

What's Next, Papa?

Several years ago, while hiking in a creekbed together, my then-first-grader son and I struggled up a particularly steep pile of boulders. “Well, that was an adventure!” I sighed nervously as we reached the top. “But it was a little scary, wasn’t it?”

The boy paused and knit his brow. “Actually,” he offered, “it’s not a real adventure unless it’s a little scary.”

For several months now, the Father has been telling me to prepare for a “new direction” in my ministry--revealing no details--and the real adventure now beckons. Two weeks ago, my only scheduled engagement for 2003 canceled. After almost 15 years of speaking around the world, to have nothing forthcoming on my calendar is not only unprecedented; it’s not natural. Anything less graphic, even just a few engagements, would’ve made me wonder, but this is clearly super-natural.

This past year, I was blessed with 20 different venues, and privileged to witness the Father heal men’s hearts from a front-row seat in His Kingdom theater. As a bonus, I’ve hiked along a snowy glacier in Alaska, gawked at Winchester Cathedral in England, water-skied in Wisconsin, awakened to barking seals on Cape Cod. To top it off, we’ve paid our bills on time every month. It’s been a good year, and an enjoyable ministry.

We don’t get to write the script for our lives—and in our more faithful moments, we know that’s the Good News. Sure, we fancy that being in control would feel more secure—but where’s the adventure? My new non-schedule startled me until I remembered that my dad—a career Navy officer—rarely got to choose his new duty assignments. In 1954, after two “boring” years in a Pentagon office, he begged his commanding officer to “send me as far away from this desk as you can!” Soon, he was on his way to Karachi, Pakistan, to help start a Pakistani Navy with only two other men. My mother, two sisters and I (then 10) followed six months later—a 3-week voyage by sea in those days before passenger jets!

Should a spiritual warrior expect any less adventure?

Earlier this week in my morning worship, I laid at the Cross once again my plans and control, confessing my fears and asking the Father to use this time to prepare me further for whatever lies ahead. After singing along with a worship CD “All I Need,” I was led to this marvelous encouragement from Paul to the church in Rome, where Spirit-filled Believers had begun to backslide into very controlled and very dull religion:

So don’t you see that we don’t owe this old do-it-yourself life one red cent. There’s nothing in it for us, nothing at all. The best thing to do is give it a decent burial and get on with your new life. God’s Spirit beckons. There are things to do and places to go!

This resurrection life you received from God is not a timid, grave-tending life. It’s adventurously expectant, greeting God with a childlike, “What’s next, Papa?” (Romans 8:14-16, *The Message*)

Only after I had joyfully sung that Jesus is “all I need” and thanked Him for this wonderful “new” word did I realize that this is the very text I have been signing on copies of *Sons of the Father* for years, revitalized by a new translation!

Still, the “scary” in true adventure looms. As Joshua strengthened his peoples’ faith not by planning an uncertain future, but rather by remembering the sure works of God (Josh. 24), I scroll through the past year for reassurance. I stop at an airport waiting area last summer, half-doing while awaiting a connecting flight.

“WILL A GORDON DALBEY PLEASE COME TO THE COUNTER?” the loudspeaker suddenly booms, jarring me awake. “WE NEED TO CHECK YOUR TICKET.” Uneasily, I gather myself, approach the counter, and offer my ticket for inspection.

The agent glances at the ticket and hands it back to me. “We’re sorry,” she offers, shrugging in confusion. “I don’t know why we called you up here—your ticket is fine—go ahead on board.”

I sigh a mixture of relief and frustration.

“Excuse me—but are you Gordon Dalbey?”

Startled, I turn to see a well-dressed young man approaching me—apparently on a business trip—one hand lifting a book closed on his forefinger. I nod cautiously.

“The same Gordon Dalbey this book talks about?” The man shows me the cover of *Wild at Heart*, by John Eldredge.

“Well, yes,” I allow, still puzzled.

“That’s amazing!” the man exclaims. “I was just reading about how the author went to one of your conferences and read your book, and then suddenly I heard your name announced over the loudspeakers!”

The Good News: I’ve been praying with this successful young businessman by long-distance phone now for several weeks, rejoicing as the Father brings him out of crippling childhood wounds into a new strength and confidence.

Again, I scroll to a phone call three weeks ago “out of the blue” from a new senior editor at W Publishing Company, which as Word Publishing 15 years ago, released *Healing the Masculine Soul*. Because of a poor contract (of up to \$14 you pay in the store, I get only 50 cents), and an unwillingness either to promote the book or return the copyright to me, I had dismissed W as an option for any further publishing.

The Good News: W has asked me to work on a revised and updated edition of *Masculine Soul* for a September release, my past grievances were aired and respected, and they want to re-print my last two books if the latter project is successful.

Years ago, I read the first part of Philippians 4:6 “Don’t worry about anything”—and worried terribly that when I should worry, I’d be disobeying God. Living under the shame of religion, I concluded, “Instead of worrying, I should hide my fears behind a righteous happy smile and pretend I’m OK.”

Long afterward, I read the rest of the verse: “But instead, ask God for what you need, always asking him with a thankful heart.” Today, living under the grace of sonship, I know that God’s “instead” of worrying is to trust my Father, cry out my needs to him, and praise Him for His goodness to me.

After all, my Father and I are not on a schedule. We’re on an adventure together.

The Good News: I’m not in control.

So what’s next, Papa?