

AGE IS NO EXCUSE

Part Two

By John Gagliardi

In the last Breakthrough Word, we looked at the role some young people had played in carrying out the "master plan" of God in redeeming this fallen world. We saw that throughout the Bible, God used young people to do "mighty exploits", and that the excuse of "I'm too young" just won't wash with God. But neither will the twin excuse: "I'm too old"!

In the same way that God has used young people who felt unprepared and untried to carry out His purposes, He has equally used old people to do amazing and incredible things.

The Prophet Joel said that while young men would "see visions", old men would "dream dreams" (Joel 2: 28). In practice, I don't think there is much difference between a vision and a dream, if it is something God has placed in your heart.

It doesn't matter how old or how young you are, God can give you dreams and visions - and it is then a matter of your own free will to choose whether to trust and obey Him, or to turn away with a half-baked excuse that this isn't the "right time".

Nowhere in the Bible, according to my reading anyway, does God tell us that "yesterday was your big day and you missed it" or "tomorrow is your big day so just sit around and maybe it will happen". On the contrary, he says: "Look, NOW is the acceptable time; NOW is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6: 2). He is a God of action, and he wants us to be people of action, no matter what our age!

In his book *The Dream Giver*, author Bruce Wilkinson tells the parable of Ordinary, who leaves the land of Familiar, to pursue the Big Dream. He says that many of us are like "Ordinary", who sits back waiting for something to happen and just letting his Big Dream pass him by:

"It's so easy to get caught up in the demands of life. And we all take refuge at times in routines and recliners and 'usual' anything! But if we're just marking time - instead of making a life - we have put our Big Dream on hold. Years pass. Personal losses pile up. We lose our sense of meaning and purpose ... and the Big Picture of why God put us on earth in the first place begins to fade from view.

"Tragically, a whole lifetime can pass without a person ever accomplishing the Great Things he or she was born to do and wants to do ... Moses, then 80 years old, heard his dream through a burning bush ... You can imagine Moses' shock. In fact, he responded with one excuse after another.

"But how was an aging shepherd going to rescue an entire nation from the most powerful king on earth? Like all Big Dreams, Moses' assignment seemed far too big.

"Here are three insights into every God-given Big Dream that we can glean from Moses' story:

1. A Big Dream always seems overwhelming at first
2. Ultimately, a Big Dream is aimed at meeting a Big Need in the world
3. While you still have breath, ***it's never too late to act on your Dream!***



"No matter what's happened in your past, or what circumstances you're in, ***you can turn your heart toward your Dream, starting now.***"

If the years have taken their toll, you may not have quite the energy and the drive you once had - but God always gives us what we need to achieve the dream He has planted in our hearts. While old age may not be linked with youthful energy (although of course it might - I can do ALL things through Christ Who strengthens me), it is very much linked with WISDOM:

"Wisdom is found with the elderly, and understanding comes with long life" (Job 12: 12). "...Age should speak, and maturity should teach wisdom" (Job 32: 7. And if you would like to see some of the benefits of wisdom, look no further than Proverbs 3 and 8:

"Happy is the man who finds wisdom ... long life is in her right hand; in her left, riches and honor ... Listen ... my mouth tells the truth ... I possess good advice and competence ... understanding and strength ... it is by me that kings reign ... with me are riches and honor, lasting wealth and righteousness .. anyone who listens to me is happy ... for the one who finds me, finds life, and obtains favor from the Lord."

So if wisdom comes with advancing years, and these are the rewards of wisdom, then it seems no great hardship to have some gray hair as your "crown of glory" (Proverbs 16: 31). We are told by Jesus Himself in John 15: 16 that He chose us to "bear fruit" - and there is no reason why we cannot "bear much fruit" even in old age:

"The righteous thrive like a palm tree, and grow like a cedar tree in Lebanon ... **they will still bear fruit in old age, healthy and green...**" (Psalm 92: 12 and 14). Old people will "dream dreams", and bear fruit - as they did time and time again in the Bible:

- Moses was 80 years old, and Aaron 83 years old, when they had their series of dramatic encounters with Pharaoh over the fate of the Israelite nation (Exodus 7), and Moses was 120 years old when he died, with his eyesight and physical strength unabated (Deuteronomy 34)
- Caleb was 85 years old, still as strong as the day when Moses sent him out to spy out the land, when he asked for his mountain from Joshua (Joshua 14)
- Joshua died at the age of 110, and was 85 years old when he crossed the Jordan (Joshua 14)
- Abraham was 100 years old when - through faith - God finally gave him his "son of promise", Isaac (Genesis 21)
- Anna the prophetess, who was "of a great age", and had been a widow for 84 years, was able to remain in the Temple, serving God "night and day with fastings and prayers", prophesying over the life of the infant Jesus (Luke 2).

Not to mention other great servants of the Lord in later times who ministered powerfully well into their old age. Who can doubt the power and influence of people such as John Wesley, John Knox, Billy Graham, John Haggai, Lester Sumrall, Oral Roberts and Norman Vincent Peale, just to name a few.

In Genesis 6: 3, God tells fallen mankind they are flesh, and will live to 120 years - so it should come as no surprise that great Christian leaders minister effectively on into their 80's and 90's. In fact, scientists tell us that the human organism is designed to last around 120 years, but our lifestyles - stress, pollution, inadequate diet etc - make us die before our allotted time.

As an example, Professor Craig Cooney, Professor of Molecular Biology at the University of Arkansas for Medical Science (and a pioneer in new dietary advances in the study of aging), says in his book **Methyl Magic - Maximum Health through Methylation**: "An optimal diet, which would include supplements or be made of engineered foods, would be designed to make sure we maintain our cells, organs, metabolism and our health.

"Perhaps most important, this optimal diet ... will presumably allow us to maintain our DNA methylation, our membrane fluidity, our protein repair, and a number of other vital functions that depend on methylation.

"The ultimate reward could well be lives extended toward or beyond our biologically allotted 100 to 120 years - healthy years, full of energy, achievement and vitality ... Once we develop an optimal diet, it's possible that humans could achieve lifespans of as much as 150 years!"

Whether we live to 100, 120 or even 150, the traditional "three score and ten", or even if our lives are seemingly cut short prematurely, the important point to remember is that God gives us a "Big Dream" and He gives us the time we need to live out that dream.

God doesn't make any mistakes - we are "fearfully and wonderfully made", and God knows every hair of our head, every molecule and atom of our physical being, and the "thoughts and the intents" of our heart. In short, he made us, so he knows all about us.

If we are young, and "see visions", or old and "dream dreams", or somewhere in between, the bottom line is that we must trust and obey God, our Maker, and no matter what age we are, take a step right now to achieve what Bruce Wilkinson calls our "Big Dream".

"The Bible says that 'the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose hearts are loyal to Him'. The Dreamers I know who are changing the world know a secret: God is eager to show Himself strong towards Dreamers who take risks to do what He wants done."

It is always risky to take a first step - and it is always tempting to come up with an excuse to stay in your comfort zone. We can blame our age (too old or too young), our lack of education, our parents, our environment, some tragic event in our past - in fact, the excuses to keep us in our comfort zone are endless.

But just as Jesus told Peter to get out of the comfort zone of his boat, and to step out onto the water, He is saying the same to each and every one of us, whether young or old: **"Have Courage! It is I! Don't be afraid! ... Come!"** He is challenging us to get out of our "comfort zone boats" and embrace our Big Dream in faith, not sinking in the depths of fear and unbelief as Peter did (Matthew 14: 22-30).

And the time to take that step out of the boat - the step towards our Big Dream - is **NOW!**

"In an acceptable time I heard you, and in the day of salvation, I helped you ... Behold, NOW is the acceptable time; behold, NOW is the day of salvation."