Our Joyful Dreams

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*Hope deferred makes the heart sick,*

*But when the desire comes, it is a tree of life.*

Proverbs 13:12 NKJV

As a child I read books about scientists who changed the world. Like Antonie van Leeuwenhoek, the Mayo brothers, Marie Curie and Oliver Sacks I wanted to find the cure for something when I grew up. I was inspired by Luis Pasteur finding a vaccination for anthrax and a way to make milk safe. By age 10, studying medicine seemed like the road to my dreams but it did not turn out that way. God gives children these dreams but we color in how dreams will be realized from whatever elements are available to our young imaginations.

My mother taught literacy in a remote village in the high Andes. One little boy she taught to read became an internationally known heart surgeon. We love stories like that because we all dream about making a difference. We all dream of making the world a better place, teaching the world to sing, or read or smile again. We all dream of a world where whatever matters most to us will grow and spread. Singers want to teach the world to sing and dancers want everyone to dance. No one becomes a leader, teacher or pastor without a dream for the world.

As we live with desires two problems will inevitably emerge. First, we will dream of how our desires will be fulfilled – a childhood fantasy that will not match reality and therefore never come true. Second, whatever is most important about us will always be the source of the deepest pain in our lives. When these two factors combine, our heart dream usually becomes the most painful and discouraging aspect of our lives. Here is where the trouble starts and we get discouraged, cynical or practical. Eventually we forget our dream because we get busy doing something practical and necessary. I am convinced that the major plan of intelligent evil in this world is to make the road to our dream painful so we will give up.

Some examples of how what matters most becomes our deepest pain are these: kind souls are most wounded by unkindness, lovers are wounded by rejection, surgeons trained to save lives watch patients die on the table, therapists face suicides and lawsuits from someone who did not pay for half of what he or she was given. In the process, our dreams become more realistic – or so we are prone to think. But the proverb is true, “hope deferred makes the heart sick.” None of us has completely escaped the illness.

The Psalmist says, “*Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart.”* Psalms 37:4 NKJV.

Let us look at my dream again. I was still dreaming of finding cures when, at age 19, I witnessed my first divine healing of trauma and switched my major from biology to psychology hoping to study what I had just witnessed. Soon after, Walter Trobish encouraged me to go to graduate school so I might work with him but he died while I was working on my Ph.D. By now all hope of finding cures to some disease were lost as I raised children, paid student loans and worked on my profession.

I grew to understand divine healing during my supervision with Jane Willard at Shepherd’s House. By now, my dream seemed silly and far away – lost when I had turned from my biology major and I created a career dream of helping missionaries with mental health issues. However my new and practical plan continued to fail year after year as no missionaries darkened my office door.

Finally, I gave away every book on missions that I owned to a colleague after a fire burned her entire library on missions. I gave up that missionary dream and set to work helping trauma victims as that was who was coming in my door. We had trauma from prisons, wars, terrorists, crimes, families, disasters, cults and governments. Three months later I noticed that three quarters of my appointments were with missionaries –all of them there for trauma recovery. I laughed and shook my head. It was obvious that trauma always blocked the maturity process and that when trauma was resolved people had some “making up” to do. Working at Shepherd’s House as part of the Life Model development team, I sequenced maturity tasks and development across the lifespan with particular attention to tasks and contributions by seniors. These elders comprised the 4th generation in the maturity matrix. In India they were called “parents to their community.” Sequencing maturity tasks helped us answer what was missing and what to do next for the best “yield” from our counseling methods. By finding elders and community resources we were also able to help people mature after healing.

The second step for the Life Model was to sequence the trauma resolution process with the cooperation of Dr. Karl Lehman. Sequencing trauma resolution with the order in which the brain processes experience increased the yield from counseling. The Immanuel process that came out of sequencing trauma resolution proved useful for guidance, community life, group ministry and many other applications besides healing. Although all the elements of the Immanuel process are found in other models for divine healing and therapy, sequencing saved effort, reduced pain and helped people be more rested and joyful in the healing process. Increased resilience allowed more healing in the same amount of time and more maturity to develop afterward.

I wanted to help people become resilient folk who were glad to be alive. After the violence I witnessed growing up as a missionary’s child in Colombia during “La Violencia,” I wanted to see men (in particular) become good for the women and children around them. I was far too familiar with how people could spread misery and fear. After realizing that trauma propagates without any further training while the best of current recovery methods do not propagate at all without extensive training and supervision, I realized we are facing a global societal illness that is contagious and deadly. There is no known solution that can keep up with the propagation rate for trauma. Somehow the spread of trauma reminded me of rabies. Think of where we would be if Luis Pasteur had not invented a rabies vaccine for our dogs? Until Luis Pasteur, this plague spread everywhere. Now we can safely love our dogs because one person found a solution and many people helped it spread. My childhood dream was beginning to re-awaken.

The genius work of Dr. Allan Schore introduced me to joy as the basis for growing a resilient brain and developing a great personal maturity. Joy created cozy belonging, friendships, endurance, improved health and creativity making us more effective at everything that mattered. The most dangerous people are those who have given up on joy. Low-joy environments breed problems: orphanages, prisons, disaster zones and high-crime areas.

Joy, like trauma, was something with the potential to spread. Joy created trauma resistance and aided recovery. Deep inside, we all want to spread joy. My joy is not just about me but includes my environment. From the ancient wisdom literature of the Bible to current brain science, relational joy brings out the best in us.

My dream was reawakened. It was the same dream I had as a child but the path I lived to find this “illness” was something I could never imagine. Sequencing how joyful relationship skills spread could produce something that spreads as readily as trauma. While therapists can teach relational skills as professionals, the yield is small considering the thousands of dollars and hours needed for one person to learn to be joyful from a highly trained professional. Perhaps if a self-propagating form of joy and healing could be developed and introduced as a normal part of the church we could combat global results of trauma.

I am not the only one with a dream. You also have a dream that may have languished for years or been buried by practical demands. Perhaps this story has served to awaken your dream as well. In the end, the spread of all good things comes from the fabric of the dreams God is growing in each one of us. All our dreams are ways of bringing God’s joy and shalom. Our dreams die without joy and spring back to life when joy returns.

The king shall have joy in Your strength, O LORD; And in Your salvation how greatly shall he rejoice! You have given him his heart’s desire, And have not withheld the request of his lips. Selah Psalms 21:1-2 NKJV

Find your dream again. Take off all the ways you imagined it would look and the roads you thought would take you there. We reach dreams our way by being strong but reach dreams God’s way by being weak. Perhaps we need a little healing for the pain that has been piled on our dreams and the hopelessness that inevitably follows. Take your dream back to God and see it again as God sees your dream today. Discover the dream alive in you.

Possible insert box

My dream

1. God gives us each a dream - all our dreams include spreading joy to others
2. We imagine how we can reach our dream but that road never works
3. We are profoundly hurt every time our dream is taken away, deferred or defaced
4. Evil seeks to make the path to our dream as painful as possible
5. We avoid pain by changing or hiding the dream God gave us
6. We find our dream again
7. We remove our means of reaching the dream
8. We see our dream again as God sees it today
9. We smile on each other’s dreams

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