

New York Times Bestselling Author of
Love Does and *Everybody, Always*

DREAM BIG

Know What You Want, Why You Want It,
and What You're Going to Do About It

BOB GOFF

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CONTENTS

Introduction ix

Part 1: Getting Ready to Dream Big

1. Don't Go Alone 3
2. Thermometer 7
3. Get Under the Ice Cap 13
4. Who Are You? 21
5. Where Are You? 27
6. What Do You Want? 31
7. Chase the Jeep 37
8. Getting to the "New" Part 45
9. Sleepwalking 51
10. One Hundred Calls a Day 59
11. Sea Otters 65
12. Finale 73
13. Comparison Is a Punk 83

Part 2: Set Absurd Expectations

14. Gather Your Leaves 91
15. Sizing Up 99
16. Get the Sticks Before the Drums 109

Part 3: Explore Opportunities

17. Keep the Moon in the Window 117
18. The Number for the White House Is (202) 456-1414 . . . 123

CONTENTS

Part 4: Clear the Path

- 19. Hostage Negotiation 131
- 20. Give It a Quarter Twist 137
- 21. Be a Quitter 143

Part 5: Take Action

- 22. Living on the Edge of Yikes 153
- 23. 10:34–10:35 159
- 24. One Thousand Words a Day 167

Part 6: Expect Setbacks

- 25. Pick the Vespa 175
- 26. Three Epic Fails 183

Part 7: Sustain Belief and Land the Plane

- 27. Check Your Ropes 191
- 28. Ground Effect 197
- 29. Matters of the Heart 205

Epilogue 213

*The Dream Big Framework: Reflection Questions
and Action Ideas* 215

Acknowledgments 233

About the Author 235

Connect with Bob 237

INTRODUCTION

What will you do with your
one extraordinary life?

I have been teaching as an adjunct professor at Pepperdine Law School for more than a decade. It's a place filled with bright, ambitious law students, many of whom have had a lot of life break in their direction. I also teach a class at San Quentin State Prison. My class there is filled with men who are felons, and their misdeeds have exacted a high price from them—namely, their freedom. I learn quite a bit from both sets of students, but the contrast between them cannot be overlooked. There is an authenticity that brokenness can refine in our lives if we'll let it. Ironically, the guys with the life sentences often seem to be living freer lives than the law students with all the opportunities. Their brokenness ultimately led them to a personal freedom, even behind bars.



INTRODUCTION

Have you ever wondered why some people achieve so much with their lives and others don't? One person starts with no money, some terrible circumstances, and seems to be the happiest, most fulfilled and self-aware person you've ever met. Another person is born with a trust fund, good looks, and endless apparent opportunities, and yet they lead a sad, self-absorbed, meaningless life. What happened to allow some people to make the shift and others to miss the ramp? Some people seem to move from success to success, while others seem to be stuck in a loop of pain and sadness and distress. Some people also have a rich and vibrant faith that is taking them places, while others believe the same things just as much but seem stuck struggling with their beliefs and how to reconcile them with their lives.

In short, why is it some people live inspired lives and others can't? How come some people glide through life and others grind it out? Why is it that some people seem to be living three times more than a normal life, and others feel like they are only living half of one? These are all questions most of us ask ourselves at some point. Where do you think you fit on the spectrum? Don't shade it, fake it, or sweat the answer. Just get real about it. Here's why: we need to figure out where we are before we can plot a course forward.

The fact is no map will take us where God wants to lead us. We are all off-roading most of the time. Yet there are plenty of clues out there for living the big and meaningful life that Jesus talked to His friends about. Instead of telling them to look for a plan, He pointed them toward their much bigger purposes. In the pages that follow, let's figure out where your purposes are and then hatch a plan to get there.

I've written a few books, and some of the stories probably made you laugh, while others made you cry. I want this book to make you think. In the pages that follow, I hope you'll figure out where your purposes lie and then chart a course to get there.



When I was out of college and living alone, I had a closet in my house where I would throw the things that didn't have a specific place to go. Naturally, this closet quickly became a huge, disorganized, impenetrable pile of debris. Everything in there was evidently important enough to acquire at some point and even valuable enough to keep, yet none of these things remained accessible to me anymore because there was no order to them. As a result, a whole lot of items, with individual value, were collectively worthless because I couldn't get at them.

Our lives are not much different. We gather experiences, emotions, knowledge, and self-awareness. We amass pains, triumphs, disappointments, and wisdom. Without some shelves to put them on, though, we can't access these things or what they've taught us to help us move forward. These experiences and "aha!" moments are the stuff you'll need to access as you figure out what your next moves are going to be in the direction of your ambitions. Put aside the self-help talk. What you need is a good set of shelving to access what you've already experienced and a willingness to reflect on what you find there.

It took 220 years after the pencil was invented for someone to invent the eraser. I'm glad they did because I've erased in my life much more than I've kept. We all get to do this. We take what we've written about ourselves, what we truly believe God thinks of us, and decide what to keep and what to erase. We're not the only author of our lives either. Like the ones who have signed the pages of a high school yearbook, other people who have intersected our journey have written over us too. Some of what they said is true and beautiful and lasting. Other things not so much. "Never change" was written in my yearbook by at least a dozen people. It's the worst advice I've ever received. We're supposed to change constantly—into kinder, humbler, more faithful versions of our old selves. This change and growth happens when we sort out the truth from the lies in our lives. Here's some great news. The next version of you is the one who will pursue the ambitions all the previous versions were unable to accomplish.



INTRODUCTION

Our understanding of who we are and how God sees us is worth all the time and energy we'll put into the task. The trick is figuring out what is true after all the distractions, misstatements, and misunderstandings have been eliminated from our lives. Here's what makes it worth it: when we sort through all the words written by ourselves and others, and when we discard what isn't true or doesn't matter anymore, we'll find the clarity we need to choose the desires worth pursuing. What's left over will be your truest, most beautiful, and lasting ambitions. That's what this book is all about.

My faith has shaped my worldview and plays a big part in my ambitions. I decided to make my first and last ambition to love God and the people I come across without an agenda. I certainly haven't arrived, but I'm somewhere along the way of getting there. You are too.

My relationships play a big role too. Some people are easy to connect with. If you want to achieve great things, find a couple of these people to do life with. Also find a couple of difficult people to engage with love. Don't make them projects; make them friends. This is where you'll grow. If you do these things, I promise you will lead a purposeful and meaningful life. Sure, it will be complicated at times, and you'll mess it up more than once, but your purpose will never become clearer. I know this because if you go deep with a few people and stay close to those who rub you the wrong way, you will have accomplished the ambitions Jesus said were always worth the effort.

While no efforts of yours or mine will be more important than loving God and the people around us, our ambitions can be much broader, more expansive, and more varied than this. I want to talk about those things too.

Achieving your ambitions isn't going to come easy, and it won't be cheap. Don't bail out. Will you have setbacks along the way? Of course you will. The reason is simple: you are you and life is life. Stay the course. We've brought leaders together in countries riddled with conflict only to have our meetings raided. I've been detained, held

in jail, and even kicked out of a country for freeing children held in brothels. We've started schools in war zones that failed completely and other schools that shouldn't have worked but did. Don't be put off by the difficulties you'll face; remember the reason why you started. Keep your ambitions and your life's purpose in mind. Why? Because our lives are on-the-job training for eternity.

If ambitions had two handles, they would be love and hope. There have never been two forces in the world more powerful than these. Much of life involves simply grabbing ahold of love and hope and never letting go.

One of the writers in the Bible named Paul nailed it when he said, "The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." I agree. It's easy to mistake faith with all the doctrine you believe to be true. Faith, however, is what you do about what you believe. It's easy for most of us to hope big things for other people. It's beautiful and right, and we should keep doing lots of that. This book is about hoping a couple of things for ourselves as well, then engaging our most important ambitions with confidence and a strategy so we can release those ambitions into the world.

Setting aside a time for personal reflection about who you are, why you think what you think, and why you do what you do is the heavy lifting you'll need to do if you want to accomplish things in your life you haven't been able to yet. I'm not advocating you go on a hedonistic bender and make everything about yourself. You will find nothing less fulfilling than making everything about you. This book is about self-discovery, not self-help. It's not about simply having dreams. Dreams are too easy. Even my dog wags its tail when it's asleep. I want you to become fully awake to your biggest and most worthwhile ambitions by becoming fully awake to yourself and your God-given purposes.

All this requires developing a new way of thinking. To do this you're going to need to carve a new groove in your brain so you can get after your ambitions rather than just push them around on the plate



INTRODUCTION

like a bunch of peas. Carving a new groove in your brain is like blowing up a balloon. A big balloon. Sometimes your head starts spinning after a while when you think about your ambitions. Take some breaks. Rest is holy. Get as much as you need, but know when it's time to be fully awake and get back to work. If we're going to get after some of your unexecuted ambitions, we need to take that new groove you're carving and go Grand Canyon on it. Doing this is going to take some effort, but hey, do it anyway.

Let me get this out there. God is over the moon about you. Honest. I've asked Him. He's not grimacing at your past failures; He's smiling at the bright future you have with Him. As you pursue your ambitions, rest in knowing that heaven is simply nuts about you and can't wait for you to get there. That said, you've got some time right here, so make good use of it. Making eternity one of your biggest ambitions is terrific, but what if we use this desire to better understand your short time here on earth and what you'll do next with your life.

I'm really excited you chose to pick up this book. It's a reflection of the life I've tried to live for decades. I've had a couple of successes and plenty of failures. I'll let you know about both. I have tried to tease together my best explanation for why these things happened and what I learned when they did. While I hope you have a blast reading this book, know that there is a process and a journey baked into its pages. If all we had in the end was a bunch of words, what good would that do us? We need a path, and I hope this book provides one that moves you toward your ambitions. I also hope you'll find your deeper purposes in these pages. Let's have some fun together, sure. But don't get distracted and think that a good time is all we're about. We want to be the kind of people who release amazing things into the world and are willing to do whatever it takes to make it happen.

To this end, there is a section in the back of the book with some questions for you to think about and some actions you can take to move toward your dream. I hope you'll have a pen in your hand while you

read. Maybe get a journal, too, dedicated to the process in this book. I've based the questions and the words you'll read in these pages on a live workshop I've been doing called Dream Big. We've had leaders from our country and Middle Eastern countries, Grammy-winning musicians, megachurch pastors, stay-at-home moms, billionaires, and broke college students attend. I've watched these and thousands of others follow the ideas and principles we'll discuss as they move forward with their ambitions. This book is my attempt to show you what those thousands of others have learned for themselves—that there is a path to discover and release your most beautiful and lasting ambitions into the world. Don't settle for anything less, because God says you're worth it.



Part 1

GETTING READY TO DREAM BIG



Chapter 1

DON'T GO ALONE

If you are serious about your dream, surround yourself with people who love you well.

There she was. Maria. She wasn't "Sweet Maria" yet because we didn't know each other. She was definitely still sweet, but I hadn't gotten the chance to call her that. When I first saw her across the room thirty-five years ago, I was immediately smitten. I would have jumped out of a moving car to meet her. It took a while, but she figured out I liked her. Perhaps it was the list of names I created for our children and gave her a short time later. Eventually, she reluctantly learned my name. She even said it once or twice, or at least I thought she did, because she was usually walking away. I remember her saying things like, "Thanks for the invitation, Bob, but no," and "I'm sorry, Bob, but I'm busy that year," and "Bob, are the pair of panda bears in my yard from you?" I think I'm an acquired taste.



DREAM BIG

After way too long, Maria started liking me back. When this happened, it was like the part in *The Wizard of Oz* when everything goes from black and white to color for the first time. It was in my pursuit of Maria that I learned the importance of having an ambition and staying after it, no matter how big or impossible it seemed. I knew what I wanted, why I wanted it, and I decided what I was going to do about it. There is a silent flip of a switch that happens when we make this determination about something we want. It's the point where we move from just thinking about an ambition to actually doing something about it.

I clinched the deal when I invited her rock climbing with me. I had her tied to the end of the rope, and before she started climbing, she looked up at me and saw me confidently holding the rope. She told me later she realized in that moment she could trust me with her life. Pursuing your ambitions will take an equally big dollop of trust. God's got you. Take the risk. It's worth it.

Eventually Sweet Maria said yes, and we made a few kids to go with my list of names. It's thirty-five years later, and whatever I'm good at these days, it's because Sweet Maria Goff is better at it. One of the many things she's good at is knowing herself and finding joy in her unique set of gifts, abilities, and desires. She doesn't compare her abilities and ambitions to anyone else's. She knows that God doesn't compare what He creates. She also knows what she wants, why she wants it, and what she's going to do about it. Having this kind of clarity is rare and beautiful and unstoppable. Aim for this in your life and you will find great joy.

Sweet Maria and I could not be more different. I love meeting new people, and the more of them in a room the better. Maria, on the other hand, thinks having me in the room is a lot of people and finds her purpose in being fully present with our family. Not many people get to see her. It's like seeing a unicorn. She simply doesn't need or want the attention.

She wrote a bestselling book once. Instead of going on a book tour or having a release party and inviting thousands of our friends, she ordered a medium pizza for the family and we made root beer floats at home. The way she lives her life is a daily reminder to me that our purpose is not found in another person's validation. It's not found in familiarity or approval or popularity either. It is discovered somewhere far deeper within us. Maria lives her life solely and sacrificially for our family and a handful of friends. She not only helps us better understand the complex world we live in, but she also helps me get ready each day so I don't leave the house with one pant leg tucked into my sock.

I'll admit, it's a lot of work to live with a guy who acts like he's sponsored by Red Bull. They call my drink of choice at the local coffee stand "Goffee." It's two shots of energy drink and three shots of espresso. I may die young, but I'll be wide awake when I do. Sweet Maria likes to say I'm the balloon and she's the string. This beautifully describes the right kind of codependence. If you want to achieve your ambitions, don't be all balloon and no string in your life. We need to be anchored in God and tied to one another.

Being different isn't always easy. Perhaps you've felt like you were different than your friends or family. That's a good thing, and we're going to need to settle into who God created us to be if we're going to move ahead. To be purposeful and at ease with who we are, we're going to need to be incredibly truthful with ourselves and the people around us, which is something Sweet Maria lives out every day. If she told me ghosts pooped Tic Tacs, I'm certain I'd believe her. In these pages it will seem like you're reading my thoughts, but you're actually reading what I've learned from her.

I'm always the optimist, and we sometimes see things differently. Recently Sweet Maria texted me upstairs at breakfast. She said there were "creeps" waiting for me in the kitchen. I was guessing "crepes" but had my fingers crossed. When I got to the kitchen to see who was



DREAM BIG

there, Maria was looking at the weather forecast. The exchange went something like this:

Maria (shaking her head): “It’s going to rain today.”

Me (bright-eyed and smiling): “Isn’t that terrific? Sounds cozy.”

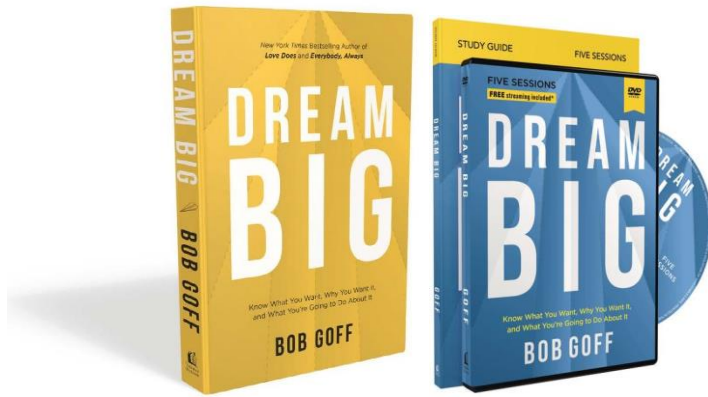
Maria (grumbling under her breath): “Bob, just say something’s bad, okay?”

Maria (looking up after a short pause): “Did I just say that out loud?”

While different in so many ways, we both share a common faith and a strong sense of adventure. I find mine in traveling, talking with lots of people, and starting schools in war zones. Maria finds hers in the more difficult work of loving and nurturing our family, making places of peace in our lives, and giving us all a place to return to. Yet we’ve found our superpowers *because* of our differences, not *in spite* of them. We’ve used these differences to sort out what things are worth the effort to pursue and which ones we should leave behind.

Our kids and the people they love are my teachers, my advisors, and the ones I go to for clarity on the many things I don’t quite understand. They help me sort into piles those things that will last in my life and the others that won’t. As you embark on this journey to identify your ambitions, find these kinds of people to surround yourself with. It’ll be worth the effort.

Someone wiser than me once asked, “If God answered every one of your prayers, would it change anybody’s life except your own?” I’ve seen Maria’s prayers change countless lives. I know her prayer for you and for me would be that we would leave all the planning behind, figure out what our lasting ambitions are, and get back to building those rocket ships that were supposed to be our lives. To do this, she would want us to trade what is easily available for what is actually worthwhile. It’s a distinction that has the power to change everything in your life.



DREAM BIG

by BOB GOFF

Bob Goff is on a mission to shake people into the version of their lives they dreamt about before someone told them it was impossible or incorrect. He wants people to reconnect with the seat of their passion and their person. He wants them to dream big.

In this revelatory new book, Goff takes readers on a life-proven journey to rediscover their dreams and turn them into reality. Based on his popular Dream Big workshop, Bob draws on a lifetime of living and dreaming large to help guide readers to reaching their larger-than-life dreams. In *Dream Big* he shows us how to:

- learn to define clearly your dreams for yourself,
- identify the obstacles holding you back,
- come up with a specific plan for reaching goals, and
- develop the tools that will help you act on the plan.

Dream Big is the only book you need to uncover the wild and exciting dream for your life you've hidden from yourself--and help you take the steps necessary to achieve it.

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