

When a
Woman
Discovers
Her Dream

CINDI McMENAMIN



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Part I

*Discovering
the
Dream*



*“Don’t live carelessly, unthinkingly.
Make sure you understand
what the Master wants.”*

—EPHESIANS 5:17 (MSG)



Daring to Dream Again

There are two kinds of people when it comes to discovering one's dream. Those who dare to dream. And those who've given up. Which story is yours?

"Candy" balks at the idea of discovering her dream. "Why does someone have to have a dream to pursue, anyway?" she asks, almost irritated. "Why can't people just learn to be content? I'm someone's wife and someone's mother. Isn't that enough? Why do I have to search for something *more*?" Candy's tone is almost bitter. Is it true that having a dream is a sign of discontent? Or has something deep in Candy's heart refused to let her dream anymore?

To answer Candy's question, there's nothing wrong with being content with your life. Being a wife and a mother is wonderful. But what was Candy *uniquely* designed to do that *only* she can do? How was she created for "good works" that God planned for her long ago? When Candy asked her questions, my response was to ask a few more: "But what about when your kids are grown? What will you do then? What if, when your husband hits midlife,

he wants to pursue different goals? Then what? Our purpose in life must consist of more than our roles and relationships.”

“Angie” agrees with Candy. But rather than being bitter, she is nonchalant. “I never really thought about having a dream,” she said. “Since I got pregnant in high school and then got married, I just lived life the way it came. I never went to college and pursued a real career, but I’m happy with how my life turned out, anyway. I’ve never had this desire to have to make something of my life or accomplish some great thing. I figure you just do the best you can and if you’re happy, then you did okay.”

Again, there’s no rule that someone must *strive for more*. But then, is our own happiness and contentment the ultimate goal? What about the contentment and pleasure of the One who made us in secret? Psalm 139:15-16 says, “My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”

If God took such great care and detail to “weave” us together in our mothers’ wombs and ordain all of our days before there were any, wouldn’t He have also woven into our hearts a special purpose for us as well? And wouldn’t that plan and purpose for us be as unique to us as our fingerprints? A God whom we’re told counts the number of hairs on our heads (Matthew 10:30), and records our days in a book (Psalm 139:16), and saves our tears in a bottle (Psalm 56:8 NASB) surely would not just set us on this earth at random, not caring this way or that about what we do with our lives.

Perhaps for Candy or Angie, the big dream hasn’t occupied much of their thoughts. But it’s been on their Maker’s heart...since the day they were born.



Maybe your story is that you know you have a dream. You just feel guilty sometimes for not pursuing it, or frustrated at not being able to reach it. Or perhaps you're saddened each time you see someone else living out what you feel you're supposed to do. If so, you're not alone. You're one of the countless women for which this book was written. And prayerfully, you're one of the women who will be encouraged through this book by finding what it is you are supposed to be doing.

Now, when I talk of pursuing a dream, I'm not suggesting we ignore our God-given responsibilities at home in order to pursue something that seems more exciting or fulfilling. We need to continue taking care of priorities at home, and realize that if God has given us a husband and family to care for, we are already living our part of His dream for us right now. What I *am* suggesting, however, is that He has something unique in mind for us that goes beyond what we may have considered before.


Encouragement Early On

I mentioned earlier that every Daddy has dreams for his little girl. From the time I learned to walk, my Dad was telling me I could accomplish anything. He constantly told me how smart I was (which came in handy by the time the “blonde” jokes started rolling around in my adulthood), and he often bragged about his “Ceenee” and that she would “go places.” I guess that instilled in me a confidence to dream big, set goals, make plans. To this day, every New Year's Day, I sit with pen in hand and write out what I hope to accomplish in the next year—physically, financially, vocationally, educationally, and spiritually.


It wasn't so with my older sister, however. Although she was as smart as I was (probably even more so), and twice as able in many areas, she didn't receive the encouragement I did. Kristi, at the age of 5, could pick up any instrument and play it by ear. She had an exceptional ear for music, an exceptional vocal range, could sing any part, and hit any note in the spectrum. I, on the other hand, couldn't carry a tune for most of my childhood. But because Kristi didn't excel academically (meaning she didn't get straight As like I did) she was in some ways, although not intentionally, dismissed in terms of academic expectations. No one encouraged Kristi to go to college or strive for more. For years, Kristi struggled with trying to figure out what others wanted her to do, what it was *she* wanted to do, or what it was that might bring in some extra income. And then the day came—at 40 years old—when she discovered her dream and dared to pursue it...not for her parents or her husband or her children or her friends. Not even for her, but for her Lord. After all, it was *His* dream for her. (I tell her inspiring story in chapter 7.)

It's Not About Us

When we get past our own hesitation to dream, our baggage at what may have hindered the pursuit of our dream, and our



*We cannot separate the dream
from the One who has whispered
that dream on our heart.*



fear or reluctance to think outside the box, we can begin to listen for the dream that God placed on our hearts when He wove us together. After all, He continues to whisper the dream to us so that we'll

respond...and bring Him joy as we live out the dream He intended for us to live. The bottom line is that it's not about us. It's about the One who made us and what *He* had in mind.

As we talk about discovering a dream, it's important for us to realize that finding this dream is not primarily so we can be happy. And it's not so we can feel significant or have the satisfaction of knowing we're living out our purpose. Those are all *benefits* of living out our dream, but they are not *the motivation* and reason behind discovering it. Our motivation is to fulfill the call that God has placed on our lives and live out for Him what He intended, for His glory.

As Os Guinness writes in his book *The Call*, "First and foremost we are called to Someone (God), not to something (such as motherhood, politics, or teaching) or to somewhere (such as the inner city of Outer Mongolia)." ¹ That is our primary calling—to love and obey God (Matthew 22:37). Our secondary or specific calling is *how* we carry out our expression of love for God—through thinking, speaking, living, and acting entirely for Him. We cannot separate the dream from the One who has whispered that dream on our heart. If there is no Dream Giver, there is no dream. If there is no Caller, there is no calling. If there is no Creator, there is no reason to continue.

If you're still not too sure about a Creator who's designed a dream for you, that's okay. Stay with me anyway. I'm confident that as you continue this search, you will find more than a dream. You will find the Dream Giver, who stands offering you not only the dream, but life eternal...and life to the full. ² And hopefully, on this journey, you will experience what Guinness describes: "We start out searching, but we end up being discovered. We think we are looking for something; we realize we are found by Someone." ³

Where Do You Stand?

So which story is yours when it comes to discovering the dream that God has whispered on your heart? Are you the skeptic? (Probably not. After all, you've picked up this book, haven't you?) Are you the "innocence is bliss" type who doesn't know your dream and doesn't really care, you're just happy anyway? Are you the one who is beginning to struggle because you *know* there is something more but you just don't know where to start? Or are you someone who knows what your dream is, but you are still trying to grasp hold of it?

Regardless of where you are on the journey, this is the place to start.

Looking Back on the Dream

One of the best ways to discover what it is you were called to do is to think back to the time when you were a little girl. What is it you wanted to be when you grew up? A princess? A ballerina? An actress? A nurse? A model? A mommy?

Whenever I speak to women's groups on this topic, and ask them to think back to what they wanted to be as little girls, many women in the audience begin to cry. Something tugs at their hearts as I ask them to recall what it is they've always wanted to do. Perhaps as we recall our childhood, we remember that a dream was there, and we so long to get it back. Or, maybe as we think back to days long ago, we encounter wounds that struck our hearts, shattered our innocence, and kept us from pursuing what it was we wanted to do. I'm going to talk about that in the next chapter. But for now, try to think of what you told others you wanted to be when you grew up.

Maybe you're embarrassed to say. I remember telling people I wanted to be a librarian. My husband laughs when I say this. He

can't imagine me being in a profession in which I have to be quiet most of the day. But I can see today that my love for the library, and wanting to be there, was because of my love for books. I wanted to read them, be around them, take care of them, write them.

I also wanted to be a schoolteacher. In fact, I had it figured out that I would be a schoolteacher during the school year and a librarian during the summers, when school was out. Then during my junior high and high school years, I even toyed with the idea of being a cosmetologist.

Looking back now I can see that I not only had a love for books (the writer in me), but also a love to teach (which is the speaker and Bible teacher in me). And could it be that I wanted to be a cosmetologist because I had a desire to help women become beautiful, or at least all they could be? I imagine God looking at all those desires I had while growing up and smiling as He knew back then that I would someday live out His dream for me...to be a writer who speaks and teaches, and helps other women see how beautiful they are in the eyes of God. While I was growing up, I had no idea that those desires I had for my future were rooted in a desire God had already put in my heart to be something I had yet to discover. I just figured I had three different ideas of what I would like to do with my life. Perhaps, as a child, I was simply unknowingly expressing the dream that was on my heart.

What did *you* want to be when you were a little girl? Think about that for a few moments, and record your answer here:

Now ask a parent, sibling, or a close friend with whom you grew up if they remember what it was you often talked about becoming back when you were a child. Write their answer here:

Ask that person, also, what it was you often spent your time doing (and playing) as a child. Record their answer here:

Looking at how you spent your time as a child can be eye-opening when it comes to discerning the dream that God placed on your heart. That's because when we were children, we tended to live from our hearts. We most likely did things because we *wanted* to, not because we felt we had to, which is how we tend to live our lives as adults. What was going on as your heart (and the Maker of your heart) was trying to communicate to you your dream? Think about it...and begin the exciting process of discovering your dream.

You're not the *only one* who's been waiting for this day to arrive....

Dream On

1. If time and money were no object, what would you love to be doing, at this moment, as a career or calling? _____
_____ Why? _____

2. Looking at what you wanted to be when you were a child and what you loved to spend your time doing as you grew up is only part of the picture. Chances are, residues of that dream still remain in your heart today. Since it may have been awhile since you've really thought about what it is you were designed to do, or what makes your heart sing, try this.

Step 1

Read through the following verbs. Circle the words that really resonate with your heart:

accomplish	bestow	brighten	build	call
cause	communicate	compel	complete	compose
confirm	continue	defend	delight	demonstrate
devise	direct	discover	distribute	dream
educate	embrace	encourage	engage	enhance
enlighten	enliven	excite	explore	express
extend	facilitate	finance	foster	further
gather	generate	give	grant	heal
hold	host	identify	illuminate	implement
improve	inspire	integrate	involve	know

labor	launch	lead	live	love
make	manifest	measure	mediate	model
motivate	negotiate	nurture	open	organize
participate	persuade	praise	prepare	promote
pursue	realize	reclaim	reflect	release
renew	resonate	restore	satisfy	save
serve	share	speak	support	surrender
sustain	team	touch	translate	travel
understand	use	validate	value	venture
volunteer	work	worship	write	yield

Now narrow your choices down to the three verbs that are the most meaningful and purposeful to you, and write them in the blanks below:

_____, _____ and _____

Step 2

Next, think about what you stand for, what your cause is, or what you'd be willing to devote your life to or even die for. Would it be family values, or truth, or God's Word, or justice? Think about your passion (which literally means what you'd be willing to suffer for), and then insert that word or phrase here:

Step 3

Our dream is never about just us. Who is it you are being called to help or serve? Who is it that stands to benefit from you living out your dream? Is it children? Women? The elderly? Think

about it and write that one group, entity, or cause you would most like to help or impact in a positive way:

Step 4

Now put the puzzle pieces together.

My dream is to:

_____, _____ and _____
(your three verbs)

(your cause or value)

to, for, or with

(the group or cause that most moves you)

Some people refer to this kind of statement as their mission statement for life. For now, we'll call it your basic dream concept. We'll build from here to discover the specifics of just *how* you will accomplish the statement above—if it truly represents, or is beginning to sound like, your dream.

When I completed this exercise six years ago, I came up with the following:

To encourage, inspire, and motivate Christlikeness in women. I later added the “how” element with the phrase “through writing, speaking, and teaching.” That became the grid through which I

passed everything through. If I was asked to partake in an extra-curricular activity, I asked myself if it somehow fit into my purpose statement. If it did, I pursued it. If not, I suggested someone else. That statement has also reinforced to me what it is I need to focus on. And your statement will be a catalyst for you, too, in taking one more step down the road toward discovering your dream.

Well, are you feeling a bit closer to discovering the dream God whispered on your heart? If not, stick with me. We're just beginning on this journey. There's much more to the exciting adventure ahead.

Press On

Psalm 37:5 says, “Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this.” Another translation of that verse reads, “Open up before God, keep nothing back; he’ll do whatever needs to be done: He’ll validate your life in the clear light of day and stamp you with approval at high noon” (MSG).

Isn’t it exciting to finally have a few words that may help describe the dream that’s been whispered on your heart? Now that you’ve come up with your basic dream concept, let’s look next at the forces that may be working to keep you from wholeheartedly embracing your dream.