

September 24, 2006  
 The Pain of Shattered Dreams and the Quest for Hope  
 Psalm 43:1-5 / Habakkuk 3:16-19 / Job 16:22-17:16

I hope you noticed, as I read the passage, that there has been a change in Job's outlook. At the very beginning Job (and everyone else) appeared to believe Job had a terminal illness and would die very soon—a few more days, or a few more weeks at best.

Then as time goes by, and Job doesn't die, he and his friends realize he's not in any immediate danger of dying, though they still seem to cling to the idea that his illness is still terminal and he won't last too much longer—a few months, or maybe a year (Chapter 10:20-21).

But today, for whatever reason, Job seems to have come to the conclusion that he's going to be around for at least *"a few more years"* (16:22). Not a long time, mind you, but at least "a few years" (2, maybe 3 or 4).

Now combine that what he says in verse 11, where we read: *"My days have passed, my plans are shattered, and so are the desires of my heart,"* and we find the plight of Job in this passage. He feels he has a little time left, but not enough time to complete the plans he had for his life, or see the dreams and desires of his heart come true.

And in that sense ALL OF US CAN RELATE TO JOB'S PLIGHT TODAY! In fact, Job has touched on one of the strongest driving forces in the life of any person— that of having plans and dreams and aspirations we want to see come true before we die! Most people I talk to don't really care whether they live a long, long time. They just want to live long enough to make some significant contribution. Long enough to accomplish some worthy goal in life. Long enough to leave behind some virtuous legacy before they go. Long enough to accomplish something that makes a difference in the world for the better.

And if they feel they have, they can often face death fearlessly, feeling they have done what God put them on this earth to do! But if like Job, they feel they haven't accomplished those things, and don't have enough time left to do so, it can create a grief or despair, or sense of regret that's hard to deal with.

Because the pain of living with shattered dreams and unfulfilled desires, with no time to change them or complete them, can make us feel we failed in life — failed God; our parents or families, our community or ourselves. And that is hard to take. That's why Job is struggling so hard in today's passage.

What were his shattered dreams? We can't know for sure. But if we've understood Job at all, we can see that at least one of his desires was to leave behind a godly heritage — earnest, devout, godly, believing children who would pass the faith on to their children, and their children's children for generations to come.

But they've all died, and because of his illness his wife finds him repulsive (19:17), and with only a few years left, he wouldn't have the time to raise them up in the Lord anyway — not before he passed on. If he died when they were 2-3 years old, he'd be lucky if they even remembered him — and it crushes his heart.

And I'm sure there were other plans, and other dreams and aspirations Job had that couldn't be accomplished in a few short years. Making Job feel that he might go to the grave NOT having accomplished what he was placed on this earth by God to accomplish.

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How about you? What are the dreams, and desires, and aspirations that you want to accomplish before you die?

*What LIFE-GOAL are you shooting at? What's the DREAM, that if accomplished would make you feel that all your hard work and sacrifices had been worth it — but if it went unachieved, or was never accomplished, would fill you with regrets, and make it seem like you had failed in life?*

*WHAT IS IT FOR YOU? And where are you on the time line? Everyone has a dream they pursue, or plans and aspirations they want to see become a reality. What are yours? Do you even know? Or are you still searching?*

*Are you in the planning phase? Or carrying out the implementation phase? Maybe the regrouping or re-envisioning phase? Or maybe your in the "I've already accomplished all of them, and because of it God could take me any time now phase!"*

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You see, Job knew exactly what his dreams, desires and aspirations in life were. That's the only way he could have said they were shattered! And they must have been VERY SPECIFIC, WELL-DEFINED, BIG dreams because even with a few years left he felt he didn't have enough time to pursue and accomplish them.

Verse 11: *"My days have passed,"* he says. (And in light of verse 22 of chapter 6, he appears to mean, *"With only a few years left I don't have enough time to see the desires of my heart come true."*) *"My plans are shattered, and so are the desires of my heart."*

**So I ask YOU:** Where are you in relation to the plans and desires of your heart? Still young and healthy and thus unconcerned, because you seemingly have your whole life still ahead of you?  
(I remember those days!)

Or maybe you're a little older. Married, with kids. Maybe you're like Randy who just turned 32 this week, or maybe you just passed 40, or worse yet, you only have 5 weeks until your 50! And thus you realize that instead of having 45 or 50 years to accomplish your dreams (like you did when you were 20), you now only have 15 or 20, or 25 years at best—with the clock ticking down as each year passes.

In fact, that's what they say the "MID-LIFE CRISIS" is: It's the very real experience of hitting 40, or 45 years old and suddenly realizing you haven't accomplished the things they had planned to accomplish by that time in your life. You not where you hoped to be, nor doing the things you hoped you'd be doing.

It's hearing all this talk about having to "prepare for retirement," enhanced by investors telling you, "It's just around the corner, you know."

It's realizing you're losing your sex appeal, because no one gives you a second glance anymore when you walk by! It's seeing commercials with people your age taking Viagra! It's having kids in college and realizing that when you were in college, your parents seemed SOOOO old!

It's standing in front of the bathroom mirror and seeing little tints of grey starting to pervade your head of hair — that is, the one's that haven't thinned out yet! It's being 48 or 49 years old, going to the mailbox, and finding your application to join the AARP! Or going to a movie and being asked if you want the "Senior Discount!"

Yes, it's finding yourself forgetting what you were going to say, or going to your favorite dimly lit restaurant and realizing you have to hold the menu half way across the table in order to read it! It's realizing you can no longer put off that appointment with Dr. Paul any longer — you just plain need that pair of glasses!

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**And you begin to think:** Where has life gone? This isn't where I'd hoped to be by this time in my life. I haven't accomplished what I thought I'd accomplish by now — and time is running out! It's passing the half way mark and realizing you're not getting any younger—in fact, the time you have LEFT is less than the time you've ALREADY HAD. And with some people, that can be pretty scary — especially if you're like Job and you realize you haven't accomplished your life goals, and now it seems there may not be enough time to do so!

In fact, to some men (and women) that realization is so traumatic that they actually revert back to their youth. I knew one 40+ year old man who divorced his wife of 20 years, bought a little sports car, went to bars, and ended up marrying a young — I believe it was 19 year old girl — the same age as his son, and younger than his oldest daughter. It was pretty sad, but it's not an uncommon response for people going through "mid-life crisis."

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You see, my friends, the goals and dreams and aspirations you hold dear to your heart are no small thing. Some are worthy, and some are not so worthy, but everyone has at least one, and regardless of what it is, the influence it exerts in your life is extremely powerful. In fact, when we lose sight of them, or give up on them, we can even lose the desire to go on. *"After all,"* we say, *"what's the purpose of living if we have no dreams—no purpose for living—nothing to set our sights on that gives us a reason to go on!"*

And that's what I want to speak about today. The desires of your heart, and the hope that comes from having them, pursuing them, and knowing we have enough time to accomplish them.

Because, you see, Job's despair comes from feeling that he'll never see them come true — at least not in the time he thinks he has left. Which is why he can say in verse 15: *"Where, then, is my hope?"* If all I have to look forward to is the grave (v. 13), where is my hope? I want to accomplish something! I want to make my life count for something! I want to see my hearts desires come true!

Which is why he can say in verse 15b: *"Who can see any hope for me?"* Somebody please give me some hope! And I believe he means, "Hope that my days have not passed, that my plans are not shattered, and that I will have the time to see the desires of my heart come true."

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So what can we learn from the text in this regard?

**FIRST**, we can learn that Old Testament saints understood death as an intrusion on life, and not as the wonderful culmination of life. They did not see death as a transition to a better place, but rather, they saw death as the unfortunate consequences of, or punishment for, sin. Had it not been for sin, death would not cut short the coveted divine gift of life!

As Mike Mason points out, for Job and the other Old Testament saints, *"Being a man of deep faith did not protect Job from maintaining a proper fear and loathing of the grave. The fact was, he had no peace about death, for he did not see it as something natural, but as wildly unnatural.... He held to the very curious Old*

*Testament notion (curious, that is, from a post-Easter perspective) that this present life was, for all practical purposes, all there was. An 'other world' existed, to be sure, but only the way shadows exist (vv. 12-14), bearing no comparison with the richness of this present reality."*

Even despite Paul's statement in Philippians 1:21, that *"To live is Christ, and to die is gain,"* it's not death Paul looks forward to (as if death is somehow a good thing), but rather, what he cherishes is the thought of being with Christ — whether it be in life or death!

Death, says Paul in I Corinthians 15:25-26, is an ENEMY to be destroyed, not a friend to be embraced! It's not a glorious thing, it's an unfortunate thing —something God will ultimately destroy!

*"Christ must reign," says Paul, "until he has put all his ENEMIES under his feet. The last ENEMY to be destroyed is death."*

That's what death is—the ultimate enemy of Christ! The last enemy He will destroy at His return, after He has put all his other enemies under His feet!

Which means that Job's desire to go on living, and accomplish the desires of his heart is NOT an unspiritual aspiration! It's NOT an indication that he's "worldly," or that if he were "really spiritual" he would not only stop loathing the grave, but yearn to die and gladly welcome death!! Not at all!

Job understands that the gift is LIFE, and that death, which cuts life short, is an unwelcome, unwanted, ungodly intruder — an enemy that often shatters dreams, and leaves the desires of the heart unfulfilled.

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Which brings us to our **SECOND** point which I believe we can discern from this text. That although wanting to live long enough to fulfill our dreams and aspirations may seem "unspiritual" to some, I believe there is a sense in which it can be seen as the righteous and godly desire to carry out and fulfill the desires God has placed in your heart by His Spirit.

Listen once again to what Mike Mason says in this regard:

*Though Job's "friends assume that he is only indulging in a bit of wishful thinking...in a righteous person wishful thinking is serious business, and because Job really is a righteous man and is therefore in tune with God's deepest thoughts, his wishes will turn*

*out to be the Lord's commands. "Ask," Jesus promised, "and it will be given to you." WHY? Because the profoundest desires, wishes, dreams and hopes of a child of God turn out to be the very stuff of the Lord's own will. If He promises to "give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4), it is because He is the one who planted those desires in the first place. Wishing may seem to be the province of magic and fairy tales, and hence dangerous ground for the Christian. But really the opposite is true: in a real believer wishing is the very essence of childlike faith."*

You see, so often people (I believe) read Psalm 37:4 wrong! They read it to mean that "If they delight in the Lord He will give them what they want," when in reality, what I believe it means is something far more spiritually significant and wonderful! Because I believe what it means is that "If we delight in the Lord, we can trust and believe, that the desires we have in our hearts were put there by Him! And thus, when we pursue them we can have the confidence that comes from trusting that we are not merely trying to get God to put the rubber stamp on our will, but are actually being prompted by His Spirit to pursue His will for our lives!"

Now, of course, that's not true of sinful desires — which the Psalmist didn't even need to mention, since he clearly said, *"Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart."* And a person who delights in the Lord knows where sinful desires come from — either himself or Satan—because God will not give us the desire to sin!

What joy and rest of soul it brings to know God promises to place HIS desires in OUR hearts! What confidence and faith come from it. What a death knell to the anxiety, and worry, and fear, and that bound up feeling in the pit of your stomachs that comes from being afraid you may simply be pursuing your will instead of God's.

In fact, as we know from reading ahead in the Book of Job, his plans and the desires of his heart have NOT been shattered at all, but will come true twofold! His days have not passed, but rather the days to come will be richer than anything he's experienced so far! Or in other words, he will be given enough days to ensure that all the desires of his heart come true.

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Which leads me to say this: "Until you have accomplished the purpose for which God placed you on this earth, you are essentially immortal."

I once heard a preacher say that, and at first I recoiled because it sounded so arrogant! But then as I studied the life of Job, and Psalm 139:16 where David says, *"All the days ordained for me were written in His book before one of them ever came to be,"* it seems he was right after all!

Neither Satan, nor people, nor providential circumstances (which God, of course, controls!) — not terrorists nor ANYONE nor ANYTHING else in all creation, can snuff out your life until the days ordained for you by God are up! Not even you! I've known people who tried to commit suicide and God foiled their plans because the work He had for them to do hadn't yet been accomplished!

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Which brings me to my **LAST** point. That shattered dreams often lead to better dreams! We don't know exactly what the plans and desires of Job's heart were. But we can know this — the plans he did carry out after his trial ended were probably better and more glorious than the ones he initially had!

I forget who it was that once said (part of that growing old thing!): *"That when God closes a door, it's usually because He has opened a window."* Or if I can put it in other words, "The roadblocks we often encounter in life are not necessarily God's way of saying no, but God's way of saying *"I've got something better for you."*

Sometimes we are heading in the right direction, but we're on the wrong road! Or sometimes we were on the right road, but there's a turn ahead that we need to take and we're going so fast that if we're not slowed down by some obstacle in our way we'll miss it. Thus our sovereign God interrupts our plans so that we can refocus, and regroup, and possibly get our priorities back in order. We're often like a car. After a while the wheels get out of alignment and we need to stop and put the car into the shop and get things straightened out, lest we have an accident.

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Carole Mayhall, in her book "Help Lord My Whole Life Hurts," wrote that through a trial that stopped her in her tracks she learned this very important and life-changing lesson:

*"Until this time in my life" she says, "I had been coming to God for some thing – for His peace, His love, His power, His gifts. But now I saw that He was wanting a more mature relationship with me. Now He was asking me to come to Him for Himself. He wanted me to come to Him because I loved HIM, and wanted HIM, and wanted to be with HIM, and not just because I wanted some "thing" from Him."*

Dr. Larry Crabb puts it this way:

*"Only a few in any generation believe that the weight of knowing God is a blessing heavier (and by that I mean more wonderful) than every other. And those who believe it appear to have developed that conviction only through suffering. Happiness must be stripped away forcibly before joy can surface, before we will value and pursue*

*dreams whose fulfillment produces true joy. It's a great tragedy when Christian people make it through life without ever discovering that their happiness is no different from the happiness of circumstantially well-off pagans. I fear that millions of Christians have never made that discovery and therefore blissfully continue to drink watery grape juice when fine wine is available."*

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You see, suffering, or trials, or roadblocks along the way, are not necessarily God SHATTERING our dreams and plans (as Job thought). But rather, they can be, and often are, God preparing him to receive BETTER dreams and plans.

They are often God helping us REFOCUS our dreams and plans, so that we can become one of those "few in any generation," who like the Apostle Paul, come to realize through those roadblocks and suffering "that knowing God is a blessing more wonderful than any other."

I don't know where any of you are in the process of pursuing your dreams—in the dreaming stage of youthfulness / the doing stage of adulthood / the mid-life crisis stage of the 40's where your making some adjustments or the last few years of life where you want to make everything you do count because you don't have much time left.

But to each of you I say: ***Don't lose sight of your hope. Don't give up on your dream! And don't be like Job's friends who quench his hope, but friends who do what Job pleads for and give others hope!***

For chances are, if you have made God your delight, it is God Himself who put those desires in your heart. And therefore to pursue them is to pursue His will for your life.