

God's Work in Shattered Dreams

I'm trying to get papers filed. *Trying* being the optimum word. One of my best friends says, "The difference between trying and doing is actually getting something done." I don't think I quoted that exactly, but you get the idea.

I've gotten a lot done, but sometimes I feel like I just shuffle things around. Usually when I'm organizing, I feel like I'm just moving things from one floor or room of my house to another. I'm working on it, though. I really am.

So, I decided I was going to go through a bunch of boxes and get some order back. And I found a plastic box full of pages I'd ripped out of magazines—mostly *Country Living*. Pictures of rooms, furniture arrangements and anything else I loved. I think I'd planned on making a binder of my favorite things because I found page protectors in the box as well. (Sounds like a good project for one of my creative kids!)

Looking at all the pictures brought a smile to my face. I enjoy dreaming about, looking forward to and planning for the future, imagining wonderful things.

Recently I was sharing with a friend how when I found out about my husband's affair and knew the potential of him leaving, I imagined what our life would be like if we reconciled. I thought about how our relationship could be better than ever, how our love could be stronger, and how we could have a vital ministry to others who were struggling. When reconciliation didn't happen, God refined my vision.

Now I look forward to what God is going to do in my life in a different way. I look forward to what God is going to do in the lives of my children. I have great hopes and dreams for us all!

“Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God.”

—William Carey

I think it is part of the forgetting what lies behind and straining toward what is ahead.

“Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:12-14, ESV).

What does God have for us? Whatever it is, God uses some interesting words to describe our journey to get it: *pressing* and *straining*.

Pressing. During my brief running career a few years ago, I recall at the beginning of my “training” (it is in quotes because I didn’t really train well; hence the brevity of my running career) I would run increasingly longer distances, but always the first mile or so was absolute torture and the final half-mile would seem like slogging through mud. During both of those times I’d have to keep my focus ahead and press with my whole body to move forward. It was a pressing of feet on pavement, a pressing of body into the momentum forward, a pressing of breath in and out, a pressing onward.

Straining. That one isn’t difficult to imagine—especially with my running analogy. There was always an element of straining—and panting, plodding, trudging and wooziness. I’m not a good runner (especially with the broken foot!).

In thinking about pressing and straining in my walking (or running) out my faith, I believe having a vision is helpful. When I have something to strive for, I do better. Although with running I don’t need a stop sign or a set tree to run to—in fact, I’d prefer not to have a visual because

sometimes I just feel like I'll *never* get there. But if I have a vision of the end, then I enjoy running more. I imagine how I'll feel at the end, the sense of accomplishment, the joy of being done.

I think I might be a little bit like that in my spiritual life as well. I don't need to actually see where I'm going. Hey! That sounds a little like faith!

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1).

I think what I need is a very clear vision of what I have to look forward to—and that gets me back to the question, "What does God have for us?"

"Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance" (Heb. 9:15).

"So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:16-18).

"Let not your heart be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (John 14:1-3).

"And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life" (1 John 2:25).

Thinking about eternal life is all well and good. But does

eternal life necessarily mean good life? I say yes—a wholehearted yes!

I believe eternal life is all things wonderful! John describes it like this:

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:3-4).

I don't imagine heaven is a place of clouds, harps and wings. I believe heaven is very much like what we are familiar with in terms of earth—He does refer to it as the new heaven and the new earth. I tell my kids we will get to enjoy all the wonderful things this earth has to offer but it will be perfect! No fear, no worries, no violence, no pain. What's not to like about that?

Recognizing what I have to look forward to helps me press on through sorrow, pain, trouble, challenges and even things that are pretty good by this world's standards to strive to live a life of peace, joy and service here.

“When the Bible speaks of the new heaven and the new earth, it is not speaking of an alternative to this world; it is speaking of the healing and restoration of this world. This gives Christians a reason to participate in restoring this fallen world. Furthermore, because Christians know that there is a perfect world coming, they don't put all their hope in the current world. Christians can sacrificially serve others because they value the things of the coming world more than the things of this world.” —Tim Keller

And the most important part of heaven is Jesus.

Oh my goodness—epiphany! The vision, the goal, the hope, the joy, the thing to look forward to is *Jesus!*

“There will be little else we shall want of heaven besides Jesus Christ. He will be our bread, our food, our beauty, and our glorious dress. The atmosphere of heaven will be Christ; everything in heaven will be Christ-like: yes, Christ is the heaven of His people.” —C.H. Spurgeon

I guess there is something—I mean Someone—I want to keep as my focus, my focal point as I run this faith race.

“A continual looking forward to the eternal world is not a form of escapism or wishful thinking, but one of the things a Christian is meant to do.” —C.S. Lewis

I pray as we all run this race we will keep our eyes on the prize, on Jesus.

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