

Move Beyond What Holds You Back

by Tommy Barnett

To dream, we must overcome both our own excuses and the barriers that confront us as we move toward our destiny. Some people get stuck on the way because of events in their past or obstacles that seem immovable. Other people are afraid of following their dreams, so they employ avoidance techniques, busy schedules and willful ignorance to try to drown out the voice in their heart that whispers, "You should be following your dream." I have identified several obstacles that can keep you from following your dream. See if any of them apply to you.

Your past. A person without a future will always return to his or her past. He or she will go back to old friends, old hangouts or old habits, trying to find meaning. But when you are drawn to your past, it is because your dream has stopped drawing you to your future.

Only a dream can give you the booster rockets to escape the gravity of the past. Only a dream gives you daily motivation to go forward, to keep your priorities straight, to help you distinguish between what belongs in the past and what belongs in the future.

Did you know we have God's permission to forget the past? He gives us the option of leaving yesterday behind. To reach our dreams we must learn to practice selective memory—regarding even the good parts of our pasts.

When I was a young man, I left my hometown of Kansas City, Kansas, to pastor a church in Davenport, Iowa. That was a tough assignment. The elders were grumpy and the finances nonexistent.

To keep myself encouraged, I nurtured a strong affection for my old stomping ground, Kansas City. I put my Kansas City Chiefs pennant on the wall. I ate Kansas City steaks.

I always ran home to Kansas City when I had a chance, and I would talk about Kansas City at every opportunity. As a consequence, I was always homesick for Kansas City.

One day God spoke to me and said: "Burn the pennant, quit eating Kansas City steaks, and don't go back and visit anymore. That's all in the past." I obeyed, and that day I began to learn the value of selective memory.

You see, some people never let go of their pasts, so they live in yesterday's memories. These people get their scrapbooks out and take you down memory lane whenever you visit them. It's as if they are in a former era in their minds.

Someone asked me one time if he could see my scrapbook. I told

him, "I don't
have a scrapbook because I'm too busy making scrap."

Are you stuck in memories of the past? If so, it's time to sit down and
identify which ones are holding you back and then selectively
"forget" them.
Simply refuse to bring them up.

The apostle Paul said, "Forgetting those things which are behind" (Phil.
3:13, NKJV). He was talking about the bad things and the good things in his
past. He selectively forgot them because his dream mattered more to him.

Unfinished business. Some people feel incomplete in spite of the many
wonderful things in their lives—friends, family, wealth, vacations and
retirement security. They have a nagging sense of unfinished business because
they have not reached their full capacity by achieving their dreams.

Some people reading these words will feel like crying and might even become
desperate, and they won't know exactly why. Such weeping often comes unannounced
and for no apparent reason.

Oh, sure, we all get tired at times, but this is something more significant.
It springs up from hidden wells of disappointment within you.

Perhaps the tears flow because there is unfinished business in your life.
Perhaps in the depths of your soul you know that you are neglecting your dream,

missing your moment, putting your purpose in a drawer for a later time that never comes.

The Bible calls this “double-mindedness” and says it will make you unstable in all your ways (see James 1:8). You won't really accomplish anything lasting.

Even though your life may look stable, there is a deep fissure between who you are and who you know you ought to be, and it creates below-the-surface instability. How much disunity do we create in our families and in our own minds because of the untended dreams lying dormant at the bottom of our souls?

If you have a constant, aching sense of unfinished business, you are probably avoiding your dream.

Boredom and self-destruction. When you lose sight of your dream, boredom sets in—deep, pervasive boredom and unsettledness—and in the midst of apparent success it drives you to the hollow pursuit of pleasure and leisure. People begin to drink, have illicit affairs, gamble money away, wrap their lives up in sports and do drugs because they become bored. They have lost touch with their dreams and their future.

Proverbs 29:18 says, “Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint.” Where there is no God-given dream, people cast off restraint.

In their boredom, they go anywhere and do anything for a thrill. There's nothing to hold them back. Why not have extramarital affairs or spend foolishly?

One time I picked up a young hitchhiker. I don't normally do that, but it was pouring rain, and I felt that maybe this young man needed help, so I pulled over and invited him into the warm car. He seemed bored, directionless and depressed.

I asked where he was going, and he said, "No place in particular." I probed further and asked what his goals in life were. He looked at me and said:

"Mister, you don't get it. I'm not going anywhere." He asked to be let out, and away he walked in the rain.

That young man is symbolic of how some live their lives. They walk along the highway with their thumb out, waiting to catch a ride with anyone who will stop.

They are bored. They will go anywhere. They don't care.

We all need a sense that we exist for a reason. We need the clarity that a dream brings. Where there is no dream, there is no order to life, no reason to live. We perish by confusion and disorder; we make a mess of everything.

If you are bored and beginning to experiment with behavior you know will harm you, or even just cultivating pastimes you know are a waste of time, you have lost sight of your dream.

Disappointment. Sometimes you have a dream, and that dream is shattered. The experience creates a deep wound in your heart that gets filled with disappointment, like a bitter well. You approach each new opportunity with melancholy and doubt stored up inside you.

The waters from the well blur your vision and obscure your dream, and the disappointment grows more potent the longer you hang on to it. It stops being a well and becomes a wide river separating you from your dream.

Moses endured one of the greatest disappointments in the Bible. He spent 40 years leading the children of Israel through the desert, doing everything well, obeying God when the others were worshiping a golden calf. He didn't grumble as they did or doubt God, but because he disobeyed God on one occasion when his anger got the better of him, the Lord forbade him from going into the Promised Land.

The Lord took him to a mountaintop where He allowed Moses to see the magnificent reality of the Promised Land (see Deut. 34:1). But He consigned him to living with the stunning reality that he would never set foot in it.

Nothing hurts quite like disappointment. The word implies that we believed we had an appointment, but when we got there, things didn't happen the way we wanted them to. We were "dis-appointed."

Our momentary assessment of a situation is always affected by human limitations. We cannot always see what God sees, and much more may be happening than we are aware of.

The Bible says we see through a veil; our knowledge is imperfect. At some point, you have to give your disappointment to God and trust His judgment, which is perfect.

What seems like a disappointment may have been the best thing to happen in your life. That relationship that ended, that business opportunity you passed by, that investment you didn't make—God may have been sparing you.

Even if you believe you have good reason to be disappointed, you should have a better reason for letting disappointment go. That reason is your dreams.

You will experience bitter disappointments in life. People will drop the ball, lead you astray, abandon you and worse. You will be disappointed with God. But if you want to reach your dreams, you must become an expert at releasing disappointment when it comes.

Oversatisfaction. Satisfaction is also the enemy of a dream. Some people look at their lives and pronounce them good enough. They hit the cruise control button and lean back instead of forging ahead. They become satisfied

with slow, incremental progress.

Instead of being drawn by a dream, they are drawn to enjoy the abundance God gave them. They spend time planning vacations, buying recreational equipment and turning a blind eye to their higher calling. They trade their dreams for the pleasantness of present circumstances. Some ride this satisfaction to the very end of their lives.

Fear of the battles. Some people fear the battle so much that they abandon their dreams before they ever reach the battlefield. They never even try, or they give up quickly.

I'll be the first one to say that following your dream is agonizing, especially in the beginning. But fear of the battle causes some people to stay stuck at the starting gate forever. They are waiting for some mystical wave of emotional energy to propel them effortlessly through difficulties, problems and crises.

But that approach just doesn't square with reality. Life is full of battles, no matter which course we take. It is no different when we follow our dreams.

The battle itself is always less frightening than the days leading up to it. Anticipation will kill you quicker than the fighting!

When I face battles, I feel weakest before the battle starts. I know God will

see me through the battle, but sometimes I wonder if He will
see me to the
battle.

I rarely have peace beforehand. Rather, I feel overwhelmed,
powerless and
ineffective.

Maybe you know what I mean. You have gone through surgery and
were afraid up
until the moment they wheeled you into the operating room. Or
you competed in a
contest and dreaded every second until you stepped up to take
your turn. Or
perhaps you started a business and laid yourself on the line,
wondering if it
would pay off.

What does this tell us about pursuing our dreams? We will
seldom have a
moment of absolute conviction of victory as we embark on the
dream path. If we
wait for people to toss flowers at our feet and wish us
success, we will be
waiting a long time.

Yet we cannot let fear of the battle stop us in our tracks,
keeping us frozen
to the spot as our opportunities slip away. We have to have
courage to pursue
our dreams.

Courage isn't just for comic book heroes and movie stars. It's
for anyone who
will go after his or her dream. Life is going to be full of
battles, no matter
what. But when you dream, the battles are taking you
somewhere.

The Bible spurs me on when it talks about courageous people
“who by faith
conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained
promises, shut the
mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge
of the sword”
(Heb. 11:33-34, NASB). I love those action words: conquered,
obtained, escaped.
Those are words of courage and reward.

Promises must be obtained, kingdoms must be conquered, the
lions' mouths must
be shut. And the best part, I believe, is that these people
became powerful in
the battle, not before it. Courage gets you to the battle.
God's power sees you
through.

I have noticed that God never supplies power until I need it.
He always
provides power along the way, after I have decided to go in
the direction of a
dream. You have to take steps toward your dream before you
will receive power to
fulfill it.

God promises that you can do all things through Christ who
strengthens you
(see Phil. 4:13). That should give you courage.

You may see the battle rising, the clouds gathering and the
enemies arrayed
before you. Instead of abandoning your post or going back to a
life defined by
other people's opinions, dig in and get ready to fight for
your dream. Walk with
courage in the direction of your calling. God will supply
power along the way.

God has called you to dream great dreams. He has called you to be creative, like our Master. He has made you to be an explorer, an adventurer.

As you begin the journey toward your dream, God will give you power along the way. With courage and God's help, you will overcome all obstacles and launch out of the starting gate into your destiny.