

A true story of divine intervention in the life of a young Iowa man. Hardships connected with having a self-centered father led Chuck Thomas into an encounter with his heavenly father. God begins to unfold modern day miracles that will enlighten, encourage, and stretch your faith to believe for the unbelievable, and make your dreams come true.

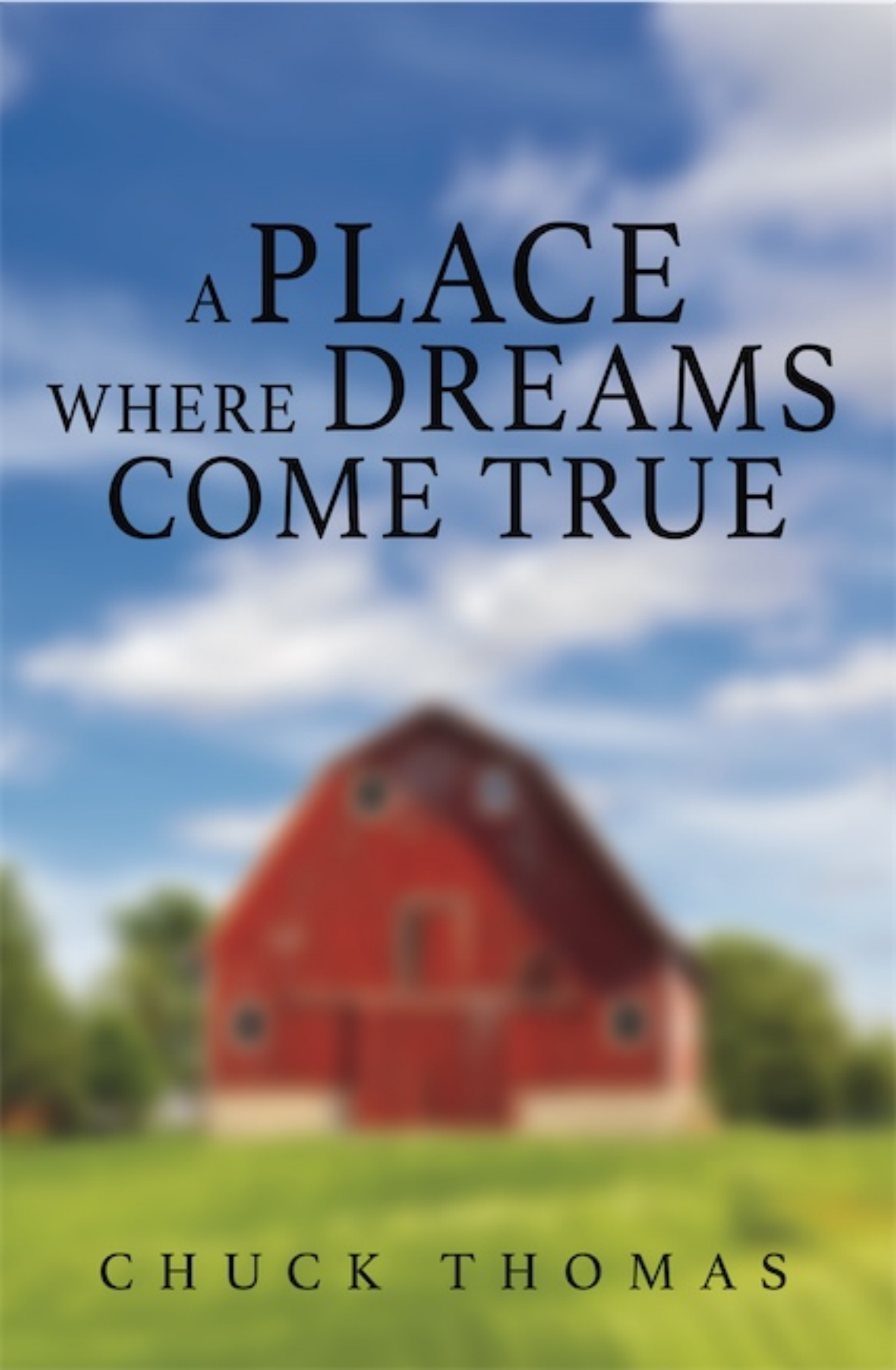
A PLACE WHERE DREAMS COME TRUE

by CHUCK THOMAS

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A photograph of a large, red barn with a gambrel roof, situated in a lush green field. The sky is bright blue with scattered white clouds. The barn is slightly out of focus, creating a soft, dreamlike atmosphere.

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SLAP OF REALITY

IT WAS GRADUATION day for the class of 1977. I was an eighteen-year-old walking out of my graduation ceremony toward the school cafeteria with the final strains of “Pomp and Circumstance” lingering in the background. Thoughts raced through my head, *What am I going to do now?* Up until this point in my life, everything had been dictated to me. As a kid, having no adult responsibilities, there was no need to think about the daily cares of life. Now all of a sudden, the weight of this responsibility was on my shoulders. A wave of panic swept over me. I thought, *Man, I have to start getting serious about life.* At that moment, I hit the wall of reality.

Growing up in Iowa, I had a typical Midwestern life. I grew up in a God-fearing, non-Christian family. We attended church two or three times a year, but the mention of God never came up unless someone we knew had died. In the late 70s, I was doing the same things as most other teenagers. I was involved with high school activities, parties, and hanging out with friends at the local bowling alley. My life was a machine; it felt like so routine. Deep down, I knew something was missing. I knew there had to be more to life than sucking up air and taking up space. Something inside me said there had to be a higher purpose for our existence.

During my childhood, I watched old movies like *Ben Hur*, *The Ten Commandments*, and *The Robe*. I saw the faith in the main characters. I knew they had something I wanted, but I didn’t know how to obtain it.

This thought lurked in the back of my mind; I had a desire to know the answers to all these questions of faith.

When I was older, I started watching the TV series *The Waltons*. I loved the series because of the family's closeness. I admired how they loved and supported one another in bad times and in good times. I coveted that for my own family; it was my heart's desire to have a family that close. It was a dream.

I remember grabbing a Bible and heading outside on a warm autumn day when I was in my early teens. I found the old Chinese elm tree on the north side of our white two-story home on Cedar Street. The house was on top of the limestone bluffs that ran along the river in Iowa Falls, Iowa. With my Bible shoved in my pocket, I climbed to a high branch, sat down and leaned against the trunk. A strong wind blew as it commonly does in Iowa, and I started praying, "God, if you're for real, I would like to hear your voice like Ben Hur and Moses did." Sitting there feeling the wind and watching it stir up waves on the Iowa River below, I felt a peace in my heart that everything was going to be all right. When I opened the Bible, I flipped to the book of Joel chapter 2 verses 28–32, where God says:

I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the Lord has said, among the survivors whom the Lord calls.

These verses spoke life into my spirit; the passage seemed as if it were jumping off the pages—as if what I was reading had life. I felt the words speaking directly to me; this was the first time I experienced

anything like that. I didn't hear God's audible voice but knew deep down that he had everything under control. I felt so peaceful.

Most people want to leave an influential mark on this earth in some way—to make their lives count for something greater than themselves. From that moment on, I wanted my life to have influence and to make a difference. Deep down in my heart, there was a desire to leave an eternal mark in the lives of others. If Moses could influence a nation of people with God's help, then I could do the same by getting to know the same God. *So where do I begin?*



THE BEGINNING

I WAS BORN with an identical twin in Bishop, California, in October of 1958. We were named after our two grandfathers, Charles Thomas and Edward Keeseey. My mom managed us, along with my older brother, Lanny, who had been born a year and a half earlier. Our mother, Shirley, loved us, and we never had reason to doubt that. Needless to say, at that time it was quite a task to raise three young boys in a small miners' community stuck between the high Sierras and the White Mountains in Inyo County. Our dad worked in the mineral mines in the area. My parents were born and raised in Iowa and had been invited by my dad's uncle to come work and live in California. My father, Charles Ray, found his new job boring. Mom said he had a hard time staying awake watching buckets of minerals come up on a conveyor, and because of that, he later lost his job. So after a year and a half in California, we headed to Colorado. Dad worked in the mines again, so we only lived there for a short stint. We then moved back to Iowa where my youngest brother, Blaine, was born.

Now with a family of six, Dad got a new job in the local grocery store chain in Creston, Iowa. My grandparents lived there, so they helped Mom take care of us. Eventually, my dad was transferred to Iowa Falls, Iowa, and that's where we spent the next twenty years.

When I was growing up, I felt insecure and unsure of myself. I know it was due to how each one of my brothers and I related to our dad. My childhood memories of my dad were difficult. He was considerably self-involved, and our family life was determined by what he wanted to do.

My mother didn't have a choice in family matters. She may have had input and probably did, but it came across to me that Dad had all the control. He loved us and provided for us, but I felt like whatever I did wasn't good enough.

I held resentment toward my father because I wanted peace in our family, and there rarely was. My brothers and I didn't want to do anything to make him mad, so our home life was full of tension. During the school year, I dreaded the weekend because I would have to spend it trying to manage his angry outbursts. When things didn't go his way, he would make everyone's life a living hell; it made me so mad. This bullying was his form of manipulation to get people to do what he wanted them to do. He was selfish. I couldn't wait to grow up and be out on my own. I dreamed about being old enough to leave the house and start my own life. Sometimes while he was in one of his rants downstairs, I fervently wished I could just get out of there and go live with my friends. I yearned to escape.

No child should have to feel that way. Every kid craves acceptance. It is in a child's nature to please his parents. My dad would seldom acknowledge the good work or the effort put into the jobs we did. He just expected work to be done; and if it weren't, there would be hell to pay. Even if we did everything correctly, there was no positive appreciation. Panic would devour me if we were asked to do a job. If we broke a tool or something didn't go as planned, there would be an explosion of anger because we had just ruined everything. It was such bondage, and I hated it with all my heart.

I felt as if I were living in a concentration camp, and it seemed to be worse in our teen years when personal issues with my dad came to a climax. He was unhappy, and he struggled with depression. Many nights as we sat down for supper, my dad would talk only to my mom. If we had anything to say, we had to talk to Mom. With Mom acting as the mediator, she would then repeat what we had said to him and vice versa. When he came home from work, Mom told us he was home, and we went to the basement to avoid conflict. Later on, we found out that this made him more upset. Life should be better than this, and I was determined to find the answer. My searching started here.

I wanted to do things right. Being a perfectionist, I always worked to get flawless papers in school and would be overly frustrated with myself when I didn't attain the A. Constantly this conflict chafed my mind. I thought of myself as "screwed up" because I wanted to do better. This insecurity fostered fear. I never chose to take risks for fear of failure. I didn't like myself, and I couldn't understand how anyone could like me because of my imperfections. If there were a God, there had to be a better way of living life; but again, I had no idea where to begin. In my teen years when watching the Waltons deal with life's issues, I envied them very much. They lived a dream life, and I wanted my family to be exactly like theirs.

As I became older, I grew more and more emotionally needy; I sought relationships with girls to fill that void. When my girlfriends told me they liked me, I could never figure out why. I did not even like myself, so how could anyone else like me? In an effort to feel fulfilled, I spent most of my time with my girlfriends. As a single guy, I longed to be emotionally connected to a girl. Getting completely infatuated and wrapped up in these relationships was what I did because I had no idea who I was. The lack of affirmation from my dad led me to look outside the family for love and acceptance. Working on cars and engines was another thing I loved to do. My passion to fix things paralleled my passion to fix my life. I was never alone but always looking. I became emotionally dependent.

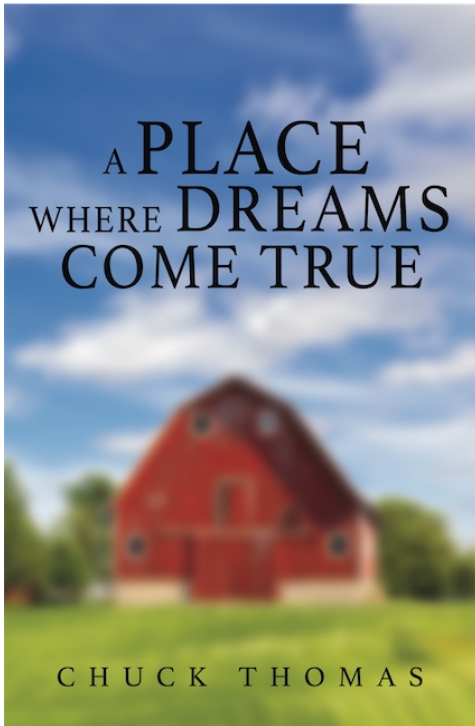


THE SEARCHING

SOMEWHERE IN THE midst of those twenty years, I had a growing desire to find the purpose of my existence. Even as a nonbeliever, my logical mind knew there had to be more than just eating, sleeping, and working. I couldn't get past the fact that everything around me screamed, "There's got to be a bigger plan." I didn't make a connection at the time, but later after reading the Bible, I saw in Romans 1:20, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse."

Even at a young age, I did not understand how anyone could not believe in God. I knew it didn't matter what I went through because every time I looked up at the stars, I saw there had to be someone who made this amazing universe.

The few times we attended church, I experienced some measure of peace. Even though I didn't understand it, I knew there was something right about it all. God was planting seeds in me to guide my way before I realized what *the way* was. I felt as if he was honoring my hunger to know the truth and to see the bigger picture.



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