

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Stuck? What Can You Do?"
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I'm not sure if any of you ever record your dreams. I did my PhD in part on how the Psychological community helps individuals interpret their dreams in a similar way to how the Christian community helps individuals interpret the Scriptures.

One of the nightmares I used to have was being in a car in the back seat while the car was going over a bridge. There are lots of bridges in the San Francisco Bay Area, so I had lots of experiences of going over bridges, although nothing like the PEI Confederation Bridge. But in the dream, contrary what I'm told is possible, the car would suddenly turn out of the lane against the steel bulkhead of the bridge, go through it like butter and begin to slowly go over the side toward the water, in a manner not unlike Wiley E. Coyote going over the cliff into a canyon as he once again missed the Roadrunner. Eventually the car would hit the water, but this would not injure us. I would be strapped in my seat, and could not get the seat belt off and I could not get the door open. The water would eventually rise and I would be gasping for air at the top of sedan. Then I would usually wake up. Have you ever had that kind of nightmare?

Another nightmare I would have would be exploring a cave, which would become smaller and smaller until I was stuck in the rock and wondered if I could even reverse so as to get out. This claustrophobic dream also gave me the same sense I had in the window seat of a small American commercial airline which was taking me wedged in the seat on the one shoulder and the knees against the seat in front of me for the duration of the two hour and forty minute flight from San Francisco to Calgary.

No matter what your condition in life, it's not a nice feeling to feel stuck or at any impasse. There is a freedom we receive when we choose relationship with God. Receiving the gospel of Jesus Christ is free, he paid the price. But continuing to grow in the Christian life costs us our whole life. The preacher brings back to this point in the existential book of the Old Testament called Ecclesiastes. He tells us that many of the activities that we spend our lives pursuing will not in the end be the center of our lives. Work and career are such things. In the end of the book, he strongly urges us to

pursue relationship with God, as early in our lives as possible, because this is the only thing that makes sense amongst all the mysteries of life.

The Psalmist in Psalm 49 also agrees that wealth and power aren't all that seem to pretend to offer an individual. Even though the person purchasing multiple lottery tickets always would tell me it sure would be nice to find out what it feels like to be rich and powerful.

Paul and Jesus similarly agree that contentment with what we have is a great gift. Also, Jesus tells a powerful parable about a guy who chose to build a great agricultural bank of wealth, but would never live to enjoy it. He tells this in part as an answer to the man who wanted Jesus to settle a dispute he had with his family concerning an inheritance. He tells it also to remind us that we only get to keep what we give away, not only our money, but ourselves and our other gifts and abilities.

Paul is even more explicit. To those in the small town of Colosse in the Lycos Valley, he reminds the Christians there that Jesus is not only the Centre of the Universe, the Creator of the Universe, the One who holds our existence together, he also calls us to give up the things that kill our love for God. In fact, Paul is bold enough to mention eleven things that kill our love for God.

You'll note that these eleven things are more on the internal journey of Christianity as opposed to the external journey. The external journey has us consider the Good Samaritan and loving the people God puts in our path every day and the Worldwide Mission before us. The internal journey has us confronting the realities of what we are like on the inside, even when we don't like what we see, something like what we feel in a nightmare.

Paul says we need to put to death (note the strong language), put to death the following:

- (1) Sexual Immorality. The Greek word is similar to porno and basically describes a desire to either imagine or act out an illicit sexual relationship, violating either your marriage or your call to singleness, often causing a deep experience of shame and uncleanness...
- (2) Impurity. Impurity is the opposite of pure, clean and good. It simply means "dirty." So we are to turn away from dirty books, movies, jokes, humor, not because we have no sense of humor, but because we want to honour God and others.

- (3) Lust. Lust usually has to do again with wanting illicit sexual things but also can be about power and control, and a lack of contentment.
- (4) Evil desires. Evil desires can be another way of talking about the above three things. Yet most evil desires come masked because many of us have an aversion to killing, stealing, destroying and lying, yet these urges are at the same time in many of us and our entertainment often depicts such.
- (5) Greed. Literally means the “desire to have more,” in Greek “*pleonexia*.” Simply put, it is the paper cup with the hole in the bottom, which can never hold a liquid for long. This is the picture of a person who cannot be satisfied.

The above five are followed by five more with the Greek saying, “Get rid of these, folks,” using language that alludes to an image of asking us to take off dirty clothing, that is, those things which kill our love for God and our love for others:

- (6) Anger. Anger here has to do with a long term bitterness, tone and entitlement. It is a continual churning, as opposed to...
- (7) Rage. Rage is more the explosive quality some of us experience in others and in ourselves. Blowing up, flying off the hand, and losing patience are other forms of this. How reactive are you to others?
- (8) Malice. Malice is a form of viciousness that enjoys seeing others suffer, or taking a perverse pleasure in seeking revenge or imagining revenge on another.
- (9) Slander. Slander is often in the form of insulting others, slandering, putting others down. Have you noticed much of the comedies on TV are about putting others down, and insulting them for some kind of humour?
- (10) Filthy language. I don't think you need me to explain to you what filthy language is. The question is what you think about saying to someone who starts shouting at you for no apparent reason, or the driver who gives you the finger or yells f.u. out the window at you.

And finally Paul asks us:

- (11) Stop lying. Now lest we think we tell the truth all the time, we should consider those times, when someone asks us to come to them, and we say “I'm coming right away” and we are not. Or perhaps other times where we tell someone something we think they want to hear rather than deal with the argument that might ensue if we tell

them the truth. Or if you have ever caught yourself saying, “you never...” or “you always...” is rarely the truth.

But here's the kicker after going through Paul's negative lists of what we are supposing to stop. What if you can't?

What if you can't stop? You're stuck. I'm stuck. We are back in that very real nightmare that keeps on going. What if you can't help getting angry? What if you can't help not telling the truth, or “little white lies” as some say? What if you can't stop the sexual sin or the lust for more stuff, or the greed which does not go away? What then?

The good news is that God has given us each other to help us when we are stuck. Bear one another's burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ, Paul says in Galatians. But Paul also says in that chapter 6, that each one of us must learn how to carry our own load. Both are true. If we are stuck in one or more of the eleven above, then we need to say to God and another human being that we are stuck and that we need help. If we ask for help, God will give us a way to get unstuck, through our friends help and care. And if we can help, please tell me or one of the elders and we will set up a way to help you, whether a group or an individual time or whatever.

The Christian life is meant to be lived together, not a Lone Ranger's life. But this takes more courage than a lone ranger has, because we have to admit our weaknesses. That is where we find God's strength and the ability to change. Otherwise we experience the same well worn paths over and over again.

Let's choose God's way and learn to trust God and others.

Let us pray.