

Crumpled Dreams

By Jane Keller

As I sat at the table with a blank poster board in front of me, scissors in hand, and a stack of magazines beside me, a feeling of dread began to build. I had no idea where to begin. I looked up at my friend, Missy, sitting across from me, a mother of five, and as she stared back at me, a mother of six, one look said it all.

It was a Monday night, and I, along with several other women, were meeting with a life coach.

She had just given us an assignment: look through magazines and cut out pictures, words, or phrases that reflect our dreams. We weren't supposed to process our thoughts too much—just let our hearts respond to what appealed to us.

Missy and I laughed and joked as we flipped through our magazines, but underneath the laughter, I sensed a growing frustration, and the flipping of the pages began to sound like a desperate search for ourselves. Another friend at our table, an empty-nester, asked me, “Jane, what do you see yourself doing when your kids are gone?” As I stared at her with the same glazed-over look I had given Missy, I realized I had no answer. That night a truth that had been gnawing at the edges of my heart broke through in full clarity. Sometime in the last 20 years, I'd given up on my dreams.

When I was first married, I was full of them. I wanted to have all my children while I was young and be a stay-at-home mom. After our kids were grown and gone, Steve and I would travel, collect antiques, and live on the beach. All of this while I owned my own business and he was a pastor.

As the years went by, some of these dreams came to life. Steve is a pastor. We had three children while we were young ... but then five years later, along came two more ... and four years after that number six. We weren't so young anymore.

I've yet to open my own business, travel has pretty much been limited to family vacations, and so far, not a single antique (unless you count the washer and dryer).

I was afraid to start dreaming again, telling myself that I shouldn't have dreams and that I should just let my life turn out the way it's going to turn out.

That Monday evening I came home with a poster covered with magazine clippings and a heavy heart. I began to see that it wasn't just the big dreams I'd let go of, but even smaller dreams had been put on the shelf because, well, because of life. Like the dream of running the Boston marathon, going to Napa Valley, or taking a road trip with my sisters.

The next morning, my 5-year-old daughter walked into the living room holding my poster. “Mom, is this important? Because Noah just ripped it.” Behind her trailed my 22-month-old son with magazine paper crumpled tightly in his little fist. As I tried to salvage my dreams from his grip, tears sprang to my eyes, but I couldn't help but laugh at the irony of it. This one action by my son summed up all that I had been feeling.

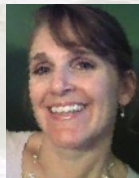
As I tried to sort through all my emotions in the days that followed, one seemed truer than the rest. Fear. I was afraid to start dreaming again, telling myself that I shouldn't have dreams and that I should just let my life turn out the way it's going to turn out. God is sovereign, right? I can trust him.

As I looked at my tattered poster I felt something beneath the fear begin to stir. A hunger. A hunger for more, a hunger for God. Wasn't God the first dreamer? The One who saw the world for what it would be and created it? Hasn't he placed that same creativity in me? I believe he has. I also believe perfect Love destroys fear.

Like a toddler learning to walk, I've started dreaming again. I've realized with joy that some of my dreams are the same. I still would love to own my own business and buy that beach house.

I still want to run Boston, travel, and take that road trip with my sisters. I have some new dreams, too. But they are still young and need caring for and tending to in order to grow. I've promised myself I will not feel shame for wanting more, that having dreams is not an indication that I am unfulfilled or unhappy. Dreaming big means having hope, and hope does not disappoint.

I think I'll give my sisters a call and see if they've got plans for next spring. ■



Jane Keller lives in Charlotte, North Carolina and is happily married to Steve. She stays busy with their 6 children, who range from a toddler to college age. She loves running, cooking and squeezing the juice out of life.