

# IT'S NOT OVER

## *Message Notes*



### WEEK 1: SWEET DREAMS ARE MADE OF THIS

#### **Opening Illustration:**

KFC/Colonel Sanders Story

(Some details available here: Venessa Wong, "Everything You Don't Know About the Real Colonel Sanders," BuzzFeed News, July 9, 2015, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/venessawong/the-real-colonel-sanders>)

#### **Illustration/Big Idea:**

Colonel Sanders had many chances and reasons to give up on his dreams. In my experience, that's the moment when dreams die for so many people. When a crisis hits, when they don't understand how they can possibly move forward, most people respond by giving up. Or they settle for something smaller—something easier. And their dreams are buried in what-ifs and thoughts of what might have been. Sanders didn't give up. He kept pressing on. And so can you! That's what this series is all about...

Colonel Sanders' story is a great illustration of what I refer to as a "God-sized dream."

Definition: A God-sized dream is a compelling vision, goal, or longing that drives us toward something way too big for us to accomplish on our own. It's a dream or a yearning we feel inside—usually it's something that we deeply desire to achieve or experience. And yet we often have no idea how to bring it about. God-sized dreams are those desires inside us that simply won't be ignored. When we pay attention to them and spend time pursuing them, we feel exhilarated. We feel joy and purpose—like we're doing exactly what we were created to do. On the other hand, when we try to ignore our God-sized dreams or move away from them, it burns. It's like an indigestion of the soul.

What is your God-sized dream? This series is all about discovering and living out your God-sized dream!

Why most people aren't living out their God-sized dreams: They are focused on who they are instead of who God is. We know we are inadequate to achieve them on our own, so we press them down instead of turning to God for help.

#### **Background/Context on Nehemiah:**

#### **Characteristics of a God-sized dream:**

## 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.’”*

Imagine the horror and pain in Nehemiah’s heart when he heard that the walls and gates of Jerusalem had been destroyed. His hometown was defenseless.

The report from Judah broke something inside Nehemiah. That was the moment he thought, *This is not okay. Something has to be done!*

**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)

## 2. GOD-SIZED DREAMS CREATE OPEN DOORS

Nehemiah waited and asked for a door to open:

*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.”*

When it opened, it opened in a BIG way:

*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.’”*

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.

You might be thinking, *But how do I know which opportunities are God opening a door, and which are just happenstance? How do I know when to jump?*

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.

### 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."*

**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 good at? What comes easily to you? Are you good at working with your hands? Do you like math? Do you enjoy speaking in public? Are you a natural leader? Do you love to write? Do you enjoy initiating things? Do you love animals? Do you love kids? Do you enjoy teaching?

God has uniquely created you with passions, talents and abilities.  
You were created on purpose for a purpose.

### 4. GOD-SIZED DREAMS CREATE OPPOSITION

Illustration: Joshua tells about a time when he was being bullied by a kid named Billy. His mom went on the bus and defended him.

**We will face opposition while we chase our dreams.**

*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."*

Don't be concerned when you are facing opposition; be concerned when your dreams are so small there is no reason for opposition.

**If you know your God-sized dream, write it down!**

Illustration: Joshua used an illustration of a time he thought he lost his phone but he was actually holding onto it.

In the same way that I sometimes try to find a phone that isn't actually lost but is in my hand, we often try extra hard to discover dreams that aren't hiding. We sometimes ignore God-given dreams because they don't seem spiritual enough or important enough, or seem too simple and obvious.

**Action step/challenge: You are responsible only for being faithful to the dreams God has called you to steward! Don't sit on the sidelines wondering where your dream is when, like Nehemiah, God has placed it right in front of you. No, you're not too old. No, you're not too young. You're not a collection of yesterday's mistakes, and you haven't used up your potential. You are God's masterpiece, and He has uniquely created you to accomplish your specific purpose.**

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

### Opening Illustration:

"You're five feet nothin', 100 and nothin', and you got hardly a speck of athletic ability. And you hung in with the best college football team in the land for two years. And you're also gonna walk outta here with a degree from the University of Notre Dame. In this lifetime, you don't have to prove nothin' to nobody except yourself."

Do you recognize that quote? It's from the movie *Rudy*, which is one of my all-time favorite films...

Explain *Rudy* background/story

(<https://parade.com/708397/solanahawkenson/rudy-turns-25-the-films-most-memorable-quotes/>)

I've learned that we will encounter lots of Franks and very few Petes in life. And not only will the Franks always seem greater in number, they will also be louder in volume. As a result, we have to be careful which voices we allow to influence our decisions and our futures, lest we become the clone of everyone else's opinion and cover over the masterpiece God designed.

**The fastest way to forget what God thinks of you is to become consumed by what the Franks of this world think of you.**

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.’”*

## **B. Vampires**

Characteristics:

- They constantly take rather than give.
  - Ernie Johnson on current political climate: “I have to look in the mirror and say, ‘How am I going to be a better man? How am I going to be a better neighbor? How am I going to be a better citizen? How am I going to be a better American? **How can I be a fountain and not a drain?**”
- 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.
- They are willing to sweat alongside you. Make sure the voices you allow to speak loudest into your dreams have sweat alongside of you while you’ve chased them.

What a sidekick wants most is to see you become a better version of yourself.

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.”*

## 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.

*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."*

Having a hero allows you to aim your life in the direction of your desired outcome.

If you have a dream to\_\_\_\_\_, you need to find a hero who has successfully\_\_\_\_\_.

*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."*

## 3. EXPERTS

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

\*\*The unique thing about experts is that they can come in both good and bad forms!

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.

Background/Story - Israelites wandering in search of the Promised Land:

Before stepping into their promise, the Lord told Moses to send out some volunteers to explore the land:

*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."*

Unfortunately, Moses sent out men who were experts at evaluating land and fighting wars, not experts on what God had already done and had promised to do in the future. So, after exploring the Promised Land for forty days, the twelve scouts came back and shared their opinions with Moses and the Israelites:

*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!’”*

Of the twelve experts sent into the Promised Land, ten returned with a negative report. And those ten persuaded the entire nation to believe that their dream of receiving the Promised Land was impossible. They convinced the Israelites to see themselves as grasshoppers in a giant’s world.

As a result, the Israelites wandered in the desert for forty years. During those four decades, an entire generation missed out on their dream, their miracle, and their God-given promise because they allowed the opinions of “experts” to convince them that there was no hope.

**Action step/application: There’s no better way to end up where you want to be than to spend time with people who can show you how to get there.**



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### WEEK 3: DANGEROUS PRAYERS

#### Opening Illustration:

Joshua told a story of a friend telling him about her struggle to pray confidently because her prayers to see her son healed have not been answered.

#### Illustration/Big Idea:

Our prayers and our dreams are not two separate expressions of who we are. Instead, they are directly connected. **When our ability to dream becomes weak, the same happens to our prayer life.**

Big and bold dreams lead to big and bold prayers! BUT when we feel wounded by unfulfilled dreams, we only allow ourselves safe and comfortable dreams, which means we settle for safe and comfortable prayers.

**Prayer is the only antidote to our problems with praying.**

We have to pray even when we don't feel like praying, even when we're not exactly sure what to say, and even when it feels like our prayers are not being heard.

**God wants the real you!** Don't be fake. Don't hide pain. Don't try to sugarcoat feelings.

*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

Most of us allow the day-to-day circumstances of our lives to form our understanding of who God is and what He values. We allow our experiences to shape what we believe about His character. That's how we start to think of God as a Cosmic Vending Machine who only exists to grant our wishes, or as a Divine Accountant who spends His days constantly checking over our thoughts and actions in search of mistakes to punish.

Story/Illustration: Horatio Spafford losing his family before writing "It Is Well"  
(more details here: <http://www.spaffordcenter.org/>)

"When peace, like a river, attendeth my way, When sorrows like sea billows roll; Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say, It is well, it is well with my soul."

**God never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.**

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

Therefore, you can use God's unchanging nature as a foundation for your prayer life.

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

There's a dad in the book of Matthew who ran up to Jesus in need of a miracle, and he believed that nothing is impossible for God. Jesus was in the middle of a conversation about fasting when the guy interrupted Him:

*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.'"*

This man came looking for a miracle and this was his last resort! So he went directly to the one person he believed could turn his impossibilities into possibilities.

*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!"*

Do you know why the crowd laughed? Because they were looking only at the impossibilities!

**But...when Jesus is there, ANYTHING is possible!**

What dream have you stopped praying for? And is there any reason why today can't be the day you run to Jesus in desperation?

## **3. GOD, GIVE ME FAITH TO SAY, "EVEN IF YOU DON'T"**

Story/Background - Daniel 3 context:

*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.'*"  
(emphasis mine)

Mic drop! Obviously, that's a powerful moment of faith even in the most dangerous of circumstances. But there's one important detail that stands out to me. One particular phrase: **"even if he doesn't . . ."**

**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!"*

**I don't know what type of circumstances you're facing or what furnace you're in, but I do know God is standing beside you.**

**Action step/challenge: 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.**

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### WEEK 4: FINISH STRONG

#### Opening Illustration:

Joshua told a story of starting a house project and being daunted by the reality he had to now finish it. Why? Because starting is so much easier than finishing.

**Finishing strong: Not the act of completing something, but the process we go through on our way to completion.**

The moment we start something, the process of finishing begins; therefore, how we choose to live in the gap between the starting line and finish line will determine how we actually end the journey.

*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!"*

We as a culture are much better at starting things than we are at finishing them.

Examples:

- 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

**The only way to finish strong in the pursuit of our dreams is to start and run each race with realistic expectations.**

Jesus talked about that very thing in one of his most famous teachings:

*Luke 14:28: "But don't begin until you count the cost. For who would begin construction of a building without first calculating the cost to see if there is enough money to finish it?"*

It's easy to start pursuing a God-sized dream, but you'll need to put together all 4,124 LEGO pieces scattered across the floor if you want to finish strong. You'll have to work through moments that cause you pain, anger, exhaustion, disappointment, fear, and discouragement. You'll need to make the decision to keep going even when everything inside of you wants to give up.

On a practical level, managing your expectations means being aware from the very beginning that those difficult moments will come. It means knowing up front that achieving your dream will be hard and will require much sacrifice from you.

## 2. FIGHT BACK AGAINST DISCOURAGEMENT

Jesus Himself warned us of hardship when He said:

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

**DISCOURAGEMENT IS THE EMOTIONAL EVIDENCE THAT WHAT YOU'RE FIGHTING FOR IS WORTH THE FIGHT.**

How to battle discouragement:

- Consult:

- Talk with people who've gone before you and probably experienced what you're experiencing in that moment.

*Galatians 6:2: "Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ."*

- Capture:

- When you get hit with discouragement or other negative thoughts, you need to recognize it and reject it with quick hit prayers. Examples:

- "No, I reject the thought that I will never find happiness."
    - "I reject the lie that my career is stuck and I will not advance."
    - "I say 'no' to the lie that I will never find freedom from this addiction. That is not true, and I reject it."

*2 Corinthians 10:5: "We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ."*

- Control:

- You can also actively declare positive thoughts over your own life in a similar way. Examples:

- "I am a child of God, and He cares for me. He will bring me the desires of my heart."
    - "God is the provider for my family, and I trust Him with my career."
    - "I have been healed of my sin by the blood of Jesus that was shed on the cross, and I will gain victory over this addiction."

*Proverbs 18:21: “The tongue can bring death or life.”*

*Matthew 12:37: “The words you say will either acquit you or condemn you.”*

- Commit:

- When discouragement is trying to knock you off course from pursuing your dreams, make a fresh commitment to trust God’s promises.

*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.”*

### 3. FOCUS ON WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL

Story/Illustration: Joshua tells the story about how he hydroseeded his backyard and walked outside the next day impatiently expecting grass to already be sprouting up.

**We will exhaust ourselves in the pursuit of our dreams if we keep trying to manage things over which we have no control.**

In what ways are you trying to do God’s job for Him right now?

**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.”*

Closing story: Walt Disney went through many bankruptcies before his dream of Disney World came to be. More info here: Bob Thomas, *Walt Disney: An American Original* (Disney Editions, 1976). Steven Watts, *The Magic Kingdom: Walt Disney and the American Way of Life* (University of Missouri Press, 1997), 228. Michael Barrier, *The Animated Man: A Life of Walt Disney* (University of California Press, 2007), 4.

Today, our culture celebrates the perfectly posed photos taken when someone crosses the finish line of an important race, but we often ignore the sweaty, painful miles of endurance, grit, faith, and hard work it takes to reach the end.

**Action step/challenge: 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 and pursued for years, and it seems easier to let things die than to live another day without the hope of those dreams coming true.**

**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!**