

### Childhood Dreams

Christmastime becomes more precious every year. One aspect I like about this time of the year is that I revert back to childhood in much of my thinking and for those who know me, that journey is not too distant. If we may reminisce on childhood thinking, I invite you to return with me to childhood fantasies. Much of my childhood make-believe games revolved around war. I enjoyed playing Civil War, World War II and Cowboys and Indians. My favorite play days were when the entire community of boys would divide up on two sides and play the better part of the day in combat. My favorite personal play time was when I would line up my toy soldiers and engage them in all manner of combat. One of my battles would be two sides neatly arranged and hidden in my sculptured hills and trenches of my backyard and launching rocks like gigantic bombs (at least to my toy soldiers) with a whining, then a kaboom sound upon impact with dirt and soldiers flying in every direction. By the way, the side I determined to win always won. If you are curious, it was always the good guys who won.

I have enjoyed hearing my wife talk with remembered equal enjoyment of her doll playing. I like hearing her talk about her paper dolls and arranging different outfits for them to wear for different occasions. I liked best hearing her tell about the imaginary life of her dolls and how that when she grew up and met me, I was a fulfillment of her every fantasy (I made that part up, but I thought it sounded good). She did, in fact, enjoy her doll playing. It made her happy and what I played made me happy. Isn't that why we played what we played? Isn't the psychology of play that, as children, we fantasize ourselves in certain settings, events and personality interactions with an eventual happy ending? Although the weapons, dolls, toy soldiers, houses, tanks and cars that we imagine are only imaginary, we intend one day to surround ourselves with events not unlike our play-worlds. As we grow up with required work and education, our level of happiness is often determined by an anticipation of a future that includes all our imaginations becoming real. No matter how many chores, homework assignments and parentally enforced disciplines, we relish that thought that one day we'll be living our dream.

For many adults, much of the way we live our lives resembles nothing of what we imagined it would be like. This is perhaps why we get into Christmas celebration so heartily -- because it takes us back. Where does it take us to? To use the words of one writer, it takes us back to a "metaphysical second chance." A. O. Scott defines this kind of story as the kind "...in which the laws of time and space are bent to give characters access to self-knowledge unavailable in ordinary circumstances." Metaphysical second chance stories surround us during this time of the year such as "A Christmas Carol" and "It's a Wonderful Life." Recently I heard the words of a Christmas song that stated, "All I want for

Christmas is you.” I did not hear the whole song, but from what little I heard, it sounded like this young lady was wistfully longing for a relationship that had been terminated, but she wanted restored. One reason “after Christmas” is such a let down for many people is because the thoughts that took us back to our dreams only allowed us to wake up to the nightmare of our reality. To borrow the lines of Ebenezer Scrooge’s nephew after suffering a barrage of “Bah Humbugs and Good afternoons,” “I am sorry, with all my heart, to find you so resolute. We have never had any quarrel to which I have been a party. But I have made the trial in homage to Christmas, and I’ll keep my Christmas humour to the last. So a Merry Christmas, uncle!” My question to you is, how do we maintain the Christmas joy and live overcoming all humbugs?

### **1. If you live in obedience to God, you are living God’s fantasy for you.**

This may sound funny to you, but one of the earliest thoughts that came to my mind as an older teen who was about to surrender to the ministry was, “Well, I’ll not be going to West Point and I’m not going to be a soldier.” I was quite aware that I was saying good-bye to my childhood fantasies in this genre. Now after forty-two years of ministry, I have no regrets at all. I accepted in my youth that this was God’s plan for my life. I was aware if I decided for a military career after God had revealed to me so plainly that He wanted me to preach, I was doomed to be unhappy. I agree with the words of George W. Truett who said, “Success, what is success? Success is finding the will of God for your life and doing it.”

Another aspect of childhood dreams are that they are often God’s way of prepping you for the future that He has planned for you. You see, I see myself as a soldier in God’s army and my competitive spirit expressed in my youthful gaming is lived out in a real spiritual warfare that I have and still am presently engaged in. So, I say, those dreams of youth are not wasted: *“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand”* (Ephesians 6: 10-13). By the way, I am even more filled with joy because in this warfare the good guys will definitely win in the end!

### **2. If you are not sure you are operating in God’s plan, ask God to reveal His plan aright.**

I know someone may be reading this today who would say, “Pastor, that is fine for you, but here I am 25, 35, 40 years of age and I am not sure I am in the center of God’s will.” Please know that is not God’s fault. His word says, *“Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart”*

(Psalm 37:4). The key here is in delighting yourself in the Lord and if we do that, then He gives to us the deepest longings of our hearts.

If you are frustrated and may be saying in your heart, but I am delighting myself in God, therefore, why don't I know if I am doing what God wants me to do? I suggest to you it may be one of two things. 1) You may be doing what God wants you to do, but you have intercepted a fiery dart, a mental missile of discontent launched from Satan. This is why God says, *"Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee"* (Hebrews 13:5). 2) There may be a change God wants you to make and it is His way of getting you there. I remember the conversations that Pastor Dennis had with me on more than one occasion. We talked about his desire to go from the youth pastorate into assistant pastorate, but we eventually began to talk more seriously about the senior pastorate. I believe our former staff member now is most happy in the senior pastorate, because this is where God ultimately wanted him to be, but the path was the youth pastorate, the assistant pastorate and finally senior pastorate, My father used to describe God's way of dealings with us is often, "a push from behind combined with a pull from before you." *"And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left."* (Isaiah 30:21). If you ask, God promises to answer, so, just ask Him what He wants you to do. If He reveals it is something other than what you are doing, ask Him to open the door for you. Our Lord said, *"I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it..."* (Revelation 3:8). If, on the other hand, you are where He wants you, ask Him to help you be content. *"Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content"* (Philippians 4:11).

-Pastor Pope-

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