



Theme: God's Dreams

"Dreams to Make Us Strong"

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Weekly Memory Verse:

³¹ But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint. – Isaiah 40:31

Meditation Moments for Monday, September 28 – Read **Isaiah 40:1-31** – You are in for a treat today! This chapter from Isaiah is one of the most beautiful in the entire Bible. Chapters 1-39 of Isaiah is a call for repentance, and then the book of Isaiah takes an intentional turn. Many Biblical scholars set chapters 40-55 apart as being written by another voice called "Isaiah of the Exile," or "Isaiah of Babylon," with the author writing to the people who were living through Babylonian exile. We learned two weeks ago as we studied the prophet Jeremiah that the northern part of Israel was captured and destroyed by the Assyrian empire in 722 BCE, about 700 years before Jesus. The Babylonian empire destroys the southern kingdom of Israel, called Judah (where Jerusalem is) in 586 BCE. The nation of Israel ceases to exist for the next 50 years. Thus, there is a dramatic shift from a message of repentance to one of comfort and hope for those living in exile whose dreams have been lost, much like we find in Jeremiah.



The chapter begins with verses that Handel popularized in his Messiah. (You can listen to that [here](#).) In its original context, God was speaking to the Israelites who were living in captivity in Babylon, promising that God would deliver them and bring them through the wilderness back to the land of Canaan. Read this chapter carefully and see what it says about God. What do you see, or hear?



Isaiah points out the superiority of God over the idols that the ancient people fashioned out of metal or wood or stone and worshiped. In verse 25 God speaks directly to the reader. What would we compare to God? What is God's promise in verses 28-31? You can listen to those verses in [this classic song](#), "On Eagle's Wings," by Michael Joncas. Where do you find strength to dream when you feel like your dreams have been dashed? End with this pray that prayer our memory verse for the week from verse 31.

Prayer: *Have you never heard? Have you never understood? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth. He never grows weak or weary. No one can measure the depths of his understanding. He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless. Even youths will become weak and tired, and young men will fall in exhaustion. But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint. Amen.*

Tuesday, September 29 – Read **Romans 12:1-2**. The apostle Paul told the Roman Christians their appropriate service to God was to offer themselves as a "living sacrifice." They couldn't do that by copying the perfection that is lifted up, and sometimes worshipped, in "this world." The words "this world" can be translated also as "this age or time." In Galatians 1:4, Paul called it "the present evil age." It is an age that often lies to us about what perfection is or can be. The phrase, "transform you into a new person," is about allowing God to help us see things as God sees them. The culture's "common sense" didn't fit with God's way of life. To live God's way, they needed to let God transform their thinking. We do too.



In the ancient world, most people had made a sacrifice to some god. That usually meant killing an animal in the right temple or shrine. This is how you would be made "perfect." If that were your background, how would you need to shift your thinking and acting to respond to Paul's call to, "present your bodies as a living sacrifice"? In what ways are you willing to put yourself, your life, "on the altar" to live each day offering yourself to God and God's perfect will?



Sooner or later, when we let God transform us, we ourselves become agents of transformation. In our homes, schools, neighborhoods or workplaces, we begin to see things that aren't quite as God wants them. What steps, large or small, have you taken to transform attitudes or practices in your settings? Where might you have the chance now to transform things for the better?

Prayer: *Dear God, I offer myself to you. That's a little scary—I'm not always sure just where it might lead. But I'm learning to trust you, and so I commit myself to being a "living sacrifice" for you, leaning into your good, pleasing, and perfect will. Amen.*

Wednesday, September 30 – Read **Galatians 5:22-23**. The prophet Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 64:8, "But now, Lord, you are our father. We are the clay, and you are our potter. All of us are the work of your hand." In today's reading, the apostle Paul, who in 2 Corinthians 4:7 spoke of God's children as "clay pots," used the image of a fruitful tree

to portray the kind of people into which God's Spirit is steadily shaping us as we daily seek to renew our openness to his presence. The Spirit's works in our human lives not merely to inspire internal experiences—it ultimately shows itself in lives that glow as they act out the beautiful qualities Paul listed for the Galatian Christians. The big idea is that grow stronger as we dream of being with God and knowing God is working in us.



Most of us are products of a culture that can tell you strongly, “you get to be whatever you want to be.” For some people, that makes the idea of allowing God's Spirit to shape you into the kind of person portrayed in today's reading sound like a bad thing. Do you believe letting the Spirit shape you robs you of your individuality, or makes you fully into the full humanity God intends you to have? Think through the reasons for your answer.



Do you express or act out love, joy, peace and the other fruit of the Spirit in ways that were not characteristic of you in the past? Take a personal inventory of how present each of the “fruit of the Spirit” qualities is in your life. Prayerfully ask the Holy Spirit to help you identify one or two of the areas you most need to grow in.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, keep shaping me on your divine potter's wheel, making me into the person you want me to be. Thank you for the Spirit's constant presence to guide and mold me. Amen.*

Thursday, October 1 – Read **Matthew 25:31-40**. Scholar William Barclay told this story: Martin of Tours was a Roman soldier, and a Christian. One winter day, Martin met a beggar who was blue and shivering with cold. Martin took his worn and frayed soldier's coat, cut it in two, and gave half of it to the beggar. That night he had a dream. In it he saw the heavenly places and Jesus amid the angels. Jesus was wearing half of a Roman soldier's cloak. An angel asked, “Master, why are you wearing that battered old cloak?” And Jesus answered softly, “My servant Martin gave it to me.”



When we see people who don't have enough to eat; or decent clothes to wear; or can't afford medical care if they're sick; or are digging out of a flood – most of us are willing to do a little something to help them. But Jesus called such people “these brothers and sisters of mine.” To truly “buy into” being Jesus Christ to the world means seeing that the poor, the sick, the prisoners, the outcast are not “them”—they're “us.” What has helped you grasp the truth of Jesus' words and given you strength to respond?



In Jesus' story, those he said had helped him were surprised: “When did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink?” They saw need, not a chance for reward. What can help you learn to see in the faces of the people you meet, especially those who are outcast or hurting, the face of Jesus? When have you found the freedom and joy that comes from blessing others because you know God cares about them and dreams we might be the answer to their prayers?

Prayer: O God, keep my eyes and my heart open to see your face in the faces of hurting people around me who need your touch through me. Amen.

Friday, October 2 – Read **2 Timothy 1:1-8**. The apostle Paul started churches in modern day Turkey and parts of Greece. Timothy was his protégé. Paul no doubt dreamed that Timothy would take over for him and give him strength to lead after Paul was gone. Acts 14 tells us that Paul likely met Timothy's mother and grandmother on his first visit to the city of Lystra (in modern-day Turkey) and won them to Christ. Timothy must have been a child then, but he had a strong faith heritage from those two women. Unlike many converts, he didn't have to "unlearn" pagan habits of thought and worship. That no doubt made the strong friendship Paul formed with him easier.



How did Paul's language in verse 3 show that he saw his Christian life as a fulfillment of his Hebrew faith, not as a rejection of it? How did he connect his heritage of faith with Timothy's family heritage of trust in God? Who, whether a blood relative or not, has played roles like Lois and Eunice in your life and given you strength to dream?



In verse 7 Paul tells us that fear and timidity do not come from God; instead, God equips us with the courage and strength to dream and to act. In Paul's day, the Roman emperor claimed to be a god. Most Romans thought any who served a different Lord (like Jesus) were enemies of the Empire and fools. Facing that, would you be able to answer verse 8's call to "not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord"? How can you be unashamed of Jesus in the world today and find strength to be honest about your faith?

Prayer: Strong God, when I am afraid or feel small, remind me that I am enough and your dream is that I might be your child, serving you and others, each day. It's a simple and profound dream. Give me strength to live it! Amen.

Saturday, October 3 – Read **Philippians 4:6-7 and 10-13**. Many Bible students call Philippians Paul's, "letter of joy." Philippians 1:13 tells us that Paul wrote from a prison cell, yet he still could write a letter known for its emphasis on joy. Believers have this gladness because we know even when there are problems, harassment or hardship, it doesn't mean God has deserted us. But observe that Paul didn't say his joy grew from a naturally grateful, upbeat disposition. Quite the contrary, in verse 12 he wrote, "I have **learned** the secret to being content in any and every circumstance."



Robert Emmons' research on being thankful bears out Paul's testimony when he writes: "Emotional venting without accompanying insight does not produce change. No amount of writing about the event will help unless you are able to take a fresh, redemptive perspective on it. This is an advantage that grateful people have— and it is a **skill that anyone can learn**." He recognizes that being able to dream often begins with being thankful. What life experiences and choices have already helped you learn to live life from a more grateful point of view? What additional steps do you want to take to learn this important spiritual and life skill of being grateful so you can pray at all times?

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, if the aggressive, angry Pharisee Saul could learn to be the apostle Paul who wrote an epistle of joy from prison, then I can learn, too. Guide and teach me in the ways of gratitude knowing that brings me strength. Amen.*