

6 WAYS TO LIVE YOUR
DIVINE PURPOSE

God-
Given
Dreams

NANCY GAVILANES

Encouragement is the key word for *God-Given Dreams*. Weaving in her own storyline along with the stories of key people from the Bible, Nancy beautifully reveals that God has a plan for each one of us and that we can trust Him to fulfill it. If you're struggling with your purpose in life, encourage your spirit by reading this book, soaking in the Scripture passages, and trusting that God has His best for you.

ROCHELLE TRAUB, Our Daily Bread Ministries

As followers of Christ, we are exhorted to encourage one another to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18), care for one another (Ephesians 4:32), and actively seek opportunities to show love to one another in the body of Christ (1 Peter 4:10). Nancy has spent her career in ministry as a Bible school professor doing just that, and *God-Given Dreams* is an extension of her heart to encourage believers to a more yielded, fruitful walk with our Lord! Many of our students have expressed how much they appreciate Nancy's encouragement and insight. May our Lord and Savior continue to give you success as you serve and love others.

ANTHONY HEWITT, dean of the New York School of the Bible

If you're ready to identify, confirm, and pursue your God-given dreams and do it with faith and confidence, this book is for you. The processes and biblical examples in Nancy's book will equip and empower you to make an impact on the world.

COACH REBECCA GARCIA, founder of Christian Women Entrepreneurs Network

Nancy Gavilanes specializes in making God-sized truths relevant, relatable, and applicable to our daily lives. In *God-Given Dreams*, she gives us permission (and a biblical framework) to boldly pursue the big dreams God has placed in our hearts. Though ostensibly for women, this book overflows with wisdom and encouragement that we all need to hear.

EDWARD GILBREATH, author of *Reconciliation Blues* and vice president of strategic partnerships at Christianity Today

This book is powerfully packed with steps for women to achieve their God-given dreams and assignments. Whether you are a new believer or a seasoned one, you will glean from the wisdom Nancy shares. Nancy gives you the foundation to overcome insecurities by emphasizing God's love for you and instilling confidence to know who you are in Him. This book

would be a great tool for Bible-study and small groups to allow women to grow and gain the confidence to fulfill their God-given dreams.

CHRIS LUPPO, TV producer, media consultant, author, and speaker

In a world where the noise of competing values can drown out our inner calling, this book provides an encouraging oasis for you to stand firm and live your divine purpose. By weaving the author's personal journey as a Latina with profound insights from Christian practices, it invites readers of all backgrounds on a refreshing spiritual journey. It's not just about dreaming; it's about actively pursuing and courageously living your own God-given dreams.

REV. ELIZABETH TAMEZ MÉNDEZ, PhD, executive director of New Generation3, lead editor and contributing author of JUNTOSseries.com

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NANCY GAVILANES

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God-Given Dreams: 6 Ways to Live Your Divine Purpose

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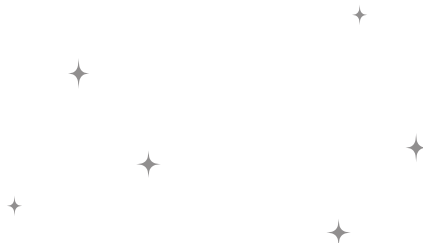
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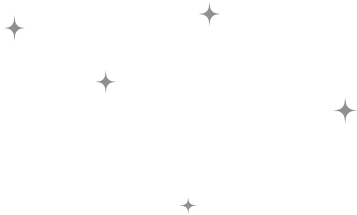
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This book is dedicated to my loving familia, who have encouraged me and prayed for me all these years.

And also to every reader who has the courage to say yes to God's perfect will for her life.





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Introduction

The Six Cs of Transformation

AS A LITTLE GIRL, I wanted to work at my favorite toy store so I could buy all the dolls I wanted. In third grade, I was fascinated with horses and dreamed of owning a horse ranch. By sixth grade, I wanted to be a pop star because I enjoyed belting out my favorite tunes.

Spoiler alert: My favorite toy store eventually closed, I'm still a city gal who doesn't own horses, and I (thankfully) outgrew my desire to be a famous singer.

Some whimsical childhood dreams are better left in the past, right?

What I didn't outgrow is my love for writing, which came as naturally to me as breathing.

I loved when my mom would read bedtime stories to me. And I still remember when she gave my older sister and me our first fancy diaries. They were so pretty that

we each immediately put a prized pink satin sticker on our covers. I was eight years old, and it felt normal to jot down little notes about my ordinary days.

When I was in fifth grade, my sister and I would spend hours making magazines out of loose-leaf paper. We joyfully wrote all the articles, drew all the pictures, and bound the pages together with tape or staples. I still have the six issues I created. My sister was my only reader.

I thought everyone enjoyed writing.

As a teen, my writing dreams were to work at a magazine and to go to the Olympics as a reporter.

I'm not sure how I even had the audacity to form such big aspirations at that age. I was just a young writer who enjoyed reading magazines and admired Olympians. I didn't know any reporters or elite athletes. And I had no idea how I could ever reach those goals, which seemed as outrageous as going to the moon.

Looking back at my life, I now see that writing was a gift from God. And while I had plans for my future, God had His own divine plans.

I'm a Latina from New York and the daughter of two hardworking and loving parents who immigrated from Central and South America as young adults. My mother and late father were the first in their large families to leave their respective home countries on planes bound for the United States. Unknowingly, they arrived in the Big

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Apple just months apart from each other. They came in search of better opportunities, and they did so at a time when there were few Latinos in New York. They met soon after arriving, married, and later had my sister and me. I saw my parents struggle and succeed at attaining their American dreams, and that has left a lasting impression on me.

Now I can see that I come from a family of dreamers and doers.

When you're the daughter of immigrants, or an immigrant yourself, you tend to have that extra drive (or *ganas*) to want to succeed and make your parents and extended family proud.

So I worked hard to achieve my personal goals. I graduated with a master's degree in journalism from New York University and started to experience success in my career. I was seeing my dreams come true but had drifted far from God.

When I finally dedicated my life to God, the trajectory of my life changed. Instead of pursuing my goals, I started pursuing God and dreaming with Him.

That's made all the difference in my life.

God called me out of a successful journalism career to speak and write about Him. The process hasn't been easy, and I haven't had a huge cheering squad in my corner. But after many years of prayer, preparation, and experience,

GOD-GIVEN DREAMS

I'm now an author, speaker, Christian life coach, Bible school instructor, podcaster, and evangelist.

I've been blessed to see God's miraculous fingerprints on six continents.

I've had the honor of speaking to various groups, including Christians working at the United Nations, chapel attendees at a Christian college, and wonderful women living at a shelter. I've been a small-group leader, a Bible-class facilitator, a short-term missionary in five countries, a volunteer chaplain, an evangelistic-outreach leader, and a counselor and coach to friends and family.

A big part of my calling is to encourage and empower faithful and fabulous women of God like you!

DARE TO DREAM WITH GOD

Throughout my years of ministry, I've had the privilege and honor of ministering to countless precious women. The women I've met may vary in age, race, ethnicity, and background, but many share a similar struggle of not having the courage, confidence, or clarity to pursue their God-given dreams.

It's as if they're afraid to dream big or are waiting for permission to proceed.

Many feel their dreams are only daydreams. Their goals seem unattainable or impossible.

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There are many reasons why some women stop short of taking steps toward their dreams.

Many grew up feeling pressured to fit a certain role or stereotype. Others lack the opportunities or resources to move forward. Some were raised in abusive households or other toxic environments that left them feeling insecure and afraid. Others just haven't had access to mentors or role models who could give them a glimpse of what it's like to work in a certain career or serve in a certain capacity. They lack someone who can remind them of their extreme worth, nurture their gifts, and coach them along their path.

These women doubt they have what it takes. They feel stuck because they don't know how to get started. They're worried about what others might think or say. Some feel disqualified because of their rocky start in life, their nationality or accent, or their current circumstances.

Can you relate?

Maybe you're there now.

If you've ever wondered whether God loves you or has a plan for your life, or if you've ever questioned if God could use you to make a difference in this world, this book is for you.

If you've ever felt underestimated, misunderstood, or even marginalized, this book is for you.

GOD-GIVEN DREAMS

If you've felt as though your dreams don't matter or are too far-fetched, this book is for you.

If you're feeling stuck and unsure about how to start living your God-given dreams, this book is for you.

If you're ready to take prayerful and bold steps toward your God-given purpose, this book is for you.

GOD'S BELOVED DREAMER

What dreams has God placed in your heart?

What stirs your soul and keeps you up at night?

What breakthrough have you been waiting and longing for?

How would your life—and the lives of those you seek to help—change if you were living your God-given dreams?

What's holding you back from taking steps toward your God-given dreams?

I know how frustrating it can be to try to figure out what God's calling you to do, how confusing it can be to try to map out what steps to take, and how daunting it can feel when it seems like the odds are stacked against you.

It can feel discouraging, disappointing, and downright disheartening. It can even make you question whether you somehow misheard God.

Thankfully, I also know the joy of being at the center

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of God's will and have experienced the blessings that come with answering God's call.

My prayer is that you will also know the joy of being God's beloved dreamer and will be able to flourish in all that God is calling you to do.

God already knows what's on the other side of our yes!

YOUR GOD-GIVEN DREAMS MATTER

In this book I'll be sharing some of the Bible verses, Bible heroines (who I call "Bible beauties"), and Bible-based principles that have helped me on my journey. May you be inspired, challenged, and empowered to dare to live your God-given dreams and purpose.

God has made you for such a time as this.

You matter. Your God-given dreams matter.

The world needs you to take your place, wherever God is calling you. People need to hear your voice. They need you to be that salt and light and that woman of God who will be His hands and feet to express His love to those near and far.

You are the answer to someone's prayers. Will you let God use you as He sees fit?

Will you say yes to God's call on your life?

I love seeing women walk in a way worthy of their calling.

There's a time to dream, and then there's a time to do!

I'm looking forward to spurring you on in your journey to your breakthrough.

Are you ready to do some prayerful soul searching to discover how God has designed you?

WHO DO YOU SEE WHEN YOU LOOK IN THE MIRROR?

Do you like who you see when you look in the mirror?

Can you see past her seeming imperfections? Can you accept her—flaws and all?

Can you see past the labels placed on her by society, her cultural heritage, her leaders, or her family members?

And who are you behind your smile? Who are you when no one is looking?

Do you like the woman you've become? Can you love her despite her past? Can you look beyond her outward appearance and résumé, or her lack of experience?

Or do you get hung up on her scars and blemishes, both visible and internal? Do you judge her by her past sins, failures, and poor choices, or even her present circumstances?

Do you feel unlovely, unlovable, unworthy, or unqualified? Are you filled with doubt, insecurity, or fear? Do you question whether you have what it takes to make a difference in the world?

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Are you afraid you're all alone, not enough, unwanted, or anonymous?

Ever wish you could trade places with the gal who seems to have it all together on social media or TV, at the office, or in the classroom?

Do you struggle to fit in or to feel like you belong? Do you know who you are? Do you know your real worth?

I'm here to remind you that God loves you beyond measure. You are God's unique masterpiece! God is with you. You are not alone.

God sees you and hears you. God is closer than you think. God is closer than your next breath. God is working out His perfect plan for you.

Don't listen to what the critics, the cynics, the haters, or even society says about you.

You are beloved, blessed, and beautiful.

God loves you more than you'll ever know!

DISCOVERING THE SIX Cs OF TRANSFORMATION

In this book, we'll go on a journey to discover, embrace, and celebrate who we are in Christ using the Six Cs of Transformation. I prayerfully created this framework for my coaching clients and Bible school students to help them go from feeling frustrated to fruitful, frazzled to focused, and fearful to fierce.

Let's rejoice even now that we are

- *created* by almighty God;
- *called* to honor God;
- *chosen* to bear fruit;
- *conformed* to the image of Christ;
- *clothed* with purpose; and
- *commissioned* to shine and soar.

My prayer is that each chapter of this book will flood you with the love of God. May you be captivated and enthralled, and may your heart and soul be stirred!

Once we know who we are in Christ, we're unstoppable.
God sees us, flaws and all, and loves us!

God's love for us is extravagant. He longs to lavish His love on us.

We are God's beloved. God is doing a beautiful work in us.

When God sees you, He sees Jesus.

Jesus has redeemed you.

You are precious in His sight.

Look up.

Stand tall.

Stand strong.

You are a blood-bought daughter of the living God.

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Be kind to the woman smiling at you in the mirror.
She is precious and dearly loved.

You are the one who captivates God's heart.

Walk in God's love. Bask in God's love.

Receive it. Remain in it. Reflect it. Rejoice in it.

Hold fast to what God says about you, and dare to live
your God-given dreams!

CHAPTER 1

Created by Almighty God

You created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

PSALM 139:13-16

“THIS IS FOR YOU TO write things down,” my mom said as she handed my older sister and me our new diaries. I was eight years old, and I was enthralled by the pretty notebook with pink pages and hearts all over the cover. It was from the fancy store where everything was covered in pastel colors and cute cartoon characters.

I didn't know what I'd write in this special book, but I couldn't wait to get started. First came placing a satin sticker on the cover, and next came the writing.

I wrote about ordinary things like playing with my sister or pets or cousins and going to the dentist. I also wrote simple prayers or hopes for upcoming events.

Private and introverted me welcomed having a space where I could jot down whatever random thoughts or experiences I was having. I thought everyone wrote about their daily lives.

I continued to journal my thoughts in notebook after notebook. Writing became second nature to me.

My parents made sure I had scores of books to read and plenty of paper and pens on hand. They encouraged me to hone my writing skills, and they delighted in celebrating even my earliest published articles in high school, college, and local newspapers.

My dear late dad, who was from Ecuador, and my precious mom, who is from Central America, both ran successful small businesses in New York. They modeled and instilled in my sister and me the value of working hard to achieve your goals.

My parents immigrated to New York at a time when speaking Spanish was extremely frowned upon in the neighborhood. They had learned English in their respective home countries and continued studying and practicing English once they were in the United States. While I grew up in a bilingual home, English is my dominant language. It's the language I used when speaking to my sister and to my school friends. English was the language my family tended to use outside the home—to blend in, I guess, and not draw attention to ourselves.

Spanish was reserved for the adults. They used it mostly inside our home and especially when familia from abroad came to visit. Spanish always felt like a second language to me. It always felt more natural to express myself in English.

Funny enough, I only recently learned the reason I ended up in a bilingual kindergarten class: The school was overcrowded. When my parents found out I was in a bilingual class, they thought it was good for me to be exposed to both languages. At the time I didn't realize there was anything different about my class, but now I see it helped prepare me for my Spanglish world.

Even as adults, my dad and I spoke mainly in English, whether indoors or outdoors. That was our heart language with each other. My mom and I have a unique way of communicating. She speaks to me mainly in Spanish, and I respond mainly in English. Over the years, people in stores have been baffled to hear us speaking to each other in different languages.

I'm grateful that I'm fluent enough in Spanish to draw on it as needed. I know that being Latina means more than just how well I speak español or how I look or sound.

As a native New Yorker, I grew up surrounded by vibrant Hispanic culture as well as a beautiful mosaic of other cultures. As diverse as my city was, I wasn't usually surrounded by many other Latina or Latino writers.

Many of my Latina/o peers didn't know what to do with me.

"You're not Spanish, you just look it," some acquaintances would say. I guess my interests and experiences were different from those around me. As a teen and young adult, I did struggle with embracing my Latina roots.

But I'm glad that didn't stop me from putting pen to paper.

In my sophomore year of high school, I joined the school's newspaper. The English teacher who oversaw the newspaper was a tough editor, but she saw potential in me and my writing. She helped affirm that I was a good writer. I reluctantly became the editor-in-chief of the paper in my senior year.

When the time came to choose a college major, journalism seemed like the best fit. While I did have a professor in a Latin American studies class who introduced me to books by Latina authors, I was the only Latina student in my journalism classes. It didn't really bother me, but I noticed it. I'm glad my professors treated me fairly. I did feel like the odd one out during our required internship, though, when journalism majors moved to another city for six months to write for a local paper. I was the only Latina in our small group. Our editor enjoyed giving us nicknames, and he chose to call me "Sally Sombrero." That irked me, but I didn't say anything.

Whether I was writing for my college newspaper or interning at weekly papers, I enjoyed telling stories that gave a voice to the voiceless or informed readers about issues happening on campus or in the community.

I had the great honor of being the second person in mi familia to graduate from college.

After graduation, I worked at a prestigious newspaper as a news clerk and then started writing articles and book reviews for them. At my dad's urging, I went to graduate school and got a master's degree in journalism from New York University. I then worked at a women's magazine in Times Square. All my journalism dreams were coming true.

Unfortunately, as my writing career soared, my walk with God suffered. I thought I had outgrown God, and I tried to put Him on a shelf.

I was bored with church and tired of religion, and I didn't read my Bible, which I had only used back in school when I had religion-class homework. None of my friends were going to church anymore, so I thought this was all normal.

I was making my plans and asking God to bless them.
Big mistake.

One of my biggest career aspirations was to attend the Olympics as a reporter. I was ecstatic when I received the opportunity to travel to the Summer Games in Sydney, Australia, as a reporter and a spectator!

GOD-GIVEN DREAMS

I had a lovely time there, but something wasn't right. I had reached my goals and had gotten myself as far as I could, but I still wasn't satisfied.

My purpose in Sydney was to chase down athletes. God's purpose was to send the Holy Spirit to chase *me* down.

During my last full day there, I was by myself in Olympic Park, crying and still feeling empty.

I started to think about all that God had allowed me to accomplish in such a short amount of time, even though I had been rebelling against Him. I felt overwhelmed by God's amazing love and grace and mercy. I knew I didn't deserve any of these blessings.

All my mom's and sister's prayers from over the years must've finally kicked in.

I realized I needed to turn to God.

Right there in Olympic Park (without a pastor or evangelist with me), I surrendered my life to God and dedicated myself to serving Him. I started to realize that God had created me with great love. Almighty God has a plan for my life. And God has a plan for your life too.

CREATED WITH EXTRAVAGANT LOVE

If you've ever felt invisible, inadequate, or insecure, you're not alone. Many people struggle to feel valuable and significant.

Many times, this stems from having a strained relationship with a parent or from having toxic people around us, especially during childhood. It could be compounded by harsh words or abusive actions from a spouse, a boss, or others.

Society, peers, and circumstances may also make us think we're not enough or we don't have what it takes. We need to shatter those lies. Thoughts that you'll never amount to anything, or you're no good, or God could never love you are lies from the pit of hell. The enemy wants to fool us into thinking we're unloved, unworthy, or unwanted. He wants to steal, kill, and destroy our lives and rob us of our identity.

But the enemy is a liar and defeated!

The first truth in the Six Cs of Transformation is that God created us with extravagant love. Almighty God, the Creator of heaven and earth—the One who made the sun, moon, and stars and created the splendid array of gorgeous flowers, spectacular sunrises and sunsets, and the breathtaking sea—delighted in creating each one of us.

In one of the very first verses in the Bible, we read: “God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27).

Even King David marveled at knowing we're God's creation. In Psalm 8 he wrote:

GOD-GIVEN DREAMS

When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
what is mankind that you are mindful
of them,
human beings that you care for them?

PSALM 8:3-4

The next time you see an exquisite sunset, sea, or flower, remember how lovely you are in God's sight! You were created to worship Him. You were created to bring Him glory.

God didn't make any mistakes when He created you.

He knew exactly where and when you would be born. He knew the shape of your nose and eyes, the color of your skin, your height, and even the funny way you laugh. God designed you as He saw fit.

FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE

Psalm 139 is one of my favorite psalms because it describes how God fashioned and formed us with great love and attention:

You created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

CREATED BY ALMIGHTY GOD

I praise you because I am fearfully and
wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.
My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths
of the earth.
Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in
your book
before one of them came to be.
How precious to me are your thoughts, God!
How vast is the sum of them!
Were I to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand—
when I awake, I am still with you.

PSALM 139:13-18

We're not anonymous or random to God. God knows us by name and knows our thoughts and every hair on our heads.

When I was alone in Australia, I may have been anonymous to the people all around me, but God saw me and knew everything about me. He knew I'd be at the park that afternoon. He didn't scold or punish me.

He just loved me. That meant the world to me and reminded me that I couldn't outrun God's love, even when I was on the other side of the globe. God truly is everywhere.

God knew us before we were in our mothers' wombs and has a plan for every one of our days. *We are fearfully and wonderfully made in God's image.* Let that truth sink in.

The woman who stares back at you in the mirror each morning is dearly loved by God and is His masterpiece. This fact should silence any lies you may have believed. Let it change the way you see yourself.

God does wonderful works, and you are one of them! We are the apple of God's eye, engraved on the palms of His hands. We are God's beloved, and we are precious and honored.

GOD'S BELOVED DAUGHTER

Even with our quirks, imperfections, messy pasts, or insecurities, we are precious to God.

In Matthew 3:17, God declares His love for His Son, Jesus: "A voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'"

In some Bible translations, God calls Jesus His "beloved Son." God *deeply* loves His Son, Jesus, and the Father and Son are one. If you consider how much God

loves Jesus, John 15:9 will blow your mind and warm your heart. Listen to what Jesus tells His disciples:

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.
Now remain in my love.”

Did you catch that? Jesus loves His disciples (including you and me) as God loves Him. It’s almost too incredible to believe, but let that truth reach the deepest part of your heart. *Jesus loves you as the Father loves Him.*

During my “lost years,” when I was living as I pleased and asking God to bless my plans, I felt far from Him. Though I loved God, I felt like there was a wall between us. I felt like God was mad at me for my rebellious ways, and I wondered if He still loved me.

That wall was smashed when I realized that I could be reconciled to my heavenly Father through Jesus, as it says throughout the Bible (in 1 Timothy 2:5-6, for example). Even when I felt far from God, God had never left me.

God has precious thoughts toward us. He knew us before we were in our mothers’ wombs. He loved us before we could love Him. He loved us even when we were His enemies and rebelling against Him. We can’t do anything to earn His love. Romans 5:8 states: “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

GOD-GIVEN DREAMS

God loves us even though He knows our past, present, and future sins.

When we receive Jesus as our Lord and Savior, He comes to live inside us, as we read in Colossians 1:27: “To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

We also become God’s beloved children, as the apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 3:26-28:

In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

God isn’t some distant being floating around in the universe. He is our heavenly Father, according to Romans 8:14-17:

Those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “*Abba*, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit

that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

May we never take for granted that we, like a child speaking to her daddy, can call God “*Abba*, Father.”

GLEANING INSIGHT FROM A BIBLE BEAUTY

Ruth is a beautiful example of what it looks like to be created with extravagant love by God.

When we first meet Ruth, we learn she is a young widow. She had been married to a Hebrew man named Mahlon. Ruth was a Moabite. Her people were longtime rivals of the Israelites.

Mahlon and his family had moved to Moab during a severe famine in Bethlehem. While in Moab, Mahlon died, and so did his father and brother. Ruth's elderly mother-in-law, Naomi, was devastated and heartbroken, and she made plans to return to Bethlehem since the famine was over.

What was Ruth to do?

Ruth could've stayed in Moab with her parents and restarted her life there. Naomi even urged her several times to stay. But Ruth made a defining decision that changed the course of her life. Ruth chose to leave Moab and go

with Naomi to Bethlehem. Ruth chose to forsake her people's gods to follow the God of Israel.

Ruth had no idea what lay in store for her. She emigrated to a new land. As a foreigner and a widow, she was among the most vulnerable in society.

It looked like Ruth was headed for a life of poverty and suffering. She may have felt unqualified, unwanted, and unfit for any other kind of life.

But God had created Ruth with extravagant love.

God knew Ruth was a Moabite. He wasn't surprised by her background. And God hadn't abandoned Ruth or Naomi.

Ruth put her trust in God, and God came through for her.

God provided food and work for Ruth. And God led Ruth to glean in a field belonging to Boaz, a kinsman redeemer (a relative close enough to buy the land from Naomi's family to keep it in their family line). Boaz and Ruth soon married and had a son named Obed. Obed was the father of Jesse, who was the father of King David.

Ruth, a hardworking immigrant who humbly served her family and others, is King David's great-grandmother and one of Jesus' ancestors. She is one of only five women mentioned in Jesus' genealogy (see Matthew 1:5) and one of only two women to have a book of the Bible named after her.

CREATED BY ALMIGHTY GOD

God truly worked all things together for Ruth's good.

Almighty God *created* Ruth with extravagant love.

God *called* Ruth to honor Him.

God *chose* Ruth to bear fruit.

God *conformed* Ruth to the image of Christ.

God *clothed* Ruth with purpose.

God *commissioned* Ruth to shine and soar for Him.

BEING ROOTED AND GROUNDED IN GOD'S LOVE

Before we can dare to live our God-given dreams, it's essential that we become rooted and grounded in God's extravagant and everlasting love.

Sometimes our past hurts or current disappointments prevent us from believing that God loves us. Or maybe you grew up thinking God was the mean "Man Upstairs" who was always mad at you and waiting for you to make mistakes.

Beloved, may you keep your heart open and ready to receive all the love and goodness and kindness and mercy God wants to shower on you. May you remain in God's love today and always.

God is the definition of love, as the apostle John stated in 1 John 4:16-17:

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete

GOD-GIVEN DREAMS

among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus.

If we truly accepted how much God loves us, it wouldn't matter what other people thought about us. We would walk with confidence, clarity, and courage because our identity would be wrapped in Christ.

How would your life change if you lived as the beloved child of God that you are?

How much more secure and significant would you feel if you remembered that God doesn't stop loving you?

Nothing can separate us from God's love. Romans 8:38-39 is a wonderful passage to memorize and meditate on: "I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

What a beautiful truth: We are dearly and eternally loved by God! The apostle Paul prayed that the Ephesians would be able to grasp the magnitude of God's extravagant love. This prayer is my prayer for us as well:

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious

CREATED BY ALMIGHTY GOD

riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

EPHESIANS 3:14-19

Being rooted and grounded in Christ's love is the firm foundation we need to flourish in all areas of our lives.

REFLECTING ON BEING CREATED TO LOVE GOD AND OTHERS

As we meditate on God's goodness and receive His extravagant love, our natural response will be to lavish Him with love.

We love because he first loved us.

1 JOHN 4:19

If you want a clearer picture of God the Father, look at the life, ministry, and character of His Son, Jesus. Jesus is the image of the invisible God.

GOD-GIVEN DREAMS

Jesus is also the Good Shepherd. A friend who sticks closer than a brother. The Way, the Truth, and the Life. The Bread of Life. The Lamb of God. Immanuel, which means “God with Us.” The Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. The Resurrection and the Life.

Once you receive God’s amazing and extravagant love, you’ll be able to serve as an expression of His love to others, who also need a taste of God’s infinite love for them.

Empowered by God’s love, we’re able to love our neighbors and make a difference in our communities and beyond.

Is your heart being stirred?

You were created with a divine purpose. Are you ready to take the next step toward living your God-given dreams?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

I hope these questions will help stir your heart. You can use them as journal prompts or as discussion questions with your small group.

1. Are you feeling God’s unconditional love for you? If so, stop and soak it in, and then write a prayer thanking God for His extravagant love.

2. Has something been hindering you from receiving and reveling in God's love for you? If so, ask God to expose the lies you've been believing and to help you replace those lies with His truth.
3. How does Ruth's story inspire you and demonstrate that almighty God creates us with extravagant love?
4. Have you received Jesus as your Lord and Savior? If so, describe that glorious day. If not, what's stopping you?
5. How would your life change if you truly received and remained in God's extravagant love for you? Would you feel ready to dare to live your God-given dreams?
6. What is one key takeaway or insight you learned from this chapter?
7. What's one faith step you can prayerfully commit to taking this week to get closer to living your God-given dreams?

ACTION STEP

Write a letter to yourself reminding you just how beloved, blessed, and beautiful you are to God. Read it out loud to yourself while facing a mirror. Keep the letter handy so you can read it whenever you need a sweet reminder that God loves you.

PRAYER AND PRAISE

Lord, thank You for Your extravagant love, grace, and mercy. Thank You that I am fearfully and wonderfully made by You. Forgive me for doubting Your love or concern for me. Help me receive Your unmerited, unlimited, and unconditional love for me. Today, I'm praising You and praying for . . .