

Chapter One

Dream Within a Dream

Dreams. We all have them. As little girls, we often have huge ideas of what our futures will look like. My favorites are the “combination dreams”, the ones that combine every favorite thing of the moment. *When I grow up, I’m going to be a scientist, a ballerina and an astronaut. Oh, and maybe a veterinarian, too!* I had some crazy ideas of what I would become when I was a girl. Maybe you did, too. Or maybe you are one of the unicorns that actually lived out your lifelong dream (if you are, I envy you!). As we become women, many of our dreams change.

Our dreams change from job titles to ones more relational in nature. Dreams centered around God, your husband, your family. You want to be pleasing to God, to really know Him. To understand His plans for your life, knowing the key to true happiness is living in His will. You want the blessings and favor of God to be on you and for everything you touch to prosper. You want to be loved and adored by your husband. To have a connection deeper than friendship, a bond that is rooted in trust, respect, and love; something sacred. To be a true team. You and him, against the world. You and him, creating a family.

You want your children to know God, to know how much you love them, and for them to be happy. Your all-consuming love for them drives you to be the best mom possible, providing for them, teaching them, raising them. Your dreams for them become a priority. You want to succeed in your career choice, whether you’re a doctor, a business owner or a stay-at-home mom. To be fulfilled by your work and believe it’s important. Contributing to your church and community in meaningful ways, filling needs by serving others.

Thriving in relationships becomes an equal measure of success to your career. Whether it’s your husband, children, parents, friends or coworkers, healthy relationships are vital. You need to feel like you belong or have found your “tribe”, surrounded by people who love and respect you. Having sisters in Christ who urge you to chase after Jesus and call you out when you’re not. You want to live confidently

knowing who God is, His plan for you, and how to walk in His will. To feel like you are winning at the important things in life. Honestly, you want it all.

Dreams Vs. Reality

The funny thing about dreams is they often feel just out of reach. Somehow, the bar keeps moving when long sought after goals are reached. Never taking time to enjoy the moment, it's just on to the next thing. You may find yourself exhausted by the end of the day after trying your best to have it all and do it all. Time is your most precious commodity, and there just isn't enough of it. After working all day, coming home to a sink full of dishes and an empty refrigerator can leave you dreaming of a massive raise. One that would allow you to afford a live-in maid who loves to cook! If you are staying at home raising littles, you may fondly remember the days when your boss acknowledged your hard work. Words of affirmation that felt so good. You may long for any kind of recognition as you stand knee-deep in laundry with screaming toddlers at your ankles! Dreams of happiness get replaced with expectations and deadlines.

Trying to live up to these expectations is draining. Demands placed on you by culture, upbringing, friends, churches, and even yourself. You are ambushed with images showing you what your life should look like. Especially from social media, displaying images of everyone else's perfect home, marriage, kids – their perfect everything. This perfect life narrative is dangerous. It fuels the belief that you must perform to prove yourself worthy. If you fail in any way, you are a failure. Inferior and weak. Needing help or not being able to do it all proves you're not the ideal independent woman. Lies telling you that you're not enough.

The culture tells you to be a queen, a girl boss or be your own hero. Speak up, don't be silent, stand up for your rights. This produces an uncontrollable need to be right and in control. Your perspective and your beliefs take center stage, silencing other's opinions – even silencing the voice of God. When faced with a difference of opinion or when outcomes fall short of what you expected, those messages play like a movie reel in your brain, triggering the need to stand your ground immediately. Advocating for yourself looks more like fighting to be right. Bending others to your will. You're left feeling battle-weary when what you really want is peace.

Independence or Control

This battle creeps into your marriage, disguising itself as equality or fairness. The real culprit is control. The insatiable need for control and fairness often has you steamrolling over your husband without you even realizing it. The media constantly portrays men as bumbling idiots who need women to tell them what to do. Between you and me, we secretly love telling everyone what to do. Manhood has become the punchline of a joke. Have you ever stopped to consider how the need for control affects the most intimate relationship in your life? How what you believe about manhood might affect your husband? Achieving equality shouldn't involve the need to control men or require diminishing their value.

Control or being the boss leaves no room for partnership. You can't have a partnership without trust. Lack of trust produces fear. Fear of failure, fear of betrayal, fear of being vulnerable, fear of rejection, fear of judgement and fear of losing control take up residence in our minds. Fear rules with an iron fist. Control and fear often walk side-by-side, and both stand in opposition to the One you believe in. Jesus says to trust and follow Him. Jesus served others and put others first. Jesus promises freedom. Your beliefs about control can prevent you from truly knowing God, His plan for you and experiencing the freedom Jesus talks about. They can also be damaging to your marriage and your ability to connect with your husband.

You may have found yourself struggling to find your identity throughout your life. You dream big dreams and want them all to come true, rather than picking which ones to focus on. You want to grow closer to Jesus, desiring to know more about Him. But you also find yourself struggling for control over people in your life, your husband, your boss, your parents and your friends. You desperately search for someplace to raise your voice, to be heard. I'm here to tell you today that you are not alone in this battle! The illusion of the perfect independent woman is unobtainable. No one is truly independent. But you are not a victim, either. Women have been set up to fight a battle that is never-ending and un-winnable. Our bar of victory is always moving. This battle of the sexes forever leaves women in the role of victim and men starring in the role of oppressor.

The root of this war has its origins in the Garden. Deception began with a crafty serpent, who spun a web of lies trapping generations (for the purposes of this book, satan and his other designations such as serpent, enemy, accuser, adversary, etc. are intentionally left uncapitalized because he doesn't deserve any kind of glorification!). A web that diminished women for centuries. The serpent tells you lies that keep you focused on the wrong enemy. Lies intended to cause division and destruction so that you could never fulfill the purpose God created you for. Lies designed to steal your

worth as a woman. Lies crafted by an eternal evil genius who never sleeps and never stops scheming. His only goal is to destroy as much of God's creation as possible.

Unfortunately, that includes me and you. His original target was mankind, but he focused on Eve. He stole her dignity and stole her voice. There is hope in this battle: God's original plan was always one of equality. Following Jesus makes you a daughter of the King. As God's daughter, you are royalty, valued beyond measure, entitled to every spiritual blessing, empowered and fully equal to every other heir. You are not a queen, or your own hero, or a girl boss. You are God's daughter. You were made in His image, with purpose and for a unique purpose. It is time to reclaim your identity!