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## AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR

2014

**M**ost of us dream each night, our minds painting pictures that float in and out of conscious memory. We often describe our dreams as surreal—sometimes odd, perplexing, or even foretelling. Yet, throughout my life, no matter how hard I've tried, I've never remembered mine.

At least, I could never remember more than a rare, hazy fragment—until one night in 2014. The premise of the following story begins with a dream, one that has been seared into my memory . . . and has altered my heart.

Before I go any further, allow me to elaborate on my limited experience when it comes to the mysterious phenomenon of dreaming. This insight might clarify why my August dream remains one of the most meaningful events in my sixty-plus years. Remembering the simplest of dreams was practically nonexistent most of my life. And I found that void, the inability to remember almost all my dreams, extremely frustrating. My wife, Missy, often remembers at least half of hers. Plenty of my other friends seem to recall a significant number of theirs. So, what was wrong with me? Was I dreaming every night? I wasn't sure. And if I were, why could I recall only bits and pieces at best, and then only on rare occasions?

But all these concerns don't seem to matter after what took place on a sticky night that August. After Missy and I spent the evening talking and watching HGTV, I kissed her goodnight and

headed toward the bedroom, hoping for a good night's sleep. Yet, unbeknownst to me, once tucked under the covers I would have a dream that would significantly impact my family's destiny and inheritance.

After laying my head on my pillow that night, I remember nothing until this night vision unfolded in my mind:

The scene opens with me standing all alone, center stage, in an early 1900s theater. Stark white walls are topped with ornate crown moldings. Art-deco sconces cast a soft glow over dozens of curved rows of seats, upholstered in red velvet. A balcony looks down from above. On either side of me, massive burgundy drapes—hanging floor to ceiling—remain open, allowing me to see not only the seating, but also the expansive stage. No other props or objects are in view. Not a sound is heard.

Suddenly to my left, Jesus Christ appears from out of a brilliant white light, just a short distance from where I'm standing. Instantly, everything in the scene vanishes, other than Jesus standing on the stage's wooden floor.

I literally have no words. My mind reels. *What am I seeing?* It's not like a dream at all. Then realization strikes: I'm having a visitation from Jesus! Everything within me is resounding, *How can this be possible?*

As Jesus makes His way toward me, I take in His whole appearance. Far from what I'd expect . . .

From head to toe, Jesus appears handsomely dressed in fabrics of various shades of brown, each piece beautifully made—classic, timeless. Subtle textures add depth to His presence.

His black, wiry hair pulled back in a tight ponytail rests just off his broad shoulders. A dark, well-groomed beard frames His face.

But now my eyes are riveted, captivated . . . drawn incessantly to His face. I can clearly see His eyes oozing with blazing liquid love.

His entire appearance burns a hole in my heart that still remains.

I watch with trepidation each deliberate step He takes towards me. I squirm uneasily as He approaches. Though His loving eyes draw me in, both His tangible presence and unknown purpose for this visit cause a holy fear inside.

As He comes closer, my heart jumps inside my chest.

Jesus abruptly stops within easy speaking distance. His face is gentle yet set with determination, and He passionately commands:

“Take your dad back to his roots.”

As I try to grasp what He’s saying, what He’s asking, my rapid heartbeat quickens more. Without hesitating, I then begin shaking my head, responding from my stubborn, selfish flesh:

“No. No. No. No . . . I’m *not* doing that!”

Jesus immediately responds:

“Wells, I’m not *asking* if you’ll take your dad back to his roots. I’m *telling* you to do this.”

His reply sucks all the oxygen out of the space between us. After a long moment, I realize I cannot tell my Lord “no.” I reluctantly say:

“Yes, I will do it, Lord.”

The corners of His mouth turn up in a smile, and with a slight nod, Jesus acknowledges His approval. I smile tepidly back, not thrilled with my assignment. Seconds later, my Lord turns and vanishes.

Dream over.

I awoke hours later and shared the dream with Missy. Due to the nature of the dream—a visit from Jesus!—plus, His instructions and all the unknowns, we both agreed to keep silent and not share anything with our adult children, family, or friends. Only Missy and I knew about this dream, and for now, we wanted to keep it that way.

Over the next few days, I replayed the dream in my mind, over and over again. I knew instinctively when Jesus said to take Dad “back to his roots,” He meant we were to travel back to Dad’s birthplace and explore his early years.

A trip like this seemed like a mountain before me—one I wasn’t wanting to scale nor take time off to conquer. In hindsight, I’m fully aware of how self-centered this sounds, but at the time of the dream, compassion and empathy toward my dad were still a work in progress.

Over time I came to realize the root of my struggle. I had not dealt with all the stains that had formed on my heart over the years regarding our father–son relationship. For most of my life, I

can best describe my heart toward my dad as offended, resentful, and angry. These emotions spiraled down into judgment, unforgiveness, hatred, and bitterness. The end result was a cold heart toward my dad. Our relationship had been rife with more than forty years of misunderstandings, disagreements, and failed expectations. Love rarely prevailed in the heat of an argument or conflict.

To all this emotional baggage, add the knowledge that my dad's early years in rural Mississippi in the 1930s and '40s were filled with pain and poverty. I had no stomach for returning to this type of roots, especially when I felt like I was a victim of all the dysfunction it had wrecked on me. I balked at the emotional cost of spending several days in close quarters with my elderly dad, a man in poor health and even poorer disposition. This scenario evoked anxieties within me and childish thoughts like, *would we end up in cockroach-infested hotel rooms with no cable?*

You may smile, and I don't blame you. My reaction *was* trite and small-minded. But I had to be honest with myself: I was in no state to take on this assignment. Even when Jesus directly commanded me to do so. That mindset showed how much I needed Him.

And God did not give up on me. Over the next several months, I struggled, and wrestled, and slowly submitted my fear and self-centered concerns to my Lord.

As He *turned my thoughts* to Him, He began to *turn my heart*, ever slowly, to the idea and possibilities of the trip. Thus, my heart began to soften to the idea of loving and honoring my dad in ways I'd never envisioned. I began to mentally and emotionally prepare for a trip I suspected would take place sometime in spring 2015. That was my original thought . . . until, on a cool, damp December night, I received a troubling phone call from my older brother about Dad.

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# WHOSE REPORT WOULD I BELIEVE?

**December 2014**

**F**ive months later, when I answered my brother Bruce's phone call, I immediately heard the anxiety in his voice; his words, catching in his throat, were laced with alarm.

*"It's Dad!"*

He then explained that our 81-year-old father had collapsed while reading at the dining room table.

Mom, discovering him crouched over and unresponsive, had immediately called 911—and then endured several frantic minutes before firemen and paramedics arrived. Preliminary reports suggested Dad had suffered a heart attack. When finally stabilized, the ambulance whisked him away to Harris Methodist in Fort Worth. Even so, Bruce stressed there were no guarantees Dad would survive the fifteen minute ride to the hospital. He strongly suggested Missy and I get to Fort Worth ASAP.

Ending the call, I tried to process and make sense of it all, then rushed to find Missy to share the news. The next thirty minutes were a blur as we scurried to pack an overnight bag, not knowing what the following twenty-four hours would hold. It sounded like time was not on our side.

A little background: Dad's health had steadily declined over the past ten-plus years. Smoking since age eleven, he had developed chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or COPD. Shortness of breath, coughing, and wheezing were the norm. With one lung totally disabled, Dad resorted to using liquid oxygen from portable