

A person is walking away from the camera on a city street. The background is bright and out of focus, with a large, warm sun flare in the upper left corner. The person is wearing dark clothing. The overall mood is one of movement and aspiration.

UNLOCK YOUR DREAM

DISCOVER THE ADVENTURE
YOU WERE CREATED FOR

PHILIP
WAGNER

Praise for
Unlock Your Dream

“Everybody has a dream, but few know how to make it a reality. Let Philip Wagner be your guide! He’s a man who can help get you where you want to be, because he knows how to trust God for the impossible.”

—RICK WARREN, pastor of Saddleback Church and *New York Times* best-selling author of *The Purpose Driven Life*

“Philip Wagner has been a friend of mine for a long time. I like a lot of things about him, but right at the top of the list is that he’s a dreamer. Dreams can be brain-candy that take us away from the present, but the best dreams are the ones that launch us into the future. This book is a conversation with a trusted friend about what could happen if we traded in our small-sized dreams and ambitions for some of the big ones Jesus talked about.”

—BOB GOFF, *New York Times* best-selling author of *Love Does*; founder of *Love Does*, a nonprofit human rights organization; and Honorary Consul for the Republic of Uganda to the United States

“Everyone dreams. As we get older, realities of life adjust our dreams, usually downsizing them. In *Unlock Your Dream*, my friend Philip Wagner reignites the dream, helps us understand why we have rationalized our dreams away, and gives us pragmatic steps to dream once again.”

—SAM CHAND, leadership consultant and author of *Leadership Pain*

“So many of my God-dreams have been realized because I have applied Philip Wagner’s teachings to my life. Reading his wise words in *Unlock Your Dream* on surviving through hurt and betrayals has been a soothing balm to my soul. I am excited for you to unleash the power of your God-dreams, the same way Philip has, with God’s hand, shown me.”

—SHERRI SHEPHERD, former cohost of *The View* and star of NBC’s *Trial and Error*

“We all have difficulties in figuring out what our purpose is on this earth. Philip Wagner has found a way for us to whittle away the parts of our dreams that are selfish and focus on the dreams that are God-centered. If you are looking for God to use your life for His glory and to have a great and fulfilling time along the way, this book is for you!”

—BARRY ZITO, Cy Young Award–winning pitcher and three-time All-Star for the Oakland A’s

“We all dream of a life that matters. We have a desire to make a real difference but often don’t know how. In *Unlock Your Dream*, Philip Wagner will inspire you to push past your doubts and give you the confidence you need to reach your God-dream.”

—CRAIG GROESCHEL, pastor of Life.Church and *New York Times* best-selling author of *#Struggles: Following Jesus in a Selfie-Centered World*

“*Unlock Your Dream* breathes new life into that stirring in your heart you so desperately want to pursue. Philip identifies the challenges we’ll face in launching our God-given dreams while also providing the encouragement we need to keep moving forward.”

—LYSA TERKEURST, *New York Times* best-selling author and president of Proverbs 31 Ministries

“I believe the Holy Spirit has sovereignly ordered the steps of your life to the intersection of Pastor Philip Wagner. In his book, *Unlock Your Dream*, Philip humbly reveals the divine purpose and destiny assigned to his life: ‘It’s part of my dream to release you so you can reach your dreams too.’ Through practical vignettes of dreams, dreamers, and dream-makers, every page both pushes and calls you to dream and dream big!”

—BISHOP KENNETH C. ULMER, DMin, PhD, Faithful Central Bible Church and former president of the King’s University, Los Angeles

“*Unlock Your Dream* will not only encourage those who read it to remain faithful to their dream, but it will also provide insight about how to do it.”

—AL KASHA, two-time Academy Award–winning songwriter
and composer

“Not many people you’ll meet will be as genuinely inspiring as Philip Wagner. He’s lived an extraordinary life as a husband, dad, and pastor—and now he’s penned a practical but personal guidebook for us to reach our highest God-given dreams along the real and sometimes rocky roads of life. He’s a modern-day happy sage with stories to tell and wisdom to share.”

—JUDAH SMITH, lead pastor of the City Church and *New York Times*
best-selling author of *Jesus Is* _____.

“Culture has always been created and grown through dreamers who dare to dream big. In Philip Wagner’s book *Unlock Your Dream*, you will discover that setbacks and past hurts don’t have to keep you from the dream God has put in your heart. Philip is honest and transparent about the challenges he has faced and gives us a glimpse into his personal journey, which will encourage and inspire you to dream again.”

—DARLENE ZSCHECH

“Dreams are your view of the future. Dreams are the substance of great achievement. In his new book, Philip Wagner shares the events in his life that taught him how to unlock his dreams and face the future with anticipation and excitement instead of hopelessness and apprehension. It will change your life!”

—A. R. BERNARD, founder, senior pastor, and CEO of Christian
Cultural Center in Brooklyn, New York

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To all the dreamers . . .

who imagine a higher version of your story.

To all the dreamers . . .

who have stumbled or have been knocked down along the way, who have been disqualified, dismissed, or overlooked, whose dreams are locked up somewhere in your soul but still have a flame of hope burning inside that causes you to imagine what could be.

To all the dreamers who are fighters . . .

to cancer survivors and to those who are still in the fight, to overcomers of the variety of life's battles, and to those whose dream is for those you love to keep fighting.

To all the dreamers . . .

who dare to believe, dare to trust, and are willing to take the risk, who start a business, express your art, sing your song, plant a church, create ideas, tell your stories, build a family, become humanitarians and philanthropists, loving people and changing the world, and who are willing to pursue the highest dream of your life—the God-dream.

**May you experience the elation of living the
rest of your days in the joy of the dream.**

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Interpreting Your Dreams

When I was a small boy in Kansas, a friend of mine and I went fishing, and as we sat there in the warmth of the summer afternoon on a river bank, we talked about what we wanted to do when we grew up. I told him that I wanted to be a real major league baseball player, a genuine professional like Honus Wagner. My friend said that he'd like to be President of the United States. Neither of us got our wish.

—President Dwight D. Eisenhower

My dream as a kid was to be the first white member of the Harlem Globetrotters, a basketball team made up of outstanding African American players. To me they were one of the best teams in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s. Back then, some of the great players, such as Wilt Chamberlain, played with the Trotters before joining the NBA. Not only were they an extraordinary basketball team; they were entertaining and earned the title Ambassadors of Goodwill, taking up humanitarian causes such as supporting campaigns with World Vision, inspiring at-risk youth, and entertaining US troops overseas.

Their basketball skills were second to none, and on top of that, they made people laugh. I loved how Meadowlark Lemon would always give his loud and humorous commentary on the game *while playing on the court*, and how they playfully harassed the referees and played tricks on the opposing team. Often they would bring a fan onto the court to be part of one of their

pranks or would replace the game ball with a ball that had no air in it, or they would suddenly begin a game of “football” on the court. I loved them because they inspired me to think outside the box. As a kid, I imagined myself in their famous Magic Circle pregame routine, in which they set the tone for what was going to unfold in the game—dribbling between their legs, no-look passes, and unexpected trick plays. They had a perfect blend of superior skills and fun.

At home when no one was looking—well, even when someone was looking—I’d play my 45-rpm record of their theme song, “Sweet Georgia Brown,” while I dribbled a basketball around the house. In my mind, I was on the court with the Trotters and I was so amazing, they didn’t need Meadowlark or Curly Neal on the court.

Of course, you have probably already guessed that my childhood dream didn’t come true. My aspirations of basketball fame are a distant memory. Like most children, I wished for something improbable.

A lot of first dreams are like that.

Everyone Has a Dream

Many of us have those big dreams. We envision becoming rich and famous or winning the Powerball lottery. Some guys want to race in the Indianapolis 500 and win, while some girls dream of marrying Bradley Cooper. Although these dreams are fun to think about, the truth is that 99.9 percent of them will never be realized. (Sorry about that. Especially the Bradley Cooper thing.) My Globetrotter idea was one of those big, fanciful dreams that was great but didn’t have a realistic shot of coming true. And like many childhood fantasies, it lasted only until another big-idea dream came into my mind. But that’s the wonderful thing about these types of dreams—they have no boundaries. While most childhood dreams may be implausible, they teach us that dreams are wonderful goals to reach toward.

I live in Los Angeles, a place many people move to so they can pursue their big dreams. For more than thirty years, I've worked as a pastor at a church where many of those dreamers attend. A few years ago, I was walking down Hollywood Boulevard, known for the Hollywood Walk of Fame, where celebrities are given an actual star paying tribute to them and recognizing that they reached their dreams. As I watched people pass by, I wondered what their dreams were. Had their childhood fantasies been realized? Did their lives resemble anything close to those dreams, or had they taken on new aspirations?

As I maneuvered the street among the tourists, the locals, the young, the old, the rich, and the homeless, it occurred to me that Hollywood isn't the only place of dreams. No matter where I travel—New York, Nashville, or the rural areas of Africa—everyone I've encountered has a dream. So many people are inspired by them, some pursue them with passion, and others find that those aspirations are harder to reach than they'd expected. But we *all* dream. The capacity for dreaming and pursuing those dreams is a gift God has given each of us.

*I think everybody should get rich and famous
and do everything they ever dreamed of
so they can see that it's not the answer.*

—Jim Carrey, actor

Unfortunately, some people stop dreaming. They've tried and failed and grown frustrated. In their most difficult moments, whether wondering where the next meal will come from or becoming suddenly troubled by their own success, they whisper heartfelt words filled with familiar longing and heartache: "This isn't the life I dreamed of."

Every year people move to Hollywood by the thousands to pursue

dreams that they believe will answer those longings. And thousands are crushed and heartbroken. A young woman I knew named Nicky was one. She moved to Los Angeles from Kansas to become a movie star. (Sounds cliché, doesn't it? . . . Kansas.) You might guess how the rest of this story goes. The girl came with high hopes and was met with frustration, loneliness, and discouragement. She discovered that this “following your dream” business is hard work. Okay, I'll just say it: it dawned on her that she was “not in Kansas anymore.” She experienced rejections along the way, and the struggles she faced overpowered her desire to succeed. She learned the hard way that she needed to ask some important questions, the ones all of us ask at some time or another:

Should my dream really take this much work?

Does trying this hard mean I'm on the wrong track?

Is the dream I'm following really the dream of my heart?

Should I quit and try something else, or should I be even more determined?

If I keep going the way I'm going, will I really find fulfillment?

Those wonderings get to the heart of our deepest question: *Why am I really here?* When we begin to ask that question, we open ourselves to another kind of dream, one more significant and powerful.

Another Kind of Dream

Some people follow their first dreams only to discover another kind of dream that involves reaching beyond themselves to change the world for others. Sometimes we go down one path, pursuing a vision of what we believe we are supposed to do, and then we discover we are meant to do something else. It may seem like a waste of time, but we likely would not have found the new path without taking the risk of pursuing that initial dream.

The path to these dreams of significance starts with that question: *Why am I here?* These dreams come from deep inside, and they inspire us to do

and be better. They offer us significance, legacy, and a life well lived. They put our mark on the world and prove that what we do matters.

The power of these dreams is that every person is born to pursue them. *You* were born to pursue them. And best of all, unlike the childhood and big dreams we may harbor but not realize, these dreams absolutely can come true. I know because I'm living proof and I work with people every day who live out these dreams.

Jeff, a man in his thirties, is one of these people. He gathered up his wife and toddler and moved to Los Angeles to become a screenwriter. He thought, *If I don't try it now, I may never do it and I'll always wonder if I could have succeeded.* His dream was not so different from Nicky's, yet he *did* succeed. It didn't happen right away, but eventually doors opened and good things started to happen. Even though he struggled with the frustration and discouragement of each challenge or setback, he, unlike Nicky, became more determined. He knew he'd made the right decision. He was realizing his dream, and that kept him motivated. It wasn't his desire simply to become a famous and rich screenwriter; he felt compelled to write stories that would inspire people to live *their* lives with meaning, with a higher purpose, and to encourage them to fight to overcome their struggles. He wanted to use his gifts to influence others to be better people; he used his big dream to pursue a higher goal, which was his dream to achieve something of significance.

A Higher Dream for You

As I continued my walk on Hollywood Boulevard, I could still smell the unique aroma of the previous night's trash in the alleyways by the restaurants. It blended with the smells of tourists with their coffees, croissants, and popcorn. The dichotomy of beauty and ashes that exists in a dream journey is vivid. I glanced down at the stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Matt

Damon, Morgan Freeman, Billy Crystal, Kevin Costner, Katy Perry, Whitney Houston. Some stars represented those who had achieved great things in television, some for their work in movies, and some for music. Millions walk the sidewalk and wonder, *What would it be like to live this kind of dream?*

Suddenly I stopped. There at my feet was a star inscribed with Billy Graham's name. Yes, *that* Billy Graham, the evangelist who has preached live to 215 million people and additional millions through TV and radio.¹ I was struck by a realization. He was awarded that star for his achievements in television, but his dream wasn't to be a television celebrity. His dream of significance (*Why am I here?*) led him to do something with his life, which led him to an even greater goal.

I like to call it the God-dream. God-dreams are those special desires that come directly from God. They offer significance mixed with obedience to seek God's will and pursue what He wants to do in and through us. A God-dream is higher than any other dream.

I have a dream, God whispers. It's unfolding right now. It's larger than life. It is life itself. Lean closer. I will whisper this dream to your heart. It has been imprinted on your soul. You are part of My dream. You are My dream.

Dreams are not unique to us! Our Creator God is a dreamer. He has vision and imagination, and He takes them and plants them in our souls. God gave you a specific desire, an assignment to complete, and it's something that will be larger than you and will fulfill you completely. He allows us to be part of His redeeming work, bringing a lost world back into communion with Him. God has a dream for our world, for humanity, and He has a dream for

you and me. We have the capacity to reach those dreams, but it's crucial that our desires lead us to the God-dream for our lives.

The God-dream is better than we often think it will be. He always has more for us to achieve than we think we qualify for. Our greatest pursuit will be that dream.

For Billy Graham, his God-dream was for God to use him to preach the message of Christ's love to as many people as he could. It started with his simple obedience to follow God's purpose for him, and it grew beyond what Graham could ever possibly imagine. In 1949, Billy Graham scheduled a three-week series of revival meetings in Los Angeles. He called it the Greater Los Angeles Billy Graham Crusade at the "Canvas Cathedral with the Steeple of Light." News mogul William Randolph Hearst decided to give him national news coverage, some might say out of the blue. Hearst telegraphed his newspaper editors, telling them to focus on and promote Graham during the Los Angeles crusade. Five days later, Graham's local gathering had become a national phenomenon. Graham, then thirty years old, "drew 350,000 people over eight weeks to a huge tent revival at Washington Boulevard and Hill Street . . . five weeks longer than planned."²

Graham became an international figure not because he dreamed of fame and fortune but because he discovered God's dream for him—and God used him to touch the world.

You don't have to be a pastor to do something great. Preachers are not the only ones God calls or uses to influence the world for Christ. He uses everyone. That includes you. Think about that. He has special plans for you to accomplish. Those dreams you have in which you want your life to matter, to make a mark on the world, to be significant—God placed those dreams within you. He did it for a reason.

We are on this earth for a purpose. What we do and how we live matters, not just to us but to those on the receiving end of our realized dreams. And it matters to God.

The greatest discovery you can make is to learn what God has created you to accomplish. When you uncover your purpose, pursue it with diligence, and see the effects and power of that pursuit, you experience the adventure of a lifetime!

I know from experience that living out God-dreams is the best experience we can have. I didn't know what mine were all at once; my dreams became clearer and more focused as I went through different experiences. My big dreams and my significance dreams changed often in my first thirty years, but as I discovered my God-dreams and learned to trust them, I found that *all* my dreams became fulfilled. That's the beautiful part of God-dreams: the closer we move to God, the more our own dreams align with His. The fulfillment of my dreams went far beyond what I could have imagined or hoped for. My God-dream was to be a pastor, to help people by leading them toward Jesus. Today, the church I pastor, Oasis Church, is a diverse community for those who need healing and a refreshing encounter, for those who are wandering through life to find their way home, and for those who want to help others find their way. We reach world-changing leaders, celebrities, the weary, those who never had any interest in Jesus, and the down-and-out. Our church family includes young people, older people, millionaires, families living paycheck to paycheck, the influential, and the broken. Oasis is a place where God-dreams are fulfilled. Here, people find freedom and fun in the expression of their faith.

I thought that might be a big-enough dream, but God revealed even bigger dreams for me. I'm now a pastor of a thriving church; I travel all over the globe and speak on topics from having a passionate and genuine faith in Jesus Christ to leadership to reaching your God-dream to building healthy marriages and relationships. I've been married for more than thirty years, and I'm still in love with my wife. Miracles *do* happen. Love works. God-dreams are good dreams.

The Allure of Lesser Dreams

Without intervention from heaven to understand why we are here and what our purpose is, we can entangle ourselves in lesser dreams. These are dreams that may make us feel good temporarily or might be impressive to others, but lesser dreams have little true impact on the world around us. Often they're more self-centered, dreams about *me* and improving *my* life. Or maybe they're the dreams we've settled for either because they are easier to reach or because we feel we've disqualified ourselves through some past failure.

Too often, when people go through life's battles, their dreams get locked away in their souls and are left there. These people never fully experience why they are here and what kind of power they can unleash when they dream the right kinds of dreams. They never learn how to unlock their God-dreams.

You may wonder, *Does it really matter if people don't discover and live out their dreams?* What's so wrong about living a "good enough" life, an ordinary life that doesn't necessarily change the world or make you famous but is livable?

Well, nothing. That is, if you're content to miss out on the great adventure God has planned for you. You have a dream. You long for something beyond the big-idea dreams, beyond the childhood fantasies, even beyond the good desires of marriage and family and career. You dream of significance, of reaching beyond yourself to pursue things that matter, things that last. And God has those dreams for you; in fact, His dreams for you are far better than the greatest dreams you can imagine. But we need to unlock them to actually reach them.

Attempting to reach your own dreams can be good practice for attaining the ultimate, the God-dreams for your life. The ones that God has for you are perfect. Plus the world needs you to reach them! They depend on you. They are cheering you on.

God has put something inside you. An image, an idea, or an assignment. Maybe you can't quite place it, but you know deep down it's there. If you take time to notice, you may discover that God is trying to get your attention. You just need to figure out what that dream really is, why you can't give up on it, and how you can unlock it to experience life at the greatest level. I'm going to help you do just that.

I want you to reach those dreams. I've met thousands of people who have moved to Los Angeles only to discover that the dream that brought them here isn't the dream they really want to live. I've met just as many people who have no idea what their dreams are. They know instinctively that dreams matter—I think we all do—but when asked to describe their dreams, they draw a blank.

I'm going to help you unlock your dreams so that God can do amazing things in and through you. Jesus reminded us that “with God all things are possible.”³ So nothing should hold us back!

Throughout this book, I'll share stories, my own and those of other dreamers, that can help you unlock dreams that have been shut down somewhere in your heart. Many times people get stuck in a season of life and can't seem to move forward toward the goal. Even though their dream is still important to them, they are not sure how to keep going. I'll identify some dream locks (things that keep us from pursuing our God-dreams), and I'll suggest some keys to unlock them (practical ideas that will help you go from where you are now to where you want to be—and where God wants you to be). I'll end each chapter with a scripture passage for you to read, reflect on, or even memorize so you can keep God's Word at the core of your heart and dreams.

I'm excited to begin this journey with you. I've been where you are, and I know the power of unlocking dreams in your life. The apostle Paul summed up well my prayer for you as you begin this path to unlocking your dreams:

We ask God to give you complete knowledge of his will and to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding. Then the way you live will always honor and please the Lord, and your lives will produce every kind of good fruit.⁴

Let's get started.



DREAM LOCK: Settling for lesser dreams or misinterpreting them may cause you to get stuck on a path that can jeopardize God's highest dream for your life.

DREAM KEY: Opening yourself to discovering and pursuing your God-dream will change your perspective and enhance your life pursuits. Look to God for His guidance, and allow Him to lead you not to the dreams you hoped for but to the dreams He *intends* for you.

SCRIPTURE KEY: Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. (Romans 12:2, NLT)

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