

Note: The sermon below was delivered by the Rev. Caleb Kim on Sunday, January 5, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. at St. Andrew's, Fenelon Falls and via Zoom.

Title: Forward - Time to Dream (I)

Happy New Year! The first sermon series for this new year, spanning the next five or six Sundays, is titled "Time to Dream." Today's theme is "Forward." Before we go any further, let us consider the definition of a dream. A dream can be an image or a picture of something we see during our sleep. It can also be a goal, a plan, or a project we hope to fulfill in our daily lives.

Have you ever heard of the idea of saving physical strength for our golden years? I've often heard phrases like, "saving resources for rainy days" or "sparing money for the future." When I was younger, I was encouraged to follow the 30-percent budget rule for future housing costs. This meant that at least one-third of a young person's monthly income should be set aside for mortgage payments or rent. Nowadays, even fifty percent or more of a person's earnings may not be sufficient to meet those costs. Essentially, we are encouraged to save resources for times when essential items will be needed down the road.

Now, let's revisit the question of building up physical strength. If our life expectancy today is around 90 years, our God-given time can be divided into three stages: the foundation period from birth to 30 years old, the development stage from 30 to 60 years old, and the maturity journey from 60 to 90 years and beyond. I have recently learned that middle-aged people in this life cycle are focusing on building muscles for their next adventure. I used to think that working out at a gym or exercising in a fitness center was designed only for young people, not for those of advanced age. However, I have noticed that many adults in their fifties, sixties, seventies, or even older, are working hard to gain muscle and maintain strength through various exercises. This awareness has motivated me, as a fifty-seven-year-old, to pay closer attention to preparing for the golden stage of my life.

Another goal I want to work on this year is related to mental health. I am reminded of the principle, "Use it or lose it," in relation to our brain. Unlike muscles, our brain is made up of cells, and these cells communicate with one other to help us perform both daily cognitive and physical activities. Interestingly, the development of brain cells is similar to that of muscles: if brain cells are not properly exercised, their ability to function effectively can decrease with age. On the other hand, when we engage in brain-stimulating activities- challenging our brain cells just as we challenge our muscles - our brain can be kept in good shape despite the aging process. If we maintain well-connected, high-capacity brain cells during middle age, these reserves can provide us with mental strength in case memory issues arise in the future.

Brain-stimulating activities might include solving crossword puzzles, playing cards, learning new cooking recipes, or visiting a farmer's market. Personally, I want to continue memorizing the Word of God and Christian faith statements like the Lord's Prayer and the Creed. As I have shared before, I call my mother once or twice a day. During those conversations, I encourage her to memorize key information, including the Apostles' Creed. She has done a great job. Some of us, including myself, may feel that memorizing long faith statements is challenging.

Don't worry! If memorization is not your first choice, you can choose another activity that challenges your brain. That's perfectly fine. The important thing is to remember the principle: "Use it or lose it." Just as building strong physical muscles helps us maintain our health in our golden years, saving cognitive reserves can protect us from potential declines in memory or mental function in the future.

With this introduction in mind, I want to share another definition of a dream found in the Bible. A dream can be described as a vision or passion we receive during daily devotion with the Holy Spirit.

In today's New Testament reading, we find an example of such a dream spoken by the Apostle Peter. According to his divine message, God would pour out His Spirit on all people in the last days. Once they received the Spirit, their sons and daughters, and even their servants-both men and women-would prophesy. Their younger ones would see visions, and their older ones would dream dreams. These Spirit-powered activities could be carried out inclusively by all, regardless of gender, age, or social status.

In the final part of Peter's statement, which comes from the prophecy of Joel, we hear this sacred promise: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" from the world's destruction before the coming of the Lord's glorious day. Later, Peter echoed God's invitation to all people in his preaching on the Day of Pentecost: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call. Save yourselves from this corrupt generation" (Acts 3:38-40). Having God-given dreams is one of the benefits of receiving the Holy Spirit. Throughout history, Christ's followers, empowered by the Holy Spirit, have witnessed to the world and fulfilled His Greatest Commission to "make disciples of all nations" in diverse and remarkable ways (Acts 1:8; Matthew 28:19-20).

The Bible is filled with many dream stories, which is why we might think of Scripture as a "Dream Book." In today's Old Testament reading, we meet a dreamer named Caleb, who demonstrated forward-thinking faith. Let me provide some background for today's scripture. After the Israelites captured the land of Canaan, Joshua divided God's Promised Land among the twelve tribes of Israel. Caleb, as a representative of the tribe of Judah, approached his long-time friend Joshua with a specific request: he asked for a particular portion of Judah's territory to be allocated to his family.

Before making this proposal, Caleb shared the God-given dream he had carried for decades, a dream revealed to him when he was forty years old. Back then, Caleb and Joshua, along with ten other spies, explored the Promised Land and reported their findings to the people of Israel. Through Moses, God promised Caleb that the land he walked on would belong to him and his descendants. From that moment on, Caleb remained steadfast in his love for God and faithful to His ways. Now, at eighty-five years old, Caleb was ready to fulfill the dream God had given him 45 years earlier. He asked Joshua for the land of Hebron as his inheritance.

As today's scripture indicates, this wasn't an easy task. The Anakites, known as giants, lived there, and their towns were heavily fortified. Yet by faith, Caleb chose the most challenging part of the Promised Land. He declared confidently, "The Lord helping me, I will drive them out just as He said" (Joshua 14:12). Caleb trusted God for strength and wisdom to overcome obstacles and step out of his comfort zone.

Joshua blessed Caleb and gave him Hebron as his inheritance because Caleb followed the Lord wholeheartedly. The word "wholeheartedly" is repeated throughout this story to describe Caleb's unwavering faith. To follow God wholeheartedly means to do so without reservation—holding nothing back. Caleb demonstrated this not only as a young man of 40 but also as a mature man of 85. At every stage of his faith journey, Caleb had the courage to pursue his God-given dream with all his heart, mind, and strength. This was the secret to Caleb's spiritual prosperity and success. As today's scripture also reveals, the land of Hebron was not just for Caleb; it was for his future generations. Caleb believed that if he followed the Lord completely, he and his descendants would thrive wherever they went and in whatever they did.

Because of his faithfulness, Caleb likely took care of his physical body, recognizing it as God's temple. Though he aged, he exchanged his strength for God's strength and soared spiritually like an eagle. He hoped in the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth, and received His Help every moment (Isaiah 40:30-31).

Friends, what kinds of forward-thinking dreams, like Caleb's, has God placed in our hearts this year, regardless of our circumstances? When I speak of dreams, I am not referring to personal ambitions apart from God's will. Instead, I mean envisioning the next steps in our spiritual adventures. Have we made our God-given resolutions and decided to step forward into His promised territories? If not, why not? Remember, even if we take three steps forward and two steps back, we are still progressing one step forward for the glory of God.

As disciples of Christ, we will face various challenges in our spiritual race or journey whether we like it or not. We are not exempt from difficulties. I have shared before how our spiritual adversary, the devil, uses weapons like deception, discouragement, despair, and doubt to attack us. But today is our time to dream and move forward. God created us to rule over His creation, not to be ruled by our circumstances. Whatever negative voices Satan whispers in our ears, we must remember what Jesus accomplished on the cross. He crushed Satan's head. By rising from the dead, He conquered death. Let us remember who we are in Christ today: we are called to be onward Christian soldiers, marching with our Captain, Jesus Christ. When we follow the Lord wholeheartedly, we can stand strong in faith and overcome every evil attack. By relying on God's power, the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, and the love of Jesus Christ, we can become more than conquerors and fulfill our God-given dreams.

Some time ago, my mom shared one of her favorite quotations with me: "Our future can be changed depending on what we are doing today." I like that. God knows what is best for us now, and He holds our future in His hands. In the meantime, He calls us to care for ourselves spiritually and physically by eating nutritious food, doing daily physical and mental exercises, and trusting Him fully.

On this first Sunday, January 5, 2025, when the Spirit comes upon us, the young among us will see visions, and the young at heart will dream dreams. We all will witness our prayers for our loved ones, our church, and our community being answered in the days ahead.

It is often mysterious how God works in each of our lives. However, through the Word of God, we are assured of who our Almighty God is, how wonderful the Holy Spirit is, and how deeply Jesus Christ loves each of us. When we follow the Triune Lord wholeheartedly, as Caleb did, the Miracle Worker and Creator who made everything out of nothing will help us see the dreams God has given to us, our loved ones, our church, and our community come true in His perfect time. I'd like to conclude this message by sharing words from one of my favorite followers of Christ. Hudson Taylor said, "Attempt great things for God and expect great things from God." Amen!

*In this message, I have drawn from thoughts and materials inspired by various sermons based on the texts, Acts 2:14-21; Joshua 14:6-15.