

**Sermon Title:** The Freedom to Dream, March 31, 2012 (Scripture is from ESV)

### **Introduction**

Good morning Emmaus students! I'm blessed to be able to speak at this, "New Wine" retreat. My name is John-Michael Becker. I'm originally from Northern Virginia and attended Virginia Tech where I studied engineering. God led me to Korea at the end of 2005 to live and serve in an orphanage, and I've been doing orphanage work since. I also serve with New Philadelphia Church as a pastor at the Itaewon campus and I oversee the healing and deliverance ministry for the church. This past year God blessed me with a beautiful relationship and last August I married my wife, Sky. We are continuing to serve God together here in Korea.

The title of my message today is, "**The Freedom to Dream.**"

Before we get into the message, I'm going to start by sharing some personal testimonies with you all.

### **How God Led Me to Korea**

During my final year of studying engineering at Virginia Tech I spent a considerable amount of time in prayer and fasting for my future. I made up a long list of different career possibilities including different jobs, countries, and ministries and prayed over them. As the year went by, God began crossing different options off the list. By the time graduation came around, the only thing left on my list was doing missions in Japan. A prayer of mine from the beginning was that my parents and I together would be led by God very clearly concerning my future. My parents were not at peace with me serving in Japan, but did understand my heart for ministry and were willing to let me go there for one year or two. I did not feel at peace with any of this. God had not yet made Japan clear to me or to my parents. It felt like I was just settling on it as the last option. I graduated in May of 2005 and upon coming home I told my mom I would be fasting for one day each week. She asked me why and I told her I was going to continue to fast for guidance for my future. She told me that my future was important to her and to my dad and that they would join me in fasting. This was a great blessing to me. Interestingly, the day after our first fast, my father told me that he had a dream that I was at the orphanage in Korea with the kids and the orphanage's founder Pastor Yoon Kwon Chae. This seemed so random that we laughed about it. (My father had met this pastor in Virginia one time back in the 1980's. I had also visited the orphanage in Korea for a couple days in 2003, but never thought anything would come of it.) This dream seemed completely out of the blue. Because at that point I was focused on Japan, we didn't take it too seriously. In the next few weeks, though, God made it clear that I was not to go to Japan, so once again my future was wide open. My once long list of career options had been completely crossed out. I began working a job at a construction site as I waited for God to speak and lead me. About a month after the dream of the orphanage my dad had another dream. This time it was a nightmare. Now I didn't know this about my dad, but he is the type of guy that lies down, goes to sleep, and wakes up. He very rarely remembers his dreams. After this bad nightmare he got out of bed in the middle of the night and went into another room and opened his Bible and began praying, asking God, "Why did you let me have this horrible dream?" As he was reading through Scripture and praying, God spoke to him in a very clear way. God said to him, "I speak in dreams. Pay attention!" At that moment my dad immediately remembered the dream he had of me being in the orphanage in Korea. So the next day he approached me and told me about this second dream and what God had told him. As he was telling me about his second dream, it clicked in my mind... I had literally been praying for my dad to dream dreams! You see, every semester and summer

I make new entries in my prayer journal. I write down peoples' names and pray for them. As I pray for them, sometimes the Spirit will put something specific on my heart to pray for that person and I will write it down in the journal and lift up that specific request every time I pray for them. Well, the day after I graduated, I made a new entry in my prayer journal and my dad was the first name I wrote down. As I prayed for him that day, the Spirit put a verse on my heart. The verse was Joel 2:28, "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions." I prayed over the verse and couldn't understand exactly how it related to my dad. I kept going over it in my head, "your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions..." and finally decided, "Well, my dad is my old man, I'll pray that he dreams dreams." So I wrote that in my journal, "Dream dreams, walks in your Spirit." And just a few days later my father had that first dream of me at the orphanage, and then a month later he had the second dream where God tells him, "Pay attention, I'm speaking!" After I told my dad I had been praying for him to dream dreams, he told me I need to e-mail Pastor Chae at the orphanage in Korea and find out what is happening there. We began praying over this possibility of serving in Korea. I e-mailed Pastor Chae (who can speak English, thankfully) and asked if I could be of any help at the home. This began a long, slow process of trading e-mails with him. He would e-mail me every few weeks to tell me, "The staff is considering, but we don't know yet." In the mean time, as summer ended and fellow graduates were starting their careers, I continued to work construction, wait, and pray, believing that God had a plan for my future. In late September, one night as I was laying in bed about to go to sleep, I found myself reflecting on the different faith jumps Korea would present (living in an orphanage that doesn't speak English, living with a ton of kids, being on my own, not having a secure future, and even knowing I'd have to eat kimchi everyday). Then, amidst thinking of these concerns, God suddenly turned my mind to His promises. I remembered Hebrews 13:5, "Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you." The end of the Great Commission in Matthew is this, "Surely I am with you always, even now to the very end of the age." I felt God's peace fall on me. I remembered all the times I had told God I would obey Him no matter what and go wherever He would send me. Now, because of His peace, I knew I finally had the strength to not just say I would obey Him, but to actually follow through and do it. About a week later my mom received an e-mail from a distant friend. This lady asked how I was doing. My mom replied that I was currently working construction and praying about my future... that I would either be getting an engineering job soon or perhaps serving at an orphanage in Korea. Her friend replied to that e-mail by telling my mom that she had just paid off all her debts and also had started a new job with an increase in pay. She is a prayerful woman and during one of her times of prayer God directed her to give the money from her raise to missions. As she prayed for more direction about who exactly to give the money to, God put me upon her heart. She wrote to my mom that beginning in December she would begin giving \$1,500 a month for an entire year for wherever God would lead me. That is \$18,000 in support! I had not asked her or anyone for support money yet, this was completely a gift from God. My mom called me in and showed me the e-mail, and then looking at me in shock said, "Well, if Korea doesn't work out, you have to go somewhere!" I had to laugh. God was answering my prayer. He was leading my parents with me. In fact, that same month my dad had two more vivid dreams of me living at the children's home in Korea. Before anything was confirmed, my family (parents, sisters, brother-in-law) gathered together and each shared their heart about me possibly leaving for Korea. They each felt God's hand was over everything that was happening. They each felt it would be beautiful for me to go love the children. They each voiced their blessing over me leaving and then together laid their hands on me and prayed for me. Shortly after that family gathering, Pastor Chae e-mailed me that he and his staff had prayed and wanted to welcome me to the orphanage, requesting that I arrive by the end of the

year. I would live in the guest room in the home and teach the children English. Right after I received the e-mail, I purchased my plane ticket to depart December 29, 2005.

During my time before leaving, God began speaking to my father about my future. My father shared with me that he feels this children's home will be my permanent home from here on out. That I will live there, but after a few years God will begin sending me on different missions for His work. God will take me to different places, but I will always return to the children's home to rest, recuperate, and prepare for the next sending. I felt in agreement with him in my Spirit and excitement grew within me about what would come. **During this time God also reminded me of visions/daydreams I had when I was a 3<sup>rd</sup> year in college.** For a few weeks whenever I would lie down and begin to drift off to sleep, I would have daydreams that would take me to poor towns and villages in Asia. I would be with a team of young adult volunteers. During the day we would build a church and an orphanage and serve the community. Every night we would gather together and worship God, read His Word, and pray for each other. We would simply rely on God. And after a year or two, after the community would become strong, we would go to the next town or village and do the same... place to place, just like the Apostle Paul in the book of Acts. I remember smiling as I would have these daydreams... it all just seemed so pure, just completely trusting in God's promises and going in faith. But after a few weeks of entertaining those daydreams, my lack of faith caught up to me and I told myself, "I'm not cut out to be a missionary. I can't speak a foreign language. I don't have the experience. I like air conditioning and my car and American food. I'm an engineer. Those daydreams are for someone else." And I quit letting my mind wander there again. But now, as I was preparing to go to Korea, **God reminded me of those visions and I felt in my Spirit that there was a lot of truth in them. I had to repent for my lack of faith and recommit myself to Him.** I began to feel that God was sending me to Korea to train me and prepare me for that work. By going to Korea I could learn the language, learn the children's hearts, and build a team. My hope was that after five years or so I would have the language down, have grown in God's love for the orphans, and would have a team of full time volunteers at different orphanages in Seoul. And then we would come together as a team and go and begin building orphanages for the orphans of North Korea, whether directly in North Korea or in North China for the refugees there. These were the hopes and visions that I carried with me to Korea and am continuing to pray towards.

### **Choosing to Follow God Completely**

I really feel I can testify that my life is a life fully surrendered to the Lord. I know I'm not perfect, but I have continually set myself fully before God and entrusted to Him all my hopes and desires. And God has truly blessed me!

When I was in high school my mind was thinking about girls almost all the time. My greatest desire was to find my wife and get married, and since both my sisters married at 21 and my parents married when they were 18 and 19, I didn't think my wedding day was far off. But as I began to really grow with God in university I felt God prodding me to give up pursuing girls until after I graduated. I decided to surrender dating and marriage to the Lord, and that decision enabled me to really focus on the Lord and run wholeheartedly after Him. By the time I graduated, I was fully ready to let go of everything to serve in whatever way He desired of me. And I recognized then that if I had dated in college, I would have probably rejected God's leading for me to be a missionary and prioritized dating and marriage over the calling. Instead, I was free and ready to go.

And as I came to Korea I kept my eyes focused on the Lord. I was very careful to follow the leading of His Spirit through prayer, the Word, and the counsel of people I trusted. And I can

tell you that when God eventually opened my eyes to my wife, Sky, that I was really blown away by how God had prepared us for each other. And I know because I was careful to obey the Lord and obey the people I submitted to for counsel, God fully blessed our relationship. God blessed us so much to the point that her dad, who is Korean and had never met me, had a dream of me before Sky and I were dating. And so when Sky told him about me, he immediately knew the dream was about me and that we were meant to be.

I had actually led Sky to Christ when we first met at Virginia Tech in 2004. Years later she was able to lead her father to Christ and then her brother too. So when we talked with her dad for the first time these were his words to me, “You helped lead my daughter to Christ. She has then led me and my son to the Lord. I am eternally grateful to you. I thank you. I trust you. I love you. I bless you.” Whew!

There was so much more to how God orchestrated not just our relationship but also our families to make things fully blessed for us. I am amazed. Isaiah 49:23 says, “Those who wait for the Lord will not be put to shame.” The same verse in the NIV says, “Those who hope in the Lord will not be disappointed.” This is the truth!

I wanted to share these testimonies with you all to release hope. There is far more to life than what you’ve been exposed to so far. And there are powerful, deep desires within each of you that you haven’t fully tapped into yet. I believe your generation is a generation that is marked by the freedom to dream. **More than any previous generation ever, the whole world is wide open before you all.** Think about that, because it’s really true.

I’m not saying that all of you are called to the nations or are called to the ministry. God doesn’t give cookie cutter dreams that are the same for everyone. God has made each of us unique, and that includes unique gifting, dreams and callings.

For many of you, your life so far has been following the norm. You have studied well enough in high school to attend university. Some of you were like me and chose a major that your parents said you would be good at, because you weren’t sure at all what to do with your life. Others of you have had desires and chose your majors with care, but you still have no clue what you will end up doing after you graduate or what life will look like.

I’ve learned that life is like a jigsaw puzzle. As we live our life God reveals different pieces to the puzzle to us. We try and piece together life from those few pieces, such as the advice of our parents or a couple of instances when we were young that really influenced us, but the truth is those few pieces will never fully fit together right until the full puzzle is given to us. And in order to get the full puzzle, we have to consistently walk with the Lord, putting together parts of our life piece by piece until we see the full purpose to every experience and the masterpiece that God has put together through us.

And so the question is, “How do I go from these few pieces of the puzzle of my life that I have right now to the grand masterpiece that God has for me?” “How do I get from where I am now to the true purpose of my life and the true calling God has for me?” I’m going to share with you now some of the steps to unlocking your dreams. Let’s go back to Colossians 3, and focus on verses one and two...

**Colossians 3:1-2 – If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.**

## Turning From the Past

Verse two is one of my favorites in Scripture. It's a verse that has helped set me free from different unhealthy mindsets. And we can clearly see from both verses that God is calling us to seek these things that are above, the true dreams He has for us. And in order for us to do so, **the first step we must take is to turn from our sins and let go of the past.**

Remember the jigsaw puzzle analogy? A lot of the puzzle pieces you are holding in your hand that are meant to shape your life were pieces that God never intended for you to carry. Those pieces include false identities that people have spoken over you or sins that have mastered you or have scarred you. And because of those pieces dreams become smeared and misconstrued. Those pieces weigh you down, bring guilt, bring shame, bring fear, or all sorts of other unhealthy emotions. Those pieces were never part of God's plan.

Repeat after me, "I don't want those puzzle pieces." Let's look back at Colossians 3 and read verses 5-10...

Colossians 3:5-10 – Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

We have to put them all away. All those puzzle pieces that don't belong need to be removed. Nothing can mar God's masterpiece that is you.

As I shared before, I oversee the healing and deliverance ministry at New Philadelphia Church. Just the name "Healing and deliverance" can be a bit intimidating, but the truth is that it is very simple. And whenever I am leading someone in a session the thing I look for most is conviction. Is this person truly convicted that sin is wrong and that they want to turn to the Lord? If the conviction is there, then healing and deliverance is so easy!!! Satan has no hold on us, unless we give him our hand. And the moment we truly turn to the Lord and repent of our sins, Satan has no right to stick around and we don't need to fear him in any way.

And what I want to communicate you most about this step is that "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). "There is no one righteous, not even one" (Romans 3:10). Don't ever let Satan try and tell you that you are the only one who struggles with a specific sin or scar. Ecclesiastes 1:9 states, "There is nothing new under the sun." There is nothing that surprises God. I can say with all honesty that in my years of counseling people through all sorts of sin, shame, scars, and struggles, there hasn't been anything that has shocked me. There have been some really sad stories, but no sins or experiences worthy of the shame or fear or guilt that they carry. And I've heard it all, I really have.

Also, my focus during the sessions isn't on the sin or who the person was in their past. **My focus is on who the person is becoming.** My focus is on the freedom and the true identity God has for the person. It is my greatest joy to see someone who was once broken and inward focused completely set free and fully focused on the Lord. Their countenance becomes so bright and lovely. The atmosphere around them becomes so much clearer. And suddenly they are able to see through the eyes of God of who they are really meant to be. All

those wrong puzzle pieces have been removed and now they can truly see the picture of their life coming together.

There are different sins and struggles God is calling you to let go of. For some of you it is unforgiveness toward certain people. For others it is renouncing false identities and giving God the poison from hurtful memories.

I know for me it was struggles with lust and purity when I was younger that hindered me from clearly seeing the Lord and receiving His love. Because of those struggles, I wouldn't allow myself close enough to God to receive dreams from Him. I was too addicted to the sin and too ashamed of my behavior to fully let God in. But God granted me the conviction and grace to finally address those sins, I experienced His sweet grace and strength and suddenly a whole new world was opened up before me. And that began my wonderful journey truly walking with the Lord.

For my wife, for a large part of her life she was raised by a stepfather who was hard on her and made her feel like she couldn't please him. Some of the things he spoke over her stuck with her for years. It wasn't until she fully forgave him of what he did and renounced the false identities she received from him that she was able to fully receive God the Father's love. Even my love was initially partially blocked because of those memories, but through addressing the memories and releasing forgiveness and claiming her true identity in Christ, every lie was exposed and full healing overtook her. Now she is able to receive all that God has for her, and she is truly free to dream.

God is saying, "Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things." God is calling for each of you to let go of the things of the world that hold you down so you can fully look to Him. **The first step we must take to have freedom to dream is to turn from our sins and let go of the past.**

PAUSE

**Let's take just a moment** and I want you guys to find a part in your notebook or to borrow a piece of paper from someone around you and write down some of the things you feel the Holy Spirit prompting you that need to be taken care of. No one is going to look at what you write and you can write cryptically if you want. But I want you to know that anything the Spirit puts on your heart right now is a memory or a sin or a relationship that God is able to fully set you free from and bless you far more.

AFTER PAUSE

God doesn't want you to delay in taking care of these things. And He will prompt you to share with specific people, particularly leaders, who will lead you into true freedom.

Let's go back now to Colossians 3 and read verses three and four...

**Colossians 3:3-4 – For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.**

**You're Dead** (*Speak this slowly*)

The next step to being free to dream is to know that you're dead. **You're dead!** Scripture says clearly here, "You have died." What it means is that if you are a true believer and living for God, then you are an eternal being. While your present life here on earth has an eventual

time to end, the spirit that you possess within you will go on for eternity. Scripture says that those who live by the Spirit are true sons of God.

We have to make a choice in life, whether we will live by the natural or by the spirit. If we live by the natural, then we are restricted to our flesh. But if we live by the spirit, then we have no limit. And if you are a true child of God, then your family, your kingdom, your inheritance, it is all in heaven. And if this is true, then nothing of this world can hold you down or hold you back.

You are only still in your flesh if you choose to live by your flesh. Sometimes we wonder why we can't achieve our dreams when we are living according to our flesh. But we have to remember, **in dreams there are no limits.** When we dream we can fly, we can teleport, we can do things that would seem impossible in the natural. Dreams were never meant to be restricted by our flesh. We have to learn to see things in the spirit.

When I look at North Korea I see a nation filled with idolatry, injustice, poverty, and all sorts of other strongholds. I see well over 20 million people in need. And here I am, one man, a white American at that who can't speak perfect Korean. What can I do? Looking at it in the flesh, I might as well give up now and go back to America. But no, I've learned to live not by the flesh but by the spirit. And God has shown me too much through dreams and His Word that I can never turn back. Amazing things are going to happen. Supernatural things are going to happen. God is behind this! I'm not worried. I'm already dead. I've let go of living by my flesh and by doubt. I'm an eternal being led by the Spirit of God and nothing can stop me.

Do not let the world set limits over you. You are already dead and cannot be stopped. You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you.

### **Your Life is Hidden with Christ**

The last step and most important step to have the freedom to dream is to know that **your life is hidden with Christ in God.**"

**Colossians 3:3, "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."**

If you really want to find your life, you need to know that it isn't here on earth. It's hidden with Christ in God. And He wants you to seek Him to find out what your true life is meant to be.

Apart from God, I would have never come to Korea to serve the orphans. I would have lived a life like all my friends. I would have gotten an engineering job somewhere in Virginia and worked just to make money. And while there is nothing wrong with engineering, I can honestly say that it was never a passion of mine. I would have just worked to make money, and then spent that money on the weekends to have fun. But I doubt I would have felt too satisfied. Only the desires of the surface of my heart would have been fulfilled. Inside I would be yearning for something more.

Remember Psalm 37:4? "Delights yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart." It's the truth. God knows our heart far greater than we will ever know. It's as we seek Him that He fully uncovers why He made us the way we are.

Jeremiah 29:11 – For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

If you are still breathing, then God has a plan for your life. He desires to prosper you and give you a hope and a future. He desires to blow you away!

Jeremiah 33:3 – Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.

So often we wonder about our life and our purpose. Why not ask our Creator? Why not get to know Him and find out why He made us the way we are?

Some of you are really good at relating to people. God has gifted you and you really enjoy getting to know people. And God has created you for so much more... to not just relate with people, but to speak life into them and set them free from all sorts of lies and bondage. God has made you to be a rescuer and a deliver.

Some of you enjoy art and seeing things outside the box. God has gifted you and He has created you for so much more... to reveal the spiritual realm to people in fascinating ways, to express love and beauty in a way that will go deep into peoples' hearts.

Some of you can already feel a yearning inside to make a difference in the world. If you're an engineer, this might mean bringing solar power or fresh water sources to places in the world that are desperate for help. If you're a teacher, it might mean going to the tougher places and giving both education and hope to kids who are in severe need. If you're a doctor, it might mean starting a new practice with standards radical to other practices... standards that will enable the poor and the needy to be taken care of and release a shockwave of love through a community.

We have no limit because God is with us and He is the one directing us. We can be safe and secure to know that He will never leave us nor forsake us. He will be with us always, even now to the end of the age. And if He has given us desires that release peace and joy and are in line with His love, then we can be certain that He will fulfill them in our lives.

You have the world wide open before you, more than any previous generation. And with God you are able to do anything. Turn from your sin, know your identity as an eternal being already dead to this world, and seek and find your life hidden with Christ. Receive the true freedom to dream. God has so much to show you!!!

**\*Altar calls\***

- Repenting
- Surrendering lives (desires and personal dreams)
- Unlocking dreams