

When Your Prophetic Dreams Look Impossible

I've dreamed about going to Africa for years. I've devoured countless books and blogs written by African missionaries. I've talked about it, dreamed about it, waited for it.

My friends Dr. Cliff and Julie Pash from Advancing the Kingdom Ministries (ATK) lead several churches and a school in Uganda, and have invited me several times. This summer I finally got to spend two weeks with them.

Actually packing for the trip was exciting and surreal at the same time. I didn't know what to feel. I knew enough to know that plans and expectations are fine, but that there are some things you can't plan. I figured I would just go and see what happened.

Sure enough, some things went as I expected, and some things came as a total surprise. To narrow it down, here they are—five things I learned while in Uganda:

1. Dreams are worth waiting for.

Almost 10 years ago, the Lord told me I'd work with kids in Africa. That was great, but I didn't know how to make that happen. In 2009, I met Dr. Cliff and Julie. It was a good connection, but I still couldn't see a way to get from here to there.

As the years passed, the desire to go only intensified. I began feeling frustrated. Here I had this great dream with no idea how to make it happen. I wasn't willing to just go. I wanted God to take the lead so his blessing would be on it.

Finally, at the beginning of 2016, I felt like this was the year. I still didn't know exactly how, but the time of waiting was over. Now I could step out in faith.

Throughout the first half of the year I spoke several times with Dr. Cliff and Julie. I shared my hopes with trusted friends and got counsel from my church leaders. I found the money. And I prayed a lot: "If it's not time yet, I'm willing to wait. But if we can do this, God, I really want to."

Things began happening quickly. I was surprised at how many people wanted to help. I received multiple donations of toys, clothes, Bibles and other things. I was overwhelmed at how God demonstrated His approval for my trip.

As it turned out, I would be arriving just as the students would be returning to school from a break. As a special education teacher, I was very excited to work with children who are delayed or have disabilities.

The ironic thing is that type of opportunity didn't exist when I first wanted to go. The school is only a couple of years old. By letting God set the timing of my trip, I arrived right when their new school was developing methods to help students who were falling behind. I was in the right place at the right time to add my particular type of experience and skills where they were needed.

I realized my time of waiting had actually been a time of preparation. The impatience I struggled with and jobs I had in the meanwhile taught me things I needed when I got there.

2. Kids are everywhere.

This is one of the funny things I learned. In talking to people in Uganda and the U.S., I found people in both places think kids are better "there."

Friends in the States think African students are more dedicated because they realize school isn't available to every child. My Ugandan friends assumed American students are better because they have so much more.

I did see some obvious differences: Most kids didn't have shoes. Several of my students went home sick with malaria. All the children learn to work from an early age, carrying water, gathering firewood and tending to younger siblings.

But they are also the same as "my" kids here: Some pay attention in class and some goof off. They all like toys and games. They blossom with positive attention. And even those from the hardest backgrounds can learn when they are not just taught, but loved, as they are at ATK.

3. If you're afraid, do it anyway.

One thing I didn't expect to face in Uganda was fear. I highly anticipated this trip and was with familiar people. Yet almost the second I stepped off the plane, I got smacked with a strong feeling of fear and intimidation.

I prayed and it lessened a little bit. It never completely left, though, so I had to make a decision. I could let fear keep me from doing anything or I could just do it anyway.

Dr. Cliff and Julie gave me many opportunities, including teaching, preaching and praying for people. None of those were completely new to me. Yet in Uganda they were harder than they'd ever been.

I discovered how to just keep moving forward. If I felt like hiding in my room, I made myself go out. When I wanted to let someone else lead the lesson, I did it myself. When I bombed a speaking opportunity, I sucked it up and prepared so I could do better the next time.

This fear completely surprised me. I could have let it ruin my trip and prevent me from being of any help to ATK. I refused that option. Near the end of my visit I was given a chance to preach at two churches in one day and pray for the members. I was able to say, "Okay, let's do this."

Even though the discomfort never let up, I kept going. When I

returned to the U.S., I discovered my newfound strength and boldness stayed with me. "Doing it anyway" didn't just help me those two weeks, it changed me forever.

4. Worship doesn't require my understanding.

My absolute favorite times in Uganda were the worship nights. For two hours (or longer, for the overnight services), the leaders took turns singing and occasionally exhorting the people.

None of it was translated into English, so at first I stood at a distance. I enjoyed watching them sing and dance. Quickly I realized that wasn't enough for me. I wanted to know what they were experiencing.

I shared earlier how deeply I was touched in these services. Let me simply say here that amidst the challenges of unexpected anxiety and doing new things, the worship services were an oasis of peace.

I realized it's easy to get into a pattern with our worship. We get used to our favorite songs, styles and singers. When I pushed myself past needing those familiar things, God was able to meet me where I was, and it was wonderful.

5. When God is honored, everything changes.

The Pash's prioritize showing honor to God. They are there to help people, but they know the way to do that is put God first. While there, I heard Dr. Cliff speak on 1 Kings 8:60, "so that all the people of the earth may know that the Lord is God and that there is none else." This is the basis for all they do.

Because of this focus, God has blessed their village in many ways. They have favor with the people, even those of another faith. For example, I was in Uganda during the celebration of the Muslim holiday Ramadan. The villagers have the tradition of going throughout the town waking everyone up before sunrise

so they can eat before their day of fasting begins.

In years past, they made a point of being very loud, even obnoxious, as they passed the ATK compound so early in the morning. This year, we couldn't even hear them. Much of the former antagonism has ceased.

God is also changing the economy. Julie founded Project Lydia about six years ago to allow widows and abandoned wives to earn money for themselves and their children. The women create jewelry, hand bags, banana leaf baskets, soap, lip balm and more. The goods are then sold in the U.S. at local shops and through the website.

This project grows bigger every year. The village is prospering as more and more women have money to pay school fees, purchase goods and build new homes.

God is even causing the village livestock to prosper. A few years ago the goats would give birth to one or two kids. Now they are having three and even four! In an agriculturally-based society, this is a big deal.

Deuteronomy 28 speaks of the blessings that come on a group of people dedicated to following the Lord. I saw it in action. Even better, the people there who do not yet know God's goodness are seeing demonstrated among them every day.

My two weeks in Uganda taught me so much and stirred a hunger to learn even more. I grew in ways I didn't expect and realized I can do more than I thought. Finally, it fired up my passion to partner with God in what He's doing, regardless of where it is.

What about you? Do you have a dream that seems impossible? Be inspired to know it's not too late. Take a new look at your circumstances. Determine if some of the things you're wanting to escape are training for what's ahead.

Allow God to stir that hope in you again. It's okay to dream, even when you see no possible way for it to happen. God specializes in the impossible! What's your dream?

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