

Dream Thieves

**Study Notes for
Online Bible Study**

With Rick Renner

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HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

This eight-week guide is provided for your personal enrichment as you participate in Rick's online Bible study group discussion covering the topic of his book entitled *Dream Thieves: Overcoming Obstacles To Fulfill Your Dreams*. Each weekly division of this study guide covers a subject that will be addressed during the online discussion, with questions and references supplied to draw you deeper into your own private study of the Scriptures on this topic. In addition to receiving key points from Rick's book, you will also find supplemental study material each week in which a Bible personality is presented whose life exemplified certain traits or experiences common to those today who choose to fulfill their God-given dreams and visions despite opposition.

To derive the most benefit from this study guide, consider the following:

First, please take the time to look up the Scripture verses included in each week's study. Prayerfully consider their application to your own life and dream pursuit.

Second, make note of your answers to each week's "Take Action" questions. As you do, you will deepen your understanding of God's unique plan for you and gain valuable insight concerning what you must do to fulfill that plan in the fullest measure.

Third, invest specific time in prayer and in the Word of God to consult with the Holy Spirit. He knows the divine thoughts and plans for your future (*see* Jeremiah 29:11). Ask Him. He will reveal to you the wisdom and truth of God's plan for your life, which is more wonderful than anything you could imagine — regardless of any obstacles or challenges you may face along the path to its fulfillment. Write down the scriptures or insights He reveals to you.

Finally, take action! Whatever the Lord tells you to do according to His Word, do it.

Further enhance your study of God's Word by purchasing Rick Renner's book *Dream Thieves: Overcoming Obstacles To Fulfill Your Dreams*. Or select from other titles available by placing your order at www.renner.org or by calling 1-800-742-5593.

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY TOPICS

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Study Notes

Online Bible Study With Rick Renner

Topic: *Dream Thieves*

The topic of overcoming obstacles to fulfill your dreams is a very personal one for me. I learned the truths and principles I will share with you during this study through the challenges my family and I faced in confronting our own “dream thieves.” Denise and I know what it’s like to burn with deep desire to fulfill God’s will in spite of all opposition. We know what it’s like to launch out with nothing but God’s promise before us and His Word beneath our feet. We faced fears from within and pressure from without. But we discovered — as you will, too, if you obey God — that no hindrance or hellish influence can stop your God-given dream from coming to pass if you simply refuse to give up.

I vividly recall when Jesus summoned my family to embark upon the adventure of a lifetime. In 1991 my wife Denise and I obeyed the call of God to move with our young sons to the USSR to begin our ministry to that region of the world. Many years have come and gone since we dared to believe God’s dream for our lives and ministry, and He has mightily blessed us. Today we live in Moscow. Our three sons have grown up in this part of the world and have all married beautiful, godly Russian women. Denise and I are the proud grandparents of wonderful Russian-American grandchildren. And today God’s call is burning in our hearts more strongly and brightly than ever before.

My family and I are in Russia because God spoke to our hearts and gave us a dream to work for Him in this region of the world at a critical time in human history. When God first began to speak to Denise and me about expanding our ministry into this land that was dominated for so many years by Communism, we had many questions about many important issues. We wondered about our safety, about finances, and about how to conduct our ministry simultaneously on two continents.

If we had listened to the naysayers, we wouldn’t be fulfilling God’s purposes in the former Soviet Union today. With the help of God, however, those fears, questions, and doubts were pushed aside. Denise and I wholeheartedly pursued the ever-unfolding dream God placed in our hearts for reaching the wonderful people who live in the former USSR — most of whom have never heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the teaching of God’s Word. And that pursuit has born tremendous fruit.

It is my prayer for you is that when you conclude this study, you will have gained not only the clarity to identify your own God-given dream, but also the understanding to empower and motivate you to do whatever it takes to fulfill the dream in your heart and to restrain all dream thieves you may encounter along the way. The hour is late. Jesus will soon return. People are waiting for you to be all God has called you to be. Never forget, friend, your obedience will always be linked to another person’s destiny. Your choices will carry eternal significance.

If God gave you a dream, He expects you to fulfill it for His glory, for your benefit, and for others. If you've set aside the dream He gave you, it's time to dust it off and resume your pursuit of it. The greatest tragedy you could ever experience would be to let go of your God-given dream. On that great day when we all stand before Jesus to give an account for our stewardship of the gifts, callings, and dreams He distributed to us, I want you to receive the coveted prize of hearing the Master say, "Well done."

As you go through this outline and search the Scriptures, I trust the Holy Spirit will help you hear something new from God's Word. I encourage you to be a doer of the Word He reveals to you so you can experience the rich fulfillment that comes from pursuing your dream — despite the obstacles. Whatever the cost, I assure you it's worth it.

Your brother and friend in Jesus Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Rick Renner

Study Notes

Online Bible Study With Rick Renner

Topic: *Dream Thieves*

Week 1: Holding Fast

Everything About You Is Designed To Fulfill Your God-Given Dream!

You were born to be remarkable! No one else in the world is just like you. Your genetic makeup belongs only to you. Your fingerprints are unlike any others in the entire world. Your blood type, your chemistry, your eye color — all of these are so unique and so special that there isn't any other human being on the face of the earth exactly like you. You are truly one of a kind!

I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.

Psalm 139:14,15

In the same way, your dream — your God-given vision, your word from the Lord — is also unique. God has a special plan for you alone and no one else.

For I know the thoughts *and* plans that I have for you, says the Lord, thoughts *and* plans for welfare *and* peace and not for evil, to give you hope in your final outcome.

Jeremiah 29:11 *Amplified*

1. Identify Your Dream (Read Jeremiah 1:11,12)

- Can you identify your God-given dream?

- What talents has He given you to turn that dream into a reality?

- How are you using those talents to honor God and to bless others?

2. Count the Cost (Read Hosea 4:6; Luke 14:28-30)

- What will it take to make your dream come to pass?

- List three steps you must take to align yourself with the course you need to follow toward your dream?

- What is your own level of commitment to your dream? Do you believe in your dream enough to drastically alter your life — whether others believe in your dream or not?

3. Hold Fast to Your Dream (Read Hebrews 10:23)

- What challenges have you already faced and overcome to pursue your dream?

- Describe how the following “dream thieves” have operated in your own life, including the potential dream thieves of well-meaning friends and family members?

- **Dream Thief #1: Time**

- Dream Thief #2: Satan**

- **Dream Thief #3: Friends**

- **Dream Thief #4: Family**

Bible Personality

JOSEPH

A Dreamer Who Held Fast Until His Dream Came To Pass

(Read Genesis 37-47)

He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold as a servant. His feet they hurt with fetters; he was laid in chains of iron and his soul entered into the iron, Until his word [to his cruel brothers] came true, until the word of the Lord tried and tested him.

Psalm 105:17-19

Joseph faced four dream thieves who not only mocked his dream, they sought to prevent it from coming to pass.

Family: “Now Joseph had a dream, and he told it to his brothers; and they hated him even more” (Genesis 37:5). Although Joseph was the favored son of his father Jacob, even his father became offended when Joseph’s dream indicated that he would be exalted to a position of authority above that of his parents (Genesis 37:9,10).

Satan: Potiphar’s wife lustfully sought to entice and seduce Joseph. When he refused to comply with her adulterous desires, her demonic intent escalated into malicious slander that resulted in his imprisonment (Genesis 39:6-20).

Friends: The butler was restored to favor just as Joseph said, according to his interpretation of the butler’s dream. But when it came to pass, he completely forgot about Joseph (Genesis 40:20-23).

Time: Joseph first dreamed of greatness at the age of 17. The dream thieves of family (his brothers and father), Satan (Potiphar’s wife), and friends (the butler) each added to the bitterness of the 13 years between his dream when he was 17 years old and the time of its fulfillment when he reached the age of 30. (Genesis 41:1-46.)

- Joseph forgave his family and fled from Satan’s temptations. How did he respond to the dream thieves of time and rejection by those who had benefited from his gift?

- Have you been placed in similar circumstances? How did you respond? If you had the opportunity, would you respond differently today?

Take Action

Week 1

Here are some things for you to think about as you take action to do your part in bringing your dream to pass:

1. Before the foundation of the world, God had a plan for your life. As He knit you together in your mother's womb, your Heavenly Father breathed dreams into your spirit aligned with that plan. Those God-given dreams reflect your special individuality, calling, and divine giftings. You are called to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, not to the image or opinions of your family and friends. Do you know what qualities or aspirations you have that make you unique? Have your friends or family ever caused you to question your gifts or yourself because your talents are different from theirs? If so, what did you learn from that experience?

2. If you will be honest with yourself, you will find that your own desires and abilities reveal the outline of God's design for your life. In an attempt to inject fear, dream-destroying forces will attack your *mind*, *will*, and *emotions* until you retreat from what God has revealed to you. But if you will face those attacks instead of hiding from them and then answer any questions that arise in the midst of the experience, you will find the determination you need to move forward. What is a key dream in your life? Are you certain it's from God? How do you know?

3. What is within your ability at this time to help bring your God-given dream to pass? Have you taken any of these steps yet? If not, why not?

4. The reason many people fail is not for lack of vision, but for lack of resolve — and resolve is born out of counting the cost. Consider what it will take to turn your dream into reality. When you consider potential obstacles *before* you actually face them, you will develop an inner resolve or determination to endure whatever you encounter along the way. What obstacles stand between you and your dream? What preparation is needed to help you overcome those obstacles? What changes do you need to make in your life in order to fulfill your God-given dream?

5. Are you willing to stop making excuses and lay aside a life of mediocrity so you can take steps toward fulfilling the vision God has given you? What do you have to lose? What do you have to gain?

Study Notes

Online Bible Study With Rick Renner

Topic: *Dream Thieves*

Week 2: Divine Alignment

Faith and Submission to God Yield Courage and Strength

If you want to see your God-given dream fulfilled in your life, you absolutely must understand Hebrews 10:23, which says, “Let us hold fast the *profession* of our faith....”

The Greek word for “profession” is *homologia*. In its most simple translation, this word means *to say the same thing*. The first part of this word, *homo*, means *of the same kind*. It is where we derive the word “homogenous” (*of the same species*). The second part of the word, *logia*, is the Greek word *logos*, meaning *words*. When the two words are compounded, they form the word *homologia*, which means *to say the same thing*. Some translations also render this word “confession.”

In Hebrews 10:23, however, the word *homologia* conveys even more. When you make a true profession, you speak forth words that God has sown into your heart, not just glibly repeating what you’ve heard someone else say.

Many Christians don’t understand this principle. Sincerely trying to move into a new realm of faith, they merely repeat words they heard from a preacher or a fellow believer. *Yet because their profession comes only out of their mouths and not from their hearts, their words don’t produce results — no matter how convincing they may sound.*

Spend time in the Word and in prayer until your profession of faith in what God has said reflects what you steadfastly believe in your own heart. When you believe in your heart, speak from your mouth, and then act upon what God has said, you will be in complete agreement with God. Alignment comes from bringing your thoughts, your words, and your ways into agreement with God’s words and ways of doing and being right. When you enter into divine alignment with the words, plans, and purposes of God, you will see your profession come to pass.

1. The Power of a Heart and Mouth Connection (Read Mark 11)

- What was Jesus explaining about the heart-and-mouth connection when He said, “For verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe those things which he saith shall come to pass, he shall have whatsoever he saith” (Mark 11:23).

- Read Deuteronomy 1:8. What does this passage instruct you to do in order to come into alignment with God and walk in the full measure of His plan for your life?

- Read Psalm 27:13,14. What is the dream that you believe you will see come to pass? How has that belief been challenged recently?

2. Align With God’s Word (Read 1 Corinthians 2:10)

- What words has God spoken to you about your dream? What are you actually *saying* about your dream? Are you in agreement with God?

- The Holy Spirit is your personal “life coach” sent to instruct you according to the wisdom of God. He knows the specific details of your life and the divine strategies to help you achieve the fullness of His divine intent for your life. Read Ephesians 1:11 in *The Amplified Bible*. Devote time to seek the specific counsel of God concerning your life through the Word of God and prayer. Write down your impressions or what you sense the Lord saying to you as you read, study, and meditate on His Word in prayer.

3. Surrender to God’s Purpose (Read John 5:1-9)

- Do you understand the sweeping ramifications of yielding to God’s supernatural work in your life? It will require a change in what you think, say, do, and, most likely, with whom you associate. Do you sincerely desire that? What does surrender look like in your life?

- God is the Potter — you are the clay. Read Jeremiah 18:1-6. Are you pliable in His hands? How have you yielded? How have you resisted? What changes do you need to make in the way you surrender to God's will and purpose for your life?

Bible Personality Week 2

GIDEON

Dreams Come True When Your Thoughts Agree With God

(Read Judges 6,7)

Acquaint now yourself with Him [agree with God and show yourself to be conformed to His will] and be at peace; by that [you shall prosper and great] good shall come to you.

Job 22:21

Israel sinned greatly against the Lord and, as a result, was greatly impoverished through the oppression of the Midianites. When they cried out to the Lord, He answered. God sent them a deliverer named Gideon. All Israel dreamed of deliverance. Gideon did too. But when the angel of the Lord came to Gideon declaring God's plan and purpose for him,

Gideon did not at first agree (*see* Judges 6:11-14). The angel called Gideon mighty and declared that the Lord was with him. Gideon questioned it because of circumstances. He later went on to test and prove the word of the Lord concerning his life. But when Gideon embraced, agreed, and aligned himself with God's plan for him, he achieved a great deliverance for Israel — despite opposition and threats from many among Israel who preferred the status quo (*see* Judges 6:24-40).

Key Points:

- God's Word to you is your empowerment and might to fulfill your dream (Judges 6:14).
- Agreeing with God's word *to* you and *about* you — and seeing yourself as He has called you — will help you accomplish what He will require of you.
- The fulfillment of your dream will always be the answer to someone else's prayer too.

Take Action

Week 2

Here are some things for you to think about as you take action to do your part in bringing your dream to pass:

1. Amos 3:3 states, “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” In order to come into alignment with God, you must agree with Him in your heart — not merely with your words. Simply parroting a principle without believing it from the heart is not true agreement. Life-directing confessions of power are those that come from the heart, springing forth from a deeply held belief. What do you really believe about your God-given vision and dream?

2. Even if your dreams have been on hold or even laid down for some reason, you can pick up those dreams, dust them off, and begin pursuing them once again. The faith you once had to fulfill those dreams may be dimmed and your dreams may seem obscured by time and lack of attention. But by choosing to align your thoughts, words, and actions with God’s words, you can bring your will back into alignment with His plan for your life. As a result, you will become unified with your own divine purpose — in “agreement”! What area of your character are you consciously working on right now to bring into alignment with God’s will and His ways? What areas have you been ignoring?

3. Are you pliable in God’s hands? Are you willing to conform to God, or are you trying to make God conform to you? Be honest. What are you willing to change in your life in order to fulfill your divine destiny?

4. Pruning is part of the process to become fruitful. There are some things that must be trimmed back or cut off in order for you to come in line with God’s supernatural plan for your life. What is that area in your life in need of pruning? God’s plan may require you to lay aside something you want so you can obtain what you desire even more. But you must first be willing to trust God and let go. What are you holding on to that may actually be hindering you from obtaining what you want the most in life?

Study Notes

Online Bible Study With Rick Renner

Topic: *Dream Thieves*

Week 3: The Behavior of Real Faith

Even Unlikely ‘Heroes’ Can Rise Up To Fulfill Their God-Ordained Destinies Through Unmovable Faith in God

All these people earned a good reputation because of their faith....

Hebrews 11:39 *NLT*

The Bible speaks to us most strongly about faith in Hebrews 11:1: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Although some may say that Hebrews 11:1 is a *definition* of faith, it’s actually a description of the *behavior* of faith.

Notice the word “substance” in this verse. This is the Greek word *hupostasis*, which is another compound word. The first part of the word is *hupo*, which means *alongside*. The second part of the word is *stasis*, which means *to stand*. When compounded, the new word means *to stand by or alongside something*. This tells us something extremely important about faith: *When faith finally finds what it needs or wants, it never moves until it GETS what it seeks.*

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By understanding this meaning of *hupostasis* (“substance”), we know that this kind of faith is *determined, committed, and unrelenting*. It knows what it wants, and it won’t let go until it gets it! This is a resolute, steadfast, full-of-grit kind of faith that has gumption and backbone. It knows how to look straight into the face of opposition and refuse to move. It is firm, unhesitating, unflinching, indomitable, tireless, obstinate, and inflexible.

This kind of faith knows exactly what it wants. It is a faith that will not bend under pressure and has resolved to believe at any cost — rain or shine, sink or swim — until it sees the manifestation of what God has said or promised. This is the behavior of *bulldog faith* as it is described in Hebrews 11:1. You could therefore translate the verse, “*Now faith is tirelessly and determinedly standing by and never letting go of things hoped for....*”

1. Tenacious Faith Doesn’t Budge (Read Romans 4:19-21; Hebrews 11:1)

- Faith is like a bulldog that has finally found the bone of its wildest dreams. Once the bulldog wraps its jowls around that bone, no one is going to pull the bone out of its

mouth! Someone may tug, pull, and try to jerk that bone out of the bulldog’s mouth, but it will not let go. The bulldog is going to “stand by” that bone and never relinquish it. Describe a time when you took a stand like that. What was the result?

- Faith that won’t let go is determined, committed, and unrelenting until it achieves its desired result. This kind of faith is resolute and steadfast. It looks straight into the face of opposition and refuses to move. It is firm, unhesitating, unflinching, indomitable, tireless, obstinate, and inflexible. Write down two examples of someone you know who has cultivated that kind of faith. How did he or she behave under pressure? (You can use examples from the Bible if you choose.)

2. Focused Faith Is the Product of Fellowship With God (Read John 6; Hebrews 11:1-6; 12:2)

- It will take every ounce of your strength and determination to come into alignment with even a so-called small word from Heaven. Therefore, you need to draw from Heaven’s supply of grace in order to remain focused and tenacious. This is done by spending time with God, listening to His thoughts, and soaking up the atmosphere of His presence. Most people wouldn’t even consider not eating daily — and certainly they wouldn’t tackle a physical task without eating physical food. Yet how often do people dash off to act on a word from Heaven without communing with Jesus and consuming His Word daily — the Bread of Life. What adjustments can you make in order to wait upon the Lord so that you’re exchanging your strength for His mighty, indomitable strength and power (*see* Isaiah 40:31)

3. God Selects the Unlikely To Do the Extraordinary (Read Hebrews 11:4-40)

- The names listed in these verses represent what is often referred to as Faith’s Hall of Fame. What specific insight and encouragement do you receive for your present situation as you read through this passage?

- Make a list of ordinary people who accomplished extraordinary things. What characteristics, habits, and beliefs do they have in common?

Bible Personality Week 3

APOSTLE PAUL

Big Dreams Demand Bulldog Faith

(Read 2 Corinthians 11:22-33; 2 Timothy 4:6-8)

But none of these things move me; neither do I esteem my life dear to myself, if only I may finish my course with joy and the ministry which I have obtained from [which was entrusted to me by] the Lord Jesus, faithfully to attest to the good news (Gospel) of God's grace (His unmerited favor, spiritual blessing, and mercy).

Acts 20:24 Amplified

The passage found in Second Corinthians indicates the many dream thieves the apostle Paul resisted. His patience was rewarded then *and* now as believers continue to read not only his epistles, but also of his exploits. Through them, we gain understanding into the mysteries of Christ and the behavior of faith that enabled Paul to finish his race.

- Paul esteemed fulfilling his God-given dream and assignment — his divine destiny — more than his physical life and temporal gain. His attention was riveted on eternal rewards and a heavenly commendation (*see* 1 Corinthians 4:5). Discuss how Paul's focus and determination sustained him in the midst of trials and hardship so that he could finish his course with joy.
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Take Action

Week 3

Here are some things for you to think about as you take action to do your part in bringing your dream to pass:

1. Real faith stands by a word from God with tireless determination. It reveals “bulldog tenacity,” refusing to let go of that which has been promised. This kind of faith is the overflow of a vital relationship with God. It develops as you commit yourself fully to standing by His promise for your life until you see it come to pass. Are you lacking tireless determination? Do you need to reinforce your intimate connection with God and His Word (*see* Isaiah 40:31)

2. God’s word to you is simple, not complicated. As you choose to believe and act upon it — regardless of the discouraging words you may hear from the dream thieves — the divine root of faith will spring up in you. Write down the things you know that God has spoken to your heart about your life. What are some of the ways He has been preparing you to walk in the fulfillment of His plans for you?

3. Take some time to consider the stories of the men and women in Scripture who made the commitment to believe and obey God, regardless of the challenges or obstacles they faced. When you move into the realm of bulldog faith, you can stand steady against all odds to see your divinely inspired dream come to pass. Have you identified the price that *you* must pay to fulfill the dream God has given you? Are you willing to pay that price? If not, are you willing to allow God to help you become willing?

4. God takes pleasure in selecting unlikely people for unusual tasks. He has a distinct plan for your life that He will make clear as you seek Him through His Word. Your faith-filled response to God’s Word will not only alter your life — it will shape history. Remember: Your dream is not just for you. What dreams do you hold in your heart that, when fulfilled, will make a difference in the lives of others?

Study Notes

Online Bible Study With Rick Renner

Topic: *Dream Thieves*

Week 4: Fuel Your Dream

Surround Yourself With Those Who Are Pursuing Their Dreams To Keep Your Spiritual Passion Burning

Doing God's will and fulfilling the purpose for which we were born must be our greatest desire and our highest aspiration in life. God told Jeremiah, "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5). John the Baptist was called by God to preach before he was born, and he leaped in his mother's womb as his mother, Elizabeth, was filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:41).

The apostle Paul also knew that God had plans for him before his own birth, and he described the Father as the "...God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen" (Galatians 1:15,16).

Knowing God's plan and purpose for your life gives you focus, clarity, and direction. Without a clear sense of direction and a passionate determination, people have a tendency to flounder and wander aimlessly through life. This is why Proverbs 29:18 says, "Where there is no vision, the people perish...."

Destiny awaits you. Can you see it? Focus, persevere with passion, and you'll flourish in all you've been created to do and be!

1. **Resolve To Obtain (Read Philippians 3:12-14)**

- Proverbs 29:18 in the *New International Version* states: "Where there is no revelation, the people *cast off restraint...*" Restraints mark the boundaries that define the path to your destiny or dream. They prevent you from wandering, wasting time, or living selfishly or aimlessly. What are the core markers — habits and beliefs — that will hold you steady and "restrained," ensuring the fulfillment of your goals and dreams?
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- Paul demonstrated his resolve in many ways. He was willing to do whatever it took to obey God and to fulfill his divine purpose. If that meant getting a job on the side in order to be able to preach, that's what Paul did (Acts 18:3). If it meant becoming

as a Jew in order to be able to preach to the Jews, that's what he did (1 Corinthians 9:20). If it meant becoming as those without the Law to win those who were without the Law, that's what he did (1 Corinthians 9:21). Paul did those things for one purpose: that he might win as many as possible to the Lord (v. 22). Sacrifice and unselfishness are key components to building strong resolve. How have you woven these elemental characteristics into the fabric of your own life?

2. Dream Thief #5: Neutrality (Read Hebrews 4:11)

- Neutrality is a form of being lukewarm. Jesus Himself described non-committed, dispassionate neutrality as nauseating (Revelation 3:16). If you stay neutral in your walk with God, you will become spiritually sluggish, gradually losing your inner drive and momentum until, ultimately, you let go of your God-given dream altogether. Do you recognize any areas in which neutrality may be seeking to worm its way into your life? List those areas and then write down what you can do to counteract neutrality.
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3. Stay Passionate! (Read Hebrews 6:12)

- The apostle Paul described an athlete's passion and commitment to win when he said, "Know ye not that they which in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air..." (1 Corinthians 9:24-26). Why do you think temperance is a key to maintaining a passionate pursuit of your dream?
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- List three examples of distraction or discouragement that you are currently facing. Now list three things that you can do to stay focused and passionate despite those circumstances. Remember: Regardless of what's going on *around* you or even happening *to* you, you are in control of your own attitude and responses.
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Bible Personality Week 4

DAVID

When All Hope Seems Lost, Hope in God

(Read Psalm 103)

If only one word could be used to describe David, it would be “passion.” David was passionate in his:

- worship and pursuit of God (2 Samuel 6:14; Acts 13:22).
- devotion to friends (1 Samuel 18:3).
- response to wickedness (2 Samuel 25:21,22).
- repentance for sin (2 Samuel 12:1-16).

David experienced many highs and many lows on the journey both to *receive* the dream God gave him, as well as to *fulfill* it. As a result, David had the opportunity to encounter and resist many dream thieves along the way. Family dismissed him, leadership feared and despised him, children disrespected him, and his own sin haunted him for the remainder of his life. But in every season — whether as a lonely shepherd boy, a celebrated warrior, a fugitive from Saul’s court, or the honored king of Israel — discouragement was a common denominator in every chapter of his life. Yet even as a youth, when he wrote psalms beneath starry midnight skies, David knew that the secret to defeating discouragement was to encourage himself in the Lord.

David was greatly distressed; for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.

1 Samuel 30:36

Key Points:

- Worship will keep your focus fastened upon God and your divinely inspired dream.
- Encouraging yourself in the Lord reminds you that your strength comes from Him and prevents you from relying upon the “arm of the flesh” — either yourself or someone else.

Take Action

Week 4

Here are some things for you to think about as you take action to do your part in bringing your dream to pass:

1. Just as a rudder steers the course of a ship, your divine purpose provides a sense of direction to steer the course of your life. Are your habits and immediate goals consistent with your life's purpose? If not, those habits and goals, although well-meaning, can pull you off course. Are you investing the necessary time and cultivating the kind of good habits that will draw you closer to your dream — or are you allowing bad habits to remain that will pull you further away from your dream's fulfillment?

2. The busyness of daily life can sometimes serve as a distraction that hinders us from becoming the kind of people we ultimately want to be. It is possible to “multitask” ourselves into a state of unproductiveness as a result of nearly nonstop activity. What activities in your life are colliding to prevent you from following God's plan for your life to the fullest?

3. Patience and passivity are two different positions of heart, although their external actions or characteristics may look the same. Patience is a consistent, controlled, and decisive stillness that waits with confident expectation for a desired end. Passivity, on the other hand, simply waits and shifts position based on the influence of external forces rather than internal decisions. Passivity will extinguish the embers of your passion. If you've been waiting on your dream, have you been waiting with patience and passionate expectation? Or have you lost the fire of your purpose, allowing yourself instead to just passively float along in “neutral,” lukewarm and disconnected from your dream?

Study Notes

Online Bible Study With Rick Renner

Topic: *Dream Thieves*

Week 5: Obedience and Patience

Faith and Patience Ensure Promises Received and Dreams Fulfilled

When you've stepped out in faith to obey what Jesus has asked you to do, you will experience a "fight of faith" to develop the spiritual stamina you need to stand strong and walk out your God-given dream. That stamina or endurance is cultivated by exercising patience — which is *confident expectation* despite the duration of time between the promise and its fulfillment, or the *dream* and its *realization*.

If you're facing various difficulties, count it all joy (*see James 1:2*) — knowing that as you stay in faith, walk in love, and stand your ground in patient perseverance, the person you'll become through the "fight" is the person you'll need to be to achieve your God-given dream. Take a quick survey of your present difficulties — and then rejoice! God's grace is greater than any challenge you may face.

1. Partial Obedience Is *Disobedience* (Read 1 Samuel 15:22)

- Partial obedience cannot receive partial reward because it is actually rebellion born out of the self-deception of self-justification. Half effort receives zero credit. Can you think of one or more instructions God has given you that you only "kind of" obeyed?

- Do you struggle to obey God fully in certain areas? What fear lurks at the root of your reasoning to do things your way instead of as God requires?

2. Conceive and Nurture God's Will for Your Life (Read Hebrews 11:1)

- Sarah received strength to conceive a child because she judged God as faithful. Ask God to strengthen you with might so that you can conceive His dream within your spirit. Know that He is well able to perform all of His good promise to you.

- What is the significance of linking faith and patience in order to inherit a promise? Why do these two qualities seem to multiply their effectiveness when acted on together?

3. The Appointed Time (Read Galatians 4:4; Ephesians 1:10)

- God makes everything beautiful in its time (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Until the “beautiful time” of your dream’s fulfillment, there is a process. Despite any difficulties, that process holds a unique beauty because it is preparing you for what has been prepared for you. Write a psalm of thanksgiving to the Lord for His faithfulness to you in the midst of the process. As you express gratitude, you will find renewed strength to make it through this season into the next.

- Consider the patience God Himself exercised to realize His own dream of redeeming mankind in the fullness of time. Can you think of a time in your own life or the life of someone else in which a dream was fulfilled at just the right time?

4. How To Pass the Test of Affliction (Read Psalms 34 and 119)

- Highlight and write down the verses that stand out as the most important for you to act on right now. Commit them to memory and also to action.

Bible Personality Week 5

ABRAHAM

A Patriarch Whose Faith You Can Follow

(Read Hebrews 6:11-15)

Have you ever desired a God-given dream so much that you actually concocted a plan in the flesh as an attempt to bring that dream to pass?

Abraham was known as the “Father of Faith,” yet it seems he tampered with the plan of God at every turn! When God said, “I want you and Sarai to come alone to a new land that I will show you” (*see* Genesis 12:1 *NLT*), instead, Abram brought along his father and his nephew Lot — a decision that delayed God’s plan. God said, “You are going to have a son,” so Abram slept with their slave girl Hagar to bring that to pass in light of Sarai’s inability to conceive (*see* Genesis 16:1-4). It’s sobering to realize the enormous consequences that have resulted from that decision instead of waiting for the son God promised would be born of his wife Sarah. So many conflicts can be traced back to their fleshly attempt to bring about the promise of God on their own.

Abraham personally delayed God’s will for his life for many, many years. But with every mistake Abraham made, with every wrong turn he took, and with every gross error in judgment, Abraham never lost his passion or ceased to wholeheartedly follow the Lord. Abraham may have missed it badly and often, yet he was steadfast in his zeal to follow after the voice of God.

[Urged on] by faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed and went forth to a place which he was destined to receive as an inheritance; and he went, although he did not know or trouble his mind about .

Hebrews 11:8 *Amplified*

- Hebrews 6:12 says, “That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” We are to follow the faith of those who persevere in faith — who contend for their God-given dreams and the promises of God in their lives. But we must never look for a perfect person to imitate, because we’re not going to find one other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Instead, we should look for believers who maintain a burning flame in their hearts for God through the years and through all manner of adversity — even if it was self-inflicted — while maintaining their conviction that God is indeed faithful who promised (Hebrews 10:23). Can you name some of your own personal “heroes of faith” who *stood long*, but who ultimately received that which was promised to them?

- When God gives you specific instructions, either through His word or by His Spirit, obey Him — the *first* time. Others will be affected for good by your obedience. But remember, your delays and detours — your *disobedience* — have consequences in others' lives as well. Name some examples of how this truth has affected your own life. Can you think of a time you disobeyed God and others were hurt by your choices?

Take Action

Week 5

Here are some things for you to think about as you take action to do your part in bringing your dream to pass:

1. Abraham interpreted the word of the Lord in light of his own understanding and the expectations of others. As a result, he veered off course, failed to fully obey, and ultimately brought unnecessary difficulty upon both himself and his family. Consider some specific directions the Lord has given you. Have you fully obeyed what you know to be His will for your life? Do you recognize some unpleasant consequences spilling over into the lives of others as a result of your own disobedience? If so, simply repent and ask the Father of mercies to direct your path according to His perfect will. Then step out and do whatever He tells you to do.

2. The provision and blessing God has for you is directly related to the course He has ordained for you to follow. Any detours from that course will also affect when God's plan will come to pass. Partial obedience (which is, in truth, simply disobedience) delays the will of God for your life and makes you vulnerable to the attacks of the enemy. Get quiet before the Lord and be honest with yourself. Have you allowed doubt or fear to steer you off course through the disobedience of partial obedience?

3. God took Abraham's place to guarantee the effectiveness of the blood covenant He made on Abraham's behalf. Jesus took your place to become a surety and a guarantee of a better covenant. God has gone to great lengths to ensure your success. What steps have you taken to provide a return on His matchless investment into your life?

4. Dreams are conceived by faith in an instant, but it takes time for a dream to come to pass. Faith held steady by patience will prevent time from becoming a dream thief in your life. Time provides the opportunity for growth and maturity to take place. When you keep faith *and* patience tightly joined in your life as you walk in obedience, you will emerge through the passage of time "perfect and entire" (James 1:4), equipped to walk out the fullness of your dream. If you work *with* time, it won't work *against* you. How are you working with time to take advantage of opportunities to prepare for your dream to come to pass in its fullness?

5. When it comes to making your dream happen, you can't do God's part, and He won't do yours. If you want your dream to come to pass in due season, you have to do your part by taking steps to move in the direction of its fulfillment. What has God told you to do? Have you developed daily habits to keep you moving steadily toward that dream? If you've lost your sense of purpose, it's because you have stopped *pursuing* your purpose. Reignite your faith by reminding yourself of the dream God gave you. Then take action that propels you in the direction of that goal.

6. Idleness and fantasy breed impatience and contempt. Such patterns will pull you into the miry pit of bitterness and ingratitude — which is the slippery descent that ultimately leads to spiritual complacency. What are three things you can do to express your gratitude for what God has done for you and to revive your passion for what He has prepared for you?

Study Notes

Online Bible Study With Rick Renner

Topic: *Dream Thieves*

Week 6: Practical Steps

The Future Is Waiting — Now Is the Time To Prepare To Be Productive!

People often ask, “Rick, how have you been able to do so much through the years?” Many expect some super-spiritual answer, so you can imagine how deflated they feel when I reply, “Because Denise and I and our team have worked very, very hard over the past years to do what God told us to do.”

Some people even give me an offended look as if to say, “You glory-stealer! How dare you attribute the blessing of God to your hard work!” Of course, I know that the blessing and anointing of God has played a primary role in our ministry. But what if Denise and I had never done anything — never worked, prayed, taught, studied, planned, or taken steps to begin implementing the dream God had planted in our hearts? James 2:26 tells us, “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” God blesses our faith, and faith is always expressed in works. If we’re doing all we know to do — exercising our faith by working as the Holy Spirit directs and leads us — patience will have its perfect work in our lives (*see* James 1:4).

When the reality of God’s call begins to dawn on you, His plan for your life should motivate you to *get busy* and make it happen! That dream should ignite a fire that burns so hot within you that you simply *can’t* sit around. If you are at that point, you need to know what steps to take next to make sure you’ve done all you can to get things in order in your life. When you demonstrate faithfulness to follow through to completion in an area, you signal that that you are prepared spiritually and naturally to advance into more responsibility.

1. The Call Is Not Convenient (Read Job 8:7; Luke 16:10,12)

- Each time God called someone to do something significant, they were already involved and committed to something. God gives responsibility to those who will take responsibility. Often God’s dream and call will come to a person’s life at a time and in a way that requires him or her to make a choice that leads to drastic change — and that change is seldom easy or convenient (Matthew 19:21; Mark 1:20; Luke 14:18-20). Yet the transition from one place to another must be done appropriately and in order. List your current key responsibilities. They are not to be shunned. What are the ways you can and will respond to and provide for each one?

- Obeying God never means we can shove off our family and finances for someone else to handle. Never forget that as Jesus was dying on the cross for humanity, He made certain that His mother would be cared for after He was gone. Family members must be honored, respected, and loved. Finances must be handled correctly. What steps must you take to do all things right as you step out to obey the Holy Spirit's leading?

2. Productivity Matters (Read Matthew 25:14-30)

- Laziness will thwart the plan of God for your life. Idleness will not only delay the fulfillment of your assignment, it may also disqualify you entirely. Faithful stewardship always produces fruitfulness. It's pointless to wish for more if you are not fully utilizing what you already have. Your time and your talents are valuable. Take inventory of how you invest them. How can you improve in this area for greater fruitfulness?

- Your health is a precious gift. In what ways are you deliberately investing in it for longevity? You won't go far without it.
- Money is the *lowest* form of power. With money, you can do a lot of things. But if you don't appreciate the value and power of money, why would God trust you with His spiritual, supernatural power? "Super-spiritual" people tend to overlook this consideration, but God does not. When God needs someone to do something for Him, He looks for a person who has already demonstrated that he or she knows how to handle money, knows how to work, and knows how to stick with the job until it's done! Are you that person? List some of your successes with money as well as some of your failures. What did you learn from your mistakes?

3. Dream Thief #6: Lack of Preparation (Read Matthew 25:1-10)

- It may take a little longer to do things right the first time around. But nothing is as difficult as abandoning your call in order to go back and do what you should have done in the beginning. Preparing ahead of time will spare you time, expense, frustration, and failure. God may ask you to leave all, but He will not request or require you to be irresponsible with anything or anyone. List any unresolved personal and professional matters. Do you have a plan to repair them? Have you sought someone to assist you if you need to relocate?

- Write down what you and your life will look like fully prepared to make your dream a reality. What new skills will you need to fulfill your dream? Do you need to learn a new language? Do you need to cultivate knowledge about a different culture or a new arena of involvement? Have you made provision for what you will need to sustain you in the next phase? Write your answers down and look at them honestly so you can close up the cracks which could hinder or possibly derail your pursuit.

4. **Leaving the Past Behind (Read Numbers 11:1-20; Psalm 106:15; Mark 10:29, 30; Luke 9:62)**

- Looking backward with a wistful eye after you've decided to move forward is double-minded and potentially disastrous. It reflects a failure to fully count the cost and to commit to a quality decision. Examine your heart to identify and root out any tendency to reflect longingly on the past to the neglect of planning for the present and your future.

Bible Personality Week 6

ELISHA

Steps To Make a Dream Happen

... Let me kiss my father and mother, and then I will follow you. And he [testing Elisha] said, Go on back. What have I done to you? [Settle it for yourself.] So Elisha went back from him. Then he took a yoke of oxen, slew them, boiled their flesh with the oxen's yoke [as fuel], and gave to the people, and they ate. Then he arose, followed Elijah, and served him.

1 Kings 19:20,21 *Amplified*

Elisha was a committed and faithful man who had proven he could be trusted with an assignment. When the call came to him, Elisha was *yoked* to his team of oxen and to his farming business. But Elisha was willing to take radical steps to get *unyoked* so he could follow God.

Elisha publicly burned every bridge behind him, sending a powerful and deliberately permanent message to his family, his friends, and himself: This was *the point of no return*. The oxen Elisha killed were the engines of his farming business that drove his machinery. That machinery, now fueling the fire before him, was the equipment he used to break up the ground so he could plant the seeds that produced his annual harvest and income. That huge harvest each year gave him financial security, which in turn gave him position in his community.

Elisha's identity and financial security were going up in smoke before him. As Elisha watched the fire burning his plowing equipment and cooking his dead oxen, he prepared a feast for his family and said farewell to his past. There was no turning back now.

- Elisha began his God-given assignment as a servant to the prophet Elijah: "...Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him" (1 Kings 19:21). Elisha was willing to leave his past to pursue his future. Are you willing to do the same? What will this type of servanthood look like in your life?

Take Action

Week 6

Here are some things for you to think about as you take action to do your part in bringing your dream to pass:

1. Does the phrase, “You can’t get there from here” describe how you feel at times when you think about God’s calling on your life? What obstacles can you realistically identify that block your path? Write them down. They can be overcome, but you first need to develop a strategy to do so. Beside every obstacle you list, write down the solution to remove it. The result is your plan of action — what you need to do or what you need to believe in faith for *God* to do. When you do your part, God has guaranteed to do His part to help you. His Son’s own blood is already on the line to assure your victory.

2. God gives to those who actively use what they have. He knows that the faithful and productive person will continue to be faithful and productive and that laziness is the fast track to a fruitless life. God will not give you more if you are sloppy or squandering what you already possess, including your time. So honestly examine your lifestyle choices and your attitudes. Are you lazy in any area or responsibility? This is the time to change. If you have a God-given dream will ever become more than a fantasy, its manifestation will require your hard work, your aggressive faith, and your steadfast determination to fulfill every responsibility. What are you waiting on?

3. Focus on the day-by-day work of building solid habits of responsibility in preparation for your dream to come to pass. If the opportunity of a lifetime showed up for you today, would you be prepared to take it?

4. Now is the time to cultivate the character that will equip you to fulfill your calling. Weak character can sabotage a great dream. Are you allowing any habits, pastimes, associations, or attitudes to slow down your preparation and progress? Your divinely ordained moment will come. Your gifts may escort you through a door, but will your character allow you to remain in the room your dream has destined you to occupy?

Study Notes

Online Bible Study With Rick Renner

Topic: *Dream Thieves*

Week 7: Relationships Are Key

God Will Never Give You a Dream You Can Fulfill on Your Own

God will place people and relationships into your life for the purpose of encouraging and provoking you to respond correctly as difficult situations arise. God never intended for us to live out our lives of faith alone. *We need each other as we endeavor to carry out the dreams God gives us.* If the enemy can succeed in isolating us from our brothers and sisters in Christ, he can stop our spiritual growth in its tracks and make it nearly impossible for us to fulfill our divine destiny.

To allow yourself to become isolated and separated from the rest of the Body of Christ or from spiritual authority under ANY circumstances can be deadly to your walk with God and to the ultimate fulfillment of your dream.

Isolating yourself is never the solution. And it's important to realize that isolation isn't just a matter of physically distancing yourself from fellowship with other believers, from your local church, or from spiritual authority. You can also disengage and detach yourself emotionally and spiritually so that, even though you sit in the midst of the congregation each week, you still miss out on the supply of strength and encouragement your fellow believers could provide you.

If you feel like isolating yourself from other believers, your first step should be to draw near to God. He will provide the strength and healing you need from any hurt or disappointment you may have experienced. Then you'll find that not only will He heal your pain, but He will also direct people into your life to express His love toward you and knit you into the family of God in a healthy way.

1. **Dream Thief #7: Isolation (Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)**

- Isolation does not heal pain; it actually creates more problems by making you an open target for the enemy's devices. God designed godly fellowship to be a protective measure in your life. Name three godly people whose friendship has brought a supply of divine strength to your life either to prevent or to buffer a spiritual attack?

- Do you recall a time when the enemy launched isolationist tactics against you to prevent you from integrating into your life friendships and fellowship with other believers in Christ? What was God working out in your life at that time? Do you see a correlation between the timing of God’s intended blessing and the enemy’s attempt to sever you from crucial connections and spiritual supply? Make note of Satan’s strategy against you so you can be on guard against similar tactics in the future.
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- Three of the enemy’s favorite traps to lock you into isolation include: *offense* (unforgiveness), *fear*, and *anger*. Those “traps” may manifest themselves in your life as *depression*. Three of his tried-and-tested lies to lure you away from others include: *No one likes me*; *no one listens to me*; and *no one cares about me*. ALL are lies from the devil, and he works to make your circumstances validate them so that a sense of rejection and bitterness can potentially choke out anything God is attempting to do in your heart and life. Do you see evidence of these traps and lies attempting to operate in your life? What weapons are you wielding against them? Read Second Corinthians 10:1-5 and Ephesians 6:11-18.
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2. Bear One Another’s Burdens (Read Galatians 6:1-10; James 5:16)

- Jesus sought the fellowship of His closest friends during a time of great inner anguish. He asked Peter, James, and John to pray with Him in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before His crucifixion (Matthew 26:37-40). Who are the friends with whom you can be open and honest with in fellowship and in prayer? Are you that kind of friend to others? Make a list of people for whom you can pray — whether they know you’re praying for them or not.
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3. Consider One Another (Read Hebrews 10:24,25)

- God intends for us to receive a great deal of the Word from other believers as well. That’s why He commands us to “...exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3:13). What are some ways you have made the practice of both giving and receiving encouragement a part of your lifestyle? Read through the book of Acts and notice how many times the disciples went “to their own company” to pray, fellowship, seek direction, and worship God during times of persecution or uncertainty. Who can you encourage, and in what ways will you do it?

4. **Provoke Others to Good Works (Read Proverbs 27:17)**

- Devote one week to this practice in the lives of others. At the end of the seventh day, write down how this changed your own thought process in dealing with personal discouragement. What did you learn about God's love for you as you sought to share His love with others?

- List the ways in which you have helped others fight and win against the dream thieves in their lives.

Bible Personality Week 7

TIMOTHY

Strategic Relationships Wove the Tapestry of His Life

(Read Psalm 68:5,6; 1 Timothy 1:5,6)

I [Paul] am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

1 Timothy 1:5,6 *NIV*

Timothy's godly heritage, passed down to him from his mother and grandmother, created a unique combination that was greatly enhanced by the apostle Paul and by Timothy's relationship with other believers.

Nothing is mentioned of Timothy's father or of any influence from him to follow Christ. But we know that Paul was a true spiritual father and mentor. He taught Timothy with his words and trained him through the example of his own life.

Relationships matter because God is keeper of covenant, and covenants can only manifest their true beauty and strength within the context of relationship. For this reason, He places the lonely in families so He can father the fatherless and give shelter beneath His wings to the weary.

Timothy grew spiritually and emotionally due to his strong relationship with the apostle Paul and, undoubtedly, as he walked in the grace supplied to him through the prayers of his mother and grandmother. He not only shed his youthful intimidation to fulfill his divine assignment, but he excelled in wisdom and boldness to such a degree that he was among the leadership of the Early Church and died a valiant martyr in defense of his faith.

Key Points:

- God assigns His people to groups or companies of believers of "like precious faith" (2 Peter 1:1). There He cares for them and sees that they are comforted, healed, mentored, and trained so they can fulfill their divinely inspired dreams and destinies.
- We all need godly influencers, mentors, and fathers and mothers in the faith whose faith and lifestyles we can follow and model.

Take Action

Week 7

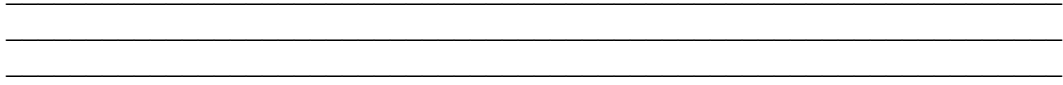
1. Your visions and dreams can bring you into connection with some of the most fulfilling and satisfying relationships in your life. Can you identify the people God has positioned in your life to strengthen you and to provoke you unto love and good works (*see* Hebrews 10:24)?

2. Encouragement is one of the most profound gifts you can bring to the life of another person. Your words can lift someone from the depths of despair to the heights of hope. Do you endeavor to take notice of those around you — to recognize when someone may need the strength of your encouragement? Stay alert and watch for people in your life who may be desperately striving to “hold fast” to their faith while feeling as though their grip is slipping. Each day, make a conscious effort to yield to the Holy Spirit so the God of all comfort can speak through you to make a difference in someone’s life. Can you think of someone you could minister comfort and encouragement to right now?

3. Friendships centered around the truth of God’s Word can shield you from faltering in your fellowship with the Lord. Conversely, friendships rooted in carnal pursuits or supported with worldly attitudes can serve as the fast track to failure in life. Who are the dominant influences in your life and how are they influencing you — for better or for worse?

4. Are you drawn to an association that has caused the vision of your purpose in life to grow dim? If so, you are in danger of derailing your dream by becoming attached to a dream thief. Associations for God and for good will inspire you to see and to become more, not less. Evaluate the quality of your associations and activities in light of your God-given dream. Are there any adjustments you need to make as the Holy Spirit leads?

5. Has jealousy, negativity, or fear caused *you* to become a dream thief in someone else’s life? What do you need to do to make things right?



Study Notes

Online Bible Study With Rick Renner

Topic: *Dream Thieves*

Week 8: The Power of Your Will

Set Your Face Like Flint and Honor God by Fulfilling Your Divine Dream

We all have crossroads in our lives — moments in time when God speaks to our hearts, and we choose either to stand by the word of the Lord or to go our own way. These crossroads can seem great or small, but none of them lacks significance. Our lives today reflect the sum total of our choices. For this reason, we cannot afford to underestimate the power of our will. Our ability to choose, to make a decision about how we will or will not respond — either to God or to circumstances — is a powerful force. Through the power of our will, we choose our destiny. We decide whether or not we will live mediocre or extraordinary lives.

Courage, faith, and patience are qualities that we choose to cultivate within our lives. It is, however, nearly impossible to choose them over our flesh if we do not renew our minds by choosing to abide in God's Word. The decision to think, speak, and act on God's Word will not only transform us, it will equip us to overcome the obstacles and challenges we are guaranteed to face as we follow after God's plan.

No matter what your challenges or deficiencies may be, choose to place all that you are and possess into the Master's hands. If you will simply trust Him and obey, no matter how small your "all" might seem, your *little* will miraculously multiply into *much* until, finally, your God-given dream become real. But more importantly, you will come to know Jesus more intimately than you ever imagined!

1. Dream Thief #8: Your Own Choices (Read Hebrews 12:1-3)

- Satan desires to cross the threshold of your mind to implant his thoughts. He seeks to make his words the dominant influence on your will, the part of you that makes choices. If the enemy can convince you that your dream is too far beyond your reach or too costly to fulfill, he knows he can keep you from fulfilling God's will for your life. Pay attention to your thoughts today. Are your thoughts agreeable with God's will, or do they question if God's words will ever come to pass? What are the first words you speak when your dream is either mentioned or challenged? Identify the thoughts and the source of the thoughts or words that dominate your mind.

- Read Romans 12. Does the light of God’s Word show up any deficiencies in your character or belief system? Make sure the obstacle hindering your progress is not *you*.

2. The Gift of Challenges (Read John 15)

- Abiding continually in the Word builds our understanding and establishes the spiritual foundation in our lives. It gives us supernatural courage to stand by a fresh word from God and launch out in faith to see it fulfilled in our lives. It enables us to come into divine alignment with His perfect plan and stand with patience until that dream comes to pass. Read Psalm 119:11 and John 8:31,32. What fresh word from God are you praying, saying, and acting on to overturn the obstacles to your dream?

3. Crossroads (Read 1 Corinthians 6:19,20; Revelation 3:20)

- Crossroads, whether great or small, clear a path for you to step into your dream. Without an honest assessment of yourself and your circumstances, you may find yourself going in circles — or worse, absolutely nowhere. Write down your answers to the questions below. After you review them, also write down a solution if necessary:

- Are you holding back some part of your life that you know God is asking you to relinquish to Him? What is it?

- Are you going through the motions in your Christian experience, but falling short in developing an intimate relationship with the Father?

- What is the Master asking of you today? Is He asking you to “launch out into the deep”? Or is He asking you to embrace your dream with renewed faith and patience as you wait upon Him? In what way?

4. Choose the Miraculous (Deuteronomy 30:19,20)

- When you choose to obey God’s will, you have automatically chosen the miraculous because you have chosen to believe and to act upon words that, initially, seem impossible. Describe one or more specific instances in which the miraculous followed your obedience to the word of the Lord?

- Read Colossians 2. Make a conscious decision today to conform yourself to Christ and to walk in His ways. That is entirely possible because you already have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16). *The Amplified Bible* states: “For who has known *or* understood the mind (the counsels and purposes) of the Lord so as to guide *and* instruct Him *and* give Him knowledge? But we have the mind of Christ (the Messiah) *and* do hold the thoughts (feelings and purposes) of His heart.”

Bible Personality Week 8

Jesus

The Last Adam Fulfilled His Father's Dream

(Read Matthew 26:36-56; John 6:38; Romans 5:14-19)

When God created man from the dust of the earth, He formed man into His own image and likeness. God then breathed His very own life into this man Adam and bestowed upon him a gift, the likes of which no angelic being could boast: God gave Adam a free will, providing him with the ability to *choose*.

All Heaven must have been astounded by the unfathomable generosity the Creator displayed when He poured His very essence into a finite temple of clay. But then for the Eternal One to allow that being the freedom to choose or to refuse to worship Him — only the Triune could comprehend it. For every angelic being had been created solely to worship and to serve. When Lucifer rebelled against the purpose of his post, defiantly seeking to exalt himself, the iniquity found in Satan perverted a third of the Lord's host — and they all fell like lightning, cast down to earth by the swift retribution of the Almighty's voice.

God positioned Adam in a perfect garden with instructions to stand guard and to protect. He knew the treachery lurking nearby, seeking to penetrate. Yet God gave Adam full authority and dominion — a governance Adam did not fully appropriate. So the enemy slithered through the gate, tempting Adam and deceiving his mate with the lie that forbidden knowledge would supply what Truth had already provided. Adam *chose* and disobediently ate.

Previously clothed with the glory of God Himself, Adam was stripped and separated from God by Adam's own choice, incapable of redeeming himself. But before the foundation of the world was laid, God's plan of redemption was set into place. As death invaded earth's atmosphere, introducing the curse as sin's fate, the Father declared that a last Adam would legally enter through earth's gate. Born of a virgin's womb, the *Word made flesh* would bring freedom through man's precious gift: Jesus would use the power of His free will to choose righteousness and restore the Father's family to Himself.

The last Adam, Jesus, triumphed in the setting where the first Adam lost. In a garden, Jesus bowed not to self-interest but in surrender He bowed His knee to pray, "Father, if it be Thy will, take this bitter cup away." Then humbly before the One who sent Him as a Lamb to be slain, Jesus chose to activate redemption's plan to remove sin's cruel stain. There in Gethsemane's garden, the last Adam chose Calvary's tree. And with the words: "Nevertheless, not My will, but Thine be done" (Luke 22:42), what the first Adam willfully lost, the last Adam won. With His choice in Gethsemane, Jesus revealed the power of the will: At last, man chose to agree with God, and the Heavenly Father's dream was fulfilled.

- Are you prepared to "set your face like flint" (*see* Isaiah 50:7) to do the will of God and see the dream He gave you fulfilled? Write a brief statement of commitment that

you can rehearse to yourself and pray over and over again as you faithfully wait before the Lord and promptly obey His instructions.

Take Action

Week 8

Here are some things for you to think about as you take action to do your part in bringing your dream to pass:

1. Everyone faces crossroads in life. Each crossroad is significant because it requires you to make a decision, and your decisions direct your course. Ultimately, your decisions determine your destination and final outcome of your life. Do you detect a negative pattern in your life? Name some wrong decisions you've made in life that you had to trust God to redeem. Name some decisions you made that were good. What were the results of those good choices? In every situation, you are the common denominator that you can control. Change your choices, and you'll automatically change your results.

2. Your will is the control-center of your life. You can shape and influence your own will to gravitate toward God and toward what is good by filling your mind and your mouth with the Word of God and with truth. What dominates your mind will penetrate your heart — and there, at the seat of your will, your choices will be made. What occupies your thought-life on a regular basis? What habits occupy your time in private? Your answer will indicate the direction in which your will is steering your life. If you don't like the destination you see on the horizon, now is a good time to make some changes and shift your focus so you won't sabotage your own dream by taking a detour that leads to a dead end.

3. Life is filled with crossroads. You can choose a path that's "okay" or one that is "extraordinary." How will you know the difference? The path that God invites you to travel may contain challenges and difficulties, yet it will also cause you to rely on Him, to grow up in Him, and, ultimately, to produce the excellence and character that can only be forged by His work in your life.
