

## "HOW TO TURN BIG DREAMS INTO EVEN BIGGER REALITIES"

(Romans 15:14-33)

(Chuck Swindoll)

Great men and women become great because they dream on a grand scale and then set out to turn their vision into reality. Paul's vision for the gospel stretched farther than any of his contemporaries dared to imagine. After three circuits around the eastern part of the Roman Empire, nearly every major city had a relatively stable church with fairly capable leadership. It was then that Paul set his sights on the western part of the empire. He would build on past success by employing the same principles that had guided him thus far. I find four in Romans 15:14-33.

First, *life's greatest achievements are accomplished through joint effort* (15:17-18). We often imagine Paul trudging from town to town all alone except for a faithful companion or two. In reality, he often traveled with a relatively large entourage, which is why he frequently asked the churches for help in continuing his mission. He understood the power of collaboration, recognizing that the involvement of others would compound his own effectiveness. He was ever on the lookout for capable people he could energize by sharing his vision.

Second, *great accomplishments are never achieved without hindrances* (15:22). One very wise author wrote, "If I'm told that the road to my glorious destination is marred by loose rocks and potholes, every jolt along the way reminds me that I'm on the right road." Evangelizing the eastern part of the empire did not occur quickly or easily. Paul faced exposure, hunger, shipwreck, robbers, imprisonment, floggings, stoning, slander, and even opposition from his closest friends. Any one of these might have discouraged the apostle. Many might have taken this opposition to be a sign of God's disapproval. But he remained determined.

Third, *hindrances are overcome by sustained hope* (15:23-25). As Paul endured unjust punishment and unfair treatment and continually encountered opposition to his planned objective, he trusted that the Lord would use the evil deeds of evil people to advance the good news of Christ (Phil. 1:12-14). If you run with people who dash your hopes and dreams, you're running with the wrong crowd. Get new friends. Genuine friends give wise, realistic



counsel, but they also encourage us. They remind us that nothing is impossible with God. Hope is sustained by trusting the Lord as we remain focused on a God-honoring vision.

Fourth, *the essential ingredient of sustained hope is enthusiasm* (15:29). Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, "Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm." He was right. However, don't confuse enthusiasm with excitement. They often go together, but excitement fades quickly, usually after the first couple of setbacks. Enthusiasm is a sustained positive attitude fueled by the steadfast conviction that one's vision must become reality.

By the way, Paul did go to Rome . . . and the government paid his way! While fighting false charges leveled against him by his former colleagues and dodging assassination attempts, he was transported to Rome under Roman guard to have his case heard by Emperor Nero. He remained under house arrest in Rome with a Roman soldier to guard him, which he viewed as another grand opportunity. He turned his circumstance into an opportunity to evangelize the palace guard!

If you have a great vision, you are a leader. You also have been given a responsibility to turn that worthy dream into reality. Share your vision with others and don't hesitate to enlist help. Expect hindrances and remain focused on fulfilling your vision. Smother your dreams in prayer, asking that the God-honoring vision you hold will be accomplished through God's power, and choose companions who remind you of His faithfulness. And when you inevitably face setbacks, refuse discouragement—remain enthusiastic. Allow your convictions to carry you forward, and discover ways to turn each difficulty into an advantage.

If your vision is something that honors God and brings the righteousness of God to the world, you can be certain He will turn your grandest dream into an even grander reality. Trust Him!