

## LOST IN THE MIDDLE CHAPTER 5—"TOWERS TO THE SKY"

To be used 10/16/05. Mostly summary of Tripp's material.

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### INTRO (Tripp pages 135-139)

We are all dreamers, planners, goal setters, imaginers, thinkers.

Dreams motivate us, magnetize our energy, give us reason to press on.

Story of Greg's disappointment. Stuck, dead-ended.

Sullen = gloomingly or resentfully silent or repressed.

Detached from family, irritable, impatient, spending on luxuries.

Obsessed with youth & exercise. Comfortable life, but unthankful.

### Section #1—IN GOOD COMPANY (Tripp pages 139-140)

Dissatisfaction is a common problem, often leads to bigger trouble.

Feeling cheated, conned, and stuck. Regretting past, fearing future.

Regret that stepping stones in our plan become dead ends.

Feel life has passed us by, feel our situation is confining and claustrophobic.

Feel helpless to change anything and regret decisions we made that got us here.

Feel people are driving us crazy. Unhappy with neighborhood, car, clothes, yard.

Key—Truth is that nothing around us has changed that dramatically.

WE have changed. Our dreams have crumbled, slipped through our fingers.  
 Perfect family, career, lifestyle, ministry has not be achieved.  
 In fighting to keep our dreams alive, we tend to do all the wrong things.

### Section #2--THE BEAUTY OF IMAGINATION (Tripp pages 140-142)

God made us to imitate Him in our capacity to imagine, think, plan.

Man = anthropos = the upper looker.

Seeing things as they are (reality). Seeing things as they ought to be (vision).

We are made for relationship with God who is real, but unseen.

For a home, a kingdom, and rewards that are real, but unseen.

#### Genesis 1

- 26 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."
- 27 So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.
- 28 Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."
- 29 And God said, "See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food.
- 30 "Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food"; and it was so.
- 31 Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

#### Psalm 8

- 4 What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him?
- 5 For You have made him a little lower than the angels, And You have crowned him with glory and honor.
- 6 You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet,
- 7 All sheep and oxen; Even the beasts of the field,
- 8 The birds of the air, And the fish of the sea That pass through the paths of the seas.
- 9 O LORD, our Lord, How excellent is Your name in all the earth!

Ability to imagine is wonderful, mysterious, practical, and holy.  
A Christian's largest investment is in the invisible world.

### Colossians 3

- 1 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.
- 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.
- 3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.
- 4 When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.
- 5 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

Key motivation for godliness is that we are headed for a better world.  
Mistake is when we seek highest happiness (heaven) here on earth.

### Section #3--THE DANGER OF IMAGINATION (Tripp pages 142-144)

The Lord created us to imagine, but, like all of God's good gifts, we are prone to misuse our imagination/planning capacity.

2 strands of Bible teaching:

1. We are commanded to plan for the future
  2. But can't control the future, so must plan in submission to God
- Pray for the best; plan for the worst; accept thankfully whatever the Lord provides.

### Plan--Proverbs

15:22 Without counsel, plans go awry, But in the multitude of counselors they are established.

16:3 Commit your works to the LORD, And your plans will be established.

16:9 A man's heart plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.

19:21 There are many plans in a man's heart, Nevertheless the Lord's counsel; that will stand.

20:18 Plans are established by counsel; By wise counsel wage war.

21:5 The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty, But those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty.

### Submission to God's Providence--James 5

13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit";

14 whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.

15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that."  
 16 But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

A dream is imagination coupled with desire and projected into the future.  
 We want comfort, success, significance, influence.  
 More we replay our dream, more detailed it gets, more it has control of us.  
 Dream becomes our prized possession.  
 Life without it seems unthinkable and unlivable.  
 Our identity, purpose, well-being, contentment, and satisfaction get wrapped up  
 in achieving our dream.  
 This is dangerous.  
 Our imagination has been captured and is now controlled by some aspect of  
 creation, instead of the Creator.

## QUOTES

False Values--Though we do not face a pantheon of false gods like the Israelites did, we face pressures from a pantheon of false values—materialism, love of leisure, sensuality, worship of self, security, and many others. The second commandment deals with idols. This may be something that most of us can't relate to—unless we include life goals that revolve around something other than God Himself. What is the object of our affections, our efforts, and our attention? Where does the majority of our time go? On what do we spend the greatest amount of our resources? (Today in the Word, June 14, 1989)

Other Gods--What other gods could we have besides the Lord? Plenty. For Israel there were the Canaanite Baals, those jolly nature gods whose worship was a rampage of gluttony, drunkenness, and ritual prostitution. For us there are still the great gods Sex, Shekels, and Stomach (an unholy trinity constituting one god: self), and the other enslaving trio, Pleasure, Possessions, and Position, whose worship is described as "The lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16). Football, the Firm, and Family are also gods for some. Indeed the list of other gods is endless, for anything that anyone allows to run his life becomes his god and the claimants for this prerogative are legion. In the matter of life's basic loyalty, temptation is a many-headed monster. (Your Father Loves You by J. I. Packer, page for April 17)

Trusting people, possessions or positions to do for me what only God can do.  
 Jer. 17:5 - B. Gothard

Idolatry is worshiping anything that ought to be used, or using anything that ought to be worshiped. - Augustine

Today's idols are more in the self than on the shelf. - Anon.

That for which I would give anything and accept nothing in exchange is the most important thing in my life. Whatever that is is my god. cf. Isa. 44:6-20.  
- J. McMath

All of OUR plans were meant to be subservient to GOD's plan.  
Our plans define, motivate, guide, and direct us.  
Give us a reason for living, and a reason to press on.  
Consume our imagination, shape our behavior, condition our emotions, structure our plans.  
Danger is leaving the Creator/Redeemer out of the picture.  
Not serving Him. Having stuff obstruct our vision of His glory.  
Putting our hope in the wrong thing will disappoint us in the long run.  
Even things not sinful in themselves can become replacements for God.  
All our dreams, plans, and ambitions will fail us.

### IS THAT ALL THERE IS? By Peggy Lee (circa 1969)

SPOKEN: I remember when I was a very little girl, our house caught on fire.  
I'll never forget the look on my father's face as he gathered me up  
in his arms and raced through the burning building out to the pavement.  
I stood there shivering in my pajamas and watched the whole world go up in  
flames.

And when it was all over I said to myself, "Is that all there is to a fire?"

SUNG: Is that all there is, is that all there is  
If that's all there is my friends, then let's keep dancing  
Let's break out the booze and have a ball/ If that's all there is

SPOKEN: And when I was 12 years old, my father took me to the circus, the  
greatest show on earth.

There were clowns and elephants and dancing bears  
And a beautiful lady in pink tights flew high above our heads.  
And as I sat there watching the marvelous spectacle  
I had the feeling that something was missing.  
I don't know what, but when it was over,  
I said to myself, "Is that all there is to a circus?"

SPOKEN: Then I fell in love, with the most wonderful boy in the world.  
We would take long walks by the river or just sit for hours gazing into each  
other's eyes.  
We were so very much in love.

Then one day, he went away. And I thought I'd die -- but I didn't.  
And when I didn't I said to myself, "Is that all there is to love?"

SPOKEN: I know what you must be saying to yourselves.  
If that's the way she feels about it why doesn't she just end it all?  
Oh, no. Not me. I'm in no hurry for that final disappointment.  
For I know just as well as I'm standing here talking to you, when that final  
moment comes and I'm breathing my last breath, I'll be saying to myself...

SUNG: Is that all there is, is that all there is  
If that's all there is my friends, then let's keep dancing  
Let's break out the booze and have a ball/ If that's all there is

Our dreams die or we finally get what we want and are disappointed.  
We set ourselves up for disaster when we allow dreams to capture our hearts.  
None of us can control enough things to guarantee that dreams will come true.  
We pretend (unintentionally) that we are sovereign and that the world will operate  
according our our expectations, but it doesn't.  
Things we give our heart to will never give us what we hope they will.  
Identity, meaning, purpose, stability, security found only in Christ.  
Looking elwhere is setting ourselves up for huge and lasting disappointment.  
Instead of being disappointed with ourselves, we are often disappointed with  
God, wondering why He doesn't love us more.

#### Section #4--DREAMS DIE & DISAPPOINT (Tripp pages 144-147)

1. You Will Dream/Plan God commands us to think ahead, set goals.  
Need plans for career, savings, retirement, business, ministry.  
But we must do this ready to submit to His unfolding providence.

#### 2. Your Dreams Will Compete with the Lord for Your Imagination

Dreams are deceptive because we think we are in complete control.  
We hope to reach all our goals, get all we want, without any detractors.  
We imagine an unfallen world. In fallen world, we face resistance.  
Israelites get Promised Land, but have to kick the bad guys out.  
The closer we come to capturing our dreams, more likely dream has captured us.  
Can't live without it. Meaning, purpose, identity.  
Dreams competes with God for the rulership of our heart.  
Replace God as the source of security and hope.  
Kingdom of God purposes are grand and expansive.  
They are to move and motivate us to action.  
Our dreams are often too narrow and selfish.

BIG CIRCLE–little circle (grasshopper, grass, breath, dust)

Christ gives us eternal treasures and pleasures.  
 Guarantees us overcoming in the ultimate war. Greatest victory.  
 Solves our greatest problems and gives us reason for living with hope.  
 Loves us with an everlasting love.  
 Gives us righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.  
 Writes our names in heaven. Eternal redemption.  
 Takes away the penalty, power, and presence of sin (ultimately).

### “Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken” (#269)

Glorious things of thee are spoken,/ Zion, city of our God;  
 He whose word cannot be broken/ Formed thee for his own abode:  
 On the Rock of Ages founded,/ What can shake thy sure repose?  
 With salvation's walls surrounded,/ Thou may'st smile at all thy foes.

See the streams of living waters,/ Springing from eternal love,  
 Well supply thy sons and daughters,/ And all fear of want remove;  
 Who can faint, while such a river/ Ever flows their thirst t'assuage?  
 Grace which, like the Lord, the giver,/ Never fails from age to age.

Round each habitation hov'ring,/ See the cloud and fire appear  
 For a glory and a cov'ring,/ Showing that the Lord is near:  
 Thus deriving from their banner/ Light by night and shade by day,  
 Safe they feed upon the manna/ Which he gives them when they pray.

Saviour, if of Zion's city/ I, through grace, a member am,  
 Let the world deride or pity,/ I will glory in thy Name:  
 Fading is the worldling's pleasure,/ All his boasted pomp and show;  
 Solid joys and lasting treasure/ None but Zion's children know.

In our blindness,/foolishness we are often more attracted and attached to our  
 little self-designed dreams.  
 And experience great personal anguish when they slip through our hands.

### 3. Your Dreams Will Either Die or Disappoint You

Most dreams crumble before we get a chance to experience them.  
 Real world doesn't cooperate with our fantasy world.  
 Fantasy world has no obstacles or competitors.  
 Real world, people, systems, organizations are broken by sin.  
 People do bad things to us—cheat, overlook, mistreat, deceive.

Hold on to their own turf.

Dreams die also because God over-rules, controls, governs.

Psalm 115:3—Our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases.

Ecclesiastes 5:2--For God is in heaven, and you on earth; Therefore let your words be few.

Even if we attain our dreams, they will not fulfill, satisfy, make us secure, give meaning and purpose.

Many are successful yet still feel empty, hungry, disappointed, and lost.

## Section #5—SO YOUR DREAM HAS DIED (Tripp pages 148-155)

### 1. The Envy Trap

Comparison, coveting, jealousy, green eyed monster = opposite of contentment. Feel gyped by God, that He gave the success or blessing to the wrong person. Feel like God made a mistake.

Envy success, prosperity, possession, position, relationships, joy of others.

Paying too much attention to how God has blessed others.

Envy will cause you to be sad when you should be happy, angry when you should be grateful, disappointed when you should be contented.

Makes it impossible to love God and neighbors.

Debates God's wisdom, doubts His sovereignty, questions His love.

Sucks life out of fellowship with God and others.

Jealousy is always disloyal. (Italian Proverb)

Envy is the height of selfishness. It's a moral cancer that eats away at your heart.

Key is wanting what we have instead of having what we want.

### 2. The Bitterness Trap = Feeling like we deserve more or better from the Lord.

Key is to leave the "accounting" in God's hands.

Abraham had no land when he died.

Jesus had only 120 followers before Pentecost.

At root here is a "works" mentality, not a grace mentality. We deserve nothing!

Feel gyped, cheated by God and/or others—boss, spouse, child.

Real dissatisfaction with God blessing others more than us.

Feel He is unloving, unkind, unfair, unfaithful.

God has determined our preappointed times and the boundaries of our dwellings  
(Acts 20:26)

He has determined the spouses, kids, jobs, health we have or don't have.

### 3. The Doubt Trap

All our difficulty with people and circumstances is the fruit of a functional theology of cynicism.

Less and less willing to put ourselves in God's hands and rest.

Scripture calls us to run with our fear, pain, and grief to the very One who we think is a major part of the problem.

### 4. The Bargain Trap = Trying to play "Let's Make a Deal" with the Lord.

If only I had \_\_\_\_\_, then I would be happy.

God will not bargain with us.

He knows that unless we find our ultimate happiness in Him, we will become hopelessly enslaved to things that cannot deliver the life we are seeking.

"False messiahs/saviors" always disappoint us, leaving us more despondent, bitter, and morally bankrupt.

God refuses to participate in any bargain that would tempt us to search for life outside of Him.

Hannah is not bargaining in 1 Sam chapter 1,2.

She is submitting to God, letting go. Abandoning her dream for a better one.

When we focus on God's name being hallowed, His kingdom coming, His will being done, then He often gives us better than we desired.

### 5. The Denial Trap = Doing everything we can to keep the foolish dream alive.

#### Section #6--SO WHAT DO WE DO WITH OUR DREAMS? (Tripp pp. 155-158)

1. Dream Vertically = Anthropos = upper looker. Hebrews 11

24 By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter,

25 choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin,

26 esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

27 By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.

Worship, Bible study, fellowship at its best is a little taste of heaven.

Revelation 1:3--Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.

The Lord has made us for Himself...And our hearts are restless unless they rest in Him. - Augustine

Focus on Christ is the only "dream" worth living for, the only dream that can deliver, the only dream that, when held tightly, won't wreck damage on you

and those around you.

Our hearts were always meant to belong to Him, and whenever they are taken away by anything else, bad things result in and around us.

## 2. Recognize the Power of Your Dreams

James 1:14,15--But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

Our dreams have the power to tempt and seduce us.

Yesterday's dream...becomes today's demand...becomes tomorrow's need.

Becomes something we can't live without.

Dream becomes a bad thing when it becomes a ruling thing.

## 3. Greet Your Disappointment & Pain as a Loving Warning

God KNOWS what's best for us (His wisdom).

He WANTS what's best for us (His love).

He is able to DO what's best for us (His power). Not playing games with us.

Our ability to experience pain is God's system of warning.

Tells us something is wrong and needs to be corrected.

Heart disappointments alert us to spiritual dangers that we would not be aware of any other way.

These alarms are sounds of God's grace, mercy, and peace.

God is alerting us to the danger of a wandering heart before it is too late.

Pain is an instrument of His love. Disappointment is a tool of His grace.

A crumbling dream is a sign of His kind warning.

Moment of pain can be a moment of rescue, if we respond right.

Let suffering drive us:

To the 10 Commandments--Honoring God, God's worship, God's name, God's Day. Honoring the sanctity of family, life, marriage & sex, property, truth, heart.

To the fruit of the Holy Spirit--Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. (Gal 5:19-23)

Away from the works of the flesh--Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries.

To rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1 Thes 5:16-18)

To righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (Rom 14:17)

To pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord. (Heb 12:14)

To deny ourself, and take up our cross, and follow Jesus. (Mt 16:24)

To do justly, love mercy, And to walk humbly with our God. (Mic 6:8)

To fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil. (Ecc 6:13,14)

To love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' ...And...'Love your neighbor as yourself.' (Mark 12:30,31)

To focus on God's name being hallowed, His kingdom coming, His will being done.

To depart from evil and do good; Seek peace and pursue it. (Ps 34:14)

None of us do these godliness things well enough.

All of us need God's correcting providence. His reminders.

Psalms 119:67--Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word.

#### 4. Fix Your Eyes on a Better Dream 2 Corinthians 4--

17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,

18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

#### 5. Celebrate the Fact That God Is the God of Fresh Starts

Job, Abraham, Moses, David, Peter, Paul.

Many Bible characters were rescued by God and set on a better pathway.

Don't wallow in self remorse.

You have been graced by God with the opportunity to start fresh once more.

Throw yourself into life with enthusiasm, a life ruled by vertical rather than horizontal dreams.