

Episode: God Has Dreams for Our Life

Contributor: Msgr. Fred Dolan

Podcast Page: <https://stjosemaria.org/podcasts/god-has-dreams-for-our-life/>

We are pleased to offer a transcript of this podcast to serve the needs of all our subscribers. Please note, however, that this transcript is generated by AI and may not be perfectly accurate. This content may not be published or reprinted without permission from the St. Josemaria Institute.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are here, that you see me, that you hear me. I adore you with profound reverence. I ask your pardon for my sins, and the grace to make this time of prayer fruitful. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.

Our topic for this time of prayer is a very wonderful consequence of our divine filiation: the fact that we are God's children. We want to ask the Lord to give us an ever deeper vocational sense of our life. Just imagine that moment that St. John the Evangelist never forgot, that moment when he as a young man, perhaps 18 years old, was there by the River Jordan, with John the Baptist. He heard John the Baptist say, "Behold the Lamb of God." And he and his friend Andrew went running after Jesus, "Master, where are you staying?" The Lord said to them, "Come and see." Years later, when John was an old man, he wrote, it was about four o'clock in the afternoon, he never forgot. Just imagine John, as an old man gathering all sorts of, well, that very first generation of Christians all around him and hearing them say to him, "John, tell us the story again. We love that story of your vocation." And John, with eyes glistening, would once again tell of that amazing moment when his life changed radically.

There is something very special about people who have discovered what it is that God has in store for them. We can turn to Tolstoy to *Anna Karenina* to get a sense of this. It's not quite a depiction of someone discovering his or her vocation, but Tolstoy does put his finger on what happens to a person when that very special event takes place. It is a moment when Levin describes his relationship with his wife. Tolstoy writes, "Levin wanted to listen to her voice, which had changed and acquired, along with her gaze, that mixture of sweetness and seriousness so characteristic of people who give themselves body and soul to a single occupation." Levin's wife had had found that and so everything about her had changed, and she became focused. That comes from this clear awareness that we have a mission.

You may recall those words, those thrilling words, of Saint John Henry Newman, "God has created me to do him some definite service. He has committed some work to me that he has not committed to another." A definite service... The mission that Jesus offers us can change our life and fill it with light. It all comes down to that conviction that we were created, each one of us, in the Lord's image. We were called personally into existence and given a personal name. Throughout our life, God addresses us personally. And very compellingly, God has dreams for our life.

You may recall that passage in the Book of Revelation, the very final book of the New Testament, where we read, we read that, at the end of our life, we will be handed a white stone on which is written our real name. It's a very haunting thought to realize this, that God has, he has a name for us, he has a plan for us. Well, this is the beginning of having an inspired life, that life that begins with the awareness that God dwells within us. That God is keenly interested in everything we do. And furthermore, that God awaits our loving response all day long, every day. That is worth pondering for a minute. To realize that our life, if we want it to be like this, can be a constant give and take. We can, we have every right to begin each day by saying to the Lord, "I'm coming to get you. I am going to pursue you in my work, my family life, my recreation." It becomes a delightful back and forth. And we can say this because God himself has said that he takes delight in us. He finds his delight in us. And furthermore, as the psalmist says, "if we take our delight in him, he will grant our heart's desire." This can be a very first, very wonderful resolution from this time of prayer together: to see how much depends on my response, day after day, hour after hour, and to realize that God is there, following me with his tender love, with his tremendous interest. Well, the challenge then is to find a way to remember that that is what is going on, to maintain that vocational sense throughout the day.

Many of us begin the day with that one word, *Serviam*, "I will serve." Even with that one word, very simple word, we are already setting in motion the context, the bigger context, of our life. Then come those precious minutes of spending time talking things over with the Lord meditating, just as we're doing right now. How important it is for us throughout the day to stop, even just for a few seconds, to reconnect with the central truth of our existence, that our whole life is going about our Father's business.

There is an author that I appreciate very much named Dietrich von Hildebrand. And in his classic work, *Transformation in Christ*, at one point he's talking about this ongoing process of little-by-little being transformed into another Christ. And he's talking about the importance of being, as he puts it, fluid, supple, eager to change, in fact, with a passionate desire to constantly improve to change. And he makes the point that people, as the years go by, if they don't have that supernatural vision of things, people tend to become less flexible. In fact, the word he uses is the process of petrification. Petrification not in the sense of becoming petrified, but becoming rocky, just no more flexibility. On the other hand, if we have that supernatural vision of things, if we are struggling to grow in our spiritual life, well, then the opposite happens. And here's how he puts it, this I find this really compelling: "As we grow in our spiritual life, we get better at focusing on what really matters. Accidental concerns and complications recede into the background. The great decisive aspects of life become more clearly accentuated and a steady orientation towards the essential and decisive becomes dominant." Now that's quite a mouthful to read at once, but the elements of those sentences are a really helpful. To the extent that we pray, that we check in with God every day, we get better and better at identifying those things that really do not matter, as he puts it, those *accidental, accidental, concerns and complications*.

Even now, during this time of prayer, we can say to Jesus, "If I am carrying around in my heart, in my imagination, things that you could not care less about, well, then help me Jesus. My Lord, I ask you right now, you're here in the tabernacle, I ask you to just get rid of them, make them dissolve into nothingness." What is, what then happens, is that the great decisive aspects of life become more clearly accentuated. That's where things get really interesting. When we get better at identifying what are the great decisive aspects? What are the things that I really should be paying attention to? What are the different aspects of my roles in life? That's where things get really interesting. And as he finishes here, "a steady orientation towards the essential and decisive becomes dominant." Well, this could give each one of us a homework assignment to get better and better at identifying, even putting down on the list, what are the essential decisive aspects of my life? And all the rest, on the other side of the column, and then we just tear that up. Without this awareness, life runs the risk of becoming insipid. And we run the risk of spinning our wheels and spending a lot of time on things that really, in final analysis, just do not matter.

At one point, in the same book, Dietrich von Hildebrand talks about people who have lost or who have never possessed this supernatural vision of life. And here's how he puts it, "Some people squander away their lives in shallow pleasures. Others are so engrossed in their daily concerns, that even though they're not leading an agreeable life at all, they simply find no time to stop and think. The complete enslavement of their attention to the practical task, immediately, immediately ahead, deprives them of any leisure for feeling their lack of peace. Like beasts of burden, they tread along their path and dull monotony without ever becoming sufficiently awake to feel distressed by the meaninglessness of their lives." Who wants to be a beast of burden? It's going around and around, the same commute, the same tasks, the same dull, uninspired work. That's no way to live. And we say to Our Lord right now, "I don't want to live that way." On the other hand, if we have a vocational sense, we can turn anything into a moment, into a masterpiece.

I hope you don't mind if I tell a brief story that took place just a few years ago. Someone invited me to play in a golf tournament, fundraising tournament, for a hospital. So I played. We had a lot of fun. At the end of the round of golf, I went into the men's locker room and there the only person who was present was the locker room attendant, 65 year old, who looked up and he said, "You had a wonderful round of golf. It was a gift of the Lord." I was dressed just like a golfer, so he had no idea that I was a priest. I was quite taken with that. Anyway, I said, "You're absolutely right. Thank you very much." Well, then he disappeared, I disappeared. Some minutes later, I changed into clerical garb. He came around the corner, and he said, "Oh, Father, I had no idea." So then this gentleman went, he proceeded to explain his operating system. He said, "Every time any member of the club comes in that through that door, I say a prayer for him. When he puts his shoes down at the foot of the locker, I take them, I clean them, I restore them, so they look like new. Then I put them back at the foot of the locker, and I say, 'Jesus, you take these shoes, and whoever puts them, puts his feet in them, and lead them back to you.'" Now what do you say to someone like that? All I could say was, "Sir, hat's off to you." Because he turned what might be one of the most boring jobs in the face of the earth into a masterpiece. And you can, you can imagine the ambiance, the, the atmosphere that he created there in that locker room—one of joy, of cheerfulness, of peace, reassuring those who had just had a terrible round of golf, you know, the list goes on and on. Well, that's what we want to do. Now I'm not saying what we want to do is play golf, what we want to do is turn everything we do into a masterpiece. There is much at stake in our acquiring and developing this vocational sense of our life.

The very first point in *The Forge*, a wonderful book by St. Josemaria, stresses this point. He says, "We are children of God, bearers of the only flame that can light up the paths of the earth for souls. The only brightness that can never be darkened, dimmed or overshadowed. The Lord uses us as torches to make that light shine out. Much depends on us. If we respond, many people will remain in darkness no longer, but will walk instead along paths that lead to eternal life." Much depends on us. Much, much depends on whether we live our lives as God wants. Many people's lives depend on that. We just think for example, as you listen to this meditation, as you talk things over with, with the Lord, perhaps the Holy Spirit will place in your imagination, this friend or that friend, someone who may be calling you. The Holy Spirit will do that so that you end up informing that person of this day of recollection. The best laid plans of mice and men. I'm here at a conference center. It's absolutely deserted and now the phone rings, but what can you do?

A great question to ask ourselves during this time of prayer, "Am I, at this moment, where God wants me to be? Am I doing what he wants of me?" Now going back to that great thought of St. John Henry Newman that God has created me to do some definite service, that I have my mission, that God has not created me for not, for naught. If you look at that wonderful App called *iPray with the Gospel*, you've come across a very charming consideration about this, where the author says, "God has risked a lot. He's, he has, risked a lot calling us. God is like a good football coach who has chosen to train you. He helps you to develop your skills. He teaches you all you need. He invests his money, time, and gifts in you, but you are free. You can turn your back on him and decide instead of playing football, to do synchronized swimming. You might be good at it, you might be famous. But your coach would be disappointed and your team will have a gap." Now, why this person thought of

synchronized swimming, I don't know it's hard to imagine 255-250 pound football player doing synchronized swimming, but then why not. But it's a great point. You might be good, you might end up being famous. But people who are dependent on you will be left without you.

You know one of the dangers that can trip us up in this consideration is thinking that God could, could not possibly be thinking of me, can't be aware of me; there's so many people to take care of, I'm just one of the, part of the maddening, maddening crowd, etc. That kind of thing. So I'll just do my job, go home, be a good citizen, and that's life. That is not God's point of view. He has a definite plan for us. He has definite dreams for us. Another danger would be to sink into individualism, to just hide do, do my thing, not be concerned or interested in anyone around me. No idea who lives next door. Go to work. Those who still go to the office end up in your cubicle wearing noise cancelling headphones with no idea who's next to you—that kind of thing. Well, that's not God's point of view, either. So we hereby reject it with all our heart. And, another point of view, another danger, Pope Francis wrote to the young people of the world, talking to them about the importance of avoiding what he calls *early retirement*. “Dear young people make the most of these years of your youth. Don't observe life from a balcony. Don't confuse happiness with an armchair. Don't be parked cars, but dream freely and make good decisions. Take risks even if it means making mistakes. Don't go through life anesthetized. Don't approach the world like tourists. Make a ruckus. Cast out the fear that paralyzes you so that you do not become young mummies. Live. Give yourselves over to the best of life. Open the door of the cage, go out and fly, and please don't take early retirement.”

It can help us considering our vocational sense of life to pray at this moment in the meditation about those around me, about around each one of us, “How am I called to raise the spiritual temperature around me?” At the office, wherever we were, wherever we are with people, we can say to the Lord, “What are your dreams for these people through me? Because, after all, Jesus, you are continuing your mission on this earth through me.” Let us never lose that fascination—the desire to find out what God is up to. We can be thinking right now, going back to this app that I just mentioned, iPray with the Gospel, “Gee, I wonder who could I send that to? Who could I inform about that app? And just say, you know, something I look at every day, takes 30 seconds to read, very, very helpful consideration.” And then we leave it up to the Holy Spirit to do whatever he wants with that suggestion.

Final idea is the, the incalculable value of spiritual direction. After all, when we're talking about responding to God's dreams for us, about aiming for the stars, about aiming for genuine transformation in Christ, we need a coach. Some of you might be old enough to remember this movie, *Chariots of Fire*, long time ago, but there's a great scene about one of these runners. It's a true story back in, from back in the 20s, about two runners getting ready for the Olympics. One of them is so desperate to win that he goes way out of his way to convince a professional coach to coach him. And back then that was against the rules, but he did it anyway. But it's a very powerful scene because you see that he understands, “Either I get a coach, someone who really knows, who's one of the best, or I am not going to the Olympics.” That's why we can renew our determination to do whatever it takes to find someone who can say, “Here's how to go higher and higher in your vocational sense of life, in your prayer life, and your apostolate.” Well, let us finish this time of prayer by turning to Our Lady, the Queen of the Apostles. Speaking of vocational sense of life, could Mary ever forget that moment, the moment of the Annunciation, when she heard all that God has in store for her? Every single day, for the rest of her life, she renewed that *fiat*, “Lord, let it be done to me according to thy word. Do with me, do with my life, whatever you want.”

I thank you, my God, for the good resolutions, affections and inspirations you have communicated to me in this meditation. I ask your help to put them into effect. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. God bless you.