

WHAT KEEPS YOU

Starting with *Cinderella* in 1950, and coming right up to the present with *Frozen*, the Walt Disney studios have spent considerable effort to convince us—at least temporarily—that if we believe enough in our dreams, they can come true. And it is a fact that the first step to make a dream come true is to have a dream in the first place.

Makes sense, right? Without dreams—aspirations, hopes, expectations—we would never know the joy that comes when a cherished desire is fulfilled. We would never experience the satisfaction of seeing a hard-fought goal become reality.

So why is it, then, that so many of us are afraid of our own hopes? In fact, many of us spend much of our lives actively avoiding our hopes, running in the opposite direction. ►

An excerpt from CCCA conference speaker Pete Wilson's book, *What Keeps You Up at Night?: How to find peace while chasing your dreams.*

UP AT NIGHT?

by Pete Wilson

WE'RE HARDWIRED TO DREAM—
BUT WHAT DO WE DO WITH THEM?



THE BIGGER THE DREAM, THE BIGGER THE FIGHT YOU'LL FACE.

I believe it's because we are afraid, pure and simple—afraid of disappointment, dashed hopes, broken hearts. I mean, if you never want anything, you can't be disappointed when you don't get it. If you don't have the desire or expectation of a richer, more fulfilled life, you don't have to worry about that ache in your soul that comes from being denied the desires of your heart.

The trouble is, each one of us is hardwired for dreaming. That's right; we were made to be dreamers! The writer of Ecclesiastes, in the Old Testament, explains it by saying God has "set eternity in the human heart" (Ecc. 3:11). In other words, we were created to yearn for something better, something more. We can't help ourselves; we have to dream. And that's where our fear problem comes in.

What is fear, really? Usually, when we talk about fear, we mean the unpleasant emotions that come with the feeling something or someone is a source of pain, danger, or an undesirable outcome.

Not all fear is bad. Our hunter-gatherer forebears learned quickly, for example, that when you see or hear a large predator, that voice in your head yelling, *Get away fast!* needs to be heeded. In that case, fear keeps you alive. It is a flashing light on the dashboard of life that says, "Pay attention, or you'll die!"

But for most of us nowadays, fear

has a different meaning. It typically has less to do with preservation of life and limb and more to do with a heightened sense of vulnerability and a diminished sense of power. And these fears are not imaginary! Fears of failure, fear of being alone, fear of disapproval, fear of poverty, fear of illness, fears for the well-being of the people we love—all these are very real, very present challenges that everyone faces. All of us struggle with fear—every single one of us.

But I'm here to tell you that fear shouldn't get the last word. Fear should not deter us in the pursuit of the lives God has for us, nor should it paralyze us. The fact is that you were meant for so much more, as Switchfoot tells us in their song "Meant to Live." The dreams in your heart are no accident; they were put there by God.

Your Dream and God's Plan

God has always used dreamers to do the really big stuff. Take Jacob, in the Old Testament, for example. God first revealed himself to Jacob in a dream of angels going up and down a ladder to heaven. And you have to understand that at that time, Jacob was on the run from his older brother, Esau, whom he had just swindled out of his rightful inheritance as oldest son. Things were pretty hot at home, so Jacob's mother had sent her favorite son to her brother's house in Harran until Esau's rage cooled down. The Bible records what Jacob thought about the dream:

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it." He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven..."

Then Jacob made a vow saying, "If

EXTRA INFO

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God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father's household, then the LORD will be my God and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth." (Genesis 28:16–22)

Indeed, God had big plans for Jacob, despite what his angry older brother thought. Jacob would go on to become the father of 12 sons—who would in turn become the patriarchs of the 12 tribes of Israel. And—spoiler alert—he and Esau were eventually reconciled.

For a New Testament example, take a look at the apostle Paul. Throughout his career as a missionary, Paul received guidance, warning, and encouragement from his dreams. On one occasion, he was even permitted a peek into heaven itself (2 Corinthians 12:2–4). And trust me, if anyone could have used a glance past the pearly gates, it would be Paul. After all, this is the same guy who was falsely accused, beaten, shipwrecked, whipped, imprisoned—even bitten by a snake!

No Bed of Roses

The point is, there is overwhelming evidence that pursuing a God-given dream—whatever the dream may be—is guaranteed to bring you up against opposition. That opposition can come from many sources: naysayers and critics, well-meaning friends and family members, negative circumstances, and, most of all, from the fear in your own mind.

When we start facing disappointments, setbacks, bad news or what have you, one of our first reactions is usually to say to ourselves something

like this: *Hey, I thought I was doing God's will! What's the deal with all these trials and tribulations? God, how about a little support here? Whaddya say?* Our confidence in pursuing our passion is all too often overwhelmed by a riptide of fear and doubt.

Let me share this truth with you: the bigger the dream, the bigger the fight you'll face. In fact, the people throughout history who have been the most directly in the center of God's will for their lives are the same people who have gone through the toughest trials.

Think about it: Joseph, Moses, the prophets, Peter and the apostles, and of course, the best example of all, Jesus Christ Himself. There is a very good reason why the Messiah is described as a "man of sorrows, acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3 KJV).

So, it seems we can safely conclude that if we are expecting the universe to lavish approval on us for following our dreams, we are destined to disillusionment. Chasing a dream is no job for an approval junkie. ●

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EXTRA INFO 3 QUESTIONS FOR DREAMERS

Use these reflection questions on your own or with your staff to help start discussions about their dreams and God's plans.

1. In your opinion, what is the biggest obstacle for most people in following their dreams?
2. Think about the last time you were really afraid. What can you remember about your thoughts, words and actions during that time?
3. Why do you think those with the biggest dreams typically encounter the harshest opposition?