

Unfulfilled Dreams • Isaiah 40:28-31

Roald Amundsen was a Norwegian explorer who dreamed of becoming the first person in recorded history to reach the North Pole. In 1908 he received government and private funding, gathered supplies and hired a crew. Then he received news that an American had reached the North Pole and his dream was shattered.

Amundsen did not cancel his planned expedition but secretly planned a different destination. He didn't even tell his ship's crew until after they left Norway that they were headed not to the Arctic but to Antarctica. Amundsen was going to the South Pole.

Antarctic is among the most dangerous and extreme climates and terrain on earth. Their ship reached the seventh continent in 1911. Amundsen carefully prepared, setting out across the ice with four men, 42 dogs and four sledges in October 1911. It turned out to be a race. The English explorer Robert Falcon Scott was headed for the South Pole from a different direction. The winner would go down in history as one of the greatest explorers and pioneers of all time.

In December 1911 Amundsen's party was closing in on the exact location. His men told him to go first. Roald Amundsen reached the spot and planted the Norwegian flag in the name of their king. At that historic moment Amundsen's men told him to make a speech. Roald Amundsen then said, "I wanted to go to the North Pole." He had a dream but his dream was unfulfilled. Even though he accomplished one of the greatest feats of human endeavor all he could think about was the dream that hadn't come true.

Few of us ever yearned to reach the North Pole, but we are all dreamers. We imagined the way we wanted life to be. We pictured ourselves as successful, healthy and happy. We wanted to be married, rich, thin, tall, pretty, famous or powerful. Our dreams included winning a varsity let-

ter or a gold medal. We wanted a house, a baby, a business or a farm. We expected our children to pick up where we left off and be better than we ever became. We thought we could rewrite the script of life and live happily ever after.

Yes, we have all dreamed, but some of those dreams didn't come true. The marriage didn't happen. The child wasn't born. The team didn't win. The happiness didn't come. The pain never went away. We feel cheated. Perhaps we are deeply disappointed. Maybe even angry and bitter! It is as if we are living somebody else's life, trapped in a biography that is more of a nightmare than a dream.

At first we think that our unfulfilled dream is merely a temporary setback on the way to something even better. But then it doesn't get better. It gets worse. We begin to wonder if there is any point in dreaming again. What is the point of anticipating tomorrow when we can't even deal with yesterday?

We are not talking about the kind of dreams that show on the screens of our minds when we are sleeping at night. Sleep dreams have been thoroughly researched.

They typically rehearse and rewrite what we did and thought about during the day before we fell asleep. To be sure, they are psychologically and physically important. But sleep dreams are primarily about the past.

What we are talking about are wide-awake dreams. These are the dreams of hope and a future. They look at life and imagine the way we want it to be. We observe all the possible options and choose the ones we like best.

Dreams are important. They give us hope. Dreams show us the way. Dreams help us to anticipate the way we want things to become. They are our way of visualizing ourselves in a preferred tomorrow.

If we could not dream we would be trapped in yesterday and today. There would be no faith,

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for faith is always about the future.

The Bible is a catalog of dreamers. God dreamed of a Garden of Eden. Eve and Adam dreamed of eating fruit that would make them better than God. Noah dreamed of an ark. Moses dreamed of his people set free from slavery. Hannah dreamed of becoming pregnant. David dreamed of a temple in Jerusalem. Hosea dreamed of getting his wife back from prostitution. Mrs. Zebedee dreamed of her sons, James and John, sitting on either side of Jesus in heaven. Jesus dreamed that someday God's will would be done on earth as it is done in heaven.

One of the Bible's dreamers was a Hebrew woman named Naomi. She was a good and godly person who lived in Bethlehem over 3000 years ago. Her dream was to be a wife and a mother; to live a happy domestic life at home. Then came bad economy, unemployment and famine. Her husband Elimelech told her that they had to move—to Moab. Moab was a different country with different customs and language. It was not where she dreamed to be.

Naomi bore two sons and named them Mahlon and Kilion. Her dream of motherhood came true. She loved her boys and was deeply proud of them.

Then one awful day her husband died and part of her dream died with him. All her dreams focused on her sons. She dreamed that they would marry godly Jewish women and give her grandchildren that would fill the hollow place in her life.

Mahlon and Kilion came home with Moabite girls and wanted to marry them. It was against all she believed. The Old Testament forbade marriage to unbelievers. But her sons married them anyway and it broke Naomi's heart.

Thinking she had suffered the worst and that there were no more dreams left to shatter Naomi was blasted with the double barrels of her two beloved sons dying. There are no pains like losing your children. When a husband or wife dies you are called a widow or widower. When your parents die you are called an orphan. But when your child dies there is no word to describe who you are. It is the shattering of dreams too painful

to have its own word.

Naomi changed her name. Naomi means "my delight" but there was no delight left in her life. She called herself Mara, which means "bitter". Unfulfilled dreams had turned her into a bitter woman.

When our dreams are unfulfilled we can't help but wonder why. Sometimes the answer is not hard to find—just difficult to hear. Some dreams are unfulfilled because they never should have been dreamed at all. We assume a right of entitlement to have whatever we want. If we want it, we assume God is obligated to give it. If we dream, we assume it will automatically happen. Since childhood we have been told, "You can do anything!" This is simply not true. I do not have what it takes to be an amateur musician or a professional athlete. When unrealistic and inappropriate dreams are unfulfilled it is not that we have been cheated or deceived, we merely dreamed the wrong dream.

Some dreams are unfulfilled because they would have been bad for us. It is the love of God that keeps us from some of our dreams. We would have ruined our lives and the lives of others if everything happened according to our plan. God protected us from ourselves.

Some dreams are fulfilled but feel unfulfilling. We dreamed that we would be happy if only we got what we wanted but then found that what we dreamed for didn't actually work. The American standard of living has significantly increased during the past 50 years but there has been no increase in the number of people who say they are happy. New possessions, realized ambitions and desired success didn't produce what we expected.

Naomi must have wondered why. Her dream didn't seem bold or unreasonable. She did not dream of fame or wealth or power. There is no record of her praying for a miracle. She wanted a husband. She wanted a happy marriage. She wanted godly sons to marry godly Jewish wives. She wanted her sons to outlive her. They didn't seem like big dreams but they were not fulfilled.

Tell me about your unfulfilled dream. Years ago what did you dream for today? Did you want

a successful career; less weight; an engagement and a wedding; children or health or happiness or reconciliation? Was your goal some destination like the North Pole or a college degree? Was it children who loved and lived for God? Was it making the team or love and acceptance; friends; a house; a job or position—like manager; principal; broker, anchor; senator or president? What is your unfulfilled dream?

Job was a wealthy successful man who lost his children, fortune, friends and health. His life was a nightmare. In Job 17:11 he said, *“My days have passed, my plans are shattered, and so are the desires of my heart.”*

When our dreams are gone we turn to God. Isaiah 40:28-31 says:

*Do you not know?
Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.
He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.
Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;
but those who hope in the Lord
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.*

In other words, God gives grace to those with broken dreams. He does not guarantee that our dreams will come true but he does promise that he will give us strength to go on.

Why would God not fulfill our dreams? If we are his children and he loves us, why does he not give us what we want? There is an answer to this question that we may not want to hear but that we need to hear. God wants us centered on him. The greatest good is the God-centered life. When all our dreams come true we do not need God. The center of our lives is us and what we want.

***God designed us to be dreamers.
He gives us new dreams when old
dreams don't happen.***

This is not good enough. Totally fulfilled dreams lead to self-sufficiency—and self-sufficiency excludes God. The truth is that we need God more than we need our dreams fulfilled.

So, will we of shattered dreams ever dream again? There is a curious line that appears several times in the Bible. It is found in Joel 2:28 where God says, *“I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.”*

While these words are primarily a prophecy about the future they contain a principle from God: God causes even old men to dream new dreams. When age or circumstances indicate that our dreaming days are over God helps us dream again. God designed us to be dreamers. He gives us new dreams when old dreams don't happen.

I sometimes read the classic car ads in the Sunday newspaper. They can be a place for dreaming. I can imagine myself driving a classic Corvette convertible or maybe a red 1965 Ford Mustang convertible. In those classified columns are ads for “parts cars”. Parts cars are lower in the pecking order than the infamous “repairable”. Some cars are dreams-come-true. Some cars might become dreams-come-true if you spend a lot of money and time fixing them up. “Parts cars” are beyond repair. Parts cars were once somebody's dream but now they are good only to supply the parts to make another car into a dream-come-true.

Our unfulfilled dreams can be the parts cars in the driveway of God. He can and will use pieces of our broken dreams to turn our new dreams into classics.

That's what happened to Naomi. She did not get her husband or her sons back to life again. Her former dreams were forever gone. But, God took the leftover pieces of her old dream to give a new dream and make it come true. One of her daughters-in-law was named Ruth. She loved Naomi and believed in Naomi's God. When Naomi returned to her hometown of Bethlehem

Ruth went with her. She remarried and gave birth to a son named Obed. Baby Obed was laid in the lap of the woman who changed her name back to Naomi. Mara of bitterness again became Naomi of delight. The women of Bethlehem thrilled to see Naomi dream again. She dreamed of a godly grandson. She dreamed of a family tree that would make a difference. She looked at the baby she loved and dreamed of tomorrow.

Her grandson Obed grew up and had a grandson of his own named David. David became the king of Israel and bore a family line that included a man called “the Son of David”. His name was Jesus. God took the leftover parts of Naomi’s broken dream and made them into Jesus Christ the Savior of the world.

Listen, you of unfulfilled dreams! Do not become bitter because life has not turned out the way you planned. Turn your heart and hope to Jesus. He will give you strength to get beyond yesterday’s disappointment. Trust him and don’t be afraid to dream again. Trust him to make new dreams come true out of the pieces of the old dreams that were shattered.

In the words of Psalm 37:4-7:

Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this:

He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.

Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him.

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