

DREAMING THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM

There is a place in the Christian community for the dreamer. The most exciting Christians are those who step out on the waters of faith.

Jamie Buckingham

AS LONG AS I can remember I have been challenged by people with purpose. Those who dream the impossible dream.

People like this may not always give the glory to God. Like the Seabees of World War II, they may just do it because the situations demand it.

I have never been threatened or disturbed by those who do great things without giving God the glory, for I happen to believe that all greatness, even human greatness, has its roots in Godlikeness.

God, himself, who is the greatest of all, instills within each man a little bit of himself—that “little flame” the Quakers talk about. If it is activated by Jesus Christ then God gets the glory for man’s daring. Otherwise, man gets the glory and receives his reward here on earth. But either way, the pioneering spirit—the spirit which drives men to attempt the impossible, to create, to achieve, to conquer the unconquerable—is still born from an inner drive which is placed there by God himself.

A man may give his life to build an institution—a hospital, a university, an institute of science or even a church building. If he is a creative person he may give his life to write a difficult musical score, paint a picture never before painted, or climb the unclimbable mountain—just because it is there. He may be a Christopher Columbus who dares sail the ocean, running

the risk that the world is flat and he’ll fall off. He may be a Sir Edward Hillary who climbs Mt. Everest, an astronaut who dreams of walking on the moon, Marie Curie (and her husband Pierre) in search of radium, a Robert Fulton who believes he can make a boat run by steam, or an Alexander Graham Bell willing to risk his reputation and savings on a dream that man’s voice can travel over a wire. Whoever he is, if he attempts the impossible, his basic inspiration comes from God.

Last year a friend of mine, Bob Burdick, a senior pilot with United Air Lines, took his vacation to fly a small, single-engine airplane across the Atlantic Ocean for the glory of God. The Wycliffe Bible Translators in Nepal needed the plane for their ministry. With his teen-age daughter as his only passenger, Bob flew across the stormy North Atlantic to France. There he picked up his wife and they flew over the Alps, across the deserts of the Middle East and up into the Himalayas to Nepal at the base of Mt. Everest — flying to the glory of God.

Dangerous? Sure! But there is something inside me that wants to do the same thing. To do something nobody else has ever done—to the glory of God. After all, what’s the use of living if you don’t attempt the impossible — even if it kills you.

God’s Greatness: Sidney Lanier, who made his home along the marshes of Glynn near Brunswick, Georgia,

caught this concept of matching the greatness of God when he wrote:

By so many roots as the marsh-grass
sends in the sod
I will heartily lay me a-hold on the
greatness of God;
Oh, like to the greatness of God is the
greatness within
The range of the marshes, the liberal
marshes of Glynn.

I believe every person is born with an inner desire to achieve, create, and leave behind something meaningful.

Several years ago I read of a man who had listed 100 things he wanted to do before he died. They were exciting things, daring things: scale the Matterhorn, write a book, go on a lion safari, sing in Carnegie Hall, paddle the length of the Amazon in a canoe, sign up as an Indian in a cowboy and Indian movie. He was 68 years old at the time and had done 92 of his 100 things. They were the things all of us dream of doing, but never attempt because they are “impossible.”

The late Dawson Trotman, founder of the Navigators, used to set up difficult but attainable goals for each new year. One year he learned to speak a foreign language. Another he learned to play the organ. He was able to do this the same way he memorized scripture—through discipline.

It seems that those of us in the Kingdom, more than any other people on earth, should be willing to discipline ourselves to achieve the impossible.

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We ought to be willing to dare, to pay the price, to put into action the dreams God has placed in our hearts.

The most exciting people I know are those who leave the comforts and security of home, who turn their backs on well-paying jobs and worldly fame to go to the remote areas of the earth as missionary doctors, pilots, translators and teachers. Many of them die on foreign soil, unrecognized by men. But the price of death is very small when compared to what they purchased—not only in satisfaction but in God's approval.

There is a place in the Christian community for the dreamer. Most of us dream dreams, however, then put them aside as impossible. God never puts a desire in our hearts, or beckons us to walk on water, unless he intends for us to step out on faith and at least make the attempt. Whether we achieve or not is almost immaterial—the passing of the test lies in whether we try.

I think of the people Jesus challenged

while he was here on earth. To a man who never walked Jesus said, "Rise, and walk." To a man who had never seen before Jesus said, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, and see." To men who had never done anything but pull fish nets out of the water, Jesus said, "Go ye into all the world." To all he said, "Put that dream into action."

Urgent or Important? A great friend of mine, Martin Sweets from Louisville, Kentucky, once told me the secret of how he had built his business into a multi-million dollar concern. He said he learned the difference between that which was urgent and that which was important.

One reason I seldom attain my goals is I am unable to give priority to the important things God has told me to do. I spend my time oiling the squeaky wheels of those urgent matters that keep my phone ringing and my desk cluttered.

Jesus knew how to distinguish between the urgent and the important.

When Mary and Martha sent an urgent message for him to come quickly, that their brother was dying, Jesus took his time. Rather than being motivated by human need and human compassion, he chose to follow the voice of God. Of course he was misunderstood, but he said over and over again, "I never do anything unless the Father tells me to do it."

Several years ago a reporter traveled halfway around the world to check on reports of miracles taking place in Indonesia. After arriving in the islands he heard of a minister who might have some first hand information. It took him all day to reach the minister's little cottage, high on the side of an almost inaccessible mountain. But when he finally arrived he was told by the minister's wife that Tuesday was the minister's day to pray. The distinguished guest would just have to come back tomorrow.

When I read that something inside me jumped up and shouted "Hallelu-

jah!" Here was a man who had learned to separate the important (talking with God) from the urgent (talking with a reporter). That's the way I want to be, also.

Instead, if the doorbell rings while I'm praying I don't even say, "Excuse me God." I jump to my feet and run to the door. After all, it might be an important visitor from Indonesia. I've been known to interrupt my family devotions to answer the phone. A long distance phone call can pull me away from a heart-to-heart talk with my teen-age daughter.

For this reason many of the important things in my ministry are pushed to the back of my life, covered over with ringing phones, buzzing doorbells and "urgent" requests from well-meaning friends. There they lie dormant. Like grizzly bears in hibernation, they fall asleep in the caves of my mind; dreams, given by God, which never come to life.

As a college student in Georgia, I

was challenged by a soft-spoken southern preacher who dared come down to Americus, Georgia, and start a farm where blacks and whites could live together in peace. This was 25 years ago and many southerners didn't understand him. They burned his buildings, dynamited his peanut barn. They even killed some of those living on Koinonia Farm, saying they were communists. But had Clarence Jordan invited me to follow him, I would have done it. Why? Because he was unlike anyone else I knew. He was not just talking about brotherhood, he was living it—even if it killed him. Men like that were rare in those times. Unfortunately, they are still hard to find.

Man of Purpose: Jesus was a man of purpose. He spoke to men and they followed him. The reason: they knew he knew where he was going. He had a goal. A purpose. Men will follow a man like that—even when he leads them to their death.

Today we dream our dreams, see our visions, and say, "Oh, that's wonderful. If only I could." But then, because they seem impossible, we put our dreams aside and justify our disobedience with lame excuses.

Sometimes I try to picture Moses out in the desert, arguing with that burning bush. "Bush, you don't know what you're talking about. I'm eighty. That's too old to start anything."

I remember how I argued with the Lord seven years ago when he asked me to leave the confines of my little parish ministry and become a professional writer. "Lord, I've never written anything before (except about seven thousand sermons). I can't do it." But since then there have been seventeen books and countless magazine and newspaper articles. With God nothing is impossible.

I tried to argue from the point I couldn't spell (just as Moses argued he stuttered). But God has sent a score

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of Aarons as editors who correct my spelling, and on occasion, even change my bad grammar before the copy makes it into print.

Ever so often we catch a glimpse of a man who knows where he is going—a man with purpose who dares invoke the authority of Jesus. In him we are able to see Eden afar off. Through the mists of sin and corruption we say, "That's the way God intends for all of us to be. To live above the fog of perversion and procrastination and achieve, create, conquer and do the impossible."

William Carey was such a man. A young shoe cobbler, he had a vision. He believed God wanted him to carry the Gospel to the heathen. The leaders of his church in England ridiculed him. Finally, with stern, theological authority they told him if God wanted the heathen saved, he'd do it sovereignly—without the help of a shoe cobbler.

But Carey was a man fashioned after the likeness of the apostles. He left England and sailed to India to become the first modern day Protestant missionary—daring to do the impossible. Even after all these years Carey's

motto still excites men who dream the impossible dream. "Attempt great things for God; expect great things from God."

The Christian takes his direction from a different king. He is not motivated by money, by public opinion, nor does he shrink just because his way is blocked by a mountain. He is like Thoreau's marcher, who hearing the sound of a different drummer, walks to it—even if all the world thinks he is out of step.

The Bible throbs with stories of men like that. They were overcomers. They were the ones of whom Jesus spoke saying, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His throne." (Rev. 3:21).

The Worst Heresy: The worst of all heresies is to despair of those childhood ideals, those dreams that stimulated us when our minds were still young and innocent. How many of us have reached the crisis of middle life and, disillusioned, put aside our dreams of youth.

"They are impossible," we say sadly. "Too foolish. Too ambitious. Too dangerous."

No wonder Whittier wrote: "Of all sad words of tongue or pen, The saddest are these, 'It might have been.'"

In the Buckingham home we are challenging our children to invest their futures in things that will cost them their lives—for the glory of God. We are challenging them to go out, and even at an early age, be willing to die for Jesus.

The world does not understand this. The world says parents should protect their children from death, not point them toward it. But we know there is no glory anywhere outside that which is done strictly for the glory of God. Abundant life comes only when we give our life totally and completely to that which God has called us to do.

As a young man Dwight L. Moody was challenged by someone who said, "The world has yet to see what God can do with one man who is totally committed to Him." Moody was an unlikely candidate. His English was atrocious. He had no formal education. But he had a dream—a vision. And he said, "I'll be that man." Twenty years later he stood with one foot in Chicago and another in London, rocking two continents with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He had learned to put aside all those urgent matters which pulled at his coattail, and do only the important things God had called him to do. He was an Overcomer.

In Van Dyke's "The Other Wise Man," Arteban was advised to go on the quest for the promised king. He was warned, however, that it would be a long hard pilgrimage and possibly prove to be an empty search. "But," he said, "it is better to follow even the shadow of the best than to remain content with the worst."

I wonder if there is anybody left, willing to dream the impossible dream.

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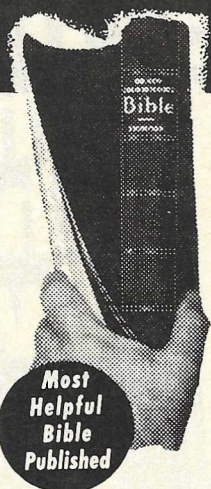
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