



*A HOLY
PURSUIT*

HOW *the* GOSPEL FREES
US *to* FOLLOW *and*
LAY DOWN OUR DREAMS

DIANNE JAGO

A HOLY PURSUIT

HOW *the* GOSPEL FREES
US *to* FOLLOW *and*
LAY DOWN OUR DREAMS

DIANNE JAGO

Copyright © 2020 by Dianne Jago
All rights reserved.
Printed in the United States of America

978-1-5359-6235-3

Published by B&H Publishing Group
Nashville, Tennessee

Dewey Decimal Classification: 153.2
Subject Heading: GOALS (PSYCHOLOGY) / DECISION MAKING /
DESIRE

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible® and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.

Also used: English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016.
Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles,
a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

Also used: New International Version NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Cover design by Matt Lehman. Imagery © OctopusArtis/creativemarket; ESB Professional/shutterstock. Author photo by Kaiden Jago.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 • 24 23 22 21 20

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Chapter 1: The Way the World Does Dreaming	5
Chapter 2: When God Becomes Your Genie and Your Dreams Become Your God	33
Chapter 3: Does Dying to Self Mean Dying to Our Dreams?.	57
Chapter 4: The Bigger Story	83
Chapter 5: The Fruitful Dreamer	105
Chapter 6: You Aren't Filler	129
Chapter 7: The Christian Dreamer's Secret Weapon	145
Chapter 8: Discernment for Dreamers	159
Chapter 9: God's Will for the Christian Dreamer	179
Notes	193

INTRODUCTION

✦ *We don't have to* look far to find a book, inspirational quote, or Instagram post telling us to chase after our dreams. Whether written by a hopeful atheist or an evangelical Christian, we find these messages everywhere:

If your dream doesn't scare you, you're not dreaming big enough.

Never give up on something you can't go a day without thinking about.

The cost of not following your heart is spending the rest of your life wishing you had.

*#hustle #goals #dowhatyoulove #girlboss
#followyourdreams*

Women across the world are bombarded with messages like these. When scroll after scroll after scroll on our newsfeed is filled with seemingly perfect women *doing all the things*, it's no surprise that we experience growing discontent, wondering if we too should be chasing after our dreams.

These mantras and those like it not only overlook the Christian's primary aim in life—to live for God's glory alone—but they seep into Christian culture, adopt a Christian twist, and disguise themselves as wisdom. Within many church circles, we are told that “true freedom” and huge impact on the kingdom of God come from unlocking His “purpose” in our lives—as if more is required beyond the call to love

Him and our neighbors. We are assured that because “God is for us,” He is certainly for our dreams too, without any consideration for the correct meaning and original context of the passages we build our dreams upon. And so, we chase wildly after our dream because if we have a deep longing, God must want us to pursue it. We tie our identities to God plus the dream itself, and our forward-focused wishing, hoping, and hustling inevitably result in comparison, dissatisfaction, and exhaustion.

What happens when our dreams don’t turn out as expected? We might be left feeling purposeless, unfulfilled, and discontent with the life-circumstances the Lord has placed before us. We may begin to doubt Him and His character.

On the other hand, there are those of us who are too fearful of stepping out in pursuit of something new—or anything, really. Out of a fear of failure, we may dismiss any outside opportunities to use our God-given gifts. We are told to lay down our lives for the sake of Christ, and we assume that means laying down everything we are good at, passionate about, or gifted with. Death-to-self supposedly means death-to-dreams, and we choose to die to anything that makes our souls stir, labeling all personal desires as selfish or sinful. Where the world says to go chase a passion no matter the cost, some of us assume that the godly alternative is to simply deny our passions altogether. When it comes to ambition or pursuit or dream-chasing or whatever you want to call it, some of us assume the world always says *yes* and the Christian always says *no*.

Beyond the exhaustion, frustration, and inner conflict that can easily result from wholeheartedly pursuing a dream, I believe there are eternal consequences at stake when we trust in the successes of our dream—or even the denial of it—to bring true happiness and fulfillment. Whether it’s going after it with all we have or killing it in its tracks, in both cases, *what we do with a dream* can end up being our sole focus, the place where we look for satisfaction instead

of God. Whether we pursue or deny, we may be so busy building our kingdoms here that we never live for the kingdom to come.

So how do we know if we should pursue a dream? Are we dreaming too big? Are we dreaming too small? Is dreaming at all a totally selfish endeavor, or is it okay in certain situations? How do we navigate whether or not we should move forward with an idea that we just can't seem to shake? Because our culture (and its values and norms) drastically changes over time, the answers to these questions will inevitably vary from generation to generation. Ask a millennial about pursuing dreams and then ask someone who was alive during the Great Depression. You will surely get two very different responses.

The questions we should be asking are: *What is the biblical approach to dreaming and how do we know if our dream is in God's will?* While there is not a one-size-fits-all answer to this (something the messaging all around us falsely tells us there is), while each one of us is called to a different life with different circumstances, and while God's Word may not address your dream specifically, there's one thing we can be sure of in this dream-chasing world: Scripture does provide trustworthy wisdom to help the Christian navigate when to move forward or not. This is the beauty of the Bible: its wisdom is timeless and is 100-percent relevant despite the changing norms, values, expectations, and trends of every type of culture. The answers to our questions are indeed found within its pages.

I charged hard toward my goals even as God closed doors and redirected my steps. I experienced frustration and inner turmoil along the way. I felt the deep longing to be identified by the dream I was chasing after. Contrary to the mantra that you can make anything happen if you work hard enough and simply get out of your own way, I found myself facing a lot of *nos* from God. Other times I faced a *pause* or a *wait*. And still other times, I was called to *pursue*—to go for it. In all of these yeses, nos, and waits, and in His perfect timing, God

set me on a new path—one that led to something far beyond anything I could have imagined for myself. He used the ups and downs of my journey to reveal to me that true fulfillment and life purpose is found in Him alone. And though He certainly didn't have to, in the end, He tied in all the things I was passionate about early into my entrepreneurial journey and wove them into a ministry that allows others to pursue their passions and dreams too. Your story will look different than mine, but my prayer for you is that this book points you to Jesus and helps you discern the next step.

A Holy Pursuit aims to remind you of who you are in Christ first and then to encourage you to use the truth and hope of the gospel as a lens when pursuing a dream. God knows the desires of our hearts because God is the One who created us. He knows us intimately and is well aware of that dream or idea impressed on your heart right now, but His ultimate desire is for His people to love Him wholeheartedly, obey His commands, and seek after His will.

Dive into Scripture alongside me as we consider the biblical approach to dreaming. I believe that by truly understanding the implications of Christ's work on the cross for us, we have the freedom to move forward with, press pause on, or lay down the dreams stirring within us.

THE WAY THE WORLD DOES DREAMING

*“Satan has been a liar from the beginning.
His constant goal is to get believers to turn
their backs on the promises of God and
pursue apparently rosier dreams.”¹*

—IAIN DUGUID

✦ *It was a blessing* and a curse to attend college in Clearwater, Florida. I was born and raised in the brutally cold (yet beautiful) land of Wisconsin and, therefore, a life of constant warmth was my college dream. However, it was difficult to sit in a chilly, sterile classroom as the warm rays of sunshine teased me about what was outside that window. It was all too easy to lose myself in thoughts about the future as I zoned out, looking through the glass. And then the scratching of pencils or feverish typing on laptops brought me back to the reality of smeared chalk on the back side of my professor (unbeknownst to him) as he spouted off scientific jargon I couldn't understand. My dreams would have to wait until I was done with school.

As a second-semester transfer, I felt awkward entering a new campus in the middle of the year at a small Christian college. There were only a handful of students, and everyone noticed the new kids. “What’s your major?” remained the go-to get-to-know-you question I was often asked. I would almost always respond with, “English education, but one day I hope to own a photo studio.” I carried

my entry-level DSLR camera around often, so it wasn't completely unusual for me to throw in that disclaimer. However, despite my quick and confident answer, I questioned my response every time I said it. My internal monologue would ask, "How does an English ed. major get from teaching to owning a studio?"

The path that led me to pick an education major is an interesting one. I can't help but laugh when I reflect on my first-grade dreams. During one classroom ice-breaker game, our teacher asked us what we wanted to be when we grew up. Doctor. Movie star. President. These were the responses of my classmates. I, however, just wanted to be a cashier. Everyone laughed when they heard the simplicity of my answer. I loved playing pretend store. My friend from across the street would use her dad's old auto sales receipt pads from his work, and we would sell cars, homes, and eventually, lemonade. (Little did I know that the future days of self-checkout would allow me to live out this dream over and over again.) But that pursuit was too simple. And I would soon feel the pressure of figuring out what I wanted to do with my life.

I excelled in my studies until I transferred to a private school in ninth grade. In this school, our grades were less about projects and presentations, and more focused on quizzes and tests. I struggled with that form of assessment and it was not long before I traded an interest in good grades for an interest in popularity. I spent most of my high school career headed down a destructive path—trying to find happiness in friends, shopping, and boyfriends. Praise the Lord for His intervention! In conjunction with the love and patience of my parents, the persistent prayers and listening ears of Miss K—a young, passionate twenty-something English teacher—who the Lord used to draw me out of a life enslaved to sin and into the freedom found in Christ.

In the middle of our choir trip, we watched a movie on the bus followed by a discussion with Miss K in her hotel room. She encouraged us to examine our own hearts, and it was in those moments I

knew I was not a Christian. Though outwardly I tried to display some form of moral living, inwardly I had been living my own life apart from God, and that lifestyle destroyed me. Once I got back to my room, I cried out to God in the middle of the bathroom floor. I confessed my sin and my need for a Savior, and asked God to be the Lord of my life. I committed the entirety of my life to Him. God used Miss K to reverse the trajectory of my life, and I wanted to do the same for others. So, like her, I decided to become an English education major. A new dream had formed.

The problem with attempting to copy and paste another person's life story is the simple fact that their story is not your story. I appreciated literature but I really struggled with grammar in college, and eventually realized that I may not be cut out to be an English education major. My heart really belonged with photography, but I made my career decision based on what would "have the most impact" and what I thought my parents would support. And this is what led me to walk around campus, torn between two careers, spouting the confusing English-education-plus-photo-studio-dream story.

Plans changed again when I met my husband, Ethan. He was on the opposite corner of the United States, stationed in Washington. His cousin was my roommate, and we connected through social media when he saw pictures of her and me together. Our first date began at the airport and ended a few days later after he visited me. Things moved quickly, and before I knew it, we were in love, engaged, married, and living in Washington state by age twenty. Moving meant transferring schools and I was not sure I wanted to continue with English education. My ambitions had gone from future cashier to popular girl to Christian-English-major to this new phase of life. I was at a crossroads once again seeking God's "purpose" for my life while trying to figure out how my giftings and desires would fit into His plan.

This way of thinking isn't far off from what many people struggle with. Graduating high schoolers go through the same process I did, wondering what major they should choose. Determined to make an

impact, they lean heavily toward one major. Concerned about salary, they switch to another. But impact and salary alone aren't enough to fuel four-plus years of your head buried in books while living on a ramen-noodle budget. And so, some start from scratch and opt for the thing they were always passionate about. Others don't, and live life wondering, "What if?"

This confusion isn't just for high school and college students. A single woman thriving in her career may wonder if Mr. Right will ever come along. And if and when he does, will his job and his dreams squelch hers? Will she be forced to move where he works? Will he even want her to work at all? And what if marriage isn't in the cards at all? What if?

Working moms wrestle with their call to pursue career for a variety of reasons including (but not limited to) solely supporting their families or helping supplement income. They may wrestle with internal guilt as they watch their stay-at-home mom friends share hourly updates about their one-on-one time with kids. They may worry over the effect day care or after-school programs may have on their children. Is it really okay to lean into community, letting the multifaceted "village" help raise their child? They may wonder also if they are allowed to truly love putting their hand to the particular plow God has gifted them for. Guilt looms overhead for liking their job. *What if I shouldn't like what I'm doing? What if I'm doing it all wrong? What if?*

On the other hand, the stay-at-home mom might wonder if she should start an in-home business or take part in local ministry on top of all she has been called to in the home. She wonders if investing in the needs right here in their home and neighborhood and church is enough. Shouldn't she be able to pull off more than this? Shouldn't she be out there making it happen like her working friends? She may worry about similar things with her own children: *Is being at home with one person all day enough for their social development? Are other kids in preschool getting more of "the village" experience than my kids are getting? Are we too isolated within these four walls—teaching my little*

ones that community isn't actually necessary? What if we are missing out somehow? What if?

These are just examples, but I regularly engage with all sorts of women who are, in a word, restless. They went to school for one thing and ended up doing something entirely different. Some feel stuck and unfulfilled in lackluster careers while others are in the sometimes unglamorous trenches of motherhood. Both are seeking something “more.” They feel the pressure too. “Dare to dream,” they are told. “Invest in what makes you happy.” The laundry pile before them doesn’t make them happy. Their current bank account statement doesn’t make them happy. Their task list at work doesn’t make them happy. But maybe following their dream will make them happy. Perhaps the unrest they feel will be satisfied in the outcome of their goal. This is worldly thinking.

Not of the World

Worldly thinking is in direct opposition to biblical thinking. When I refer to thinking, what I mean is a person’s worldview or ideology and the principles and doctrines that shape how they choose to live their lives. Whether a person believes in God or not, there is some sort of moral code we pattern our lives after.

A Christian’s worldview and approach to life is built on the foundation of the Word of God, the Bible, and on the gospel of Jesus Christ, which Scripture calls the “wisdom of God,” though it seems foolish to the world (1 Cor. 1:20–24). A non-Christian’s worldview, however, is subjective and what the Bible calls foolish, though it seems wise to the world (Rom. 1:22). Their worldview may be built on another religion, another person’s thoughts and philosophies, or it could be simply built on personal experience and emotion; in any case, they choose to do what is right in their own eyes (Prov. 21:2). The New Testament puts it this way:

For though they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or show gratitude. Instead, their thinking became worthless, and their senseless hearts were darkened. . . . You should no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their thoughts. They are darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them and because of the hardness of their hearts. (Rom 1:21; Eph. 4:17–18)

But how did their thinking become so darkened, so worthless? There is a current, a stream of thinking that flows through the world that is headed by God’s enemy, and is therefore against God’s values and ways (Eph. 2:2). When those of the world reject God and His Word, they are falling prey to the enemy’s tactics, and they deny the truth. As 2 Corinthians 4:4 says, Satan has “blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” Because they are blinded to the truth, their advice, wisdom, and philosophies are in direct contrast with the Christian’s lifestyle; therefore, our way of living—dreaming included—will look entirely different than the nonbeliever’s way of living and dreaming.

Jesus made it clear that though we are sent *into* the world—where the course of thinking is against God—we are not to be *of* the world (John 17:14–19). Being “in” the world means we aren’t supposed to run away from the world and those who are in it (John 17:15; 1 Cor. 5:9–10). After all, this world is our mission field. God made the earth good, and we can still live in it, enjoy it, and share the good news as we go about our lives.

The problem, then, comes when Christians go beyond simply living in the world for God’s glory and become *of* the world—allowing worldly thinking to shape their belief system. We are explicitly told not to be conformed to the patterns of this world (Rom. 12:2).

Throughout Scripture, God calls His people to be holy or set apart. In the Old Testament, this looked like adhering to the laws God laid before them. “Be holy because I am holy” has always been the primary pursuit of His people (Lev. 11:45). And yet, Israel consistently sinned against God as they rejected His perfect law and allowed the pagan practices in the surrounding cultures to influence them. From idol worship to marriages outside of God’s chosen people to disbelief and distrust in what God told them to do, their decisions to relax God’s standards and cling to the wisdom of the day compromised their faith and resulted in rebellion. Jesus fulfilled the law perfectly in the New Testament, and holy living changed from a system of sacrifices to confessing that Jesus is Lord, committing your life to Him, and walking in His ways. However, worldly thinking affected the early church greatly too. A good chunk of the New Testament is spent encouraging the first Christians to “hold on to the pattern of sound teaching” and to “stand firm and hold fast to the traditions you were taught” (2 Tim. 1:13; 2 Thess. 2:15). Why? Because there were opportunists—preachers who taught the gospel “out of selfish ambition” and personal gain (Phil. 1:17). Others were deceivers—false teachers who intentionally tried to lead Jesus-followers astray (Matt. 24:24; Gal. 1:7). On top of this, there were also capitulators—those who simply gave up on faith in Christ when things got hard or when the world offered a seemingly better way to approach life.

Given all we see in Scripture and in the world around us, it is no surprise there remains an ongoing tension between God’s truth and the world’s lies. There always has been. Since God has called us to be set apart from the world, it is pertinent that not only our actions obey God’s Word, but that our minds do as well.

Slow and Steady Fools the Church

A few years ago we moved into an 1850’s farmhouse in Central Pennsylvania. During our second winter in the home, we noticed that

our three kids appeared a little more dirty than usual. “When was the last time you gave the kids a bath?” Ethan asked me. I looked over at their cute, little faces and saw what looked like dirt on their chins and cheeks. Clearly, they had wiped something on their faces, but they are always playing hide-and-go-seek in closets or sneaking toys from our old, dusty attic, so it did not surprise me.

Sometime later, I spotted black grime clinging to the fringed ends of my woven wall hanging. I looked up to examine its surroundings, and then the cobwebs became much more apparent. I actually wondered if a new breed of spiders had taken over our house as all the webs were black and thick-looking.

“Ethan, do you remember us ever having spiders that spin black webs?” He couldn’t recall.

One Sunday, we came home after church and heard the sirens from our carbon monoxide detectors. As I whipped open the front door, smoky fog with a distinct aroma seeped out. I told my kids to get back into the car until we could figure out what was going on. Praise the Lord, the house was not on fire. We opened the windows to air out the rooms, and when the smoke dissipated, Ethan ran downstairs to examine our furnace. He pulled off the pipe that connected the furnace to our chimney. Several feet of black soot, dirt, and debris fell out. These fumes did not just make our house dirty—they made our home deadly.

We never serviced our chimney in the two years we lived there. All sorts of unknowns (including chimney sparrows) had clogged our vent and rather than releasing the exhaust fumes, the clogged chimney forced them into our house. The filth in our home didn’t just show up overnight. It was something that gradually seeped into the walls of our home, slow and steady, making its mark on walls and webs and wee ones. The warning signs were there, but we didn’t take them seriously. And this is how lies, false teaching, destructive heresies—whatever you want to call it—work. Like the debris in our chimney, these lies slowly settle and compact until the air around

is unbreathable, resulting in a deadly poison that has overtaken the church. And our present-day churches are littered with these worldly philosophies that Satan has slowly fed us for years.

We are naive if we think that the church today isn't susceptible to the deception of worldly thinking. Satan loves to deceive God's people, and he is good at it. Genesis 3 describes Satan as "the most cunning of all the wild animals that the LORD God had made" (v. 1). In Paul's letter to Ephesus, he admonishes them to "put on the full armor of God so that we can stand against the schemes of the devil" (Eph. 6:11). Why? Because we aren't fighting flesh and blood but rather the "cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12 ESV). This prowling lion is always on the move, plotting and seeking whom he can devour (1 Pet. 5:8). It is true that "there is nothing new under the sun" (Eccles. 1:9) and his attempts at corrupting God's holy purposes are old as time—literally.

Scripture tells us that it wasn't long after God created Adam and Eve that the serpent was in the garden using his smooth talk to attack God's order. Even before he says a word, we see that his plan of sabotage was already underway. He bypassed Adam and went straight to Eve, questioning God's Word and attempting to weaken her confidence in it when he says, "Did God actually say . . . ?" (Gen. 3:1 ESV).

Satan then goes onto say, "No! You will not die. . . . In fact, God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (vv. 4–5). This brief dialogue contains three distinct attacks against God and His word. The serpent insinuated that:

1. **God is a liar . . .** When the serpent said, "You will not die," he claimed that God didn't really mean what He said. *God isn't actually going to follow through with what He says and kill you.*

Not only did Satan undermine the character of God, but he also undermined the credibility of God's Word.

2. . . . **because God is trying to withhold something good from you.** *The real reason you can't eat it is because God is trying to keep something good from you. It must be of tremendous value if He is threatening to kill you if you eat it.* Again, Satan maligned the character of God in such a way that God appeared threatened by the knowledge a human being could have. Satan made it seem that God wasn't looking out for Adam and Eve's best interests after all.
3. **Therefore, God doesn't deserve to be obeyed.** *Because God is only looking out for number one, we can't really take Him seriously. Focus on yourself and discover the knowledge that awaits with one bite.* Satan implied that Adam and Eve's need to obey God was only as good as the reason He gave them to do so.

This is just one instance of Satan's manipulation, and this account sits right at the beginning of Scripture.

Simply having the head knowledge that Satan is actively working against God's good plan doesn't guarantee that his presence in the world is always obvious. From our perspective, we know the serpent is Satan and that Satan is terrible news. To Adam and Eve, he was just another animal under their care. He was sneaky. Have you ever seen a cartoon or movie where the main character comically consults an angel version of himself on one shoulder and a devil version of himself on the other? Satan doesn't unveil himself as a little red shoulder-buddy holding a pitchfork, trying to convince you that the evil path is better. Instead, he "disguises himself as an angel of light"

(2 Cor. 11:14), chooses to make the lie appear as truth, and uses others to do his work. Paul warns the early church in Acts 20:28–30:

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Men will rise up even from your own number and distort the truth to lure the disciples into following them.

These wolves have a goal of intentionally drawing away followers of Christ. Jesus tells us that these false teachers will perform great signs and wonders which could very well deceive even the elect (Matt. 24:24). What a sad and scary thought that these people “will rise up even from your own number”! This isn’t a random outside attack, but rather calculated destruction from within.

How can we be on guard for such people? The Epistles contain warning after warning to keep watch for false teachers and destructive heresies invading the church. Slow and steady lies fooled the first people on the planet and continue to fool the people of God today. Philippians 3:19 (ESV) alerts us: “Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.” Scripture says that these people are puffed up, full of conceit, and though they sound convincing, they know nothing of the true gospel and the life that pertains to godliness (1 Tim. 6:3–4, 7). These false teachers cannot bear fruit, and as we study the Word and grow in our relationship with God, asking Him for wisdom and discernment along the way, we will notice the subtle attacks founded on big lies.

Thomas Watson once said, “Satan’s masterpiece, his dragnet by which he drags millions to hell, is to keep them in unbelief! He knows, if he can but keep them from believing the truth, he is sure to keep them from obeying it.”² He aims to set our hearts on anything

but God because his diabolical dream is to elevate his throne above God's. And one way he does that is by tainting the biblical perspective about how Christians should handle dreaming.

Lies the World Believes

Scroll briefly on Instagram or Pinterest, and you're sure to find some worldly wisdom. It is clear that the devil is actively seeking to thwart God's purposes, and therefore we should recognize his efforts to reject them. Perhaps some of these phrases are familiar to you:

1. Follow your heart.

You have most likely heard versions of this in a song or have seen it beautifully lettered on a sign. The call to follow our hearts takes us on an emotional path with no visible end in sight. The heart is fickle, and its desires lead us on a wild-goose chase. A form of this mantra might be, "If you're not passionate about it, don't do it." So, if you don't like your job, quit. If you want that promotion, get it at all costs. Go wherever your heart leads you. But this isn't limited to entrepreneurial pursuits and can fit into pretty much any other category of life. If you don't love your husband, divorce him. If you're not ready to be a parent, choose abortion. If what you're doing doesn't make you happy, stop and figure out what does.

But we know that "the heart is more deceitful than anything else, and incurable—who can understand it?" (Jer. 17:9). When I look back at many of my high school dating relationships, though I could not see it at the time, I recognize now that I should not have followed my heart. Trusting how I felt in the moment I paved several pathways to a broken heart. My own heart betrayed me over and over again. Has that ever happened to you in some way? Maybe it wasn't a dating relationship; maybe it was something else. But perhaps you too have gone after something with your whole heart, and you were so sincere in your efforts and belief in it, only to find out that you were sincerely wrong.

Rather than chasing after our fickle, wandering hearts, we should say along with hymn writer Robert Robinson, “Bind my wandering heart to thee.”³ Because we are prone to wander, we need to be anchored to the perfect, unchanging, and Holy God of this universe. The opposite of following our heart is: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; in all your ways know him, and he will make your paths straight. Don’t be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and turn away from evil” (Prov. 3:5–7). Where the world follows after their hearts, the Christian follows after the Lord. He is a better—a perfect—guide.

2. Chase after your dreams.

Freedom and happiness await those who follow their dreams, right? This lie guarantees fulfillment and joy if you chase after what you’re passionate about. Perhaps for a season, the Christian might find some short-term fulfillment in the pursuit of a dream, but ultimately, he or she will become enslaved to the very thing they are pursuing and will have given their whole heart to it. Has this ever happened to you? If so, I’m sure the book of Ecclesiastes was a great reference to you as it was to me when considering the fleeting pursuits of this world. The author is painfully aware of the Fall and attempts to satisfy himself through worldly pleasures. But each attempt at worldliness and self-gratification turns out to be “vanity and a striving after wind” (Eccles. 4:4 ESV). You can have that dream job, all those Instagram followers, and a wardrobe to match, but if God is not your true source of joy and fulfillment, anything apart from Him will not satisfy.

Why? Because man was not made to be satisfied by the created things of this world but rather by the Creator of all things. The final verdict of Ecclesiastes says, “Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil” (Eccles. 12:13b–14). Here is the bottom line: freedom and happiness await those who fear God and keep His commandments.

3. Go make a difference in this world.

Wait, what is wrong with making a difference in the world? This one may not be as obvious, but the underlying premise is somewhat unclear. Who defines what makes a difference? By what standard is the difference made? The problem is that making a difference becomes something measurable, something immediately seen.

The opposite side of this lie would be this: if you can't visibly see results, then you're probably not making a mark in this world. For example, if I start a nonprofit company that provides job training and a steady income to women in a third world country, I am making a difference. That difference is seen every time that woman brings home money to support and raise her family. This is a noble pursuit, and I've been encouraged by the many men and women in this world whose visible impact has changed lives. However, the problem occurs when we place value on the change we can see happening now and with that, we devalue anything that doesn't display immediate change or fruit—which is most things. The vast majority of the time, fruit takes time to grow.

Motherhood, for example, isn't a calling where we necessarily see an immediate, measurable difference. When I tell my children it's time for them to go to bed and they groan and complain all the way up to their bedroom the same way they did last night (and the night before), I do not see measurable difference. I may not feel like I'm changing the world if I were to consider my daily routine, but the faithfulness of a mother in those mundane moments cultivates a sense of security and love deep within a child's heart that may not reap a reward for years to come.

Colossians 3:23–24 encourages us: “Whatever you do, do it from the heart, as something done for the Lord and not for people, knowing that you will receive the reward of an inheritance from the Lord. You serve the Lord Christ.” Rather than working to make an impact, we work as unto the Lord. Both the nonprofit owner and the mother can

joyfully serve the Lord and leave the results to Him. Yes, we strive to change the world. But we let God define the pace in how He uses us to do that, which might be slower than our culture has patience for.

Lies the Christian Believes

Let's take this concept of worldly thinking a step further and consider two Christian versions with similar undertones but veiled in Christian jargon. At first read, you may see nothing wrong with these statements. Remember that our devil with a pitchfork looks more like an angel of light? Similarly, these statements don't shout at us—they whisper. They cajole. They're the subtle undertones that sneak into Christian thinking.

1. We can walk in freedom when we figure out God's purpose for our lives.

I met a woman who had prophecy spoken over her at a young age. We will call her Sarah. She was told she would do great things for the Lord through a particular vocation that God would lead her to. Now Sarah is a wife and mom and the words spoken over her have not been fulfilled. With tear-filled eyes, Sarah shared her discontent: "It feels like I'm not living out my purpose." My heart ached for her as I saw her obvious distress. I understand where she was coming from. It's easy to get lost in motherhood and question "purpose" but it pained me to hear her question her purpose when God was so clearly using her. She is an adoptive parent and loves children deeply. In the short time I've known her, I have listened to her pray fiercely over broken relationships in her family, and I witnessed her compassion as she gathered goods for a family in need. Alongside a few others, I was grateful to be able to encourage her in the areas I see God using her throughout her home and community. I reminded her that her life is not defined by some words spoken over her as a child but rather in the new identity given as a child of God. It made me wonder, though,

how many Christians are still searching for their purpose or feel that they have missed out on it altogether?

I have seen versions of this “find your God-given purpose and find freedom” mind-set shared on Instagram and tucked into blog posts. It is suggested that if you are feeling burnt out, unfulfilled, or overwhelmed, then you must not be living out God’s purpose. Statements like this lead us to think that we potentially could be living out a purpose that God didn’t intend for us. This is why a wounded spouse might think, “Did I marry the person God intended for me?” or a Christian working a job that feels neither meaningful nor fulfilling might ask, “Am I at the right job?” We all have stressful days or dry seasons of life, but are these accurate indicators of purposelessness? No. Our purpose is clear: fear God and keep His commandments. We are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and we are to love our neighbors as ourselves (Eccles. 12:13b; Mark 12:30–31).

Do hardships reflect a life missing out on the freedom God intended for us? On the contrary, Scripture is filled with stories of hardship for the glory of God. Consider the lives of Joseph, Job, Daniel, Stephen, Paul—or even Jesus Himself! Each was called to different forms of suffering that I don’t think any of us would wish upon anyone, and yet, each life feared God and kept His commandments in the ways God willed them to. What if any of these people simply gave up when things felt unflashy or unfulfilling? While yes, God does lead us forward in certain seasons of life to new jobs, or new towns, or new ministries, experiencing hardship is not the equivalent of God “calling” us away from right where we are. We must be wary of confusing discontentment and calling, and pray for the discernment to follow God wherever He’s actually leading—whether that be moving on in a new season or staying put in an old one.

Additionally, does following our dreams bring lasting freedom? The only freedom we need is the freedom found in Christ. We once were enemies of God and children of wrath, but now we are no longer

under a yoke of slavery to sin (Rom. 5:10; 6:6). It is for freedom that Christ has set us free (Gal. 5:1)! *If you are a Christian, you are already walking in real, lasting freedom because Jesus broke our bondage to sin.* In Him, we have all joy, all purpose, and all fulfillment. Both the successful entrepreneur and the stay-at-home mom share the same freedom from sin if they are in Christ.

I want to say this loud and clear: it's nonsense to think that God's various callings on our lives give us any sort of liberation, as if by unlocking our own personal purpose there is some hidden mystery yet to be revealed to us. Scripture does not support this, and we need to guard our minds against such destructive thinking. That successful entrepreneur may lose his or her business, and that mother may lose her child, but their identities are fixed in their Savior. They can be "afflicted in every way but not crushed; we are perplexed but not in despair; we are persecuted but not abandoned; we are struck down but not destroyed" (2 Cor. 4:8–9). They can still rejoice because their identity rests not in their calling or their dream, but in the *God* of our past, present, and future.

When we say things like, "This is my purpose in life," as if something other than glorifying God and proclaiming the gospel to all nations holds greater weight in our lives, then we are trusting in our dreams for freedom and not trusting in God. He is the peace that passes all understanding; He is the source of all goodness. He is all the freedom we need. Both freedom and purpose are a result of the gospel—not a result of following our dreams.

2. Our ability to impact the kingdom of God depends on finding God's purpose.

There is that *impact* word again. I read a statement very much like this on a major Christian organization's conference page: their heart is to help you discover your true purpose so that you can live your fullest potential on this earth. This sounds like a positive statement, but once we unpack the deeper meanings, we see that this is another harmful

pattern of thinking for the believer. This is similar to the previous statement in that it also calls into question God's individual purposes in our lives. It claims that when we find our God-given purpose, then we can "go make a difference" in this world. It's pertinent that we understand that God's kingdom is not dependent on His people figuring out their purpose. The advancement of God's kingdom is dependent on *God*—on the work of the Holy Spirit moving and transforming hearts. We are merely the vessels God uses. It has never been our God-given gifts, abilities, or words that have had the power to give new birth to souls. This is why Paul never preached with fancy verbiage; he didn't want his hearers' faith to rest in man's wisdom or ability, but rather the power of God (1 Cor. 2:4). Our ability to impact anything always rests in the power of God and not ourselves.

Again, who determines what "impact for the kingdom of God" looks like anyway? Imagine Joseph—who had faithfully served in Potiphar's home and was falsely accused of attacking Potiphar's wife—sitting in a prison cell considering the impact he was making in the world. Did being sold into slavery by his own family make a difference in the world? Were the false accusations by Potiphar's wife that landed him in prison making a difference in the world? Joseph didn't run around chasing after his heart or attend a conference to unlock his purpose; he simply trusted in the Lord and remained obedient in every circumstance God helped him to endure. His faith in God is further expressed when Joseph acknowledged that the evil done to him was used for good by God to save lives (Gen. 50:20). The visible result was a significant number of lives being saved, yes, but it took many years before that reason was ever revealed. And don't forget: Joseph had no way of knowing that was going to be the outcome! Yet he still honored God right where he was. Like the lives of many other faithful servants of God, Joseph's journey reflected a "walk by faith" attitude as opposed to a "find out what you're here for and go make an impact" kind of attitude.

When It All Comes Back to Me

What do all of these modern-day mantras have in common? They are all centered on *me* and *my* own self-fulfillment. The happiness or freedom I desire points to me, flows from me, and often the primary person to benefit is me. We end up bearing the burden for our own joy and worth, and the result is likely frustration when the formula doesn't equate the way these mantras promise. A life focused on self is not at all the life God calls Christians to (Matt. 16:24–25). This is usually a good filter for determining if something you're reading or listening to falls more in line with secular thinking than biblical thinking: Who does it point to? Who does this flow from? Who does it benefit? Is this consistent with what is revealed in Scripture? If any of these do not check out, then we ought to be concerned with the inspiration and advice we allow to permeate in our hearts and shape our thinking and living.

It is Satan's aim to corrupt God's holy purposes for this world—chasing dreams included—and we must be on guard. The best way to navigate through his attempts at sabotaging even the good things in our lives is to ensure that we have proper biblical framework guiding our lives. Like glasses that help those who need to see clearly, it is crucial that the dreamer (and all Christians, for that matter) gain proper perspective.

I recently went to the doctor in search of the root cause for some ongoing medical issues. After getting a full panel of bloodwork in multiple categories, the results came back, and my doctor said, "You are healthy! Everything looks wonderful, and I see nothing to worry about." I couldn't understand why I was so lethargic. I wasn't pregnant. My thyroid and iron levels were ideal. It wasn't long after, my husband and I cut sugar and carbs out of our diet entirely. Two weeks into this lifestyle change and I had more energy than what even a good cup of coffee could deliver. It made sense. I had been fueling myself with junk for so long. Sugar, in particular, wasn't just found in

the bag of Milano cookies I snuck tastes of between every meal; it's also found in our bread, salad dressings, and even shows up in many raw meats. Cutting it out and fueling myself with clean food was a game-changer; the results were felt immediately. In the same way, for us to maintain a proper biblical outlook, we must evaluate what fuels us. We have to look at what's going in our hearts before we can rightly use what's coming out of our lives for God's glory.

Preached in 1982 and still relevant today, John Piper words it well:

Satan devotes himself 168 hours a week trying to deceive you and fill your mind with junk. He has seen to it that you are surrounded almost entirely by Christless culture whose mood, and entertainment, and advertising, and recreation, and politics are shot through with lies about what you feel and think and do. Do you think that in this atmosphere you can maintain a vigorous, powerful, free, renewed mind with a ten-minute glance at God's book once a day?⁴

Do we recognize that Satan is on the hunt and wants to take our focus off God and put it on ourselves? What music, books, or TV shows am I filling myself with? What messages am I allowing to permeate my brain? Are my go-to sources of inspiration pithy quotes that sound true but really proclaim worldly lies? Daily we consume some sort of philosophy or agenda. The commercials we watch, the podcasts we listen to, the people we follow on Twitter and Instagram are all shaped by their belief system, and when we choose to give them a foothold in our lives by listening or reading, we open ourselves to persuasion that is potentially detrimental to our spiritual health. Again, I'm not saying we need to avoid the world. We are called to live in it and minister to it. But when worldly thinking becomes so second nature to us that we can't even detect its presence in our minds, something's very wrong.

Throughout the diet Ethan and I were on, we discovered that the health aisle is not very trustworthy. Though there are countless products labeled “organic,” “low-carb,” or “sugar-free,” when we looked at the nutrition labels, we discovered these items were deceptive. The valid identifier of whether or not the products are actually beneficial for your body is in the nutrition label. To read a nutrition label, you have to know what to look for. How many net carbs are in it? How much sugar? What ingredients did they sneak in? A chocolate bar may label itself as sugar-free and yet contain sucralose or maltodextrin, which are forms of sugar.

Similarly, perhaps many of the books, podcasts, or online sermons that are part of our regular diet are labeled “Christian” or appear “Christian” but, as we can see, that word is not always a guarantee. While there is no nutrition label to refer to, we can weigh their words against Scripture. Like the Bereans, we can examine Scripture to see if their words line up with biblical truth (Acts 17:11). To catch the subtle contradictions, we must have an intimate knowledge of our Bibles. Piper argues that ten minutes a day in our Bibles is not enough, and I have to agree.

Desiring God’s Word

The psalmist throughout Psalm 119 exemplifies what it looks like to live guided and directed by the truth of God’s Word. The entire psalm is worth reading and meditating on, but we will focus in on the instruction found in verses 1–8:

How happy are those whose way is blameless,
who walk according to the LORD’s instruction!
Happy are those who keep his decrees
and seek him with all their heart.
They do nothing wrong;
they walk in his ways.

You have commanded that your precepts
be diligently kept.
If only my ways were committed
to keeping your statutes!
Then I would not be ashamed
when I think about all your commands.
I will praise you with an upright heart
when I learn your righteous judgments.
I will keep your statutes;
never abandon me.

1. Following God's Instruction Results in True Happiness

One thing I've noticed consistently in pet ownership is that animals love to push their boundary lines. No matter where we've lived, no matter how big or small the yard size, our dogs have always attempted to go beyond the fences that protect them from what awaits them on the other side. When we moved to our farmhouse, we thought that surely the couple acres that came with it would give them enough space and freedom to do whatever dogs like to do. But even still, they run right up to the fence line and seek out methods of escape.

Do they think the grass is greener on the other side? Do they believe we are withholding better lands to sniff or grass to roll in? It may seem like our boundary lines are restrictive and holding them back from true freedom, but the reality is that we fenced off our yard to protect them (and our kids) from the many tractors and farm equipment that pass back and forth our house daily.

Sadly, on the first night of moving into our home, our two dogs decided to make their way out to that road, and with tear-filled eyes and heavy hearts, we buried one of them shortly after. What our dogs don't see or understand is that within the perimeters of our home, there is safety from certain dangers of this world. Not only do they have protection, but we have food and water for them daily, loving

family members to play with them, and a warm home for them to sleep in. Our rules are not intended to withhold joy but rather to provide it under the shelter of our love and care.

But dogs don't see it that way, do they? They don't see that the grass is greener right here, with their food and their water and their acres to run and their people. No. All they see is the fence—the killjoy, the boundary line that doesn't let them wander into what they assume is greener pastures.

The world has a similar mentality toward God's instruction. It sees any one of His boundary lines as a killjoy—a bunch of rules that take all the fun out of life. It believes the age-old lie from Satan, that God is restricting us from attaining true happiness. But the first two verses of Psalm 119 boldly challenge this line of thinking. They tell us that the person who keeps God's instructions, keeps His decrees, and seeks after Him with their whole heart is happy. Right away a promise is given to us: be blameless and follow the Lord's instruction and you will be happy. Let's refer back to verse 4, "You have commanded that your precepts be diligently kept." If happiness is following God's instruction and God's instruction (or command) is that His precepts be diligently kept, then it is possible for us to have the attitude of verses 6–8 which say, "Then I would not be ashamed when I think about all your commands. I will praise you with an upright heart when I learn your righteous judgments. I will keep your statutes; never abandon me." In other words, this isn't some half-hearted obedience—no, the psalmist is all in. He recognizes that the by-product of obedience to God is happiness. These claims stand in contrast with the idea that chasing after our dreams, reaching our goals, and making things happen will fulfill us. Instead, these verses show us that chasing *God* in His *Word* is what fulfills us.

2. *Following God's Command Guards Us against Sin*

Let's continue in Psalm 119:9–11:

How can a young man keep his way pure?
By keeping your word.
I have sought you with all my heart;
don't let me wander from your commands.
I have treasured your word in my heart
so that I may not sin against you.

It's interesting how often I see a T-shirt or hand-lettered print that says, "Prone to wander . . ." as if it is a good thing. Someone somewhere decided to play on these old words from Mr. Robinson's hymn and apply them to the wanderlust mentality our generation is so consumed with. It's popular phrases like these that reveal how little our culture regards original context. The original hymn says, "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love."⁵ Knowing the original intent, this isn't my first choice of words to wear on a T-shirt or hang in my home—even if the new meaning is wanderlust. For as much as I know the truth and still feel tempted to move God down on the priority list, I am not alone in my tendency to wander away from God. How can I fight that which I'm naturally prone to?

Keeping God's Word protects us from falling into sin. Verse 9 asks the question and then answers it: How can we maintain purity? By keeping His Word. Psalm 37:31–33 says, "The instruction of his God is in his heart; his steps do not falter. The wicked one lies in wait for the righteous and intends to kill him; the LORD will not leave him in the power of the wicked one or allow him to be condemned when he is judged." Scripture affirms yet again that the evil one seeks to destroy the righteous, and yet, one major weapon against his attacks is the Word of God. Because God's instruction is in his heart "his steps do not falter." This psalmist understands that the one who keeps God's Word or clings to God's instruction protects himself from

wandering off into sin. Therefore, we should pray as the psalmist does, “Don’t let me wander from your commands” (119:10). And when we pray this, we are not only fighting against sin, we are admitting the reality that God *Himself* has a part to play in our obedience to His Word, as we will see in the principle below.

3. Following God’s Commands Requires the Help of God

There was a season in my Christian walk where I grew inconsistent with my Scripture reading. I became so upset with myself because I had the head knowledge of what I should do but had no inward desire to do it. I decided to turn to Psalm 119 as a reminder of Scripture’s value, but rather than just reading why it is profitable, it revealed that even my very desire for it comes from Him.

“Turn my eyes from looking at what is worthless; give me life in your ways” (v. 37). That verse was a mirror of my own heart. I was consumed with worthless things, but I need not stay there. The psalmist asked God to give him life—to pull him out of the muck and mire and set him upon the path of life. And so, I prayed through this psalm with fresh eyes.

There is a clear plea from the psalmist to God, acknowledging in utter humility how much he needs God in the process of keeping His commands, attaining blessing or happiness, and keeping away from sin.

Verses 17–19 acknowledge his neediness:

Deal generously with your servant
 so that I might live;
 then I will keep your word.
 Open my eyes so that I may contemplate
 wondrous things from your instruction.
 I am a resident alien on earth;
 do not hide your commands from me.

The psalmist made three requests: “deal generously with your servant,” “open my eyes,” and “do not hide your commands.” And if we look at the verses we have already covered we read: “never abandon me” (v. 8) and “don’t let me wander” (v. 10). The psalmist’s abilities to live out God’s commands come from God. Each statement he makes is preceded with a request from God to help him. “*Deal generously with your servant . . . then I will keep your word. Open my eyes that I may contemplate wondrous things from your instruction.*” If we continued reading this psalm, we find dozens of requests:

- “*Help me understand the meaning . . .*” (v. 27)
- “*Strengthen me through your word . . .*” (v. 28)
- “*Keep me from the way of deceit . . .*” (v. 29)
- “*Graciously give me your instruction . . .*” (v. 29)
- “*Do not put me to shame . . .*” (v. 31)
- “*You broaden my understanding . . .*” (v. 32)
- “*Teach me, LORD, the meaning . . .*” (v. 33)
- “*Help me understand . . .*” (v. 34)
- “*Help me stay on the path . . .*” (v. 35)
- “*Turn my heart to your decrees . . .*” (v. 36)

On and on and on we could go all the way through the entire 176 verses. This psalmist clearly needs God’s power to help him love and obey God! And so do we. We cannot muster it on our own. What encouragement that our ability to serve God does not rest in our own strength. This is the theme of all Scripture, and the very heart of the gospel! He created us, He chose us, He saved us, He sustains us, He sanctifies us, and it’s all for His glory. It’s all from Him, for Him, to Him, and if we want to live a life for His glory, we must humble ourselves and recognize just how much we need Him to help us.

As we grow consistent in our Bible reading, develop a true love in chasing God through it, and ask Him to help us along the way, He will give us eyes to see the various ways that the enemy is out to destroy us and distort the way we perceive God and His truth. This

will help us separate ourselves from the world—not just in our actions but in our thinking. The world is quick to tell us how we should live and how we should dream, and if we are not careful, we may start believing the lie that happiness is found within our dreams—whether apart from God or even with Him. We must cautiously examine the information we absorb and test it against the Scriptures because we know that God demands Christians live differently than the people who reject Him.

The only way to successfully do this is to allow the power of the Holy Spirit to equip us with discernment as we seek the truth found in God's Word. *Does what I'm reading or hearing line up with what Scripture says?* God's Word must be the final authority in our lives—and the authority over our dreams—and we must turn to it regularly. Not Instagram. Not podcasts. Not catchy sermon phrases. Not hand-lettered quotes. Not the inside advice of influencers. May we not be deceived; may we walk in obedience because of who God is and what His Word says. There's no better way to close this chapter than with the words of Paul himself:

Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by his vast strength. Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens. For this reason, take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand. Stand, therefore, with truth like a belt around your waist, righteousness like armor on your chest, and your feet sandaled with readiness for the gospel of peace. In every situation take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming

arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit—which is the word of God. Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request and stay alert with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints. (Eph. 6:10–18)



“Chase your dreams and follow your heart, no matter the cost” is the call of the world today. The opposite extreme, often advised by well-meaning Christians, is to surrender all of our dreams and passions at the feet of Christ.

One narrative says to
FOLLOW A PASSION,
and the other says to
LAY IT DOWN.

Both claim to offer happiness and purpose on the other side. But what does the Bible say about dreams, goals, and passions?

With compelling illustrations from Dianne Jago’s unexpected journey in creating *Deeply Rooted Magazine*, along with thoughtful scriptural examples, Dianne shares an honest account of how God changed her plans and aligned them with His.

Instead of the one-size-fits-all formula for dream-chasing, *A Holy Pursuit* will help you identify whether it’s time to pursue, pause, or surrender a dream you hold according to biblical wisdom.



DIANNE JAGO is a military wife and mother of three residing in Pensacola, Florida. She is the founder and chief editor of *Deeply Rooted Magazine*, where she works with her team to encourage, inspire, and equip women to be deeply rooted in Christ alone.

B&H
BHPUBLISHING.COM

RELIGION/Christian Life/Women's Issues
978-1-5359-6235-3 \$17.99 USD



9 781535 962353