



Dream Again: A Story of Faith, Courage, and the Tenacity to Overcome

By Isaiah Austin

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The inspiring story of Isaiah Austin, the man who captured our hearts when he was made the honorary NBA draft pick after a shocking diagnosis ended his professional basketball career before he could even step onto the court.

“There are two choices in life: you make it your excuse or you make it your story.” Isaiah Austin’s mother shared these words of wisdom with him as a child as he came to terms with a torn retina taking away the ability to see with his right eye. Faced with adversity at such a young age, Isaiah had to choose—let his disability define him or overcome the challenge and shine.

Overcoming that challenge is exactly what Isaiah did as he made a name for himself on Baylor University’s NCAA Division 1 basketball team. Everyone expected Isaiah to have a successful career in the NBA after college, but on June 21, 2014—just five days before the NBA draft—Austin was diagnosed with Marfan syndrome, a genetic disorder that affects the body’s connective tissue, putting him at risk of rupturing his heart if he continued to play basketball. In seconds, Austin’s hopes for a career in the NBA became impossible.

After hearing about Isaiah’s diagnosis, NBA commissioner Adam Silver invited Austin to attend the 2014 draft as his personal guest. The League recognized Isaiah’s courage, resilience, and determination in a bittersweet moment when he was made an Honorary Draft Pick.

Rather than letting another challenge destroy his faith, Austin has once again strived to overcome adversity by becoming a spokesperson for The Marfan Foundation, raising awareness and understanding for the disease. Despite the many heartbreaking challenges he has faced, Isaiah’s story is inspirational and full of hope as he encourages everyone to tower in the face of adversity and keep living out your dreams, no matter what life throws your way.

*Proceeds from *Dream Again* will go to the Isaiah Austin Foundation, which provides support for the awareness and research of Marfan syndrome and those affected by it.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Isaiah is an amazing young man with a very inspiring, and compelling story that is a must read!" (Carmelo Anthony)

"People talk about how Isaiah "lost his dream," but as his friend I have learned to see it differently. This is why everyone should read this book: We all have dreams that are really important to us. Most of us can relate to how hard it is when things happen and those dreams slip away. But, very few people I've known understand what it means or what it requires to really dream again. Isaiah Austin has a lot to teach us about the toughness, faith, and trust in God it takes to find new dreams. . . . I truly believe that Isaiah's faith has placed him right where God needs him the most. I think my friend's story has the power to inspire you, strengthen your faith, and help you learn what it means to dream again in your life." (Robert Griffin III *Heisman Trophy Winner*)

Isaiah Austin is an inspiration to me and the entire NBA family. Despite losing his sight in one eye at the age of fourteen, Isaiah worked his way to a potential first-round selection in the NBA Draft. When a diagnosis of Marfan Syndrome cut his basketball career short, he devoted himself to raising awareness about the condition and encouraging others to pursue their passion. With this book, Isaiah's story of perseverance will resonate far beyond the world of basketball. (Adam Silver *NBA Commissioner*)

"Coaching is a very difficult profession—I am sure that most coaches would agree with me on that. At the same time, I don't think that there is a more rewarding way to spend life than working with young men on a daily basis. Being able to coach Isaiah Austin has truly been a blessing. In fact, I believe that I have learned more from that experience than I was able to teach him—I know that he inspired me beyond measure. Isaiah is a success story! He is the definition of perseverance—a true overcomer and an inspiration to all. Isaiah's story is told beautifully in this book, and anyone reading it will truly be blessed. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to witness some of Isaiah's story firsthand, and because of that I am a better man." (Coach Scott Drew *Baylor University Head Basketball Coach*)

About the Author

Isaiah Austin completed his very successful college career for the Baylor Bears in 2014. He had been considered a first-round prospect until he was diagnosed with Marfan syndrome just days prior to the NBA Draft. On June 26, 2014, between the fifteenth and sixteenth picks of the 2014 Draft, NBA Commissioner Adam Silver made Austin a ceremonial pick, which fulfilled his dream of getting drafted. The crowd gave him a standing ovation as he walked up to the podium.

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Dream Again



CHAPTER 1

BLINDSIDED

I am seven feet tall, so I stand out everywhere I go. Each time I shop at the mall, every time I get out of my car at a gas station, anytime I walk across campus at school, people notice me. Standing out or being different is something I've just had to deal with my whole life. But it's not my height that really makes me different from everyone else in the world; it's my vision.

Let me explain. I take great pride in how well I see the game of basketball, especially when I am out there competing on the court. I can see a teammate coming open off a cut before he's actually open. I'll beat you to the ball because I can see on which side of the paint a rebound is going to fall before the shot is missed. I can tell if a double team is coming to trap me in the post before it actually gets to me. I've worked hard all my life to see these things better than other players.

But there are a lot of guys out there who work hard to have that kind of vision on the court. So when I talk about "the way I see," I am also talking about something much bigger. I strive to have a life vision. Life vision is similar to vision on the court, but instead of being all about the game, it's all about how well you can visualize your dreams. My whole life I've tried to look toward the positive, even in the worst circumstances, and I see my dreams coming true.

From the time I was five years old living in California, I had a vision of playing in the NBA. I know a lot of other kids might say that kind of thing, but this was different. Even when I was a child, I could see myself on the stage at Radio City Music Hall on draft night. I could visualize every part—I could see myself dressed in a crisp suit, sitting at a table with my family, hugging my mom and dad when my name was called, walking up those stairs to shake hands with the commissioner, taking the franchise hat, smiling for the cameras, and letting my personality shine while I did the post-draft interviews. For as long as I can remember, I could see all of those details clearly when I laid my head down on the pillow at night, when I woke up in the morning, every time I took the court, and each time I stood on my driveway to practice the game I love so much. That vision drove me to where I am today; it made me the person I am right now. Although I've had a difficult time seeing the details in my everyday life that most people take for granted, I could still always see my dream.

A big part of my story is about dreams and what it takes to make them come true. That kind of vision comes from hard work, grinding it out every day, especially on the days when I didn't feel like working. It comes from the support of family, learning to overcome adversity, and staying positive, even when everything in the world around me was negative. I think that's one of the reasons why I've always liked the Bible character Joseph. Every time my preacher would talk about Joseph, he'd talk about dreams. I could identify with Joseph because even when things were tough for him, when he was in trouble, separated from his family, and no one else believed in him, he still held on to his vision; he still kept his dreams in sight.

Since God gave Joseph his dreams, Joseph knew that meant they would come true. And just the same for me, I believed God had given me this dream of playing in the NBA and it was destined to be true.



FIVE DAYS BEFORE the 2014 NBA draft, I woke up early with my heart beating fast. Leading up to this big day, I had traveled to NBA franchises all over the country and competed as hard as I could through eleven different workouts. I checked my phone when I got out of bed that morning to reread the messages from my agent, Dwon Clifton, who had received great news from one of my last workouts with the Los

Angeles Clippers.

After a great sophomore season at Baylor, which included a Sweet 16 appearance in the NCAA tournament, I made the difficult decision to leave college at the end of season and enter my name into the draft. My head coach, Scott Drew, along with the rest of the Baylor coaching staff, helped me make the best possible decision and then supported and encouraged me once my choice was final. Still, a lot of people doubted my decision to come out of college early. The experts said I wasn't ready. Early on in the process I attended the NBA combine and was flagged to do some testing on my heart, so several of the scouts had me going late in the second round and a lot of people even had me projected as going undrafted. But I knew it was my time. I can't explain it any better than that. I didn't necessarily want to leave the campus I loved so much, but I had this gut feeling that it was my moment to go.

Throughout the whole pre-draft process, I only had one terrible performance, and that was mainly because I had been sick with some type of flu. My energy was low for the workout, and I know it had a huge effect on how I played that afternoon. There were a few moments where things didn't look good, but I stayed positive and kept hanging on to my vision. The truth is that the more I played and interviewed for teams, the better news my agent seemed to be getting. There were several teams who were interested in taking me with their first-round pick.

In addition to wanting to see my dream fulfilled, I also felt I had something to prove about myself and my ability. I had a pretty big chip on my shoulder because of the lack of respect I got as a player all season—even when my numbers and performances were consistently better than some of the guys who were projected to be solid first-round draft picks. I knew when all the talk was done, when we were in the gym going at it, I was going to rise to the top. I never let the doubters get me down, though—in fact, they drove me to work even harder. I stayed focused, and sure enough, my name continued to climb higher on the draft board, even ahead of players who had gotten a lot more hype than me during the college season.

When my agent called that Friday morning with great news from the Clippers, I was so excited. They told him that I shot the ball better than a lot of guards they had already tried out. They liked how energetic I was around the basket, how versatile I was for a seven-foot player, and how good my passing and dribbling were for a guy my size. They said I was very skilled and that they thought they could help me put some weight on and that I might be a great fit in their program. The NBA is big business and there are no guarantees, but the Clippers had a late first-round pick. They were a veteran team, and my agent believed it would be a great place for me to develop my game and learn from the best. We had gotten this kind of feedback from a couple of other teams, and I started to believe I had a legitimate shot at the first round. I ate breakfast thinking about those texts, the Clippers, playing on the same team with guys like Chris Paul and Blake Griffin, being coached by a future Hall of Fame guy like Doc Rivers . . . I imagined playing in front of thousands of fans and even Hollywood movie stars sitting courtside to watch every game. I was thinking about what it meant to be a first-rounder after I had spent my whole college career with people on the outside, criticizing and doubting my ability. It was hard not to be too excited. But I had to stay focused. I was about to head to Chicago, another solid team with a great coach and a lot of veterans, for my final workout the next morning. That's right, the Bulls, the team that one of my idols, Michael Jordan, helped lead to six championships.



MY HIGH SCHOOL coach and mentor, Coach Ray, picked me up early to head over to Mo Williams's gym. I have known Ray since I was a sophomore in high school. He was one of the best coaches in the Dallas area, and he had introduced me to Mo, who has been in the league since 2003 and has even played in the All-Star game. He's not only a close friend of mine, but he has also taken me under his wing and taught me a lot

about the game. He knows all about the business of what it takes to prepare physically and mentally for the NBA, and he let me train at his gym to get myself ready for the draft. Mo calls his place the Mo Williams Academy. It has a weight room, some turfs for pushing and pulling sleds to strengthen my legs, and a full-court regulation gym. Like a lot of other great players from the Dallas area, the Academy had been my lab; it was the place where I had prepared for my dream for years. If I wasn't in Waco with my Baylor family, I was usually at Mo's working out on my own or with the athletes who went there to improve their game and get bigger and stronger and faster.

Ray and I met up with my trainers, Jay Jackson and Keith Sweat, and walked into the gym laughing and talking about the good news from LA and feeling hopeful about the week ahead. I had already shaken off the cobwebs following my flights from Dallas to LA to Toronto and back home all in one week. That kind of travel was just a little taste of the NBA grind I would experience during my upcoming rookie season. Jay and Sweat are like brothers to me. Jay had played college basketball in Mississippi and was Mo's personal trainer. Sweat was an awesome coach who was really helping me develop my ball-handling skills—something that separated me from other big guys. They had closed down the Academy that day so we could do our work without getting interrupted. Once we hit the floor, Ray did what he always does: he helped me focus my vision on the next play. Yeah, my dreams were close, but it wasn't time to celebrate just yet; it was time to go to work and prepare for my tryout in Chicago.

Everybody told me it would be a “light” day at the gym. Ray is always coming up with new footwork and shooting drills and pulling new stuff together for me from watching tape of NBA great Hakeem Olajuwon, so his workouts are never boring. They said they wanted to make sure that I was fresh when I hit the court for my last tryout, in Chicago, but every time I get on the court I look at it as a chance to get better, so I never want to take it easy. I went hard through my shooting workouts: post moves, free throws, jump shots, threes, and then I finished up on the court with some ball-handling drills. Even though it was all pretty routine, Jay and Sweat made it interesting and fun, as usual—so I never felt bored with the kind of “normal” workout I had probably done a couple thousand times. Jay even made me do some light work in the weight room for a while before I finished up and hit the showers. I'm not sure I could've imagined at that moment how different my whole life would be the next time I stepped onto the basketball court at Mo's Academy. We stood around and talked for a few minutes about my upcoming trip to Chicago, and then Coach Ray got a call to invite us all over to Mo's house and kick it for the rest of the day.

I rode with Ray across town to Mo's house, and we got there early in the afternoon. It was perfect weather, a great day to be outside, and Mo was hanging out with his wife and kids in the backyard grilling up his usual feast. Mo can cook just as well as he can play ball. Jay and Sweat drove over, too, and we spent the day talking about life and relaxing. Mo has some great experiences from his time as a professional basketball player, and getting to listen to him tell stories about the league and what he's learned is priceless. Whenever he talks, believe me, I am taking notes.

One of my favorite things about going to Mo's house is getting to hang out with his five kids. I have been around little kids my whole life. Growing up, I was the oldest and Mom would always put me in charge of babysitting my little brother and sister and sometimes watching over our neighbor's kids, too. To tell you the truth, one of my favorite things to do when I am not playing basketball is to be “the big brother.” Kids are so full of joy and energy. It is relaxing to take a break from all the competition and focus my attention on them instead of the next thing I have to do, the next place I have to be, or the next drill I've got to win. That's why I've always loved hanging with the kids and teaching at camps. If there is a place away from the court I feel most comfortable, it is working with kids. Mo's crew of little ones and I played video games and then went out to the driveway to play basketball. I was doing different dunks for them and lifting their little bodies so they could jam the ball in the basket. Mainly, I was goofing off and making them laugh. I remember thinking

that it was a perfect day hanging around people who have become like family to me.

Ray felt it was time to head out around eight o'clock that night, and he offered to drive me over to my aunt Evelyn's house. I remember him saying he had to make a call before we left. He walked out to the driveway by himself and seemed to be having a serious conversation on his phone while I said good-bye to Mo and his family. I was staying with my aunt Evelyn and uncle Dre in Dallas a lot that summer because it was closer to the airport and the Academy. Evelyn and Dre are great people who love to laugh and play games, and they have been part of my family since I was a freshman in high school. They aren't my aunt and uncle by blood, but over the years their house has become my second home.

I wanted to be rested and ready for my last NBA workout in Chicago so I could finish strong. Coach Ray and I talked a lot on that long drive from Mo's to my aunt's house. We were messing around with each other and laughing, listening to music, and having a good conversation. Ray and I text each other almost every day, so he pretty much knows about everything going on in my life. I wouldn't be who I am today without him. He always tells me the truth and keeps me grounded; he's taught me so much about staying focused on my dreams.

As we drove, Ray asked how I was feeling about the whole interview process and my tryouts. I was hyped and busy talking about how ready I was for Chicago and how excited I was about the draft on Thursday, but I clearly remember that he interrupted something that I was saying and told me how proud he was of me. Coach Ray and I have a lot of history; he's been with me through so many tough times. He told me he was proud of me for the way I had been maturing on and off the court. And I still remember his last comment on our drive together. He said very seriously that no matter what happened he knew I was going to be all right. Everything was going to be okay.

The car got real quiet, and I closed my eyes, thinking about how close it all was to being real. In just five short days, I'd be there in New York City. I had already chosen my suit. My parents; my fifteen-year-old younger brother, Noah; and my eleven-year-old sister, Narah; Coach Ray; my agent Dwon; and Coach Drew (from Baylor) would all be sitting around that table with me. My man Cory Jefferson was going to be there, too, with his people. Cory was my teammate at Baylor and had become a really good friend. It was going to be a great night for both of us. The commissioner, Adam Silver, would walk up on the stage and call my name just how I had always envisioned it. And the best part was: I just knew in my heart it was going to happen in the first round. That's right, prime-time TV. ESPN. I knew I was going to get called; the only question I had left in my mind was which franchise hat I would be putting on when I posed with the commissioner for that photo. I could almost hear the announcement: "With the next pick in the NBA draft . . ." Would it be the Clippers? The Bulls? The Celtics? The Spurs? I believed that God had given me this dream. It was my dream and I had done my part. He was finally going to deliver. Like I said, the only real question was which team's hat it was going to be.



WE TURNED ONTO Aunt Evelyn and Uncle Dre's street. Usually, when I go over there to stay, there are only two cars in the driveway, but I noticed that there were way too many cars parked up and down the road and near their house. Aunt Evelyn loves to have a party, but this had to be something really big, and I hadn't heard them say anything about it all week. It was dark outside, but as we got closer I realized that my aunt's driveway was also packed full of cars. Finally, I noticed my mom and dad's car parked outside their house. I sat back and looked at Ray and wondered why my parents had made the long drive down from Kansas City. I knew how busy they had been with work and my brother's and sister's activities. We had gotten such great news about the draft in the past few days that maybe it really was a party. Maybe we were all going to be

celebrating Thursday together just a little bit early.

Ray told me to go on into the house. As I got out of the car and began to walk up the driveway, I heard him turn off the car engine and realized that he wasn't just dropping me off. He parked his car in front of their mailbox and also walked toward the house. I turned to look at him and noticed that Jay and Sweat had followed us from Mo's and were getting out of their cars.

Something was going on that I had not seen.

I remember asking Ray, "What's going on? Why are Jay and Sweat here, too? Are we having a party or something?" The expression on his face was different; it was really serious, like all of a sudden his mood had changed. I was more concerned than confused now. Ray put his hand on my shoulder and had me walk alongside him up the sidewalk toward the front porch. We stood there for just a moment in the quiet while I tried to get my mind around what could be happening.

I opened the door and walked into the long foyer. Even with all the cars sitting outside, I was surprised to see the house full of so many people that I call my family. The living room in Aunt Evelyn's house is very bright and just barely hidden to the right of the foyer. I remember each step I took as clearly as I remember anything that has ever happened to me in my life. I can still see it all in slow motion—every terrible detail. One look at the faces of the people I loved and I knew this wasn't a party. It was dead silent. I started looking from person to person and noticed my guys from Baylor: Coach Tang, Coach Mills, Coach McCasland, Coach Drew, Coach Maloney, and then I realized it was all of them—the entire staff was sitting along the left side of the room. Both of my pastors were also there, and as I moved toward a full view of the living room, I could see that it was completely jam-packed with people, standing-room only. I looked at my cousins Kristina and Ron, Uncle Dre, my girlfriend, my agent, Coach Pops, my dad, my brother and sister, too many people to name . . . and after scanning all of those concerned faces, I finally saw Mom.

I was really thrown off by the sight of Mom. My mom is my inspiration. She has always been my biggest fan. She's the light of my world, always smiling and staying positive no matter what happens. She had her hands over her eyes, but I could see the tears dripping down her cheeks. When she brought her hands down, her eyes were red, like she had been crying all day.

The pain in her expression was terrible. Had something bad happened to someone in the family? The last time I'd seen people this sad was when my grandfather, my mom's dad, had passed away. I kept looking around, my mind racing and my heart beating fast—the way it does when you feel like something really bad is going down.

I can't remember exactly what I said at that moment. I looked at Mom and started to shake my head. Maybe if I didn't believe it, maybe it wouldn't be real. She put her hands back over her face. The whole room was so quiet that I was sure everybody could hear me breathing. Finally, my mom looked at me and said, "I am so sorry, Isaiah." At that point, most of the room was in tears. I remember my little brother and sister, my coaches, pastors, and all of these people I loved were crying. I looked around, still shaking my head, but this was real.

Like I told you earlier, my vision has always been a big deal to me; my whole life I have worked hard to overcome so much and had taken pride in how well I see, but this news . . . this was something that I never saw coming. I knew exactly what my mom was saying.

I had tested positive for Marfan syndrome. It is a condition that I didn't fully understand at that moment, but

I knew what it meant for my dream. I leaned over and put my hands on my knees feeling like someone had knocked the breath right out of my chest.

It was the test the doctors made me take weeks ago at the NBA combine in Chicago. The NBA doctors had thought that my heart was enlarged, which wasn't unusual for someone as tall as me. They sent my blood work off for some evaluations and said I had a fifty-fifty chance of having a condition that could end my career. This news initially dropped me from the first-round projections. Still, I went through the draft tryouts and focused on my vision. I thought I had overcome it. I had been through similar tests as a kid and they had all come back okay. No one in my family has a history of Marfan syndrome, which is a genetic disorder. I had played basketball my whole life with no heart issues at all. In fact, I was in the best physical condition of my life. I was supposed to walk across the stage on draft night. I didn't even waste time or energy worrying about their test. I did what Joseph from the Bible would've done: I trusted God and kept my focus on the work in front of me.

I stood there for a moment in shock. This couldn't be true. I had left it in God's hands, which meant I had trusted that He would take care of me. I was sure it was God who had given me this dream when I was a kid. I kept my faith and worked through so much adversity to get to this moment. I was five days from that vision coming true. And now, in that moment, I felt hopeless. I remember looking over my shoulder toward the door because part of me wanted to run away. Like maybe if I could get away from the house, none of this would be true. I looked back and Coach Ray and the guys were blocking the door in a way that made it obvious they weren't going to let me get by them. I looked around the room and everybody seemed to be watching me to see what I would do next.

All of a sudden I couldn't get my breath. I leaned my head against the wall for a moment and then it really hit me. I felt every bit like somebody should feel when they dream, they work, they overcome, they stay focused on one goal their whole life, and in an instant, it all comes crashing down around them. Yet here I was, surrounded by the most important people in my life. These were the people who dreamed with me, taught me how to fight, to persevere, and to be a man. They were the people I would want by my side on draft night. That's where we were all supposed to be together—celebrating in New York on Thursday, hearing family and fans cheer me on as I stood on that stage after hearing my name called. But instead I found myself at the center of a stage I never wanted—with my loved ones staring at me as I heard the worst news of my life and began to feel my whole world crashing down on me.

And in that moment, before I knew what was happening, I just fell to the floor. It was as if everything went fuzzy for a couple of minutes. My friends on the Baylor football team talk about getting blindsided on the field with a tackle you never see coming, but the same thing can happen on the basketball court. Basketball is a really physical game. It moves so fast that there is an important rule out there when you are playing with your team, a trust you have to have in your teammates: if a player from the other team comes to hit you with a screen, one of your guys will talk to you and yell out a warning. Many times you are too busy guarding your man and taking care of your own business to see that big screen coming. You are completely dependent on the voices of your teammates to avoid a big hit. I've seen guys knocked out by a screen they didn't know was coming their way. It hasn't happened to me often, but I've been blindsided on the court a couple of times and it was never fun. That's the best way to describe how I felt at that moment in Aunt Evelyn's house. As if life had blindsided me—hard. I felt like no one had talked to me, no one had given me a warning. I stayed down on the floor with my head in my hands, and for the first time in my life, I really cried about losing my dream.

I began talking to God. Why had He brought me this far, only to be handed such a terrible diagnosis? I kept hearing my mom's words, "I am so sorry, Isaiah," run through my mind. I could hear my aunt crying. I think

people were getting up from around the living room. But I just couldn't see it. After fighting for a vision my entire life, I couldn't bear to look around.

I said earlier that life vision is about how well you can see your dreams. For twenty years, I had learned how to see the positive, to visualize my dreams coming true, even when circumstances had made those dreams harder to see. I had overcome so much to get to this point. I took a deep breath and covered my left eye, wiping away a tear. In my mind, I kept asking God, "After everything I've been through . . . why me?" I've heard people say that God won't give you anything you can't handle, but I am here to tell you, that just isn't true.

I had spent my whole life fighting to see, and now my dad reached down and grabbed me by my shoulders. This wasn't the first time I had been faced with unbelievable adversity. I thought of all I'd been through and what I'd learned as a child about achieving my dreams. As my dad helped me to my feet, I wondered how I could ever find another dream. Maybe I didn't even want to dream again. But deep inside, I knew that whatever happened next, it would start with the people in that room. It would begin with my family.

Users Review

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Reading a e-book can be one of a lot of exercise that everyone in the world adores. Do you like reading book thus. There are a lot of reasons why people enjoy it. First reading a publication will give you a lot of new facts. When you read a guide you will get new information simply because book is one of several ways to share the information or even their idea. Second, studying a book will make a person more imaginative. When you studying a book especially tale fantasy book the author will bring someone to imagine the story how the characters do it anything. Third, you are able to share your knowledge to some others. When you read this Dream Again: A Story of Faith, Courage, and the Tenacity to Overcome, you could tells your family, friends and also soon about yours publication. Your knowledge can inspire the others, make them reading a e-book.

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Playing with family in the park, coming to see the coastal world or hanging out with buddies is thing that usually you have done when you have spare time, then why you don't try issue that really opposite from that. Just one activity that make you not sensation tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you already been ride on and with addition of information. Even you love Dream Again: A Story of Faith, Courage, and the Tenacity to Overcome, you are able to enjoy both. It is fine combination right, you still desire to miss it? What kind of hang type is it? Oh seriously its mind hangout people. What? Still don't obtain it, oh come on its referred to as reading friends.

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