

IT'S NOT OVER

Discussion Guide



WEEK 1: SWEET DREAMS ARE MADE OF THIS

Can you recall a time when you found yourself discouraged by your inability to achieve something big on your own?

Has this ever caused you to give up on that goal instead of turning to God? What could turning to God have done to change that circumstance? What would “turning to God” have practically looked like for you?

In this week's message, we learned about the characteristics that help us identify when a dream is truly from God and to find some clues to what God's dream for us might be.

I. GOD-SIZED DREAMS BEGIN WITH A NEED

Nehemiah 1:1-3: “In late autumn, in the month of Kislev, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes’ reign, I was at the fortress of Susa. Hanani, one of my brothers, came to visit me with some other men who had just arrived from Judah. I asked them about the Jews who had returned there from captivity and about how things were going in Jerusalem. They said to me, ‘Things are not going well for those who returned to the province of Judah. They are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem has been torn down, and the gates have been destroyed by fire.’”

Nehemiah 2:2-5: “Then I was terrified, but I replied, ‘Long live the king! How can I not be sad? For the city where my ancestors are buried is in ruins, and the gates have been destroyed by fire.’

The king asked, ‘Well, how can I help you?’” With a prayer to the God of heaven, I replied, ‘If it please the king, and if you are pleased with me, your servant, send me to Judah to rebuild the city where my ancestors are buried.’”

LEADER'S NOTE: When God breaks your heart over a specific need, it's often the first sign that God is planting a dream inside you.

The need can be either a need within you or a need around you.

- Dreams can be found within us: Give examples (finding confidence, pursuing a passion full-time, etc)
- Dreams can be found around us: Give examples (ending world hunger, paying off debt, etc)

What breaks your heart? Or what are you passionate about? What needs do you see around you that consistently tug on your heart?

2. GOD-SIZED DREAMS CREATE OPEN DOORS

*Nehemiah 1:4: “When I heard this, I sat down and wept.
In fact, for days I mourned, fasted, and prayed to the God of heaven.”*

Have you taken the time to pray for God to open a door to your dreams or to show you what your dream is? **Why is it hard to pray for these big asks?**

Nehemiah 2:1-5: “Early the following spring, in the month of Nisan, during the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes’ reign, I was serving the king his wine. I had never before appeared sad in his presence. So the king asked me, ‘Why are you looking so sad? You don’t look sick to me. You must be deeply troubled.’

Then I was terrified, but I replied, ‘Long live the king! How can I not be sad? For the city where my ancestors are buried is in ruins, and the gates have been destroyed by fire.’

The king asked, ‘Well, how can I help you?’” With a prayer to the God of heaven, I replied, “‘If it please the king, and if you are pleased with me, your servant, send me to Judah to rebuild the city where my ancestors are buried.’”

LEADER’S NOTE: You don’t have to force your way into God’s plan; you just need to move in His direction when He opens a door. As soon as Nehemiah became aware of the need in Jerusalem, he prayed and fasted. In other words, he drew close to God and trusted in God’s timing. When God opened a door for a conversation with the King, Nehemiah was ready.

When you examine your life today, what “open door” moments have you experienced? Have you ever seen a path suddenly clear for you to do something big, new, or unexpected?

3. GOD-SIZED DREAMS MATCH OUR ABILITIES AND EXPERIENCES

Nehemiah 2:11-12,16-18: “So I arrived in Jerusalem. Three days later, I slipped out during the night, taking only a few others with me...”

The city officials did not know I had been out there or what I was doing, for I had not yet said anything to anyone about my plans. I had not yet spoken to the Jewish leaders—the priests, the nobles, the officials, or anyone else in the administration. But now I said to them, ‘You know very well what trouble we are in. Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire. Let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and end this disgrace!’ Then I told them about how the gracious hand of God had been on me, and about my conversation with the king.

They replied at once, ‘Yes, let’s rebuild the wall!’ So they began the good work.”

LEADER’S NOTE: God-sized dreams typically align well with our abilities and life experiences. That’s why we often find fulfillment and purpose when we pursue those dreams; We are doing exactly what God uniquely created us to do.

What are you passionate about?

What natural gifts do you have?

LEADER'S NOTE: Remind group members that God has uniquely created them with passions, talents and abilities for exactly the purpose He has planned for their lives.

4. GOD-SIZED DREAMS CREATE OPPOSITION

Nehemiah 4:7-9: "But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs, Ammonites, and Ashdodites heard that the work was going ahead and that the gaps in the wall of Jerusalem were being repaired, they were furious. They all made plans to come and fight against Jerusalem and throw us into confusion. But we prayed to our God and guarded the city day and night to protect ourselves."

LEADER'S NOTE: We will face opposition while we chase our dreams.

What opportunities and plans have you pursued only to be opposed by others?

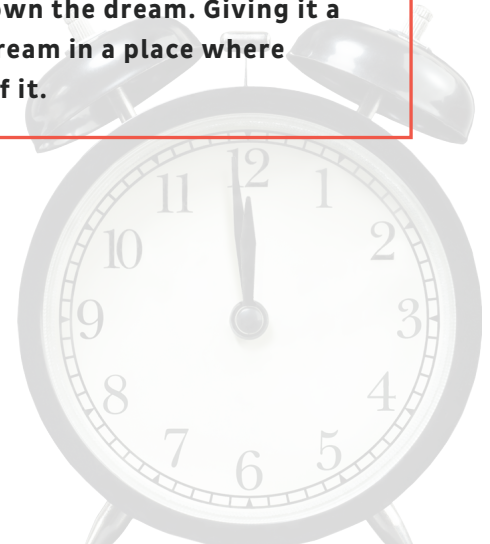
Who tends to get in your way or stand against you?

How can you overcome their opposition in the future?

LEADER'S NOTE: Don't ever feel that your dream is too small or compare it to anyone else's dream. God has a unique purpose for each member of your group and you want to help them to identify it, own it, and be both proud and excited of whatever God is calling them to do!

What is your God-sized dream?

LEADER'S NOTE: Encourage group members to take time to write down the dream. Giving it a name is a powerful step. Then, encourage them to place that dream in a place where they will see it and be constantly reminded of it.



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WEEK 2: ENEMIES, EXPERTS, & ENCOURAGERS - OH MY!

Have you ever seen the movie *Rudy*? What was your favorite part? What do you remember most about it? Why is this movie so iconic?

LEADER'S NOTE: Summarize the movie for anyone who has not seen it.

There are 3 different types of relationships that influence how we move forward with our dreams:

I. ENEMIES

Definition: People who are willing to harm you.

2 Types of Enemies:

A. Zombies

Characteristics:

- They are destructive and don't care about anything except eating and attacking anything in their way.
- They are fundamentally opposed to joy and happiness.

What a zombie wants most is to make the rest of the world as miserable as it is.

Examples:

People who drag you down, a co-worker who is overly flirtatious, an older sibling who tells you that you aren't good enough, etc.

Proverbs 13:20: "Walk with the wise and become wise; associate with fools and get in trouble."

1 Corinthians 15:33: "Don't be fooled by those who say such things, for 'bad company corrupts good character.'"

Have you ever encountered any zombies in your life? How have they impacted your life when you did?

B. Vampires

Characteristics:

- They constantly take rather than give.
- They are always a drain.
- They can find the negative side in anything.

Examples:

Person who wins the lottery and complains about getting taxed on it, gossipers and constant critics, someone with the magic ability to always point out the insecurities you are already feeling, etc.

Proverbs 18:21: "The tongue can bring death or life; those who love to talk will reap the consequences."

2. ENCOURAGERS

Definition: People who are willing to support and help you when things get tough.

2 Types of Encouragers:

A. Sidekicks

Characteristics:

- They will reliably be with you to fight the villains who come your way.
- They believe in your dreams and share your common purpose.

Examples:

Robin to Batman; people who have your back no matter what.

Proverbs 27:17: "As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend."

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10: "Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble."

Who are your biggest encouragers? How can you maximize their influence in your life?

B. Heroes

Characteristics:

- They go ahead of you and show you the way to your dreams.
- They are people you admire because they are living the kind of life you desire.

Examples:

People with the wisdom you look up to, people who are winning in the areas of life you value most, people accomplishing what you one day hope to accomplish, etc.

Philippians 4:9: "Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you."

Who is your greatest hero that you look up to? Have you ever told them what they mean to you? Have you ever asked them to invest in your growth or the success of your dream in an intentional way?

3. EXPERTS

Definition: Someone who has authority, experience, and wisdom in a specific area or field.

Characteristics:

- Experts have facts, but they rarely understand your story and they have not invested in your pursuit of your dreams.
- They believe in your dreams and share your common purpose.

Numbers 13:1-3: “Send out men to explore the land of Canaan, the land I am giving to the Israelites. Send one leader from each of the twelve ancestral tribes.’ So Moses did as the Lord commanded him. He sent out twelve men, all tribal leaders of Israel, from their camp in the wilderness of Paran.”

Numbers 13:17-33: “We entered the land you sent us to explore, and it is indeed a bountiful country—a land flowing with milk and honey. Here is the kind of fruit it produces. But the people living there are powerful, and their towns are large and fortified. We even saw giants there, the descendants of Anak! The Amalekites live in the Negev, and the Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites live in the hill country. The Canaanites live along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and along the Jordan Valley.’ But Caleb tried to quiet the people as they stood before Moses. ‘Let’s go at once to take the land,’ he said. ‘We can certainly conquer it!’ But the other men who had explored the land with him disagreed. ‘We can’t go up against them! They are stronger than we are!’ So they spread this bad report about the land among the Israelites: ‘The land we traveled through and explored will devour anyone who goes to live there. All the people we saw were huge. We even saw giants there, the descendants of Anak. Next to them we felt like grasshoppers, and that’s what they thought, too!’”

LEADER’S NOTE: Identify one or two experts in the field of your dreams who you could learn from as you pursue your God-given dream.

In order to pursue your dreams, what changes do you need to make in regards to the people with whom you spend your time?



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WEEK 3: DANGEROUS PRAYERS

Do you find it easy or hard to pray?

What events or seasons tend to impact your prayer life most?

Was there a time in life when you prayed with more boldness and belief than you do today?

Is there any habit or method you've learned or discovered that helps you to pray more comfortably?

Do you want to pray more bold, big prayers surrounded by the belief that God will move on your behalf?

Do you ever find yourself being fake or incomplete in your communication to God? Why do you think we tend to do this with a God who we know deep down knows everything?

Jeremiah 20:7: "O Lord, you misled me, and I allowed myself to be misled. You are stronger than I am, and you overpowered me. Now I am mocked every day; everyone laughs at me."

3 prayers to get you back on track:

I. GOD, HELP ME TO TRUST YOUR CHARACTER OVER MY CIRCUMSTANCES

Hebrews 13:8: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever."

What does it mean to trust God's character over His circumstances?

What are some characteristics of God that let you know that He can be counted on?

2. GOD, HELP ME SEE POSSIBILITIES WHEN I AM SURROUNDED BY IMPOSSIBILITIES

Matthew 9:18: "As Jesus was saying this, the leader of a synagogue came and knelt before him. 'My daughter has just died,' he said, 'but you can bring her back to life again if you just come and lay your hand on her.'"

Have you ever found yourself at the end of your rope like this dad? Did you or will you turn to God with as much as urgency and passion as he did?

Matthew 9:23-25: “When Jesus arrived at the official’s home, he saw the noisy crowd and heard the funeral music. ‘Get out!’ he told them. ‘The girl isn’t dead; she’s only asleep.’” But the crowd laughed at him. After the crowd was put outside, however, Jesus went in and took the girl by the hand, and she stood up!”

Why did the crowd laugh at Jesus’ words?

LEADER’S NOTE: Because they saw impossibilities.

Has there ever been a time when you trusted God for something so big it caused others to laugh?

LEADER’S NOTE: But...when Jesus is there, ANYTHING is possible!

What area of your life seems to be dying? Today, it’s time to run to God and believe him to bring it back to life.

3. GOD, GIVE ME FAITH TO SAY, “EVEN IF YOU DON’T”

LEADER’S NOTE: Review the context of Daniel 3:

Daniel 3:14-18: “Nebuchadnezzar said to them, “‘Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you refuse to serve my gods or to worship the gold statue I have set up? I will give you one more chance to bow down and worship the statue I have made when you hear the sound of the musical instruments. But if you refuse, you will be thrown immediately into the blazing furnace. And then what god will be able to rescue you from my power?’”

*Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, ‘O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. **But even if he doesn’t**, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up.’”*

What allowed these 3 young men to bravely say “even if he doesn’t” when they were about to be thrown into certain death?

LEADER’S NOTE: They were confident in God’s character and chose to worship Him for who He is over what He does.



Daniel 3:24-27: “But suddenly, Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in amazement and exclaimed to his advisers, ‘Didn’t we tie up three men and throw them into the furnace?’

‘Yes, Your Majesty, we certainly did,’ they replied. ‘Look!’ Nebuchadnezzar shouted. ‘I see four men, unbound, walking around in the fire unharmed! And the fourth looks like a god!’

Then Nebuchadnezzar came as close as he could to the door of the flaming furnace and shouted: ‘Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!’

So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stepped out of the fire. Then the high officers, officials, governors, and advisers crowded around them and saw that the fire had not touched them. Not a hair on their heads was singed, and their clothing was not scorched. They didn’t even smell of smoke!”

Are you confident that Jesus is right next to you today?

What “fire” in your life do you need Jesus to protect you in today?

LEADER’S NOTE: Stop and PRAY right now. Whether you’ve never prayed once in your life or you have quit out of discouragement like my friend, stop and simply communicate with God in your seat right now. As a group, take time to split up and pray for each other individually.



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WEEK 4: FINISH STRONG

What is something new in your life that you were excited to start or try?

Did you finish it? Did your enthusiasm wane? **What changed along the way?**

LEADER'S NOTE: Finishing strong is not the act of completing something but the process we go through on our way to completion

1 Corinthians 9:24: "Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win!"

What are some examples that our culture loves to start but rarely finishes well?

Examples from the message:

- We love weddings, but don't focus on marriages.
- We sign up for the gym, but often don't stick it out and hit weight loss goals.
- We love new credit cards, but usually can't pay the money back.
- We start new jobs with passion, but find ourselves grumbling months later.

THIS IS NOT NEW!

Revelation 2:4: "But I have this complaint against you. You don't love me or each other as you did at first!"

3 ways to finish strong:

I. MANAGE YOUR EXPECTATIONS

LEADER'S NOTE: The only way to finish strong in the pursuit of our dreams is to start and run each race with realistic expectations.

Has there ever been a time when you have created unrealistic expectations that later caused you to quit on something?

How have you seen the impact of unrealistic expectations distract you from living your best life?

What are some realistic expectations you can set for yourself today to reduce the desire to quit later on?

2. FIGHT BACK AGAINST DISCOURAGEMENT

*John 16:33: “Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows.
But take heart, because I have overcome the world.”*

Romans 8:28: “We know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.”

LEADER'S NOTE: Discouragement is the emotional evidence that what you're fighting for is worth the fight. It's not a question of "if" but "when" you will become discouraged in pursuit of your dream.

What are some ways you have experienced discouragement in the pursuit of your hopes and dreams?

Is it realistic to expect to face zero discouragement in the pursuit of a dream?

How have these discouragements affected you?

What are some ways we can begin to fight back against discouragement?

3. FOCUS ON WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL

LEADER'S NOTE: Your timing and God's timing may not be the same, but that doesn't mean God isn't still right there with you on the journey.

Phillipians 3:12-14: “I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.”

FROM THE MESSAGE: “God has a great, big, beautiful tomorrow in store for you. He has a plan and purpose for your life. You may think your best days are behind you. You may want to give up chasing your dreams because you've prayed for years, pursued for years, and it seems easier to let things die than to live another day without the hope of those dreams coming true.”

Do you find it hard to hand over control of your life to God?

Why do you think this is such a common struggle?

How can we begin to give God control over our lives and dreams?

May you always remember that as long as you have breath in your lungs, a God-sized dream in your heart, and the willingness to finish strong, it's not over!

LEADER'S NOTE: As we conclude this series as a group, once again name your God-given dream out loud. Then take time to pray for every member's dream one at a time as they name it.

