

Q&A with Jennie Allen, author of *Restless: Because You Were Made For More*

Q: This book was born out of the restlessness you hear in the voices of women you meet as a Bible teacher. How have you experienced your own kind of restlessness?

A: I love my family, but in the process of making a family I had somehow lost myself. Passions were pushed aside, dreams had trickled away, and the needs of other people outside my family had escaped me. My entire former life had been shut down for the immediate demands of my family. I wondered if it was wrong to care about anything or anyone outside of these four walls. I wondered if I would feel permission to dream again. This is a book about discovering ourselves and getting over ourselves all at the same time. This is a book about being brave enough to imagine a better world and how we may be used to make it that way. This is a book about changing the world and changing diapers. This is a book about fears and suffering and joy and gifts. This is a book about all that lays in our control and how nothing is in our control. This is a book about vision and obedience.

Q: Many women think that if they could just find the perfect purpose for their lives, they will finally be satisfied.

A: Yes. But first we have to separate identity from performance. I believe we have complete access to joy and purpose right now. Even with no grand vision from God, we have access to our Creator, and he is not hiding happiness from us. He gave it to us in the form of Christ. Our mattering doesn't depend on a stellar performance. We matter because we are children of the living, breathing, reigning God of the universe. We matter because we were worth the blood of the Son of our Father God. He set us in our spots and in our time. He numbered our days and counts our hair. And we matter because he says we matter. This isn't a book about you all the sudden finding a secret way to matter—it's about realizing you *already* matter, and therefore can deeply desire to make your few days here count in light of all that is ahead for us as children of such a God.

Q: What do you believe is the foundation that needs to be in place before we start running after our dreams?

A: If we don't begin with surrender, we inevitably dream with vanity, with ego, with control. The scariest and safest thing I have ever done is pray this prayer—to hand complete control of my life and my dreams over to my God. We all have hopes of how our lives will turn out, and we all fear that if God actually has his way with us, he may slingshot us to Africa or, worse, ask us to share Christ with the person in the house or cubical next to ours. We are scared that God's dreams may not be as cool as the ones we create in our minds for ourselves.

Q: What hinders us from dreaming?

A: There are several factors. Sometimes we just stop bothering to dream because enough of our dreams don't come true. But also, we are afraid of big dreams because we are afraid of ourselves. We are afraid of greatness because we are afraid of our arrogance. And yet Jesus said of us, "Whoever believes in me...they will do even greater things than these" (John 14:12). It almost sounds blasphemous to do even greater things. We rarely say it, but when we start to have hints of great thoughts or visions, we often quickly dismiss them, afraid that we may be vain. Arrogant. Proudful. Or worse, simply that we would *appear* proudful. The enemy is subtle and warps truths into lies for us. He tells us we are being humble, responsible, and selfless, while we are killing the things God put us on the planet to do—things that would build his kingdom.

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Q: What do you mean by the concept of “threads” that we all have and how they can all come together and be used by God?

A: Tim Keller says that as humans we all hold different raw materials. And the purpose of life's work is to work our raw materials into something excellent for the betterment of mankind. We have to first understand what raw materials we have been given. These materials—what I refer to as threads—are given to us by God and for God. And we were built to run wild with them, so it is a valuable process to uncover and untangle them. This can also be put into a simple equation (I should mention, I am anything but formulaic, but I want to give you a clear understanding): God's Story + my threads + the need + the Holy Spirit = my purpose. And the unabridged version of the equation: The story of God through Scripture + an understanding of myself and my resources + taking inventory of the need around me + the mystery of following the Holy Spirit's leading = obediently living our purposes. (Perhaps—no promises.) I think God could untangle your soul, your story, your gifts, your people, your place, and your passions, and begin to weave it into purposes that you haven't been brave enough to imagine.

Q: Throughout *Restless*, you draw upon the life of Joseph in Old Testament. How does his story relate to our modern lives?

A: Joseph's life, told of throughout Genesis 37 to 50, is the story of a life that at times felt wasted, and yet God was working in every moment that felt mundane and unfair and dark, moving all of the mess into his unique purpose and calling. Joseph deeply knew God and trusted him. So much of his life was seemingly inconsequential, like scrubbing floors in Potiphar's house. But to him, scrubbing a floor with excellence mattered to God. Staring at a prison wall for years mattered because it was building the character of a man who would forgive the evil of his brothers, and who ultimately—and most importantly— would lead a country out of ruin. There is so much we can draw from Joseph's story. Like him, you've been given gifts, and you've been dealt a hand in life that may look incomprehensible. But we can also come closer to understanding these gifts and how they play into God's plans.

Q: Many women have shared their dreams with others, only to have them shot down by well-intentioned people. How do you know whose opinions to listen to?

A: Our heads get so crowded. There are opinions shouting out everywhere, from parents, pastors, spouses, friends, and coworkers. If we let them all decide who we are and what we will do with our lives, it gets way too crowded. We feel so confused and wonder why we can't hear God. The thing is, we have to decide who we will listen to. So when I dream or sense some direction, I take that to my people, Scripture, the Holy Spirit, my husband, my elders and mentor, and my small group of friends who love God deeply and aren't afraid to kick me in the tail or push me to obey, even if my obedience looks different than theirs. To these voices I submit; I receive truth and I count the cost. Pick your voices and then be prepared and willing to disappoint the rest. You are not obligated to bend to the convictions and judgment of every person around you, or you will never do anything. Choose to obligate yourself to a few trusted voices. When my few voices affirm and release me, I run. And when they pull me in, I stop and listen.

Q: But for you, the main voice you listen to is your husband.

A: The main earthly voice in my life is my husband. I often am asked, “As a mother and pastor's wife and writer, how do you do it all?” I have a lot of help: sitters and help with cleaning and administrative help. But the most obvious answer is that without the blessing, leadership, and sacrifice of my husband, with all I have in my life, I would be unable to do any of it. We have fought our way to a good marriage, and it has not been easy. But as passionate and strong and independent as I can be, it actually feels so good to come under his leadership. There isn't a doubt that the measure of support we feel from our husbands, if we are married, will and should affect our dreams.

Q: In what ways does your husband support your dreams?

There's a portion in *Restless* that my husband wrote about how he came to understand what it means to nourish and cherish your wife. It's very powerful and honest. He says it means to unleash your wife to be everything she has been designed to be in Christ. That means you are to live with her in an understanding way, to really know her. That means you are going to be held responsible for the way you pointed your wife to Jesus, the way you cherished and nourished her as she continually gave herself to the many seemingly mediocre tasks of daily life, and the initiative you took to shepherd her gifts and callings. He wants to encourage a man to help his wife to be all she is designed to be in Christ. For your children to see a mom who doesn't make her children her identity, but disciples them by giving her life away outside the home as well. And to sit across from her and ask about her dreams and callings as you affirm her.

Q: To the woman who insists that going after dreams might be good for someone else more qualified, that her life is boring or average—what would you say?

A: There are no average, small dreams and no average people. There are no meaningless moments as we go to the gym or cook macaroni or handle shipping orders gone wrong or nurse our babies. If we were sitting across from each other and you pleaded with me—*begged* me to believe you were average, your life was boring, there was nothing significant to anything you were doing, you could not convince me. You could not.

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