

Finish What You Start

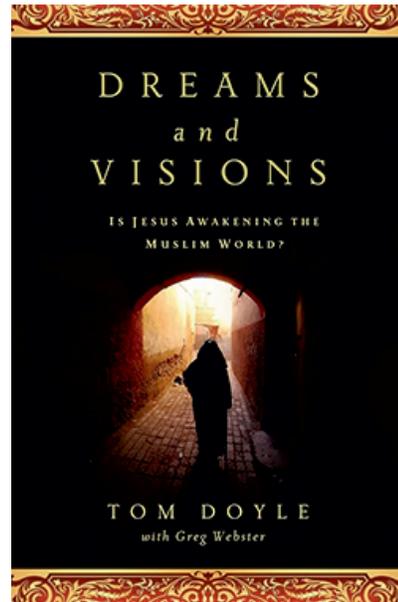
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Are we losing a sense of faithfulness in our world today? Are we placing such an enormous emphasis on short-term results and returns that we have forgotten the virtues of being faithful over longer periods of time? Is there a new ethic emerging of just getting rid of someone who is no longer useful to us; firing them is the new, expedient solution. Are people changing jobs so often these days, or constantly positioning themselves for better opportunities that they have forgotten God's call on their lives to be faithful to one another? God is faithful to us, and he calls us to be faithful to him and one another. Faithfulness brings freedom and peace to our spirits. An absence of faithfulness brings darkness, sin, and endless entanglements to our souls, every time. We are all wanting to be loved, understood, and nurtured; and no one provides that better for us than God. And in return he calls us to be faithful to him, our spouses, families, friends, co-workers, and neighbors.

At the heart of faithfulness is mercy and forgiveness. For any relationship to succeed, the parties involved must learn to forgive one another when a faithless, selfish act has occurred. After all, that is how God treats us, giving us second chances all the time. The book of Lamentations reminds us, "The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin fresh each morning." (Lamentations 3:22,23) Grace is the oil for any relationship to function well and flourish.

God loves honest hearts, and he wants us to be blessed by long-term relationships. However, he would rather have us run from him, ignore him, or even wrestle with him, than be lukewarm and not fully committed to our relationship with him. He wants us to be either hot or cold, but never tepid. Jesus said to the church in Laodicea, "But since you are lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth." (Revelation 3:16) God wants us to count the costs before beginning down the road with him, no matter how long it takes. Similarly, he wants us to think deeply about our commitments in marriage or forging important relationships with friends and fellow believers before beginning a life with them. He does not want us to start something we are not ready to finish. And when we are faithful with small things, God will give us greater treasures filled with larger blessings. Jesus said to his disciples, "The master was full of praise. 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!'" (Matthew 25:21)

Some of the bravest people I know are living in the Middle East. Christ is revealing himself in dreams and visions directly into the hearts and souls of Muslims



who are searching for greater truths and freedoms in their lives. When a Muslim becomes a follower of Jesus, he or she is faced with enormous decisions. They now must live this new life in a region of our world which does not acknowledge their experiences, largely does not allow for religious freedom, and does not give them the same legal or societal status they had as when they were born Muslim. Today in Egypt, for instance, a Muslim is not allowed to change their driver's license to indicate they are now a Christian and no longer a Muslim. These new believers must soberly count the costs of becoming a Christian, knowing they will most likely get kicked out of their families, lose their jobs, and risk becoming harassed or even killed. Yet, thousands of new believers throughout the Middle East are quietly, reverently and faithfully moving forward with bravery, laying the foundations of greater freedoms for future generations. Please be in prayer for these courageous people who are leaning into God's faithfulness in ways often unimaginable. They remember and rely on these words of our Lord, "Don't be afraid by what you are about to suffer. The devil will throw some of you into prison to test you... But if you remain faithful even when facing death, I will give you the crown of life." (Revelation 2:10)

I have spent the last 40 years of my life engaged in some form of international church activity. I have been blessed to have forged lasting relationships and partnerships with Christian leaders from many different cultures. In this time, I have learned that lasting cross-cultural partnerships require a lot of time, attention, humility, and a willingness to learn from past mistakes. It takes many visits cross-culturally to begin understanding what challenges and joys new friends from Uganda, Brazil, Mexico, Egypt, and Iran are experiencing; how I as an American might be able to encourage and help them and how they can bless and help me. Frontier Fellowship places a great emphasis on developing healthy cross-cultural partnerships. We want to be faithful in our partnerships while careful to avoid unhealthy imbalances because of wealth or greater resources. Healthy, cross-cultural relationships nurtured by time and the Holy Spirit can bring enormous blessings into our lives.

I grew up during a time in the 1960s and '70s when individual rights and experiences were elevated to new levels of appreciation and desire. However, instead of ushering in an era filled with greater "peace and love", as was the objective, many of these so-called virtuous but often

misguided pursuits gave birth to excessive individualism, self-centered lifestyles, and an unfortunate fear of commitment which now permeates much of modern life. Today, fewer people are marrying, staying in the same jobs, or joining local community clubs, religious organizations, or activities. An increasing number of people prefer staying within the comforts of their homes and pursuing virtual activities or viewing opportunities on computers. Perhaps they are avoiding relationships that sometimes can be messy and unpredictable. Virtual activities are much easier for them. Relationships, after all, require a lot of effort. And, in the end, there's always a risk that someone might get hurt by being unfaithful. Is that a risk worth taking?

As I look back on my own life, I am extremely grateful for my Christian faith. I am grateful that my faith demands crucial decisions and commitments and provides a life of constant community for me. As a follower of Jesus, I cannot sit back and pursue life on my own terms; I can't sit comfortably in the middle ground avoiding other people, keeping all my options open while just pursuing my own interests. That is not how God works. He wants me to go in the opposite direction, forging a vibrant relationship with him and others. He knows that commitment will give me greater freedom, not greater restriction. As things turned out, and by God's merciful grace, I am one of those people who took his time to make a lot of very important life

decisions. In fact, I was spared from making a lot of poor decisions. It was not until age 27 that I decided to become a follower of Jesus, and it was not until age 40 that I married my dear wife, Sharon, and was ordained in the same summer to full-time ministry with the Presbyterian Church USA. Now these three commitments have become the cornerstones of my life on which I have been blessed to build my family and calling. God has been incredibly faithful to me. And with his help, I am trying to be equally faithful to him, my family, friends and ministry going forward into the remaining years of my life.

I am so glad we do not have a fickle or capricious God. That would be incredibly unsettling. On the contrary, we have a most dependable, loving, and faithful God who is always there for us, and he invites us to be faithful with him and others. "Understand, therefore, that the Lord your God is indeed God. He is the faithful God who keeps his covenant for a thousand generations and lavishes his unfailing love on those who love him and obey his commands." (Deuteronomy 7:9) He is always faithful to us and wants us to be faithful to him.

