sense. Wisdom discerns truth in a situation, while common sense gives good judgment in what to do about the truth. I consider wisdom supernatural because it isn't taught by men but is a gift from God.

God will speak to you through an internal, still, small voice.

When we are born again, we are made alive in our spirit to be sensitive to the voice of God. We hear His whisper and we feel His

nudging even if we can't tell where it's coming from. He guides us deep within our heart. He convicts, corrects, and directs us by a still, small voice heard in our spirit.

I often refer to this as a “knowing” deep inside. We simply know what is right to do. We feel a certainty that isn't coming from our minds, but from a deeper place within us.

There are other ways God can speak to us, too. He speaks through other people, through nature, through personal conviction, through your own thoughts, through natural things that happen around us, through circumstances, through sermons, worship songs, Bible-based books—these are just a few of the other ways God speaks to His children. The Bible also shows us that at times, He speaks through dreams or visions. All of these ways that God speaks should agree with His written Word. If God's Word (the Bible) doesn't give us exact instructions about something, we can still find within its pages the nature of God, and knowing that enables us to discern between a message from God and one that might not be from God.

A Two-Way Street

As you can see, having a conversation with God is a two-way street. It's not just telling God all the things you need, and it's not just sitting in silence waiting for something to happen. Prayer is about talking and then listening as you go about your day. And just like any other relationship, talking and listening is crucial if you want to grow closer together.

We begin our journey by talking, and then listening and watching for God to speak. He may not answer you quickly, as people often do, but He will make His will known in due time. I recently heard a powerful man of God say that we learn to hear

from God by making mistakes. God doesn't require us to do everything perfectly the first time. If your heart is right and you truly want God's direction, He will continue teaching you until the day comes when someone may ask you, "How can I hear from God?" and you will be able to teach them and pass on what you have learned over the years.

I want to conclude this chapter by strongly recommending that at any time throughout the day, if there is anything that seems to be draining your energy or joy and causing you to want to say, "I'll be glad when this day is over," or "This is just not a good day," stop right then and talk to God about the thing that is robbing you of the good day He wants you to have. You can talk to Him anytime, anywhere, about anything, and He is listening!

Things to remember:

- The same thing that is true for building the home of your dreams is true for building the life of your dreams. The way you start each day (the foundation you lay) will determine how joyful and successful your day is going to be.
- When you talk to God, it should be natural to do so. He is your friend and He is interested in everything about you.
- God still speaks today . . . and He wants to speak to you!
- Having a conversation with God is a two-way street. It's not just telling God all the things you need, and it's not just sitting in silence waiting for something to happen. It is about talking *and* listening.

Suggestions for Putting “Have a Conversation with God” into Practice

- Pour yourself a cup of coffee (or whatever you like to drink) tomorrow morning and spend time talking to God until you finish your cup.
- Talk to God just like you would a friend. Ask questions, share your frustrations, be totally and completely honest.
- Be patient with yourself while you are learning how to listen to and hear from God. Don't feel defeated if you make a mistake. We are His children and it always takes children a while to learn new things.
- Before you go to bed, take some time to reflect on the day. When you do this, you will often see in retrospect how God spoke to you and guided you through the day. You may realize that something you thought to be a *coincidence* or a *lucky break* was actually God speaking.

CHAPTER 2

Dream Big

Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die, life is a broken-winged bird that cannot fly.

—Langston Hughes

A friend recently told me about a conversation he had with a group of children. His nieces had come over to play with his own kids, so he took them all out for breakfast just to get the rowdy crew out of the house. Over donuts, he asked the elementary-aged kids, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Without hesitation, the children began excitedly to tell him their answers. *My dream is to be a veterinarian! My dream is to be a video game programmer! My dream is to be a worship leader! A hockey player! A nurse!*

My friend told me, “Joyce, it wasn’t the professions that got my attention as much as how each response began—‘*My dream is to be a . . .*’” He hadn’t asked them about their dream; he had asked them what they wanted to be. But in true childlike fashion, each child spoke with wonder about their “dream.”

When I heard this story, I couldn’t help but think about how Jesus encouraged us to become like little children (see Matthew 18:3). Their faith, their sense of wonder, their optimism, and their ability to dream—what wonderful traits to have. Children aren’t scarred by failure or burdened by doubt. The exact opposite is true. They are hopeful and excited about their future!

I think one of the best things we can do in order to make every day better is to start dreaming again. Dreaming about what the future can hold. Dreaming about what new things we can accomplish with God's help.

One of the best things we can do in order to make every day better is to start dreaming again.

Dreaming about the exciting, adventurous things God has in store for our lives! Keep in mind, I'm not talking about wishful thinking or daydreaming about what life could have been. I'm encouraging you to do so much more—dream big, bold, faith-filled dreams for your life. God's Word says that He can do much more than we can ever imagine or dream (see Ephesians 3:20).

Setting Daily Goals

Setting daily goals helps us see daring dreams come true. That's because dreams are realized one step at a time . . . one decision at a time . . . one goal at a time.

Imagine for a moment that you are a world-class Olympic archer. You've practiced for years, perfecting your craft. When there is a bow in your hand and a target before you, there is no one better than you. You've put in the time. You've practiced for years and years. And now you have an opportunity to showcase your skill on the world stage. You're an expert archer, the best in the world—the gold medal is within your grasp!

But as you step up to compete, the cameras trained on you, your country's hope for an Olympic gold medal resting on your shoulders, an unforeseen problem presents itself: there is no target. You've got your bow in one hand, an arrow ready in the other, but you have nothing to shoot at. Puzzled, you inform the judges,

“Um, excuse me, there is no target. What am I supposed to shoot at?” But the panel of Olympic judges just shrugs at you dispassionately. “Shoot at whatever you’d like,” they say. “A target isn’t really necessary.”

Not wanting to disappoint the millions watching on television or anger the judges assigned to your sport, you pull the arrow back, and with muscles tight and your heart pounding, you shoot the arrow forward . . . into oblivion. There is no target. There is no measure of success. You have no idea if you’ve performed well or poorly. *What just happened?*

Obviously, the above scenario is pretty absurd. No athlete would compete in a competition where there is no measure for success. If there is no goal—if there is no target—it is a waste of time to participate. In order for anything to be realized, a goal must be set forth.

I tell you that story because I am amazed at the number of people who begin their day with no goals. They wake up in the morning with no plan for the day. Instead of establishing goals and things they would like to accomplish before the day is over, they just float aimlessly through the day. Like an archer with no target, they have nothing to shoot at, so they don’t know if they are winning or losing, succeeding or failing. No wonder they aren’t enjoying their day . . . or their lives.

Goals are essential. It is pointless and even frustrating to have a big dream for your life, or even a small dream for the day, without setting goals on how you expect to see your dreams come true. When you set things before you that you’d like to accomplish, it gives you a sense of purpose and intentionality about your day. It doesn’t have to be anything major; even something small like cleaning a certain room of the house, reading a chapter or two of a book, setting up an appointment that you have been putting

off—any goal is a worthwhile task. I usually set goals and write them down in my journal each morning, and quite often I have more goals than I will be able to accomplish, but I never let that bother me. I do what I can and then begin again the next day.

I believe that quite often people experience “bad days” simply because they aren’t doing anything that gives them a sense of satisfaction. God has not created us in such a way that we can ever be satisfied inwardly with nonproductive lives. Any day in which I feel purposeless is one that I don’t enjoy. Even if I purpose to rest all day, at least I know my purpose!

When you set a goal and move with a purpose, good things will happen for you, too. You may not know how everything is going to work out. You may not have all the answers for the day ahead. But if you’ll set a goal (or two, or three), you’ll be amazed at how helpful it can be in improving your outlook for the day ahead.

As the president of a worldwide ministry, setting and meeting goals for each day is crucial for me. For one thing, goals keep me from becoming overwhelmed by the sheer volume of things that have to be done each day. Setting goals is like setting limits on things, so we don’t feel that we have to do everything that needs to be done all at once. It would also be very easy to get distracted if I had no goals—goals keep me focused and help me prioritize my time. Each time I complete a task I had set out to do that day, I have a sense of accomplishment, and that feeling is a reward in itself.

The same can be true for you. Whether you’re a stay-at-home parent, a full-time employee, a student, a business owner, or a volunteer, goal setting can keep you alert and focused throughout the day, and it can help you feel more enthusiastic about your day. Those who have no direction in their life rarely feel enthusiastic,

because it is difficult to feel passionate and enthusiastic about nothing!

Working Toward Your Dream

John Maxwell says, “A dream without a positive attitude produces a daydreamer. A positive attitude without a dream produces a pleasant person who can’t progress. A dream together with a positive attitude produces a person with unlimited possibilities and potential.”¹ I love this quote because it is so true. It’s one thing to have a dream, but in order to see that dream become a reality, there are accompanying action steps you have to take. And one of those steps is having the right attitude.

I’m sure you’ve heard the old expression: *Your attitude determines your altitude*. Well, this expression is popular for a reason—it’s absolutely 100 percent right! You’re never going to be a confident, successful, happy person with a doubtful, defeated, sour attitude. It just doesn’t work that way. So the first step to take in order to realize any dream—a new career, getting that degree, a stronger marriage, big things for your children—is to adjust your attitude. When you’re tempted to think, *It’s going to be too hard. I’ll probably fail. I’m too old to start over*, remind yourself that your attitude determines your altitude.

- Instead of, *I can’t do it . . .* choose to think, *I can do all things through Christ!* (See Philippians 4:13.)
- Instead of, *This is impossible . . .* choose to think, *Nothing is impossible with God!* (See Matthew 19:26.)
- Instead of, *What if it doesn’t work out? . . .* choose to think, *What if it does work out!* (See Hebrews 11:1.)

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There are other steps you'll need to take, too. When you have a dream, there is work to be done. You'll have to plan. There will be sacrifices you'll probably have to make. You'll need to persevere on days when everything in you wants to give up. In other words, anytime you follow a dream God puts in your heart, get ready to do everything in your power to make it happen. And here is the really good news: When your power seems insufficient, God's power takes care of the rest. If you'll do your part, God will always be faithful to do His part. Don't give up on the dream when you feel too weak or incapable; God promises in 2 Corinthians 12:9 (NKJV), "*My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.*"

When I first started ministering, I had dreams of all the people I could help by teaching the Word of God, but it didn't happen overnight. And it didn't happen without a lot of work. Dave and I made plenty of sacrifices. There were many meetings where attendance was disappointing. And there were lots of times when we wondered where the money we needed was going to come from. But rather than give in to discouragement and despair (and trust me, that would have been easy to do), we kept at it. We worked hard doing all we could to obey what we knew God had put in our hearts... and God did what we couldn't. On days when I felt like giving up, an encouraging letter would show up in the mail. When it seemed like we were totally out of money,

an unexpected financial gift would come in. When one ministry door would close, an even better door would open. Time and time again, God's grace was sufficient.

The same is true for you. Sure, there is work to do in order to see that dream come to pass, and it will probably take longer than you expected it to. But you're never alone. God is with you, and He promises to give you the strength you need. If you've submitted that dream to God, and if you are willing to do your part to see that dream become a reality, God is going to show up and do what you can't do on your own. That's what grace is—it is God's undeserved favor, and it's the power of God to do with ease what you could never have done on your own. So, when you feel weak or unsure, that's not a bad thing. Remember, God's grace is sufficient for you, and His strength is made perfect in your weakness!

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Giving Life to Your Dreams

God is not a stagnant God. He never changes, but He is always on the move. God wants us to be on the move, too. He created us to have goals and dreams, to be the best we can be for His glory. When God gives you a dream, it's a lot like becoming pregnant: You conceive (think or imagine) a vision of the "new thing" He's planned for you. Now you have to make it through the pregnancy and get to full term to birth the fulfillment of that dream (see Isaiah 43:19).

Ecclesiastes 5:3 says, “*For a dream comes with much business and painful effort.*” I’m sure this is why many people give up on their dreams somewhere along the way. When they find out it will take effort, be costly and uncomfortable to complete their preparation for the birth of that dream, they conclude it wasn’t really God’s will after all and go and do something else. I want to encourage you to press through the hard part, because if you give up, you will never be completely satisfied. There will be a part of you that doesn’t feel settled or fulfilled. God doesn’t make everything in life easy for us, because we grow in the struggle. Faith becomes stronger as we are required to use it.

So how do we successfully make it through preparation and give birth to our God-given dreams? Here are three keys to help you get there.

1. Believe that God is working... and remain spiritually active.

Whatever dream God has put in your heart, stand in faith, believing He can bring it to pass. Each day, as you pursue the promise He has given you, make it a habit to say, “God’s working!” You may not know all the details of how it is going to work out, but that’s okay.

Each day, as you pursue the promise He has given you, make it a habit to say, “God’s working!”

God knows everything from the beginning to the end (see Isaiah 46:9–10). He is in control, and He can bring it to pass!

Resist the trap of falling into a passive attitude that says, “Well, we’ll just see what happens.” You weren’t created to be a passive “we’ll see what happens” kind of person. Instead, you can be

spiritually active, even when you feel you are in a season of waiting on God. Praying, believing, making faith-filled declarations, seeking God for direction—these are all action steps. And those action steps offer great reward. David said in Psalm 27:13, “[*What would have become of me*] had I not believed that I would see the Lord’s goodness in the land of the living!”

True waiting on God is never a static, passive place where you’re doing absolutely nothing. You may be waiting physically, but you can stay spiritually active, seeking God’s direction and putting your belief and trust in Him, actively recalling to mind your dream on a daily basis.

2. Refuse to give up.

It’s easy to start a process—or to have a dream—but it is much more difficult to see it through. That’s why so many people’s lives fall far short of God’s best. They start to obey God, or they start to move in the direction of their dream, but when times get tough or they become weary of waiting, they turn around and run in the other direction.

I want to encourage you today to keep going. Don’t be stopped by the circumstances that make it look impossible. Don’t pay attention to the “friends” or family members who tell you you’re better off not getting your hopes up. Dreams are never reached without struggle. If you’ll determine to be a person who keeps moving forward—even if it’s just one tiny step a day—you are going to experience a whole new level of joy when that dream is realized. Hang in there! Keep going! Refuse to give up!

Dreams are never reached without struggle.

3. *Realize your dream is about more than you.*

Many times people dream of things only for them—what they want out of life, or what’s best for only them. But Jesus, our example of how to live, gave His life for the benefit of others. Shortly before He was crucified, He prayed to His Father, “*Not My will, but [always] Yours be done*” (Luke 22:42). Everything Jesus did, He did for us.

To really live the dream God has for us, we need to have a “not my will, but [always] Yours be done” kind of attitude. When we submit our dream to God, asking what He wants to do in us and through us, *that’s* when our dreams become bigger than anything we could have imagined. God’s plan for your life is nothing to be afraid of. He wants better things for you than you could ever want for yourself. So ask Him to give you a dream that will bless not only your life but the lives of others, too.

Welcome to the Club

The Bible is full of big dreams and daring dreamers. Of course, we know that on many occasions God spoke to men and women through literal dreams, but I like to think of the dreams that heroes of the Bible must have carried in their hearts:

- After being anointed by Samuel, and while tending his father’s sheep, David must have dreamed about what it would be like to be king.
- While wearing a coat of many colors, Joseph must have dreamed about what the favor on his life could mean.
- Pregnant with the chosen Messiah, Mary must have dreamed about the upcoming joys of motherhood.

- Traveling on ships from city to city, Paul must have dreamed about what the early church could become.

Dreaming big dreams is part of our spiritual DNA. It's rooted in hope and fueled by faith. God doesn't just *allow* us to dream . . . He created us to dream, and to dream big, think big, imagine big, and make big plans. When you begin to do this, you will add excitement to any day.

God doesn't just allow us to dream...He created us to dream.

So let me encourage you: Dare to dream. Dream about where God can take you. Dream about what God can teach you. Dream about how God can change your situation. Dream about how high you can go and how many people you can help. If you start dreaming, your joy will increase. And if you're worried it might be too hard to dream big, I promise you, it's not . . . even children can do it.

Things to remember:

- You're never too old to have a dream for your life. Allow yourself to have a childlike optimism for the future.
- There are action steps to take in order to see a dream come true. Don't stand by, passively wishing a thing will happen. Be willing to do the necessary work.
- In order to succeed, it's crucial to have a goal—a target to aim for.
- A big part of seeing a dream come true is simply refusing to give up until it does.
- The Bible is full of men and women who dreamed big dreams for God. Follow their example and dream of what God might do in your life.

Suggestions for Putting “Dream Big” into Practice

- Write out your dream (or dreams) and display it somewhere in your home or office where you will see it every day.
- Take an action step... even if it is a small one. Do something to get the ball rolling with your dream. Call and inquire about taking a class. Read a book that will inspire you. Talk with someone who has been where you want to go. Whatever it may be, just take a first step.
- Start a “dream journal” and fill it with ideas that require big faith. Every time one of these dreams becomes a reality, celebrate. Celebrate God’s goodness, knowing that if God did it before, He can do it again!
- Use this acronym when setting your goals tomorrow:
 - G**et direction from God.
 - O**rder your conversation in line with the dream you have in your heart.
 - A**void people or things that will hinder your progress.
 - L**eave yourself room for relaxation and downtime.
 - S**incerely enjoy trying to accomplish your goals.