

"Tired of Chasing Dead Rainbows?"

Jay Strack, tells a story of a family vacation to the Florida Keys. His family found themselves caught in one of Florida's frequent torrential cloudbursts as they passed through Miami. Since they needed fuel anyway, they pulled into a Miami gas station to wait out the storm. As he and his family talked, he noticed a little boy inside the cashier's cubicle. Obviously bored, the boy bounded outside the minute the downpour was over.

In Florida, the sun comes out quickly after a rain, and often only a few puddles remain after everything else dries within minutes. As Strack got out of his car to pump gas, he heard the little boy exclaim, "Daddy, Daddy, come quick! Look at all the dead rainbows lying on the ground!"

Dead rainbows? What did the boy mean by dead rainbows? In the puddles, he saw what the child meant. The mixture of oil, gas, water, and sunlight had produced swirls of colors. Of course! Dead rainbows! (Jay Strack. Everything Worth Knowing I Learned Growing Up in Florida. Dallas: Word Publishing. 1993)

Rainbows symbolize hope for a brighter tomorrow, yet many people seem to chase *dead* rainbows. Their hopes have been dashed by circumstances beyond their control. Their zest for living has been snuffed because of health concerns; their dreams have turned into nightmares, because they feel that they cannot achieve their goals.

Moses faced a similar circumstance with the Children of Israel. He had led them out of Egyptian bondage, and then because of unbelief, lost hope and faltering faith, they wandered around in the wilderness for forty years. But we read in our Old Testament Lesson that they stood on the brink of entering the land of promise. In their past, fear, weakness, and doubt had left them with dead rainbows. But Moses stood with them on the brink of a new day, a day when their hopes were coming true, when their dreams were being fulfilled.

Moses had been the only leader that they had ever known. And now that they were on the edge of the Promised Land, he told them he was about to die. So Moses spoke to them one last time; he wanted to take one more opportunity to encourage them before they saw their dream come true.

"Don't fear the battles to come," he told them. "Instead, be strong and bold." Not because they were stronger or faster or bigger or smarter or even because they were morally superior. "No," Moses said, "be strong and bold, because it is the Lord your God who goes with you." God had been faithful with earlier promises; God had brought ten plagues to free them from bondage; God had divided the Reed Sea so that they could cross when they had been chased by the Egyptians; God had provided daily food for them with manna and quail. And all along, God had just asked for their trust; all God had required from them was that they had faith.

Through their forty years of wandering, God's promises were kept; God's word was true. And God never left them. There were times that they thought their dreams would be dashed; there were instances where their rainbows seemed dead. But God asked them to continue on their journey and eventually their dreams of a Promised Land would be fulfilled.

Sometimes we too stand on the edge of our dreams. It may be such a simple thing, like a friendship that begins to blossom. Or it may be the work that we've found that makes our hearts glad. Or the child, children, or grandchildren whose promised coming makes our hearts dance. Or perhaps discovering the person with whom we are ready to share the rest of our lives. The dream is right here before us, and deep in our souls we know that it is God who has led us to this place.

Max Lucado writes of Hans Babblinger of Ulm, Germany, who wanted to fly. "He wanted to break the bond of gravity. He wanted to soar like a bird. Problem: he lived in the 16th century. There

were no planes, no helicopters, no flying machines. He was a dreamer born too soon. What he wanted was impossible.

"Hans Babblinger, however, made a career out of helping people overcome the impossible. He made artificial limbs. In his day, amputation was a common cure for disease and injury, so he kept busy. His task was to help the handicapped overcome circumstance.

"Babblinger sought to do the same for himself. With time, he used his skills to construct a set of wings. The day soon came to try them out, and he tested his wings in the foothills of the Bavarian Alps. Good choice. Lucky choice. Up currents are common in the region. On a memorable day with friends watching and sun shining, he jumped off an embankment and soared safely down. His heart raced. His friends applauded. And God rejoiced.

"How do we know God rejoiced? Because God always rejoices when we dare to dream. In fact, we are much like God when we dream. The Master exults in newness. God delights in stretching the old. God wrote the book on making the impossible possible." (Max Lucado. "Courage to Dream Again," And the Angels Were Silent. Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books. pp. 67-68.)

Israel had every reason to continue to dream, because God was with them. But like Israel, we too become afraid. We hesitate, because we are afraid of the battles, the risks, the unknowns. Are we prepared? Can we do it? What if it doesn't work out? What if we find that we've been chasing *dead* rainbows?

Here's another story of a little boy with very big dreams. The boy's name was Daniel, but people called him "Chappy." He was born in 1920 in Pensacola, Florida. Nothing remarkable about that, except that he was born poor and black, the last child in a family of seventeen children. Can you imagine having three strikes against you at birth?

Daniel was thrilled to see the planes constantly flying over his home, since the U.S. Naval Air Base was located there. He made up his mind that someday he would fly in the Navy. Unfortunately, flying in the service was completely off-limits to black people at that time. But Daniel didn't let that discourage him. As a child, he began running errands and doing various jobs at the airport. In exchange, he got plane rides and the occasional flying lesson.

Daniel earned his degree from Tuskegee Institute, then joined a special training course at Tuskegee especially for black pilots. He became an instructor in the first course that trained black pilots to fly for the Air Corps. Daniel served in the Air Corps, and rose to the rank of second lieutenant. No matter how experienced or intelligent they were, the black pilots still faced grave discrimination, and Daniel was one of many men who actively protested the military's policies toward black people. These protests led to the integration of the armed forces in 1948.

Daniel earned his captain's bars after flying 101 combat missions in Korea. Eventually, he was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel, then to Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense. Finally, he rose to the Commander in Chief of the North American Air Defense Command. In 1975, General Daniel "Chappy" James became the first black Four-Star General in the history of the U.S. (George Shinn. The Miracle of Motivation. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. 1981. p. 213-215.)

With all the adversity facing Chappy James, it would have been easier to have chased a dead rainbow. Many other people who have been in his position have seen their dreams fall by the wayside, while others have never even bothered to *look* for a rainbow. After all, "what's the use?" some might think.

And some people continue to *chase* their dream even after they have found dead rainbow after dead rainbow. Such was the case with Theodor Geisel, who had a bad start in life. As a boy, he sold war bonds for the United States during the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt. When President Roosevelt came to present each scout a medal for selling war bonds, Theodor's name was left off of the list, and he did not receive a medal.

His passion for sketching cartoons was discouraged by a teacher who predicted, "You will never learn to draw." His fraternity at Dartmouth College elected Theodor "least likely to succeed." He transferred to Oxford University and soon dropped out.

He married Helen Palmer who encouraged him to develop his funny cartoon animals. However, on his first job, the magazine for whom he worked paid him in soft drinks and shaving cream. Sailing home from Europe, Theodor made up rhymes to the beat of the ship's engines and wove them into a children's book named *And to Think I Saw It on Mulberry Street*. Twenty-seven publishers turned down his manuscript, saying it was silly.

What good could ever come of Theodor Geisel? The answer came in 1937 when a publisher took a chance on one of Theodor's books. He wrote 48 books, and they have sold 200,000,000 copies in twenty languages. He even won the Pulitzer Prize. Theodor wrote under the name "Dr. Seuss." (Illustration Digest. Sept.-Dec. 1992. p. 4)

If Theodor Geisel had focused on his defeats, if he had settled for chasing dead rainbows, he would not have been as successful, and we would not have such classics as Green Eggs and Ham or The Cat in the Hat. Personally, because of my childhood reading and also for bedtime when my children were small, I am grateful that Theodor Geisel followed his dreams.

But *anyone* can follow their dreams. One doesn't necessarily need *God* to achieve goals in life. I do not know whether General Daniel "Chappy" James or Theodor Geisel were Christians. Following God cannot always be equated with finding success in fulfilling all your goals. We all have had opportunities where we have succeeded, and some where we have failed. But the fail-safe key in following a dream that *God* wants us to follow is found in verse six of our Old Testament Lesson. Moses told the Children of Israel, "Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the Lord your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you nor forsake you."

The bottom line is that God will never leave us nor forsake us. God will always be present whether we chase dead rainbows or fulfill our life's dreams. And when it comes to making right, just, and ethical decisions, we should be able to make them with the assurance that God will ultimately take care of us.

We will have uphill battles ahead of us; we will face adversity; we will have to provide satisfactory answers to tough questions. We will encounter situations where our faith will be tested. For some here today, life-changing decisions could be just around the bend. But the bottom line is, "Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the Lord your God is the one who goes with you. God will not fail you nor forsake you." And with that kind of assurance, how can we lose?

After World War II, the communists swept down into South Korea from the North. One of the first things they did was to gather a group of Christians into their church building where they demanded that the leaders deny their Lord. They backed up their demands with torture and threats to the lives of their prisoners. One by one the leaders succumbed. When their torturers handed them the Bible and told them to spit upon it, they did so, until the communists came to one little girl.

Fearlessly she looked at her tormentors and said, "You can hammer me into a pulp. You can beat me into extinction, but I will never deny my Lord!" Then she began to sing. What was the result? The crowd with her in the church joined her in singing. She turned the tide of denial that had been begun by the leaders. What did the communists do? They executed the leaders who had denied Christ and set free the girl whose courage had been so clearly communicated. (Billy Kim, quoted in Stuart Briscoe. Now for Something Totally Different. Waco, TX: Word Books. 1978. pp. 100-101.)

The little Korean girl personified what Moses told the Children of Israel. In the midst of trial, when the ship was sinking, in the face of adversity, she was strong, bold and courageous, for she knew that God was with her.

Page 4

Moses sought to prepare the Children of Israel for their entrance into the Promised Land; for some, the forty-year journey was almost over. He spoke firmly, succinctly, and to the point. He provided a formula for them in achieving the future that God wanted them to have.

And today, Moses turns to us as well, his eyes cloudy and his skin leathery, and he speaks to us. "Don't be afraid," he says, "not because you're smarter or stronger or more attractive. Be strong and bold, because wherever you go, and whatever battle you face, God will be with you. God will not fail you. God will not desert you."

Tired of chasing dead rainbows? Remember, as you stand with God's dreams for you shining on the horizon like the rising sun, be strong and bold. God is with you.