

LAUNCH *your* VISION

*A Strategic Guide
for Visionaries, Artists,
and Kingdom Builders*

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INTRODUCTION

Many artists begin their journey like lovers waiting to be pursued. Our hearts are eager yet shy, waiting for someone to help us spread our wings – a fairy godmother to make us spectacular with just a flick of her wand, or the Simon Cowell to pick us out from the crowd and give us a platform. We might not admit it, but most of us think that having someone “discover us” would make our creative lives a lot easier. We feel the stirring... we know God has placed a hunger for artistic expression in our lives, and we desire to use our gifts to honor Him.

“If it's God's will,” we declare with certainty, “He will make it happen.”

We may even believe that a sovereign act of God would prove a higher power to be solely responsible for the opportunity, rather than our own flesh or prideful ambition accomplishing our dreams. *If God does it, we reason, I can't mess it up.* The heart behind this idea has

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merit, but the problem is that God doesn't always work that way. In fact, He rarely does, since He doesn't honor fear (even when we're afraid of ourselves) but rather, He honors faith and obedience. The result is that there are many disillusioned visionary people who are waiting in the wings and never step into their creative destiny.

For many years, I was one of those people. I had some amount of natural talent and a passion to serve God with my gifts, but I was clueless when it came to unlocking my dreams. For many years I hoped and prayed for the “big break” which never happened. I became frustrated with life and even somewhat mad at God, because I couldn't figure out why He put such a burning, artistic zeal in my heart and didn't give me the outlet to use it.

Like Joseph in the Old Testament, I had a lot of big dreams that seemed overwhelming to everyone around me, and I didn't know what to do with them. I resonated with this young dreamer who carried great favor, but that mostly served to make others jealous. Joseph was a remarkable man; eventually he cracked the code of how to unlock a dream and see it happen. He went from being a dreamer to becoming an interpreter of dreams, and after creating a track record of faithfulness, he could hear a king's vision and create the strategy to bring it to pass. **Because of this process, Joseph went from a dreamer with no following to a strategic visionary who saved a nation.**

After 17 years of ministry as a full-time artist, I'd like to offer you some coaching on how to partner with God to

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launch your dreams. By the end of this book, you'll know how to craft a strategy to build your vision and sharpen your faith until you can throw your head back and laugh at your fears. Instead of causing people to be intimidated or jealous of your dreams, I believe you can use God's favor on your life to fulfill your destiny. I'd love to see you discover the joy of creating with your Father in unpredictable, never-before-seen, radical ways that introduce heaven to earth and captivate the human heart.

As believers in Christ carrying the divine mandate to "be fruitful," I believe that media, film, art, books, and other creative projects are powerful opportunities that the Lord loves to use to bring this calling to pass. The Lord who placed vision and creativity into your heart did so for a reason, and He wants come alongside your journey to help it unfold, change lives, and bring Him glory!

The nine chapters of coaching within this book carry keys for your journey. Not all of them will be applicable to your personal walk, but some of them may be perfectly shaped to unlock the next phase of your calling. I'll share my personal, three-step strategy on how I take a vision from the "idea stage" to launching it into full flight, and I'll be honest about the times I've stumbled along the way. We'll also look deep into God's Word and study the life of Jesus to see how He built a ministry from scratch in a way that honored the Father and fulfilled His destiny. Through Christ's journey and the lives of other important artists and visionaries in Scripture, we'll find heroes and pioneers to equip us for our walk.

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The fact is, I believe God is even more excited about your dreams than you are! If you can place them in His hands like an uncut diamond, and can trust Him in the process of crafting a jewel from your raw hopes and dreams, anything is possible! With a little coaching, you'll be able to craft your own strategy and launch your vision.

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PART I

READY:
PREPARING YOUR MIND AND HEART
FOR THE CREATIVE PROCESS.

*“Give me six hours to chop down a tree
and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe.”*

- Abraham Lincoln

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CHAPTER ONE

KNOWN

*To be known and not loved is our greatest fear.
But to be fully known and truly loved is,
well, a lot like being loved by God.
It is what we need more than anything.*

*It liberates us from pretense,
humbles us out of our self-righteousness,
and fortifies us for any difficulty life can throw at us.*
-- Tim Keller

During my career, I've produced 12 music albums of original songs, TV shows and series, films, docudramas, traveled around the world with my potter's wheel, written books, spoken at churches, schools, and retreats, and always have a few creative projects going! However, my creativity didn't start with a platform, rather, it followed a miserable season of feeling stuck and frustrated with most

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of my life-- especially my creative journey. Believe me, I know what it feels like to think the whole world couldn't care less about your vision. I've also discovered the absolute joy of watching people come alive and be touched through encountering the art that I've partnered with God to birth into the earth. Moments like that simply cannot be put into words! It was quite a trek toward this discovery, but I believe the transition started in Deadwood, TX where I did what many of us do when we feel at our wit's end: I gave up on my dreams.

DEADWOOD

Ever since I was six-years-old, I'd wanted to write music and be a recording artist. It was my life's goal, I'd written hundreds of songs, learned to play the guitar and piano, and went to dozens of music concerts to hang on every word of my heroes. I couldn't imagine loving anything more than music. It was more than a desire – it was part of my heart. Music was a gift from God, and I knew it. I also knew it was way bigger than I could make possible on my own, and the frustration of hoping for something that wasn't happening was maddening.

In my early twenties, I was still living at home when my family moved to Deadwood, TX: “no man's land” with a hand-painted sign on the highway that read, *Welcome to Deadwood. Population 100: 99 happy people and one old grouch.* (The residents said they all took turns being the grouch.) We moved there to start a ministry, but the whole thing fell apart when we arrived. In fact, the doors closed

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so firmly that it was laughable! Living on the banks of the muddy Sabine River at the end of a three-mile dirt road didn't leave much hope for a creative platform, since there wasn't any chance of being discovered in Deadwood. In frustration, I finally told God, *I'm tired of hurting because I want this so badly. If You don't want me to sing, then please tell me what you DO have for my life!*

When I hit a wall in Deadwood, it was crushing. Musical expression lost all its joy, so I decided to lay it aside to seek God's plan, and for the next year I didn't play a note. I fasted and prayed, and set up my potter's wheel in the little shed with a cracked cement floor, listened to worship music, formed clay pots, and got quiet before God. Something interesting started happening: I began to think of the beauty in the scriptural parable of the Potter & Clay, and I wrote my thoughts down. My heart started coming alive with this new medium of art: writing.

God started showing up in Deadwood. In my quiet times of prayer, I began to sense His Presence so strongly as He healed my heart, revealed some idols I'd been holding onto, and visited me in a way that I had always longed for but had never fully experienced. He challenged me with the price tag involved in receiving the anointing, and asked me if I was sure if I wanted it. (I had grown up in a Christian home but no one had ever told me about "anointing," so this was totally new for me.) I knew He was offering me an option to step into a ministry that was far better than anything I could conjure up on my own, and I was enthralled (and terrified) of this beautiful idea.

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At the end of a year, a Methodist minister from Deadwood approached me.

“The Lord says that it's time for you to start your ministry,” he said, gently but with certainty, “and it's going to start in my church. Bring your potter's wheel and speak to our ladies.”

He had been praying for revival for 30 years, and he noticed that God was up to something with me! So, I lugged my huge wheel to the Methodist ladies' meeting and have been speaking ever since. After almost two years, I moved from Deadwood to a larger town and spent 2 ½ years interning at a recording studio run by a pastor and his wife, rethinking my definition of music and how that fit into my life. They challenged me to grow and pursue my calling and gifts with passion, and I came out of that season understanding how to honor authority and serve someone else's vision. I never went to college. Eventually I picked up a camera and started filming and editing my own TV shows for a local TV station. The “death of vision” in Deadwood became a powerful place to launch my dreams, because that's where God showed up. That's how my ministry and arts career started, and it embedded a few valuable keys into my soul.

DREAMING WITH GOD

Deadwood wrecked me. I realized that God *wanted me* more than He wanted my dreams. His love for me was bigger than any “destiny” or anything that I wanted to do for Him, and I didn't have to force His hand with any of it.

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He wanted me to create, in fact He had more ideas than I did! He also called even more artistic mediums out of me – I thought I just wanted to sing, but by the end of that season I had written and illustrated four books. (I didn't even know how to draw before then!) He bypassed the way I limited my gifts and decided to color outside of my lines. The wrecking ball of His Presence was glorious, and I was hooked: partnering with God to create beauty was what I was born to do.

The biggest thing that still wrecks me is that *He knows us so deeply*. This fills that artist's cry in my soul to be known and cheered on. Many of us have been told that this longing to be known is evil or self-centered. Truthfully, and if pursued in the wrong way, it can be very damaging and we miss the greatest goals. However, if we recognize that God wants to reach inside of us and release creative gifts we didn't even know we had, and that we get to be part of His Kingdom which is so much bigger than ourselves, we'd do everything possible to position ourselves in such a way to give Him all we're holding back.

If we can recognize that God is already holding out His hand and waiting to pull us into the dance... if we can see the delight and longing in His eyes as He desires to partner with us, we'll find the One who is willing to whisk us onto the dance floor and take us into an incredible journey.

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THE FATHER'S BLESSING

If we look at the ministry of Jesus, we'll notice a trend of the Father's love that's very different than a normal ministry or career lifestyle. In my own mind, I can imagine the Father hoping that Christ would accomplish His assignment on earth and throwing a party when He did, but that's not what we see. The first benediction of the Father's pleasure came prior to any ministry at all. In fact, the Father's approval was stamped upon the Son before He called any disciples, did a single miracle, went to the cross, or rose from the dead.

When Jesus was thirty-years-old, local people knew Him as the carpenter from Nazareth. Then one day, He laid down the hammer and chisel and hiked into the wilderness to see His cousin, John the Baptist, who was leading a radical revival by the Jordan river. People were confessing their sins and being baptized in droves, and the masses were eagerly looking for the chosen Messiah who would bring freedom to their nation.

Standing in the river, his piercing eyes cutting through the crowds, John saw Jesus standing on the bank.

"Look!" John shouted with triumph. "This is the one I told you about: behold the Lamb of God!"

Jesus stepped into the water towards John, but his cousin nearly refused to baptize him.

"I should be the one being baptized by you," he whispered hoarsely, as the people looked on in wonder.

"Do it," said Jesus, "it needs to happen in order to fulfill God's plan."

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Suddenly the heavens opened, the Holy Spirit descended like a dove, and Father God's voice released a blessing upon His son:

This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased!

Nobody knew who Jesus was or supposed that He was anything other than a carpenter, yet the Father, beaming from heaven, opened the skies and shouted, *I love you, My Son! I am so pleased with You!*

For the rest of His ministry, we never see Jesus trying to earn the Father's approval or impress Him with good deeds. Instead, He worked from the place of blessing and acceptance, knowing that He had been heard, was tracking with the Father's plan, and trusting that His Father had the details covered. He never denies the desire to be known and loved, but rather He gives us the picture of someone who fully tapped into the heart of God and lives from the place of complete trust in His Father's love.

Like Jesus, when you live "from the place of blessing" in your creative journey, you never have to ask God to prove His love by opening doors or releasing resources. Instead, you're confident in His love, you know that His dreams are bigger than yours, and He's already provided everything you need for the vision. Your creativity is not birthed from the place of a needy orphan, but as a beloved child of the Father who is present and ready to walk every step with you.

I remember one moment early in my creative journey that revealed the Father's blessing in a way that made my jaw drop in amazement...

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HE KNOWS YOUR NAME

Crowds buzzed with anticipation and the atmosphere was charged with excitement over the evening's concert. Several internationally recognized bands were playing that evening, and the fans were ready to give them a Texas welcome. As a reporter for a small local newspaper, I drove my little Toyota SUV behind the event center and somehow managed to slip behind security guards as I hoped for a fresh scoop. All my life, I'd listened to these bands on my little FM radio, taping their posters to my bedroom walls and memorizing their song lyrics. The newspaper had given me the job of covering local events and helped open doors to interview some of my heroes. There was only one problem: they hadn't given me a press pass yet, so I hoped my job title alone would get me into a few interviews with the lead singers. It was a bit ambitious, but a local radio station had promised to help and I figured I had nothing to lose. It turned out to be an unforgettable evening that would reveal how God believed in my dreams even more than I did, and He knew right where I was!

With a pounding heart, I approached the road manager and placed my request for an interview, using my nicest smile and sharing the name of the local paper that had sent me.

"We'll see," he said, warily disappearing into his trailer.

Soon the security officer got wind that an annoying blonde woman was asking for interviews, and he came out with a scowl.

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"This isn't a good time. How did you get back here anyway?" he demanded, ready to bid me a speedy farewell. I gulped and scrambled for words.

Suddenly a man interrupted our conversation.

"Excuse me, are you..." he pulled a piece of paper from his shirt pocket with my name scribbled on the top, "Rebecca Friedlander? I'm from the radio station and I can set up a few interviews for you."

A little shiver of delight shot through me. *Perfect timing!* I thought. *God knows right where I am, and He sent someone who has my name in his pocket to create a way for me.*

I don't remember a single thing that my heroes said during the interviews that night, but I do remember feeling loved and known by my Heavenly Father who showed up at just the right moment. His blessing had gone before me to prepare the way, and He knew my name.

KNOWN BY GOD

The fact that a disc jockey could have the name of a random reporter in his shirt pocket is a great reminder of God's heart: we are known, our dreams are not despised, we are called to walk with a very creative God who shows up right on time. This idea of being deeply seen and known by God is key to the creative journey. Artists and ministers are often bombarded by insecurities, accusations, and over-analyzing, but the pressure lifts when we are deeply rooted in the Father's love. Suddenly, our identity isn't wrapped up in our dreams when we

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realize we are already loved and cherished by Christ.

As we follow the life of Jesus, we see that His identity and emotional stability never depended on whether it looked like His ministry was successful, but only on whether He was following the Father. When faced with pressures or difficulties, He always retreated to prayer where He could center Himself around the most important thing: His Father's love, companionship, and plan. Being known in heaven by His Father was more important to Jesus than anything on earth.

When the disciples were flying high after a successful ministry trip, He cheered them on and then counseled,

Nevertheless do not rejoice in this...

but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.

Luke 10:20

When our names are known in heaven, it is more glorious than any earthly reward and will keep us focused on what really matters, regardless of what happens on this earth. Great ministry platforms come and go, but being deeply rooted in the place of heavenly identity provides great security.

Jesus also laments the lack of knowing Him deeply. It would seem that He longs for us to enter into this space of love and intimacy, and some doors are shut simply because we have not embraced this place. To the five virgins who were late to the wedding, He refused them access to the wedding party with the words,

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Assuredly I say unto You, I do not know you.

Matthew 25: 12

In the Old Testament, the prophets became so burdened by the heart of the Lord, that their lament echoes through the ages as they pen the heart cry of God, *My people have not known Me!*

Could it be that our desire to “be known” as artists and visionaries, stems from an even deeper, God-given desire to be deeply known by Him? Our wish for a Simon Cowell to acknowledge us as the next American Idol and help launch our dreams may actually be a guise for a deep-seated yearning to be known and affirmed by the true Creator who can launch our vision for greater purposes than our own.

Thankfully, this is something Christ freely gives us. He doesn't hold out on us, but rather waits to see if we are really serious about pursuing this intimacy. Like a careful lover, He does not easily share His heart with just everyone. Instead, He waits to see if we will also invest in this relationship before entrusting us with His creative treasures.

KNOWN IN HEAVEN

When we connect with our Father's love, the fact that we're known in heaven seems to make room for us on earth. Here's another story when I found this to be true in the creative process.



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It was summertime in Northern Israel, and I was following a very tentative lead on a story. When traveling alone with a backpack of cameras to film my TV show, *Radical Makeovers*, I checked into a youth hostel which happened to be next door to the local zoo where I could watch the tigers prowling below and listen to the peacocks scream from my bedroom. It was quite an adventure!

Weeks earlier I had emailed the Christian leader of a congregation and asked if she knew anyone I might interview. She had been one of my heroes, and I'd listened to her beautiful music for years in my little studio at home. No reply had come from my email, so I simply decided to visit her fellowship and thank her for her ministry.

Crammed into a car with several people going to worship, we drove the winding, mountain roads to the beautiful building. After the moving worship service, I put on my brave face and made a beeline to speak with her.

"Thanks so much for all you do," I offered. "Your music has encouraged me so much!"

"Tell me why you're in Israel," she countered graciously, so I shared my heart for young women and the passion that had birthed this TV show about capturing true beauty around the world. She quickly interrupted me.

"You sent us an e-mail! We didn't get the chance to respond, but we know who you are. Come have lunch with us!"

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Soon I was seated at the head table (next to my hero!) in a cafe, eating a banquet of rich Mediterranean food and talking about potential connections for my show. The networking was invaluable and many people were touched by the interview that came from that time, but my heart will never forget the feeling of being “known” by God in a foreign country as I stepped out to pursue my vision. I was a “nobody,” just a camera girl with a dream, but God knew where I was and spread me a feast when I least expected it.

This place of “knowing” has become the most sacred space of my life. It’s the heartbeat of everything I do as an artist and a human being. If I get distracted from this place, I often try to meet peoples’ needs in the wrong way or miss out on a beautiful moment He has prepared for me to walk with Him in. God gives talent and anointing to lots of people: but I want to know Him deeply enough to catch the rhythm of His heart and share it with the world using my art.

Partnering with God starts with this place of being known by the Father. The Apostle John wrote to those who were new in the faith and said,

*I write to you, little children,
Because you have known the Father.*

1 John 2:13

The more we know the Father, the more we get to be little children who rest in His love. The pressure lifts, and

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we get to enjoy the process without trying to prove ourselves to the world.

A STRONG FOUNDATION

Built around the affirmation of God, our hearts can thrive in the safety of His love even when others may or may not understand or value our contribution. Having the strong foundation of His love in our lives enables us to overcome the words that might unintentionally undermine our dreams.

One time I was releasing a film at a church (I had invested major blood, sweat, and tears into this project!), and I overheard two ladies talking in the restroom.

“Sally was going to come,” one lady said, “but she saw the film trailer and decided she wasn't interested in the topic, so she changed her mind.”

For a moment, the sharp stab of rejection made me wince. In response, I quickly stepped back into the “known” place and remembered, *This is God's film, not mine. I'm just a servant trying to give Him my best, and the results are up to Him.* Wryly, I thought to myself, *The devil must be pretty mad to try to discourage me right before the film starts!* If I had become focused on defending myself, it could have ruined my evening. Instead, I shifted into the “known” place where I simply give God my best, rest in His love, and trust Him to work out the details. It turned out to be a great night!

Jesus modeled this for us at The Last Supper, revealing how to stay focused on being “known” by God even in the

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midst of difficulty. On the night He was betrayed, He could have tried to talk the disciples into following Him to the end, reminded them not to forget His teachings, or had Judas gagged and tied so the betrayal would have never taken place! Instead, His focus was not on defending a ministry or saving a platform: He was completely centered on the Father and serving the disciples with love.

*Jesus, knowing that the Father
had given all things into His hands,
and that He had come from God and was going to God,
rose from supper and laid aside His garments,
took a towel and girded Himself.*

*After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the
disciples' feet,
and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.*

John 13:3-5

Jesus was so wrapped up in knowing what the Father had given Him, that not even His own death could deter Him. He could have tried to talk the disciples into being faithful or boosted His own self-confidence, but He did none of those things. In fact, He embraced the humble, vulnerable state of stripping His outer garments and washing feet. What an awesome place of complete fearlessness! The reason for this is summed up in John's words: *Jesus, **knowing** that the Father had given all things*

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into His hands—His confidence and love flowed from the place of knowing, and He invites us into the same place today.

For an artist, it's so crucial that we experience this intimacy with the Father, since we often naturally tend to live from the heart. Who else puts their heart on the line as much as someone who dares to express it through art and ministry? The deeper we go into the beauty of knowing the love of Christ, the more confidently we can express the dreams and visions He entrusts us with. Cultivating this place of intimacy is a great way to start the creative journey as we launch our vision!

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ASK YOURSELF:

1. Do you ever feel frustrated with the creative process?

2. Have you ever been through a “Deadwood” season?

3. How does Christ make us look more like Himself in “Deadwood?”

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4. What character attributes are formed during this time?

5 Are you inviting God into your creative journey?

6 What does that look like?

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7 Does deeply knowing Christ help center your artistic journey? Explain?

8 What would it look like to spend a season really pressing into God's heart?

9 What are some ways you have experienced Christ's love?

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10 List a few ways you can continue to invest in your relationship with Him during the artistic process.

CHAPTER TWO
UN-STUCK

*Fear is the glue that keeps us stuck.
Faith is the solvent that sets you free.*
- Shannon L. Alder

Have you ever felt stuck in time with your vision? Now more than ever, we have the tools, technology, and resources to make our dreams happen, and with a bit of creativity most people are able to take steps toward their goals – so what keeps us from running with our dreams? I'm going to be radically honest with you in this chapter, because I believe WE are often the ones who hold us back. For years, I was frustrated with God for not making my dreams come true, but now I realize that I was believing so many lies that kept me from giving myself permission to fly. By believing a warped perspective, I was actually clipping my own wings, keeping my vision grounded, and

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unable to partner with God.

I want to spare you that frustration and prepare you to launch well, so let's look at a few of the common thought-processes that often derail our dreams. Honestly, every one of these lies I've believed myself and often thought they were pleasing to God. Others were spoken by people that I trusted who often had good intentions, but they were simply wrong. So, let's gather our courage, get ready to do a bit of soul-searching, and ask the Lord if there's any wrong beliefs that could keep us stuck in time instead of running after the vision He has given us.

LIE: FALSE HUMILITY

How many of you have “held back” in your creative gifts because you don't want to appear “full of yourself” or prideful? I sure have! My first creative passion was music, but I sang with a very soft voice and was careful not to put too many licks into my vocals. People in my life told me,

“Be careful that you don't sound too worldly. Be humble and don't draw attention to yourself.”

Enter the Jacksons, an African American couple who took me under their wing and mentored me at their recording studio right after I left Deadwood. In characteristic candor, they challenged me one day.

“Rebecca, how does it honor God if you give Him less than everything He has placed inside of you?”

I was shocked.

“I never thought I was cheating God by holding myself

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back," I responded. "I thought I was being humble."

Suddenly I realized my mistake: by singing softly, I had embraced a false humility and was actually not pleasing God at all. *Lord, I prayed, forgive me for this wrong belief! I want to give You everything!* Their words released a key to a treasure chest that I'd been carrying but was too afraid to open. From that point on, joy flowed over me as I sang to the Lord with every bit of uniqueness and passion within my heart!

Our "best" is not competition for God, since He made the world and isn't jealous or threatened by His creation. To quote the Olympic runner Eric Littel,

"I believe God made me for a purpose, but He also made me fast! And when I run I feel His pleasure."

When we give ourselves permission to be passionate about our vision because God is worthy of our best, we step into the grace to fully be ourselves and give Him glory. When our motive is pure and we desire to honor Christ with our vision, it frees us from false-humility because He is the one we are doing it for. God loves passion. He's not worried about competing with us. No matter how big our dream, He longs to be the Father who cheers us on and dares us to dream bigger still. Never talk yourself out of giving Him your best!

*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart,
as working for the Lord, not for human masters,
since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the
Lord as a reward.*

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It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Colossians 3:23, 24 NIV

The Greek word for *heart* in this passage is, “breath,” meaning the very God-breathed part of our being. What if we apply this verse to our creative gifts? There is a reward for honoring Christ if we work at it *with all our heart*. Let's dare to give God everything and invest our heart and soul into the vision He's given us!

Truthfully, when we release ourselves to create with big, broad strokes, we usually realize that we're not quite as good as we think we are! No matter how much natural talent, vision, or anointing we carry, most of the time it's a diamond in the rough that needs polishing. This is where true humility kicks in and we have to choose to enter the learning curve to develop our gifts with excellence. Coaching, tutorials, and mentoring help us reach our goals, so having a humble, teachable heart in those areas is so important. If you want true humility, be willing to give your vision everything you have, and then be teachable and ready to mature with your gifts. Refusing the lie of False Humility opens up the door for True Humility to step in.

LIE: COMPARISON

If you're feeling stuck, it's easy to start comparing yourself with others who seem to have life all together, especially if they're thriving in their vision. I've wrestled with the green-eyed monster of envy more than I'd like to

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admit. Believe me, envy doesn't go away when we step into God's will for our lives. In fact, sometimes it intensifies as we wonder why doors don't open faster or why some people seem to have more opportunities than we do. There are several scriptures that have helped define this issue for me: the first comes directly from the mouth of Jesus. Let's relive a story from John 21:15-19...



The beach was quiet and serene as the disciples walked with Jesus in Galilee. It seemed so surreal: only days before, they had watched the horrible crucifixion in Jerusalem, and now they were walking with the resurrected Lord. Still raw with emotion and wonder, they hung on His every word.

After a breakfast of fresh fish on the shore, Jesus called Simon Peter over for a private talk. The disciple John, still a teenager and unwilling to let the Master out of his sight, trailed behind them as they walked.

"Peter," said the Lord, laying the call of ministry on Peter's heart, "Feed my sheep."

As He began to unfold the responsibility and cost of ministry, Peter caught sight of young John tagging behind and eavesdropping on the conversation.

"Lord," Peter blurted out, "What about this man?"

Jesus responded with grace and also a challenge.

"If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?" He looked straight into Peter's eyes. "Follow Me."

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The Holy Spirit often reminds me of this story when I compare my ministry to others'. *What is that to you, Rebecca? Follow Me!* Each of us are directly accountable to God for our lives, and He gives us talents and skills based on His own will and plan. Who are we to compare them with someone else? Instead of being distracted by what others are or are not doing, let's fix our eyes on Jesus and focus on what He has called us to.

*But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts,
do not boast and lie against the truth.*

*This wisdom does not descend from above,
but is earthly, sensual, demonic.*

***For where envy and self-seeking exist,
confusion and every evil thing are there.***

James 4:14-16 [bold added]

Ouch! Not only is envy a work of the flesh and even demonic, it also brings confusion. It's hard to be focused on God's calling when we're looking at everyone else. So many people never step into their God-ordained destiny simply because they're lost in the confusion of comparing themselves to others. It's like living life with cross-eyed vision, never focusing solely on the road ahead. If this sounds familiar, recognize that this is a tactic of the enemy to destroy your faith!

One day I was reading through the book of Isaiah and

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came across an amazing verse that helped me see clearly how much God hates comparison and wants to give us His best. It shook me up a little and also overwhelmed me with how passionate He is about this topic. While giving powerful promises to Israel about their destiny, God interrupts a litany of blessings to utter these words:

*For I, the Lord, love justice:
I hate robbery for burnt offering;
I will direct their work in truth,
And will make with them an everlasting covenant.*
Isaiah 61:8

In the Old Testament, each family was required to bring or purchase their own sacrificial animal as an offering to God. If someone stole an animal and used it for a burnt offering, this was displeasing to Him. You couldn't worship with an offering that wasn't yours. No stealing was allowed in worship.

What would "robbery for burnt offering" look like in today's culture? Today we don't offer sacrifices of animals, but rather we offer sacrifices of worship and service from the heart. When reading this passage, I thought about the times I wished for a ministry like someone else's, and I realized that this type of envy is something that God will not accept. I cannot rob someone's ministry and offer it to God: that's robbery for burnt offering. If I try to copy a ministry like so-and-so's to offer to God, that's robbery. To believe that I have less

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to offer than someone else is an affront to His justice, because He put uniqueness inside of each of His children that pleases Him well. I must give Him what is my own to offer.

Today we have many people who try to be like someone they admire without discovering what God has placed inside of themselves. If we try to rob others' identity and offer it to God, this does not please Him, in fact the word "hate" in this scripture means: *to hate personally, enemy, foe, odious*. God's not joking about this! Instead, He makes a declaration that centers our hearts on His goodness:

*I will direct their work in truth,
and will make with them an everlasting covenant.*

God doesn't need you to copy someone's ministry or vision! He wants to guide you and entrust you with His perfect plan. He's so serious about this, that He promises to covenant with you and give you something that lasts forever. This is His heart for you! So let's drop the comparison game of envying others. If we're going to focus on the Father's vision for us, we don't have time to be distracted with comparison! It's time to slay the green-eyed monster: God wants to do something beautiful with YOU!

LIE: YOU CAN ONLY DO ONE THING

How many of you have been told, "Just find one thing and focus on that for your career?" Point being, let's avoid

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being a jack of all trades and master of none, right? However, I can't find a single reference to that idea in Scripture! In fact, the greatest heroes and warriors of the Bible carried many different weapons, were multi-talented, and God used them in multiple ways. David was a shepherd, armor bearer, warrior, king, songwriter, and prophet. Paul made tents, wrote books, traveled the world, and preached in the streets. Jesus told stories, healed the sick, cast out demons, disciplined followers, and calmed seas. Would we actually tell Jesus,

“Lord, why don't you stick to calming the storms and let someone else to do the rest?”

Or perhaps we could tell David,

“You write great music, so just stick to that!”

These multi-faceted people had fully dedicated themselves to God and allowed Him to empower them with whatever the moment required. For those of us who have a lot of vision and creative energy, I want to release you from the lie that says you have to only pick one thing to do! Today I lead worship, film TV shows, write music, shoot photography, and write books, just to name a few things. God often calls me to one type of communication in order to convey what He is speaking, and sometimes one medium of art reaches the goal better than another. Perhaps after writing a song, I discover I have enough vision to write a book too and create several resources. We dare not limit God in the ways He desires to use us.

In order to avoid the “master of none” plight, I have an inner resolution for myself: *Do everything that's in your*

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heart, as long as you do it with excellence. If I start getting sloppy and can't release the vision well, I'll put it on hold until I can refine my skill set or get some more revelation. However, just because we're not at the necessary skill level doesn't allow us to brush our vision under the rug and ignore it. We are responsible for everything He entrusts us with!

Also, the media/publishing world is now expecting artists to do more than one thing. Social media has taken the power away from the industry leaders and placed it in the hands of the artists. This is great, but followers still expect artists to feed them the same amount of production as a record label or publishing house would. So now an author doesn't just write a book: she writes a book, pens a blog, hosts a podcast, and stays current on social media. This is a great time to toss aside the "only do one thing" concept, because that idea just doesn't work anymore. You're going to need various skills to launch your vision well.

MANY TALENTS

Jesus gives us a remarkable story that reveals how much we are responsible to use everything He gives us.

For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey.

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Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money.

After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying,

"Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them."

His lord said to him,

"Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord."

He also who had received two talents came and said,

"Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them."

His lord said to him,

"Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord."

Then he who had received the one talent came and said,

"Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours."

But his lord answered and said to him,

"You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at

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my coming I would have received back my own with interest. Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Matthew 25:14-30

Several key points stick out to me in this story. First, the Master (Christ) entrusts certain people with many talents and others with few, but He expects each person to invest them fully and make them grow, no matter how many they have. He also rejoiced in the talents of the ten as much as the multiplied talents of the two. The rebuke was reserved for the man who hid his talent and invested nothing in the process of making it grow. **It doesn't matter how much we have, but rather that we invest it fully.**

Secondly, when the talents were used well, it brought great joy to the Master! Do you realize how much joy you bring the Lord when you act on the dreams He gives you? The most beautiful part of the creative process is when you sense the Lord's joy over what you have done with His gifts. The joy over His children's success is wonderful, and the Lord is massively pleased when we step out in faith and invest well in our vision.

The final point: those who are faithful receive more. I cannot emphasize enough how important this is! God is

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not looking for super-talented people, because He can hand out talents to anyone He wants to. Those who will be faithful with what they have are always entrusted with more, and this includes talent and creativity. Take it from someone who has no college education, no formal training in film or the arts, but has produced TV shows that have aired on PBS and worldwide networks! The biggest principle of my life has been to be faithful with what I have right in front of me and watch God offer more when I use it well. **It's a Kingdom principal: be faithful with what you have and God will multiply it.**

When I was in Deadwood, I wrote a book about the parable of the potter and clay. After I wrote down all I could think of, I heard the whisper of my Father say,

Draw some illustrations to go with it.

In the past, I had attempted some sketches but quickly stuffed them in a folder and hid them in my closet. Pulling out my charcoal pencils that day, I was amazed that I could actually draw some pictures that weren't half bad! Then I heard the same whisper,

Try some water colors.

I went to the craft store and bought some paints and watercolor paper. Soon I was playing with oils, pastels, and other artistic mediums as I illustrated my own book! I was shocked! Until that moment, I had never realized that God gives us more talents when we are faithful to use the ones we have for His purposes. Sometimes He sends people along our paths who add their talents to the mix, but other times He wants to multiply the ones we have.

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Today, I write my own scripts for films, create costumes for my actors, and do all my own graphic designs. I realize that's more creative juice than most people are interested in having, but I never dreamed of being able to do all these things. The truth is that God is more interested in birthing the visions He has given us than we are, and the One who gave us the passion to begin with is quite capable of giving us the talent we need to pull it off. Quite the opposite of just "doing one thing:" rather, He expects us to use all – and more – of what He's placed inside of us.

*By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit;
so you will be My disciples.*

John 15:8

The Father loves when we bear fruit! He is so honored when our vision brings Him glory! He may lead us through a wilderness to sharpen our vision and intimacy with Him, but He is not trying to talk you out of what He has called you to do. So if you feel stuck with your vision, don't lose heart! If any of these lies resonate with you, take responsibility and ask His forgiveness for believing the lies. Let Him remind you of the truth, and focus on the goal of fulfilling all He has given you to do!

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ASK YOURSELF:

1) False-humility: have you been holding back from giving God everything?

2) Have you felt the need to tone down your passion because others caution you not to “walk in pride?”

3) As you search your heart, do you feel like their cautions are justified, or that your passion is pure and brings God joy? (When in doubt, ask Him to show you!)

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4) Comparison: what are some ways that you've compared yourself to others in the past?

5) Have you doubted God's ability to use you?

6) What do you think God says about that?

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7) Have you been told, "Pick one thing to do?" Does that phrase limit you or help you focus?

8) What are some areas you may not feel gifted in, but the Father may be calling you to do in order to bring your vision to pass?

9) Even if you don't have the full picture, what are some areas you can be faithful with what you have been given?

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10) Ask God to multiply your gifts as you are faithful to use them!

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CHAPTER THREE
WRESTLING
WITH THE VISION

I've found that anything worth achieving will always have obstacles in the way and you've got to have that drive and determination to overcome those obstacles on route to whatever it is that you want to accomplish.

– Chuck Norris

"We don't like their sound, and guitar music is on the way out"
– Decca Recording Co. rejecting the Beatles 1962

I believe there are two types of visionaries: those who get rejected and stop dreaming, and those who face disappointment and dream anyway. I meet so many

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dreamers who have been called by the Lord to do great things, but somewhere along the way they simply gave up on their destiny. Maybe you can relate! Sometimes the visions that are the dearest to us end up being tossed aside, and it takes tenacious faith see what God is doing and partner with Him. But oh, the seeing is beautiful! When we get past the frustration and actually see what He is up to, it makes everything worth it! In this current season of my life, I deal with closed doors and disappointment regularly, but I've discovered some ways to move past it. So, I'd like to share a few keys that can help build your faith as we move forward.

The prophet Samuel was given a direct assignment from God and ran into some closed doors along the way. Some of the “no's” even came from God, while he was in the very center of God's will and stepping out in faith. Instead of becoming disillusioned, he probed a bit deeper and discovered a great treasure with God's fingerprints all over it, and this discovery led to an incredible victory for the Kingdom of God. It's a great reminder to stay true to the vision even when what we see with our eyes may conflict with what God told us.



SAMUEL'S QUEST

The nation of Israel was in turmoil, and both prophets and kings were in the thick of the madness. King Saul was anointed by the Prophet Samuel at God's bidding, but the brave yet foolish king chose to follow the wanderings

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of his own heart rather than the commandments of God. Towering a head and shoulders above the average height, Saul's natural charisma and stance made him an obvious choice for king, but his downfall was a fiery ego that often dictated dark moves. Belittling the prophets with choices that served his own political advances in opposition to God's word, Saul moved further away from God's calling on his life.

For years, the Prophet Samuel had observed Saul's growing recklessness with concern, watching with sorrow as the kingdom suffered from his hasty, thoughtless choices. One night, Saul crossed a line with disastrous consequences and God spoke to Samuel,

I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from Me and has not carried out my instructions.

Samuel wrestled with these words, tossing all night and perhaps begging God to change His mind. At dawn, he confronted the king with God's perspective. Angry, defensive, and insecure, Saul would hear none of the prophet's words. Moved with grief and disappointment as he recalled this man's potential, Samuel turned to leave the king he had anointed with his own hands, knowing he had done all he could do. Soon, the voice of God spoke again.

How long will you mourn for Saul? God asked. Fill your horn with oil and go-- I have seen a king among Jesse's sons.

Samuel resisted the idea. Perhaps he prayed, *I placed all my hopes in King Saul, and You want me to anoint another king?! Can't You just fix this one? Why should I risk hoping*

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in another vision when this one ended so poorly? Terrified, he wondered if Saul would hear of the errand and attempt to murder him.

“Lord,” he wrestled, “This is not the politically-correct time to select a new king!”

God knew of his thoughts and responded,

I will show you what to do, and you will anoint unto Me the man who I tell you to.

In spite of his misgivings, Samuel filled his horn with oil, journeyed to the farm community of Bethlehem, and invited Jesse to a feast. Seven sons accompanied their father and stood to greet the prophet who eyed each of them closely, searching for the signs of royalty. A strong warrior in his prime, Eliab looked like a king to Samuel and he thought, Surely this is the Lord's man!

Reading his thoughts, the Lord quickly responded,

Don't look at his outward appearance or height: I have refused him. The Lord doesn't see as man sees. People look at the outward appearance, but I look at the heart.

Wisely, Samuel moved past the young man and scanned the rest of the family. However, the Lord was silent, identifying none of them as the new king. All eyes were fixed on the prophet, waiting for him to speak. As the moments ticked by with no direction from the Lord, Samuel shook his head, refusing to anoint any of the strapping young men in front of him until he received clarity.

The Lord would not have brought me here for no reason, he pondered. Perhaps I am missing something. Turning to their

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father, he asked curiously,

“Are all your children here?” The grey-bearded man shifted slightly and confessed,

“There is one more: the youngest. He's watching the sheep.”

Immediately Samuel realized that God's hand was at work.

“Call him!” he said, a ring of triumph in his voice. “We will not eat until he arrives.”

Still a teenager, sun burnt and freckled, the young shepherd boy was brought to the prophet. Innocent yet strong, with a harp over his shoulder and a lilt in his step, David approached with wonder. Weeks in the field had made his heart strong in praise to God, and he had learned the basic skills of leadership by protecting the helpless sheep.

Arise and anoint him, the Lord whispered to Samuel. This is he.

As his brothers watched in complete skepticism and disbelief, Samuel poured sacred oil over God's choice for a king: David, a shepherd boy, the man after God's own heart. It was a brand new dynasty born out of frustration, regret, and curious questions that revealed the purpose of God.

*“Unless God has raised you up for this very thing,
you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils.
But if God be for you, who can be against you?
Are all of them together stronger than God?”*

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O be not weary of well doing!"

- John Wesley

When God brings a new vision into our lives, it sometimes comes during a season of frustration and disillusionment. We may wonder why He hasn't answered our prayers or why He isn't "fixing" things with easy solutions. Other times you may think, I have received prophetic words and it doesn't look like they are coming to pass! You may be in the position of Samuel who followed God's orders and still found himself facing the "no" of God even while being obedient to His will.

In studying the character of Samuel, I see two decisions that enabled him to see the new plan of God unfold: first, he stayed obedient and didn't quit, and secondly, he asked a good, probing question. Here's a few things we can learn from this story.

STAYING OBEDIENT

It would have been easy for Samuel to give up on his calling after seeing Saul, the man who he had anointed as king, make such a mess of things. He could have blamed himself, doubted God, or given up on his assignment. Instead, he got up and followed God's orders to do the very same thing again and anoint David as king. Why? Simply because he chose to obey.

Men and women who have accomplished amazing things for God always have one thing in common: a passion for obedience. You cannot make a dream come

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true simply because you “want” it enough – you have to choose to love God more than anything, and choose to put obedience to Him before everything else. Sometimes, He uses little things to test our obedience, and we have to be willing to accept His “no” before moving forward.

One time, I was building a ministry team and praying over who to invite. I really felt like my friend Jill would be a great addition to the team, but as I chatted with her on the phone, the Holy Spirit said, *She’s not supposed to be involved that way.* I groaned inside and wondered how I was going to un-invite her, so I asked if we could pray together. Sure enough, I sensed in my heart that it was simply not the right connection. Slowly, I told her,

“I feel kind of weird, but the Lord is showing me that this isn’t the right fit. Can we connect in another way concerning this vision?”

“Oh, that’s a relief,” she said, “because I felt the same thing and was going to decline your invitation!”

We laughed and were both so relieved that we could be honest with each other. Later, God brought just the right people for my team, and Jill and I are still great friends. Looking back, I can see why He was saying “no” to the first idea, but I simply couldn’t have known what was coming at the time.

If Samuel had been more focused on the vision of anointing a new king rather than being obedient to God, he would have chosen the wrong man! Wouldn’t that have been a mess?! As much as we can get excited about a vision coming to pass, it’s important not to allow that

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dream to become an idol. To keep things in proper perspective, we must value obedience to God more than the vision. Believe me, I haven't always made the right choices in this area! There have been so many times I've gotten ahead of God and need to go back and repent for not listening to His gentle voice of guidance, but when I listen and obey, I'm always glad I did!

ASK GOOD QUESTIONS

When standing before Jesse's sons and realizing that the right one wasn't there, Samuel found himself in a difficult moment. He could have said,

“Oh well, God obviously doesn't know what He's talking about. Let Him find His own king!”

Instead, he turned the question on Jesse and put pressure on the situation to reveal God's plan by saying,

“Are these all your sons?”

When Jesse responded that there was one more, Samuel was so confident God had a plan that he refused to eat until the young shepherd arrived. David was hidden to everyone else, but the prophet moved foreseeable facts to discover that there was more than met the eye. As a result, God's plan was revealed, and Israel's new king was anointed!

When we come to a difficult place in our vision where it looks like a dead end, we have two choices: to give up, or ask questions. It may be that hidden treasure is waiting for someone to find it, and if God has brought you this far, He will give you the wisdom to seek it out.

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*“My mother made me a scientist without ever intending to.
Every other Jewish mother in Brooklyn
would ask her child after school,
“So? Did you learn anything today?”*

But not my mother.

*“Izzy,” she would say, “did you ask a good question today?”
That difference—asking good questions—
made me become a scientist.”*

– Nobel winner Isidor Isaac Rabi

FINDING THE TREASURE

Often God disguises His plan, possibly to test those who are destined to inherit it to see how much they truly want it. People frequently ask me how to handle the frustration they feel over promises or prophetic words they don't see coming to pass. How do we handle dreams that don't seem to be going anywhere? One secret to finding God's hidden treasure is to become very curious and ask Him questions. The scriptures encourage us to dig deep into the heart of God in our quest for answers.

*It is the glory of God to conceal a matter,
But the glory of kings is to search out a matter.
Proverbs 25:2*

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The word “conceal” in Hebrew means: **to hide by covering**. The words “to search out” means, *to penetrate, examine intimately, search, seek out*. When God gives you a vision, it's often like a treasure hunt: He doesn't hand over the final prize immediately, rather, He wants you to find clues along the way and enjoy His companionship as you do it with Him. Recognize that a vision from God is an invitation to partner with Him. He invites you to think, reason, and ask Him curious questions. If you keep this childlike heart, you'll be enthralled by His wisdom, wit, and deep love for you throughout the process!

When I was a kid, my parents made treasure hunts for each of their children's birthdays. Sometimes we'd roll our eyes in frustration because we wanted an “easy gift,” but soon we'd get excited as the hunt progressed. Hand-written clues led to more clues and sometimes a treasure map as we followed the trail to the goody bags of treasure. Our parents watched with glee as we learned to reason, ponder, and find our way through the puzzles, knowing that they'd crafted the whole thing for us to enjoy. I remember discovering one treasure hidden under the dining room table where I had just eaten my dinner without any idea of what was waiting for me underneath it!

Dreams from God are often like this: they require some clues and digging to find the path that leads to the treasure. Like a father who gleefully conceals a treasure for us to find, He knows that we will learn from the process and become wiser if we don't give up. I can't say

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that I've mastered this yet, but I will say it's been so much fun to find God in the journey.

FINDING TREASURE

When I started my first TV show, it began with a “treasure hunt” step of obedience. I had filmed a little DVD project with a hand-held camcorder, and I can't say it was very good, but I'd done my best. By no means was I a producer, and I certainly had no interest in being behind a camera, since my real ambition was to speak and sing on stage. One day, a visiting prophet came to my town and I deeply respected his ability to hear from the Lord. Every word he had spoken over me had been correct in the past, and I didn't take him lightly. That day he prayed over me and said,

“I really see you moving more and more in the creative arts for the Kingdom of God.”

He didn't say it, but suddenly I knew that God was calling me to start a local TV show. I was horrified – it had taken me an entire year of struggle to create my little DVD, and I could only guess how much effort it would require to film and produce a TV show. Besides, I wanted to sing, not use the creative arts or produce television shows! I cried for two weeks, but in the end, I told God I would follow His call. So, I purchased the largest, shoulder-mounted video camera I could find (thinking it would give me more clout – it probably did!), bought some professional video editing software, and called all my artist friends and asked them on my variety show.

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Little did I know, there was great treasure hidden in following this command from the Lord! People began to call me in tears, telling me they'd given up on their artistic gift, but the fact that I had invited them on my show had given them hope that God could still use them! I began to interview national music artists who were on tour in our small town and asked questions of some of the most talented men and women in Christian music. Because of these new opportunities and relationships, I ended up traveling the world, recording music videos, producing an EP with an award winning artist, and after a few years of hard work, my little show ended up airing on the largest Christian TV network in the world: all because I said yes to God and discovered the hidden gem in the journey.

I look back at that struggle and recall that the emotions were real: the frustration of being led a different direction than I'd hoped, the disillusionment of having to let a dream go, and the dread of going through the learning curve of discovering how to run new equipment. The wrestling was real, but the reward was great. Today, nearly all the doors open to me on various platforms are because I said yes to God's call at a critical moment and found the treasure hidden inside the journey of obedience.

ART FROM THE STRUGGLE

Of all the art in the Bible, it's fascinating to note how many songs and poems were born from prayers of struggle and seeking. One of the temple singers named Habakkuk was so brash in his wrestling with God that the

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Jewish people actually took offense and rewrote his text to sound less shocking! According to Jewish tradition, the prophet was a Levite psalmist who led the temple singing and at some point entered into a wrestling match with God. A disillusioned visionary, he couldn't understand why God was turning a deaf ear to the wickedness of the earth and allowing people to get away with evil. After pouring out his complaint to God, he makes a statement that I love! Basically, he says,

“Ok, Lord, I'm going to set up camp and wait for You to respond. I know I'm probably seeing this all wrong and that You will correct me, so I'll wait on Your answer.”

It may sound arrogant, but God answered! His words took the prophet's breath away with wonder, proving that He wasn't oblivious to the turmoil on earth and He did have a plan. The last chapter of Habakkuk's book is a psalm pouring out praise and confidence to God, including the well-known words,

The LORD GOD is my strength and He will make my feet like hinds' feet, and He will make me to walk upon my high places.

Like Habakkuk, some of our best vision and art come from a place of wrestling with God where we simply need Him to show up and speak to our heart. The thing I love best about this story is that Habakkuk's name means “embrace,” as though the entire chronicle is less like a wrestling match and more like a dance from heaven's perspective. As we ask questions, seek out answers, and

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delight in hearing from our Father, we can grow in this holy dance and discover beautiful wisdom that fuels our creative journey.

GOD IN THE WAY

So if you've felt discouraged or disillusioned by unfulfilled promises or dreams from the past, be tenacious. This journey is not just about seeing your dreams happen, but about going after God's heart and seeking His plan to move forward, knowing that He believes in your ability to walk with Him. I used to think that if God loved my dreams, He would give me huge opportunities and fling doors open to launch me into the public arena! Now I'm intensely grateful that He loves me more than He wants to use me, and He loves journeying with me through each door that opens. In fact, He goes ahead of me to prepare the way for each step of the process! One of my favorite verses about this is Psalm 21:1-3 in the King James Version:

*The king shall joy in thy strength, O Lord;
and in thy salvation how greatly shall he rejoice!
Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and hast not withholden
the request of his lips. Selah.
For thou **preventest** him with the blessings of goodness: thou
settest a crown of pure gold on his head.*

The old English word, "preventest" attempts to define the Hebrew word which means, *to project oneself, precede,*

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anticipate, hasten, meet. The best way I can identify with this is to think of my dad who is disabled and needs some extra care. I was his caregiver for many years and was constantly on the lookout for what he might need. Always a “step ahead,” I would anticipate the things he required before he even had the chance to think about it, and this was simply a way I could show my care for him. When I read this verse, I realized that God cares for us the same way! He is constantly a step ahead of us, putting Himself in the way so that He can provide for the next step of our journey.

Repeatedly, I've seen this happen in the creative process! If I'll just do the “next right thing” in the process, He has the next step ready for me to step into. He loves us so much that He literally places Himself in our path to anticipate the next step. If we'll follow Him one step at a time, we'll discover that He's always ahead of us and right on time!

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ASK YOURSELF:

1) Have you ever felt disappointed when your vision didn't happen in the past?

2) What does it mean to "wrestle" with God?

3) What are some of the questions that you wrestle with?

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4) Are there places of struggle that have added to your artistic journey?

5) Like Samuel, have you ever heard God say “no” when you were stepping out to obey Him?

6) If so, how did you respond?

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7) What are some “curious” questions you can ask God?

8) Listen and write down anything He may speak.

9) What does it mean to see the creative journey as a dance with God?

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10) How are you embracing that journey?

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PART II

AIM: CREATING A STRATEGY FOR YOUR VISION

"A vision without a strategy remains an illusion."

- Lee Bolman

"Hope is not a strategy."

-Vince Lombardi

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CHAPTER FOUR

SEEDS

*Dreams are the seeds of change.
Nothing ever grows without a seed,
and nothing ever changes without a dream.*
– Debby Boone

After 17 years of being a full-time creative, I've created an organic strategy that seems to apply to every type of vision that helps launch a project from the "idea phase" to actually watching God touch lives with that vision. Whether I'm birthing a book, music CD, TV show, or planning an event, my process is the same, and I believe it will apply to you too!

FORMULA VERSES STRATEGY

First, let me make this point: babies need formula, but kings use strategies. A healthy baby needs his food processed into an easily digested milk (or, formula) so he

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can eat it without too much difficulty. Many people look for a “formula” to pursue their dreams that's easy, has three steps, and gets them quickly to their goals. However, I'm not here to give you a magic formula for your dreams: instead, I want to give you a Kingdom strategy that you can adapt and apply to your own vision. A strategy, in contrast to a formula, is not intended to be easy. It will stretch you, make you think, cause you to seek the face of God, and help you develop a plan of action that can launch your vision to the next level. Strategy is what kings use to build a kingdom, win a battle, and rule nations.

My particular strategy often comes into play during the most unusual of circumstances, and none more so that when He sent me on a mission to travel the world and create a TV show. It started like this...



Living in Nashville, TN area as a working artist was a dream come true, and I loved this city where so many artists were pursuing their dreams with passion. However, I could feel my heart getting restless and I wondered if God was up to something new, so I wasn't completely surprised to hear that my housing situation was not going to be available for much longer.

For the first week of each year, the local House of Prayer opened their doors 24/7 to anyone who wanted to pray, and I decided to take that opportunity to bombard heaven in search of some clarity for my next season. The first day,

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I sat on the floor and simply cried out to God for direction. Worshiping, journaling, and pouring out my heart in prayer, I just asked for wisdom and waited.

Day two came, and in the quiet intimacy of the prayer room, I heard the voice of the Father speak.

Remember that idea you had to create a TV show for women with makeovers from around the world? That's not just your idea, that's My idea too.

That was all I needed. I picked myself up off the carpet and began to brainstorm a trip that would eventually take me around the world with my camera. Starting with the people I knew, I called the director of a girls' home in Arizona and an author in California. Both agreed to help with the vision of creating a TV show for today's women called, *Radical Makeovers*. Little did we know that I would interview 50 women in 7 countries, create 18 episodes of the show that would be translated into various languages, and that several years later a major publisher would contract me to create a book chronicling their stories and the amazing film journey.

Early the next morning, I received a message from the prayer room director who also managed a resale store with a warehouse full of donations.

"Come by the shop," she said, "I want to donate to your ministry." (She had no idea what God had spoken to me on the floor of her prayer room the day before!) Walking through the mounds of donated items, she encouraged me to select anything I could use. I emerged with both arms full of ball gowns which I traveled around the world with.

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In awe, I realized that when God meets you in the secret place and puts His “go” on your vision, He shows up in miraculous ways.

Over and over I've seen this first strategic step bring so much fruit: **if you want God's blessing, take your vision into the secret place.**

*“What wings are to a bird, and sails to a ship,
so is prayer to the soul.”*

– Corrie Ten Boom

PLANT THE SEED

Your vision is like a seed: the entire DNA of your idea is wrapped up in your vision, just like a seed carries the potential to birth a tree. For that seed to germinate and put down roots, it has to be buried in the ground. For your vision to begin to come alive, it must be buried in the secret place of prayer. God repeatedly does this with me: He calls me into the quiet, hidden place where I can dream with Him, lay the vision before Him, and pray over the specifics with Him. During that time, I receive all the “DNA” needed for the vision.

The secret place is also where we receive the authority to actually carry out the vision. When I heard God say, *This isn't just your idea, it's My idea too*, I knew He would provide everything needed, because that's what He does for the visions He births. I have a lot of great ideas, but not all of them are anointed by God! In fact, I dare not move on some of them until I hear clearly from the Lord

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that He is giving me the signal to go ahead! This is very crucial if we're going to create with Him: we have all been given gifts and ideas, but our authority to create with His Presence comes in the secret place of prayer.

I once wrote a song for my Parables CD that emphasized both the human frustration and the beauty of being buried underground like a seed. Imagining the idea of a little seed admiring the tall trees and asking the gardener to carry him up to the sky to be like them, I wondered what a seed would "feel like" if the gardener told him that the way to become a tall tree was to first be buried underground. Nevertheless, the Father's love is revealed at each stage of the process: both underground and as the tree towers into the sky.

*Once there was a seed Who kept looking at a tree
Every day his longing gaze Wished that he could be
The gardener, he said, "Son, this is what the Father meant
Even a little mustard seed Will grow into a tree*

*"And every little dream He's written in your heart
Is just a little seed Dreaming of the trees above
This is His love"*

*And so that little seed said, "Gardener, please carry me
So I can climb up in the sky Like a giant tree"
The gardener, he smiled, "And he said, "Son, you'll have to wait
a while
'Cause if you want to live up high First, you must die"*

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*Cause every little seed Gets buried in the ground
For roots to grow down deep The Father meets you
underground
And this too is love*

*So that little seed Trembled as they buried
All his hopes and dreams Out of sight underground
And his shell began to crack 'Though he tried to keep the walls
intact
But they were like a worn out skin Next to the life inside of him
And though nobody could see Him turn into a tree
The Father held him close and said, This is My love*

*And he began to grow As he put roots into that fertile soil
Of the Father's love And poked his head into the sun
And now that little tree Tells everyone he sees
Not to be afraid Of dreams the Father made for them
'Cause this is His love*

Each step of this process is a way to experience the Father's love and intimate connection to our lives, even the "burying!" If we truly want to partner with God and have His anointing on our vision, we can find it in the secret place of prayer where we dream with Him.

FATHER IN THE SECRET PLACE

When I was about five-years-old, this idea of the secret place became ingrained in my heart in a funny little way.

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My little brother and I had this rambunctious tendency to avoid bedtime by slipping into each other's rooms and playing instead of sleeping. My dad decided to enforce bedtime, so he set up a wooden chair in the hallway between our rooms and made himself comfortable to keep watch until we fell asleep. With the "fear of dad" in our hearts, we kept our little bodies buried beneath the covers and quickly fell asleep. Funny enough, I recall that my father always brought his Bible, highlight pens, and a notebook during those nighttime vigils, and I knew he was praying for us too. It was part of his "secret place" time with the Lord.

One day, at the age of five, I announced that I was going to pray and hear from God. My mother, busy in the kitchen, simply smiled sweetly at my declaration, so I marched upstairs and planted myself in the place where I figured God would hear me the best: dad's chair in the hallway. The minutes ticked by as I waited for a revelation. I can't recall whether I really heard the voice of God, but when I tromped downstairs, I told my mother, "I think God wants me to paint!" and pulled out my little set of toy water colors for the afternoon.

I laugh at this story now, but it has become a hallmark moment of my childhood because I believe God was wooing me into the Father's love and His creative pattern even then. It is still in the secret place of the Father's love that I can hear His voice prompt me to create beauty – whether holding my kiddie water colors at the kitchen table or a using film camera across the globe.

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How do we connect with the Father in the secret place? Far from being passive in His Presence, there are some very strategic things we can do. I've discovered there's some powerful tools that we can use for the "secret place" time that really help us lay the foundation for the vision.

WRITE THE VISION

One of the most powerful things we can do is to move the vision out of our head and onto paper. When we get quiet enough to really write down what we see, suddenly we can start creating something that's bigger than just the thoughts that fly around in our minds. Putting pen to page is crucial, just as an architect creates a blueprint before building a structure. On paper, we can flesh out a vision before taking steps to move which saves time later.

*Write the vision and make it plain on tablets,
that he may run who reads it.*

Habakkuk 2:2

The word "plain" in Hebrew means: *to dig, explain, and declare*. Before we run with a vision, it helps to dig a bit deeper, take time for further explanation, and begin to write specifics so it's clear to ourselves and others. A mistake many dreamers make is that we want people to "run with" our vision before we have spent time crafting the idea and "making it plain" on paper beforehand. People are more likely to help you if you've spent time

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figuring out what your vision looks like and what you need to birth it.

Believe me, this doesn't always come naturally for a visionary! Early in my creative journey, I remember being in a small group and the leader asked us to go around the room and each describe the vision we carried. When my turn came around, I froze. Feeling like a deer in the headlights, I couldn't understand how I could be so full of passion and still feel so unable to articulate what God had called me to do! It took several months of processing with mentors until I was able to clearly verbalize my heart and then make goals based on that vision. Once I could articulate my heart, doors opened so much easier and I was able to steer my creative energy in focused ways that could bring forth real fruit.

As you write your vision, take some time to think about what stirs your heart the most. It's those places of passion that will keep the vision fresh and exciting to you, and they will also be what appeal to others, because people are drawn to passion. What is the cause you are fighting for? Where is the need your vision will fill? What message are you carrying that the world needs to hear?

Here's some ideas of what to write:

1) Write a vision statement

I must confess, it took me a long time to figure out how important this step is! Now I wonder how I lived without it, because it makes life SO much easier. A vision statement is a description of your core values in just a few

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sentences. It can be hard for a visionary to narrow down a vision to a brief phrase or two, but simplicity is one of the keys to making your vision happen. For instance, when I wanted to start a ministry, I chose three core goals:

The Potter's House Vision

To Cultivate:

- A space for God's Presence
- A holy tribe of disciples who love well
- Creative arts with passion and excellence

That's it! I can write pages and pages of vision around these core values, and having a center point to base every other activity around is a marvelous help in staying focused. Creating a vision statement also helps narrow your focus and communicate it well so that other people can get excited about it too.

2) Craft your Goals

This step doesn't have to be set in stone, but it's a great way to start being practical with your dream. Sometimes I ask people about their goals and they respond,

"I just want to touch the entire world with my art and go as far as God will take me."

Right then, I get the idea that they haven't been very practical with their goals because they really don't have a starting point. God can launch any one of us into global ministry, but let's face it: most of the time, He asks us to start in our community or with a specific goal. Typically

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the people He launches into worldwide ministry are those who have been working hard already. He promotes those who are faithful, so what are you being faithful with? What's a good goal that you can see yourself achieving? Not something so high that's impossible, but something that will stretch your faith and be a good launching place to go higher? Who will your vision impact? What is your audience? Who will fall in love with your idea? Dream with God about your goals and set some ideas on paper, realizing that He can expand and tweak them along the way. Give yourself some good goals to start with!

3) Dream Big

Often I ask myself, *If I could do anything with this vision, what would it look like?* I recall one time when I was vision-casting for a film about spiritual warfare. I had some great actors and sword fighters, but the landscape in TX wasn't a very epic backdrop. During a phone call to a friend I mentioned,

"If I could do anything, I'd pack up my actors and go film in Alaska. I have friends up there and the scenery is stunning."

"Well," my friend responded, "why don't you?"

Stunned, I realized I hadn't even considered the possibility because I thought it was "too big." After calling a few friends in Alaska and crunching some numbers, I texted my actors.

"How would you like to film in Alaska for a week?"

Six of us packed our bags, took extra luggage with props

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and costumes, and prayed for good weather as we filmed for a week in Alaska. That film has gone around the world and touched thousands of lives because we decided to dream big.

When writing your vision, don't be afraid to think about a big dream when creating the project. Refrain from writing down what you want to happen as the end result, like, *I want God to use me in mighty ways*, and focus on what you see happening in the creative process. Write down your vision with as much detail as you can think of, and begin to ask God for even bigger ideas than you can come up with on your own!

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WRITING THE VISION

I truly believe something beautiful happens when we write our vision on paper, especially if we spend time praying over that vision. I learned this in a curious way when I first started dreaming with God...



When I was 17, I had a dream that felt enormous, but I couldn't help hoping and praying it would come true. I'd always dreamed of singing my little original songs on stage, and I desperately wanted to share my music with my favorite recording artist that I heard on the radio. I happened to meet him one day at a backstage event, and out of the goodness of his heart, he took a moment to pray for me. After that, I really wanted to reconnect with this man who played the piano and wrote pop songs, because I

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somehow felt like he could tell me if my music was any good. After about two years of desperately praying and hoping that I could somehow share my songs with him, a mentor gave me a piece of advice.

“Sometimes,” she said in a matter-of-fact tone, “you just need to write your request and lay it before the Lord. If it's meant to be, He'll make a way. If not, then move on with your life.”

So, I did: I wrote my request, laid it on my bedroom floor, and prayed. Nothing happened, so I buried the dream for about three years, moved across the state, and stopped writing songs. During that time, I had some profound encounters with God and started to pick up music again and express myself in worship to God. One day, I happened to be driving through the town I used to live in and noticed that my favorite pop star was doing a benefit concert and dinner in a local church. I decided to go, but I only had enough money for a concert ticket and not the meal beforehand. A funny thing happened that night when I arrived to the church early and asked to meet with the pastor.

“Do you happen to have a little corner where I could pray?” I asked politely. “I'm coming to the concert, but I don't have a ticket to the dinner.”

To my surprise, the pop singer appeared and to my astonishment he remembered me from several years ago!

“Would you be my guest for the dinner?” he asked, and then he proceeded to walk to the ticket table and purchase me a ticket with cash from his own wallet.

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Then he asked me to help him with the sound check, so I sat at the shiny grand piano in a daze, playing one of my little songs just like I had dreamed of doing years before. During dinner, I asked him every single question I'd ever wondered about the music industry, and he graciously responded. God had seen the prayer I had written down and laid before Him several years earlier, and just when He was about to call me into full time ministry and knew I would need some extra courage, He made my dream come true!

My point is this: God hears our prayers, but there is something special about writing down our dreams and vision. Time and time again, I've seen God's plans unfold in ways that leave me startled with a sense of wonder and awe, and many of these are dreams that I've written down and laid before Him. It's a beautiful thing.

BOLDNESS IN PRAYER

The Scriptures tell us that God publicly honors what happens in the secret place of prayer.

*But you, when you pray, go into your room,
and when you have shut your door,
pray to your Father who is in the secret place;
and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.*

Matthew 6:6

After I write my vision, I often lay it on the floor, get on my knees, and begin to pray. That moment is a sacred

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space and I believe it sets the tone for the rest of my project, as I dedicate it to God and ask for His help in making it happen. We know that He hears and honors those who seek His face in secret, so make good use of this time!

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ASK YOURSELF:

1) Does the idea of being “buried under ground” pique your interest or discourage you?

2) How do you feel about inviting God into the “dreaming stage” of your vision?

3) Have you ever taken time to write your vision and make it plain?

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4) Have you written clearly in ways that it would make sense to others?

5) What is your vision statement?

6) What are your goals?

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7) What are several emotions that define how your vision makes you feel?

8) How does your vision impact others?

9) Does your vision reflect the heart of God? How?

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10) Once you've written your vision, have you laid it before God in prayer?
