

DARING TO IMAGINE

A few years ago, they opened a new area in Disney World themed around the Star Wars movies called Galaxy's Edge. The whole area is like visiting a different planet with 2 new rides. I saw a special about the people who designed it. They are called Disney Imagineers. They planned out the whole thing before anything existed. God has called all of us to be Imagineers. Not Disney Imagineers but Jesus Imagineers. People who use their God given imaginations to build what God wants us to build.

Ephesians 1:17-19 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. 18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe...

Today we are continuing in our series called Daring Faith. Today I want to talk about Daring to Imagine. Someone once said "Let the size of my God determine the size of my goals." How big are your goals today? How big are your dreams?

Imagination – the act or power of forming a mental image of something not present to the senses or never wholly perceived in reality. In other words, it is seeing something that does not yet exist.

One of the greatest gifts that God has given us is the gift of imagination. The ability to see things in our minds, to think and to create with mental pictures. The reason we have this ability is because we were created in the image of God, and God has an imagination. The Bible tells us that God imagined the entire universe and it was created. He thought it up before it became reality. God has already seen all of human history even before it has happened.

It has been said that we are most like our Creator when we are being creative. Does that make sense? You are most like your Creator – God – when you are being creative. God gave us the ability to create with our imagination. When you use your imagination for good it brings Him glory.

Everything starts with imagination. Nothing becomes reality unless somebody first thinks it up. This room that we are sitting in did not just come about by chance. Last year we finished a renovation. People planned what it would one day look like. Every great business, every great company, every piece of art, every musical note somebody imagined it before it became reality. Nothing happens unless somebody imagines it.

Why is imagination so important? Four reasons;

1. Imagination fuels my passion

In this passage we read this morning, Paul prays that the Christians at Ephesus would have their eyes and hearts opened by God so that they could truly see and understand the hope to which God has called them. That is a powerful prayer.

My imagination shapes my life. In other words, the way you think is going to affect the way you feel and the way you feel is going to affect the way you act. If you want to change behaviour, start by changing your thinking. Imagination fuels our passion; it gives us direction.

The person who says “I can’t do this” and the person who says, “I can do this” are both right. If you think that you can’t do something then you probably will not try to do it and therefore not do it. If you think you can do something, you can imagine yourself doing it, then odds are that you will try to do it and hopefully succeed. What we think in our minds shapes our actions.

Imagination is more important than knowledge. Logic will get you from A to B; imagination will take you everywhere. There is no limit to imagination. The true sign of intelligence is not knowledge but imagination -- Albert Einstein

Imagination is the beginning of creation. You imagine what you desire. You will what you imagine. Then you create what you will. -- George Bernard Shaw

Imagination has brought mankind through the dark ages to its present state of civilization. Imagination led Columbus to discover America. Imagination led Franklin to discover electricity. Imagination has given us the steam engine, the telephone, the talking-machine, and the automobile, for these things had to be dreamed of before they became realities. -- L Frank Baum (Wizard of Oz)

Imagination is the organ of meaning -- C. S. Lewis

We started by talking about Disney World. Walt Disney himself said, “Disneyland will never be completed. It will continue to grow as long as there is imagination left in the world.”

Imagination is powerful. It can be used for good or used for evil. Remember the story in Genesis 11 where the people in Babel were all working together to build a giant tower. It was an idol. They were going to build it to reach up to God.

Genesis 11:4-6 Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth." 5 But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. 6 The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language, they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.

This is a warning that imagination can be misused, but there is also a lesson to be learned here. How do you get a group of people to do the impossible? He says there three things:

The first is COOPERATION. The people need to be unified. They need to be together. The second is COMMUNICATION. They have to be speaking the same language. The third is COORDINATION. That means vision or imagination. They have to all be working towards the same vision or outcome.

When you get these three things together, it is powerful. It can be a force for evil or a force for good. As Christians we want to be a force for good in our world. Imagination fuels my passion...

2. Imagination focuses my plan

Paul prays that God would give the Christians at Ephesus “the Spirit of wisdom and revelation” so that they would know him better. That means faith. Imagination is essential to living by faith. In fact, you cannot live by faith without using your imagination. We cannot see God, which means that we need to come to Him through faith.

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

Faith, like imagination, is a way of seeing. It is being sure of what we hope for. Hope does not mean what we think may happen or could happen, but what we believe WILL happen.

In his book *Dare to Believe*, Dan Baumann illustrates the unique experience of knowing that something is ours, yet longing to enjoy it more fully. He explained that at Christmas time he would always do a lot of snooping. He would pick up the wrapped gifts and shake them, trying to figure out what was inside. One year he found a package with his name on it that was easy to identify as golf clubs. Baumann then made this observation: "When Mom wasn't around, I would go and feel the package, shake it, and pretend that I was on the golf course. The point is, I was already enjoying the pleasures of a future event; namely, the unveiling. It had my name on it. I knew what it was." But only at Christmas would the fullness of the gift be revealed.

Even though he could not yet see the clubs with his natural eyes, he could see them with his eyes of faith. He could see them with his imagination.

Hebrews 11:8-10 By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. 9 By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

God gave Abraham the picture of a future city. He did not know where it was but by faith he got up from his home and went when God told him to go. It was not comfortable and there were many difficulties he faced along the way, but by faith he went.

What is your God given dream? What future city has God shown you? When God tells us to go, we need to go. We need to be willing to leave our comfort zones and face hardship along the way. God's plan for our lives needs to become OUR plan for our lives. Imagination focuses our plan.

Why is understanding and following God's plan for us so important? Because it is what we were created for.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Everything we see around us with our natural eyes will one day fade away. These pews we are sitting on, even though you can see them and feel them now, one day they will cease to exist. Every tree and every house and every physical thing we see in this life will one day be gone. It is only what we do not see that will last on into eternity. We need to be reminded of that fact.

Jesus understood the power of imagination. In the church we practice 2 ordinances. One is baptism and the other is communion. They are both pictures. In baptism we get dunked in a tank of water. Going down into the water is a picture of death and coming up out of the water is a picture of new life. In communion we hold a physical thing that represents a spiritual truth. The whole thing is a symbol, it engages the imagination. Imagination fuels my passion and focuses my plan...

3. Imagination flows from my purpose

Paul prays that the Christians in Ephesus would have their eyes opened to not only know the “hope to which He has called you” but also that they would understand through faith “the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints.”

Do you understand your God given inheritance? Understanding where we are going shapes who we are becoming. It provides direction and meaning and purpose to our lives. It provides us with identity, and when we know who we are we know what we should be doing in life.

An understanding of who God created us to be determines our self esteem or worth (past). When we understand our value, it shapes our self image (present). That means who we see ourselves. People who struggle with self image are people who do not understand who God created them to be. An accurate picture of our own value forms our self ideal. That means the person we are becoming. Who do you want to be 5 or 10 years from now? When we understand our inheritance, when we understand what God created us for, it shapes the person that we become.

This is true in the positive but also in the negative. Back in 1820 there was a 10-year-old boy called Phineas. He went with his parents on a trip to see an island. HIS island. When Phineas was born, his grandfather gave him a deed to an island in Connecticut land called Ivy Island. All his life he had dreamt about what it was like. He grew up feeling important, knowing he had this amazing inheritance. He was always reminding his friends of how special he was.

Now the day had come. After a long trip the horse drawn buggy was finally nearing the island. His dad pointed north beyond a meadow to a row of tall trees stretching into the sky. "There," he said. "There is Ivy Island." Phineas was overcome with joy. He jumped from the wagon and dashed through the meadow, leaving his father and a hired hand far behind. He raced to the row of trees into an opening from which Ivy Island was visible. When he saw the land, he stopped. His heart sank. Ivy Island was five acres of snake-infested marshland. His grandfather had called it the most beautiful, valuable land in Connecticut. But it was worthless. It was all just a joke ... a cruel joke. As stunned Phineas stared, the father and the hired hand roared with laughter. Phineas was not the special important person of the family; he was the laughingstock. His grandfather had played a joke on him.

Phineas didn't laugh. Nor did he forget. That disappointment shaped his life. He, the deceived, made a living out of deception. He spent the rest of his life fooling people. You may not know him as Phineas, but as P.T. P. T. Barnum coined the phrase, "There's a sucker born every minute." He spent his life proving it.

As much as that disappointment shaped the life of PT Barnum, an accurate understanding of God's glorious inheritance for us also shapes our life for good. Paul says the “riches” of His glorious inheritance. God's dream for my life is bigger than my dream. It is far larger. It is eternally significant.

Imagination is powerful, when it is God given. I am NOT telling you today that you should go out and follow your own dream. I am not interested in that. What I am saying is that you should be following God's dream. I could just make up a dream for my life. Maybe I dream of being a rock star or an astronaut. If it comes from me it would be a waste of my life. Why? Because God didn't wire me to be a rock star. Maybe He did for you, not for me.

God wants us to see HIS dream for your life. That is your calling. When you understand why God created you, why He made you the way He made you, what your inheritance is. That is what is important.

If you want significance and satisfaction in your life then you have to understand God's will for your life. You have to use your God given imagination to see where God is leading you. It was God created you for. It is why you are alive.

I want you to write this down: God wants me to dream big. Write that down. God's dream for me is a big dream. He wants me to use the imagination that he gave me because dreaming big honors God. It shows faith. It shows trust. You should base your dream not on what you think you could do but on what you think God could do through you.

4. Imagination has faith in my potential

Paul prays that the Christians in Ephesus would have the eyes of their hearts enlightened, not only that they would understand the hope and their inheritance, but so that they would also know "His incomparably great power for us who believe." What does that mean? It means that, with God's power working through you, that you have incredible potential.

Ephesians 3:20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us

Dare to imagine what God is able to do in your life. I know that sometimes that can be difficult. Sometimes people have a hard time seeing that dream. Sometimes the circumstances in life can make that dream seem very muddy and unclear.

Doubt is the enemy of imagination. Doubt and fear neutralize what God wants to do in your life. It takes courage to imagine. Do you know why most people don't use their imagination? It is because they are afraid of failure.

When you were a kid you had a great imagination. Children have a massive amount of imagination. But the older you get the more your imagination grows rusty. You stop imagining what things could be and you just start living the way they are. You get stuck in the *status quo* which is Latin for "existing state." In other words, it means the mess your in. You don't imagine what things could be like anymore. You stop using that imagination muscle in your life.

Listen to me. Doubts are meant to be doubted; beliefs are meant to be believed. So start believing your beliefs and doubting your doubts.

Your imagination in your life is either going to be governed by fear or it's going to be governed by faith. You get to choose. If you let your imagination be governed by fear then you are going to be stressed out and worried all the time. When you allow fear to control your imagination you live a miserable life.

A lot of people start off in life with a great dream, a great goal, a great vision, a great objective, a great cause and purpose to live their life for. But over time it begins to dissipate and drain out and leak out of their lives.

It is much like if you buy a helium balloon. You put it up on your house and three days later it has gone from the ceiling to the floor. It is droopy. No one poked a hole in it. It did not pop. It just slowly lost what was keeping it afloat. Anyone here feel like that this morning? You feel like you have a flat tire mentally and emotionally. You are not dreaming any more. You are not believing anymore. You have run out of fuel.

God's Spirit and God's word fuel my imagination. You listen to God as you read his Word and you talk to God in prayer. This is the key to maintaining a vision and dream for your entire life. The key to stronger, healthier imagination is a daily quiet time. It energizes your vision.

I have lots of people who talk to me or email me and say something like this "Pastor, here is something that needs to be done. You go do it." The question I always ask them is "OK, what are you willing to do about it?" If God is showing you a need, maybe He is showing it to you for a reason. Maybe He wants you to be the answer to that need. That is why He revealed it to you in the first place.

The role of a pastor is not to do everything that people see is a need. It is to encourage everyone to use their God given imagination and attempt their God given dream to reach their God given purpose.

Back in 1944 Dr. W.A. Criswell became the pastor of North Shore Baptist Church in Chicago. At the time it was the largest Baptist Church in North America. One day he was invited to the home of one of his deacons who served as the superintendent of the Sunday School. His name was James Kraft.

James Kraft was the founder of Kraft Foods. He told Dr. Criswell that as a young man he had a desire to become a successful cheese salesman. He began in Chicago as a young man with a little buggy pulled by a pony named Paddy. After making his cheese, he would load his wagon and he and Paddy would drive down the streets of Chicago to sell it. As the months passed the young Kraft began to despair because he was not making money, in spite of his long hours and hard work.

One day in 1903 he pulled his pony to a stop and began to talk to him. He said "Paddy, there is something wrong. We are not doing it right. I am afraid we have things turned around and our priorities are not where they ought to be. Maybe we ought to serve God and place Him first in our life."

Kraft then drove home and made a covenant that for the rest of his life he would first serve God and then would work as God directed. In his own words, that day he "made Jesus Christ his business partner." He gave 25% of everything he made to the church.

That night he told Dr. Criswell, "I would rather be a layman in the North Shore Baptist Church than to head the greatest corporation in America. My first job now and always is serving Jesus."