

Russ Parker was born in Birkenhead and, since becoming a Christian in 1966, has exercised a wide-ranging ministry in the United Kingdom and internationally. He is an ordained minister in the Church of England and is currently the Director of the Acorn Christian Healing Foundation. He has been a Co-Tutor in Pastoral Counselling at St John's College in Nottingham and has published several books, including *Free to Fail* (SPCK), *The Wild Spirit* (SPCK), *Forgiveness is Healing* (SPCK), *In Search of Wholeness* (St John's, Nottingham) and *Healing Wounded History* (SPCK). He is married to Roz and lives in Farnham in Surrey.

HEALING DREAMS

Their power and purpose in your spiritual life

RUSS PARKER

 CLASSICS

CLASSICS  CLASSICS  CLASSICS

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Foreword

Here is a readable book which throws light on what is for many of us a mysterious and sometimes disturbing part of our lives.

I first met the author, Russ Parker, when he was a student at St John's College, Nottingham, training for ordination into the Church of England ministry. I was his tutor and soon came to appreciate this quiet, friendly, relaxed Merseysider. When I discovered he was embarking on a postgraduate thesis on dreams, I was more than a little curious. Yet I soon got to know Russ as an industrious person concerned for biblical and theological integrity while at the same time drawn towards psychology and counselling.

One day in the tutorial group Russ asked if any of us had any interesting dreams he could include in his project. After the predictable guffaws it suddenly occurred to me that when I was under pressure my sleep was disturbed by a recurring nightmare which I could well do without. Nothing daunted, Russ took me on. With sensitivity and prayer he helped me to examine the meaning and purpose of my dream. Fresh light was given, new insights gained, and a burden was lifted – the nightmares stopped.

This book shows how God uses dreams to give guidance and healing. I hope it will help others as I have been helped, both in their own lives and in the pastoral care they offer others in their Christian ministry.

THE REVD ANNE LONG

Pastoral Consultant

Acorn Christian Healing Foundation

Introduction to the SPCK Classics edition

Everybody has at least one dream in their lifetime which matters to them and stays with them until they manage to understand its meaning. Since writing *Healing Dreams* 25 years ago, I have seen this subject grow from being a minor and eccentric interest for Christians with a questionable spirituality, to becoming a major source for personal growth and guidance – so much so that it plays the central part in a degree course on Signs and Wonders at Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry, Redding, California, hosted by John Paul Jackson.

We are living in unprecedented times where the quest for understanding human spirituality is paramount. It is to be found on the curriculum of primary schools and is part of the training for professional health carers. Whereas some forms of religious institutions are in decline, our search for meaning beyond ourselves is a growing industry. It is no surprise to me, therefore, that dreams have become popular, because at their core is our attempt to give expression to the meaning of our everyday lives.

I am regularly invited to talk on dreams on various radio stations, and on each occasion the station has invited its listeners to phone in with their dreams to see if I can help them unpack their meaning. There is no shortage of takers! I remember one session on Premier Radio when the phone lines were so jammed with requests that they invited me to stay on for a further hour to continue responding to callers.

I hope this book provides the resources you need to gain a better understanding of how your dreams are providing a window of insight into your own life, and that, as you sense this, you are drawn closer to the God who created us all to be dreamers.

RUSS PARKER

Healing Dreams

*THEIR POWER AND PURPOSE
IN YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE*

1 I Have a Dream

For a number of years now I have been working with other people's dreams. It has been an exciting journey into the realms of spiritual growth and healing through the power of Jesus Christ. Yet I had to be converted to the usefulness of dreams for personal growth and spiritual renewal. As a Christian minister from a conservative Evangelical background, I had inherited a scepticism for anything mystical or which smacked of coming from the psychic fringe. I thought nothing much of dreams and imagined that they were the random wanderings of the sleeping mind or the result of too much rich food the night before. Taking dreams seriously did not fit into my understanding of proper Christian behaviour and anyone who thought otherwise was immediately suspect, according to my theological outlook.

I have since come to realize that my theological horizon was not wide enough to take in what was plainly illustrated within the Bible. I discovered an amazing amount of material on dreams and also visions, a companion experience. I had never allowed myself to truly respond to such a weight of biblical material before. I began to be convinced that, as a Christian, I must take such evidence far more seriously.

This book has been written to provide both a biblical and practical guide to the whole experience of dreaming. I shall also outline some of the basic discoveries made about the actual process of sleep and dreaming, and shall describe some of the major beliefs about dreams held by the pioneers of dream interpretation such as Freud and Jung. However, we shall need to hold to our Christian foundations in the Bible, so I shall provide some biblical insights about dreams to show how God can and does use dreams to bring about guidance and healing for his people. Since working with dreams I have been increasingly grateful to God for showing me how, by his grace, he can use us to reach into many of our unresolved problems and hurts. They are all too often caught in our dreams and, by taking these seriously and with respect, we are able to bring Christ's healing and relief to the buried hurts reflected in our dreams. Therefore I have written this book to encourage you to use your

own dreams, as well as those of the people we seek to help, as one more resource among others to bring about the wholeness we long to see in all of us.

There is no shortage of examples of how dreams have helped people. Besides the evidence of the Bible itself and other ancient literature, there are the records of such worthies as Kekule and Einstein who testify to a kind of 'breakthrough' in their discoveries as a result of their dreams. Innumerable people have shared how a dream has alerted them to something they had not consciously noticed before. One example is that of Mrs Frances Vernier who prevented a fire at a home for the elderly which she managed. She had dreamt of the building being ablaze and had got out of bed and driven over to the house, where she searched vigorously until she discovered a gas pipe aflame.¹

Clearly, dreams do relate in some measure to our waking lives, and paying attention to them can offer real benefits. Most of the counsellors who employ dreams will say how their patients have taken steps towards recovery when they 'worked' with their own dreams. So then, what will the Christian Church do with dreams? To relegate them to the area of fringe interest cuts right against the grain of the Bible and ignores the benefits that secular society has gained from a proper response to dreams. It is my belief that God gives us dreams as a benefit inseparable from the gift of sleep to which the psalmist refers (Ps. 127.2). As Christians we need to recover a proper respect and use of dreams and visions, so that we do not miss out on the good gifts which our heavenly Father has given to his children.

My own interest and growth in understanding of dreams was brought about by a dream which dramatically changed my life.

One morning in 1975, when I was a lay Baptist minister, I was sitting in my upstairs study preparing notes for a sermon. My eyes were open and I was awake, but from time to time my mind would drift into a sort of waking dream or daydream. The picture that began to form in my mind was that of an old toy fort which resembled one which I had been given when I was five years old. Now the fort was of life-sized dimensions and I was standing right in the middle of it. For some reason I knew that I was a very young child, and as I looked up at the battlements I could see Arthurian knights patrolling. I could feel the hot sun on my head and I felt so safe and warm. Suddenly all this peace and security was shattered. Out from a square hole in the floor of this old fort came what looked like a long tongue of huge, sticky fly-paper; it seemed alive and

immediately it grabbed hold of my head. I struggled hard to get free and stay in the fort but it was a losing battle. Relentlessly I was pulled down through the hole and driven along a dark tunnel; all the while my face was being smashed into the walls at either side.

As I sat there in my study that morning, I was acutely aware of feelings of rage and anger rising up from deep within me.

What was really startling about this dream was that, as the feelings of anger began to come to the surface, there came a string of memories all of which contained the same expression of angry rage. The most immediate was from a few days earlier. It had been my turn to baby-sit with our son Joel, and I had been at it from about midnight until the early hours of the following day before he drifted off into sleep. However, an hour or so later he woke up and started crying again; my wife was fast asleep in another room, and after all it was still my shift. I can remember feeling really angry at him being awake, only this time when I lifted him out of his cot it was not to give him comfort but to take out on him my anger. I completely lost control and began to shout at him and strangle him. It was only the intervention of my wife which prevented any physical damage from being done. I felt so ashamed of myself; here I was, a Christian minister strangling the life out of my son like an angry vandal.

I had had a number of these outbursts in my life and I had prayed about them, but nothing seemed changed in my behaviour. I wanted to be free but felt really trapped in my feelings. It is interesting to note, by the way, that the dream was triggered by a recent experience and that this is often the reason why we have certain dreams.

The rest of the memories were all directly connected with my mother. When I was about ten years old my Mum asked me to run down to Parson's corner shop to buy some cigarettes for her. I was enjoying a game of football in the street with all my friends and my two brothers and sisters. I felt picked on and, I remembered, I ran off to do the errand in sheer rage at this and called my mother all the swear words I could think of as I went.

The other memory was of a later time, when one of the boys from our street was told to move away from our house; apparently he was sitting on our fence and my Mum told him to go up to his own house and play. Sydney was his name and he climbed back on that fence just as soon as my Mum had disappeared into the house and he began to call out loudly, 'Mrs Parker is a dirty old cow.' My Mum was having none of this and so she sent out my younger

