

1. YOUR DREAMS

*Choose this day whom you will serve . . . but as for me
and my house, we will serve the Lord.*

—Joshua 24:15

I hear it every time.

Last year, I spoke in twenty-five states. In parishes, arenas, schools, funeral homes, business seminars, and fund-raising galas. And in almost every setting, the same question popped up.

The Number One Question I Get Asked

It usually happens like this.

An older man walks up alongside me and whispers, “Can I ask you something in private?” We find a room or a hallway and stand in a quiet place for just a moment.

I see the pain in his face and ask, “How may I help you?”

“I am worried about my grandchildren. They don’t go to Mass. What can I do?”

“Tell me about your family,” I say.

First, I see the pain. Then, I hear it.

“They are all just so busy. My kids work. My grandchildren play soccer, and spend lots of time on their computers and phones. They are all so busy doing so many things. And they tell me they just don’t have time to go to Mass. I’m worried. I don’t think my daughter and her husband are interested in Catholicism at all. And they are not teaching my grandchildren anything about it.”

The grandfather feels the pain and asks, “Is it my fault? Did I do something wrong? I tried really hard, and now they don’t go to Mass at all. And my grandchildren are getting nothing. I’m worried.”

Like this man, grandparents can feel like they missed their opportunity. Their own children are grown now and have lost some or all interest in the Church.

Then the grandfather asks, “What can I do about it?”

I respond, “Well done! You’re asking exactly the right question.”

What can I do about it? Is this your question? Are you worried about your grandchild(ren)? Are you concerned their future will not include the Catholic faith, or any faith at all? Does it pain you to see all the obstacles the world places in the path of your grandchild and the Church?

I have good news. That pain you’re feeling is a gift from God.

In this book, I will show you why God gives you that pain and what you can do about it. You can use it for good. It’s a gift. In fact, it’s a vocation. God made you to be a grandparent.

If you are a new grandparent, God is giving you a new vocation. If you are a seasoned grandparent, God invites you to get really clear on what your role means and why He gave you this vocation in the first place.

Like you, I have been observing and am deeply worried about the culture where our grandchildren will grow—and are growing—up. In many ways, it is a toxic place. We know there is some-

thing wrong but no one seems able to fix it. The saturation of sexual messages. The instability. The widespread violence. The lack of respect for other human beings. Illegitimacy. Abused children. Neglect. The cruelty and isolation often created by social media. The hostility toward, and even mockery of, our Church and our Catholic faith.

I imagine you worry like I do. Watching children grow up today feels a lot like watching a James Bond movie in which the bad guy has kidnapped a girl and is waiting to kill her at the end of a slow-moving conveyor belt. At times, it feels like your grandchildren have been placed on the culture's conveyor belt. That belt empties into a huge wood chipper where lives, relationships, and futures are churned up and spit out. And your gut is telling you to do something to prevent that from happening to your grandchild—fast, before the bad guy wins.

That is why I wrote this book. This book is for you, and for me.

This book is for us because the battle for our grandchildren has already begun. Whoever wants them the most will get them. This is a fight you can win.

Don't Waste Your Pain

If you are feeling that pain as you watch your grandchildren growing up separated from the Catholic Church, please know it is sending an important message. If it hurts you to watch our culture growing ever more toxic, please know that pain is good. Yes, it is a good thing that it's painful. That pain in your soul exists because there is a lot at stake. It is the first step on your journey.

What is your pain telling you? First, it is God getting your attention. C. S. Lewis used to say that pain is God's megaphone to get our attention in the middle of all the noise of our lives. God whispers to us in our pleasures. He shouts to us in our pain.

Remember Jonah and the whale. Jonah wants to go another direction from where God wants him to go. When God wants to get Jonah's attention, He sends him on a cruise in the belly of a whale. After three days in that belly, at the bottom of the sea, Jonah finally says, "When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord" (Jonah 2:7). Finally, God has Jonah's attention—in the pain.

Second, that pain means you have a choice: to do something or to do nothing. God is nudging you. He is calling you through that uncomfortable pain in your soul. He is inviting you out of the pain and into something deeper and truer. Trust Him.

God can bring purpose out of the pain you are feeling. He not only can, but He will. God hopes to use that pain to do significant things in your life and in the lives of the people around you.

Very simply, God is nudging you forward. He is calling you into action. You have a role to play.

God allows pain for all kinds of reasons. Sometimes the pain results from dumb choices we make—for instance, when we put our hand on the burner of a hot stove. Sometimes God allows pain so that you and I will learn to depend on Him and trust Him more deeply. Sometimes we learn something very deep through our pain. If you never had a problem, you would never realize just how much you need God. Without pain, you and I might think we were self-sufficient. Sometimes God allows pain because He wants to give you or me a task. He often allows pain in my life to give me the opportunity to serve other people. Pain makes us humble and sensitive to the needs of others and also to the nudging of God.

God never wastes a hurt—but you can waste it if you do not learn from it or share it. God invites you to use your pain to help someone else. He wants to redeem your pain.

St. John Paul II said, "Don't waste your suffering." In other words, put your suffering to work for your own salvation, for your

family, and for the kingdom of God. Suffering offered to Christ is precious to our Lord. Don't waste it. Offer it up with Christ for the salvation of your grandchildren's souls.

Your calling is emerging from God. He nudges you in your pain to do something. To dream big. To serve bigger.

Don't waste your pain. Use it.

Grandparent Dreams

Dream. That's what grandparents do. Grandparents dream deep dreams for their families. Grandfathers hold longings and desires for the grandchildren who carry their names. Grandmothers harbor hopes for the future of their families and the faith of their grandchildren.

Grandparents dream and hope. It's what they do; it's just who they are.

Grandmothers and grandfathers hope for:

- healthy bodies and futures for their grandchildren
- excellent education of their grandchildren's minds to think and create like God intends
- thriving marriages and relationships for the family's generations to come
- vibrant faith inspired by the beauty and genius of Catholicism
- all their family to come to happiness with Jesus in this life and in the world to come

These grandparent dreams come from God. He planted them in you.

Yet, too many just haven't thought about their vocation as grandparents very much. Few grandparents I meet are intentional

about what they really want and what they will actually do for their grandchildren. They just kind of let it happen.

Worse, the temptation is to focus on the wrong things, to have misplaced priorities. Ask yourself: If you had the choice between your grandchild having a great career and your grandchild having a great faith, which would you choose? What does your answer to that question teach you about yourself?

God dreams for more. After all, a lot is at stake: your family.

Your Deepest Desires

You may want to **pass the torch**. The teachings of Catholicism have shaped every part of your life. You grew up in a Catholic home and a Catholic family. You and your siblings attended Catholic school. Your friends were Catholic and your sports teams were Catholic. Being Catholic has helped shape everything you have done: your marriage, your job, your family, your friends, your community. And you have benefited from the richness and principles of Catholicism. You want to pass that same torch to your grandchildren so that they can carry it for the next generation, because you know it leads to happiness, both here and in eternity.

Or perhaps you want to **light the fire**. Somewhere along the way, you figured it out. You connected the dots. You had been taught all about the Mass and the sacraments. You had learned lots of the *Catechism*. You had prayed the rosary hundreds of times. But it had never really clicked. Until one day you read a great Catholic book, or were inspired by a remarkable homily, or listened to a moving talk on CD, and it all came together. Suddenly, your spirit came alive and you really *got* it. You experienced the power of the faith and the love of Christ firsthand, deep within you. And you have never been the same. Something lit the fire in you, and you

want to help light that same fire in your grandchildren. You want them to have what you have: passion and purpose.

Or maybe your goal is simply to **help your grandchildren be happy**. You learned early on that God created us for happiness. And you have discovered in your life that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to find happiness apart from God. Life just doesn't work without God in it. You want your grandchildren to be happy, so you deeply yearn to pour the foundation for their lives. Because you know that God will help them become loving, compassionate, and good. He will guide them to become the-best-version-of-themselves.

Finally, you might envision your own future. Ultimately, you hope to be with God in heaven. The ancient Jews had a name for Him: the Place. God is the Place. You and I were made by God to **get to the Place**, to get to Him. You hope to get to the Place, and you really want to help your grandchildren get there too. Death is not the end; it's the beginning. Death transitions us to new life with God, and you want your grandchildren to be there with you forever.

You may hope for one of these, or you may hope for all of them. To pass the torch of Catholicism. To light the fire of faith. To lay the foundation for a happy life. To help your grandchildren get to God, the Place. All these desires come from God. He puts them in you because He has great hopes for your family too. And He has given you this vocation so that you can work with Him to make it happen.

To make it happen, you will need a plan. And in this book, I will teach you how to map out that plan, step by step, to work with God to make these dreams come true.

I don't know how this book landed in your hands. You might have purchased it on your own. Perhaps a friend recommended it

or you received it as a gift from your parish, or perhaps a leader chose it for a group discussion. But you owe the person who got you this book a debt of gratitude. They have served you powerfully. Say a prayer for him or her right now. Their kindness will alter the future of your family.

God has given you and me a great opportunity. Grandparents today are more important than ever before. Failure is not an option.

How to Use This Book

In this book, I will:

- discuss the research that proves you are a vital influencer and predictor of your grandchild's spiritual future
- share the single most important question to ask your grandchild
- teach you the most crucial spiritual habit to cultivate in your family's life
- define success as a Catholic grandparent and how to take steps to create it
- tell you what you need to stop doing
- tell you what you need to start doing

As you read and use this book, begin with the end in mind. Remember your goal: for your grandchildren to live the best life imaginable. Because you know they were made for happiness with God and that there is no such thing as a great life apart from Him. Because you want them to know Jesus and to get to heaven. They were made for greatness.

Frankly, I invite you to have a vision even larger than that. Often we in the Church care about youth ministry only when our own teenagers are in it, or we give to the Catholic school only when our

own children are attending. We operate out of a spiritual consumerism. But God is calling you and me to care for all grandchildren. Jesus came for them all, whether yours, mine, or those of someone we've never met. You and I have a role to play in helping the Church reach every grandchild.

That's why I am here. Our entire team at Dynamic Catholic exists to serve the Church. We want to help the Church be better for all God's people and their grandchildren. In fact, your grandchild will be shaped and influenced by all kinds of people. Begin praying now for the person who will reengage your grandson when he drifts or inspire your granddaughter when she wanders.

There are two ways to read and use this book. You may wish to read it in one fell swoop. And that is good. But I believe you will find it even more helpful to read it one chapter at a time, digesting each point, each life-changing habit, and each empowering action step.

Part one of this book will illustrate just how important you are. You play a crucial role in the life and choices of your grandchild. And God has given you this important vocation for a reason.

In part two, I will guide you step by step to develop your own personal plan to make your dreams for your grandchild come true. Best of all, each chapter provides an effective Action Step. This is your specific takeaway that you can begin doing right now. Grab on to it and start today.

For this book, I have spoken to hundreds of grandparents across the country. I have intensively studied the scientific and developmental research around the role and influence of grandparents. And I have applied my thirty years of experience in full-time ministry with families. All of this will help you arrive at your deepest dream of all: what God Himself desires for your family.

At Dynamic Catholic, we like to say, "Our lives change when

our habits change.” Working your way through each chapter and absorbing these key tools will allow you to form your own plan for life-changing family habits. I have been helping families and individuals build excellent habits for more than thirty years. And in this book I will help you do that too!

Grandchildren are the stars in your crown. It is time for them to shine now and forever.

You can do this. In fact, we will do it together.



Key Point

This book is designed to help you dream God’s dreams with your grandchild and to make those dreams a reality.

Question to Consider

When you envision the future of your grandchild, what do you see for him or her at age eighteen, age twenty-five, age fifty?

Action Step

Craft an ABCs of Dreams for your grandchild modeled after the one below. Begin to dream.

Prayer

Lord, help me to dream your dreams for me and for my family.
Amen.

One Helpful Tool

The ABCs of Dreams

When little Allen Joseph arrived, I began to dream in a new way, for a new generation in our family, our first grandchild. After his

birth, I wrote some of my dreams and hopes for his life and for his faith.

Dear Allen Joseph:

Your grandmother and I have deep dreams for you. These are my ABCs of Dreams for you.

A good priest: Is there anything better for a boy, a teen, and a man to have in his life? May you always have a good priest in your life.

Baptism: My eyes will fill with tears when my daughter holds you to receive the waters of baptism. What a gift! New life in the family of God. All the possibilities. May you not only know *who* you are but also *whose* you are.

Caring teachers: The greatest gift we can give you is the gift of faith. I pray for caring teachers throughout your life to show you the way and to help you embrace it.

Deep love for people: Jesus teaches us to do two things: (1) Love God; and (2) love people. I am not concerned with whether you attain wealth or recognition. May you be known most of all for your deep, deep love.

Easter people: After all, that *is* who we are. One man said, “If you don’t believe in the Resurrection, then you’re not a believer.” We are Easter people. I hope you will learn to look forward with desire and confidence. With that, you will have a hope that the world does not.

Funerals: May you be inspired by funerals because we are Easter people.

Great education: I hope you have a fine mind. Even more so, I hope for an education that truly prepares you for life—to think fully, to have the “mind of Christ.”

Heart for God: I pray you will be like King David, a man after God’s own heart.

Inspiring music: May your ear be filled with the melody of God. Whether it be “In Christ Alone,” “Be Thou My Vision,” or a tune I have not yet heard.

Jesus on the crucifix: When I sit and listen to my friend as he musters every ounce of courage to endure chemo treatments, he and I look at the crucifix, to our suffering Lord. I pray, my grandson, that you experience that same hope in your own times of confusion, pain, or despair.

Knowing where you are headed: Our citizenship is in heaven. An old Jewish Hebrew name for God is the Place. I want you to know that’s where we are going. You are destined to be in Him. God is our Place.

Love: It has always defined the Church and God’s people. Love separates us from the world. We love. That will make you different.

Monastery of the Holy Spirit: I spend a retreat day there each month. The sheer beauty of the architecture in the church alone lifts my heart. I hope to share that same inspiration with you very soon.

Not alone: You are not alone, ever. We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, people of mission who lived life well. We shall meet them face-to-face when we too reach the Place.

Outstanding sense of vocation and purpose: Whether you are called to be a priest or to single or married life, I pray for you to embrace a life filled with divine purpose. May that purpose animate your world every day.

Parents: When I see parents sitting with their children at Mass, praying with their kids in a restaurant, or serving on a mission team as a family, I sense the deepest hope imaginable. Those parents get it—they are investing in their kids’ souls. And that will make all the difference. May God bless your parents as they seek to do the same for you.

Quests: Think St. John Fisher, who was willing to lose everything, even his life, in his quest to love God and to be obedient. Quests will remind you, my little boy, that you can be better and better. And you will be.

Reception into the Church: Who can be at the Easter Vigil Mass and witness a young man affirming his faithful desire to become a part of the Easter people and not feel hope? I look forward to the day you fully enter the Church.

St. Gertrude the Great: What a woman! I hope you get to know her a bit in your life. She's the only female saint to be called "the Great," and it's easy to see why. Read her prayer and it becomes obvious. She is a lady of great hope.

O Sacred Heart of Jesus, fountain of eternal life, Your Heart is a glowing furnace of Love. You are my refuge and my sanctuary. O my adorable and loving Savior, consume my heart with the burning fire with which Yours is aflamed. Pour down on my soul those graces which flow from Your love. Let my heart be united with Yours.

The Eucharist: The Body. The Blood. The Eucharist changed my life and my soul. I hope it will feed and nourish you every day of your life.

Unconditional love: For just a moment, meeting you, my grandson, drew me into the heart of God, a heart filled with unconditional love. If I, as a flawed earthly grandfather, can love you like that, I can only begin to imagine how much God's unconditional love abounds for you.

Very generous people: People who give are great dreamers. People of possibility. May you become one of them.

Work ethic: Everyone in your family seems to have a great one. I hope you get one too. No task is too small or too large to offer to God.

X, the first letter for Christ in the original Greek: X is a symbol

for Christ in the early Church. The dictionary says “hope” is a person in whom expectations are centered. For you, my grandson, I pray that person will be Jesus. After all, He is the Christ.

You remind me I am not alone: I will help you discover that we are on this journey to dream together with many good people.

Zephyr: A fresh wind. There is one blowing in the Church—can you feel it? May it inspire your life today, tomorrow, and forever. Amen.

Love,
Your Dreaming Grandpa