

A Dream Realized



Gary Wilkerson January 21, 2019

Knowing God's Promises in Full

I know what it's like to believe the promises of God and not see them realized. I know the promise of unspeakable joy and also years of discouragement and even depression. I know what it's like to hear God's promise of an overcoming, victorious life and spend long seasons overwhelmed and defeated. I know the promise that we'll know his love—the height, depth and breadth of it—and yet not sense that love but instead feel driven to earn it.

In short, I've known the magnificent promises of God—promises of joy, power, victory, peace and abundant life—and yet I've been burdened with a sense that I'm not living them. I know I'm not alone in this. Over the years, scores of people I've met or pastored wondered aloud to me: "Why aren't God's promises a reality in my life?"

If you're a follower of Jesus, you see every promise of God as a goal to be attained. You want everything he has for your life, for your loved ones, and for a hurting world desperate to know his reality. His promises fuel your life-dreams: dreams of a blessed family life, of serving Jesus in community, of seeing his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Yet the question for most of us is, what happens when those dreams don't come to pass?

The writer of Proverbs tells us, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick" (*Proverbs 13:12, NLT*).

Sometimes it seems like what we're experiencing isn't promises but problems. Disappointments, shattered hopes, broken dreams—we've all had godly aspirations that never became reality. And over time, that affects us deeply. As the writer of Proverbs says, it can make our hearts sick. We stop aspiring, stop dreaming, and lose something precious that God has meant for us.

That's why it's important to read the second half of this same proverb: "...but a dream fulfilled is a tree of life" (13:12). What a magnificent truth. This image immediately takes me to Genesis and a divinely watered tree in the Garden of Eden. I see a tower of green, bearing luscious fruit and sustaining life for all who partake of it. It's a metaphor for what Jesus did for us on the cross, and the promise of abundant life it accomplished for us all.

When I was 17 years old, I was walking through the woods on a moonlit night in East Texas when I saw a beautiful young woman my age. She was a dream to me from the moment I laid eyes on her. I know that if I had asked her out and she'd turned me down, my heart would have been sick. But thankfully she said yes. Forty years later, my dream has been fully realized in my wife, Kelly, and in the children and grandchildren who comprise the beautiful branches on our family tree.

So, how are our God-given dreams realized? Do they float down to us from heaven? Do they suddenly appear before us on a moonlit night? Or is it a process? Is there something God asks of us that will lead to our initial dream being realized?

As I look back, the answer is easy to see. The fulfillment of a precious dream—like any marriage or family—takes

faith *and* work. My dream life with Kelly could have soured or broken down many times over four decades if we hadn't been willing to trust, love sacrificially and persevere with faith through hard times and trials. The writer of Proverbs implies this when he warns, "It is pleasant to see dreams come true, but fools refuse to turn from evil to attain them" (13:19).

The problem isn't that God's promises are faulty. It's that many of us aren't willing to do what's necessary to see them fulfilled. So I have to ask you: Do you turn off the things that block you from receiving God's abundant life?

Over four decades of ministry, I've identified some of the blocks that keep Christians from attaining abundant life.

One significant problem for a lot of Jesus followers is the huge gulf that exists between their expectations and their realities. Their expectations for life in God are massive. Yet they keep their aspirations low, and that determines their realities. One reason for this is they see their God-given dreams as self-serving. I've counseled a lot of people who tell me, "I don't want much." They get exactly what they want, and yet they're surprised their lives are lacking.

William Carey, the great missionary to India, saw God accomplish what many thought impossible. One of his sayings became famous down through generations: "Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God."

Some Christians live this way, but their experiences are like a roller coaster. They see victories, and that fuels their faith. But then they see a string of defeats. The cycle repeats itself, and they can't take the up-and-down experiences. They begin to wonder, "If my faith is real, then why does it seem nonexistent half the time?" At some point their hearts grow sick, and they stop pursuing God's promises.

Maybe you doubt your dream. You wonder whether it's from God or just something fanciful. You can know by asking three questions: (1) Does it excite you? Do you wake up thinking about it? Do you come alive when you think of taking steps toward your dream? (2) Does it look and feel like you? Does it fit the gifts God has given you? (3) If you fail at it, would you get up to try it again? Does it make you want to be more focused and disciplined?

You know it's a God-given desire if you desire it most. But if your dream isn't from God, it will fade. If it's from him, it's going to stir you and keep stirring you till you do something about it. He has given you a certain, specific DNA that's just right for you. You can trust that his guidance—and your focused discipline—will help you step into the destiny he has planned for you.

I've seen some common blocks trip up the most sincere followers of Jesus:

Hurt. People step out in faith to pursue a God-given desire, and they're devastated when it doesn't come to pass. It may be a dating relationship. It may be a bad experience with the church. Their emotions are damaged deeply, and they can't seem to get past it.

Fear. Some people are afraid to fail, so they never step out at all. Maybe they've failed before in a big public way, and the shame of that is too much to overcome.

Entitlement. The current youth generation has been given so much that they haven't had to work for much. Why would they aspire to something if their parents are willing to give it to them? That kind of setup is a passion-killer. It derails a young person's focus and self-discipline, and sets them up for disappointment and failure.

So, what do you do when you're called by God to pursue his highest destiny for you—and you fall on your face? You get back up! If you think you're entitled to have God do the work for you, you won't develop the inner resources to persevere. I have a message for all such young people: Not everything you do will be brilliant, and that is by God's design.

Most of all, don't fear your desires. God has a destiny meant for you and you alone. But you have to pursue it to find it. "Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you" (*Matthew 7:7*).

God has instructions for all who would find abundant life in him.

God's Word makes clear that *discipline* has to accompany faith. "Take a lesson from the ants, you lazybones. Learn from their ways and become wise! Though they have no prince or governor or ruler to make them work, they labor hard all summer, gathering food for the winter. But you, lazybones, how long will you sleep? When will you wake up? A little extra sleep, a little more slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—then poverty will pounce on you like a bandit; scarcity will attack you like an armed robber" (*Proverbs 6:6-11*). The picture here isn't great for the lazy. But for the disciplined, there is no scarcity of God's kingdom resources.

In addition to discipline is *wisdom*. You've probably heard the expression, "Don't just work hard; work smart." If God has called you to be a plumber, you have to want to do it well. Your success could lead you to hire others, to start franchises, and to expand in fruitful ways. I know of a heroin addict who got free of his addiction and started a barbershop. He began hiring other ex-addicts to work for him, and now he owns four barbershops. All of those shops provide employment for men and women who are being restored holistically to the abundant life God has for them.

God has instructions for each of us to find the life he has designed for us. Follow those and you'll enter the destiny he has for you. You'll no longer lead the life you don't want, and you'll find the life God has for you. Abundant life doesn't fade; it will be there to wake you each morning to a hopeful joy. And you'll spend your day loving others toward their destiny. That itself is a dream realized! Amen.

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