

Setting Our Spiritual Goals

Sunday 14th February 2021

Readings: Psalm 37:1-11, Proverbs 3:1-12, Luke 14:25-35, Romans 12:1-7

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At the start of the year it is traditional to set goals for that year. Well now we are starting of at the beginning of the working year. It is good for us to reflect on what we want to achieve this year and more importantly to set goals around who we want to be and how we will serve the Lord. Jesus made it very clear what it takes to be one of His followers. In our reading from Luke Jesus turned to the large crowds that were following Him and said, **“If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”** Jesus was using here a technique called hyperbole of exaggeration. In other words, Jesus was not saying that we should hate our parents, our children, our siblings ... that would neither be His nature nor intent. What He is saying is that great as our love is for our parents, our children, our siblings, our love and dedication to God has to be so much greater that it pales the rest by comparison. We should understand this well because God has not changed. The Ten Commandments start with exactly the same imperative. The first four commandments from Exodus: **“You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God are only worthy of worship ... You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy....”** ... the first commandments are about placing faithfulness to God first in our lives. To be a Christian is not only to place God first in our hopes, our dreams, and our daily expectations but to live that out in our daily lives.

Jesus is quite pragmatic about this. Speaking to the crowds He uses the imagery of a person building a tower or going to war. The reason for such parables is again to indicate significant cost. Being a person of faith means not only the joys and peace of walking with God but also, sometimes, significant cost. Thus, Jesus teaches that in our faith we need to consider how we will go about living His Way so that we can both, do well in our lives, and finish well. The apostle Paul had this attitude too which is why in 2 Timothy 4 writes, **“For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for His appearing.”** To finish well and receive reward we need to do the work of faith along the way. We do not want to lose our saltiness, as Jesus puts it, but rather be salty having an impact on our environment for the Lord as we move through all of life.

The Book of Proverbs is full of wise teachings and summations of faith. In Proverbs 3 we are reminded that to do God's will we need to be constantly aware of God's commandments. These commands are simple, summed up by the young lawyer's response to Jesus in Luke 10:15: **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’ and ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’”** Again, giving a practical application, Jesus went on to tell the parable of the Good Samaritan. We remember Jesus said, in John 14:23, **“Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching.”** But do we also remember what Jesus continued to say that when we obey His teaching ... **“My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”** The Lord abides with us when we are faithful to Him. It's a simple promise but a wonderful one too.

So, coming back to our goal setting for the year it is important that we consider how we will serve God faithfully from a basic standpoint and find a manner in which to be accountable to do this. The disciples were accountable to Jesus but later, as they matured, they were

accountable to each other. That was sometimes difficult but all the same important. The apostle Paul, even though independently appointed by God, knew he still had to work and have the support of the apostles in Jerusalem and went to see them not long after meeting Jesus. Accountability is giving an account of what we should be doing and what we are doing to another. It helps keep us on track and strengthens our walk. I am accountable to God, to the Presbytery, to our Church Elders and to a professional supervisor each month – formally. Informally, I am accountable to my wife Lorraine, my family, friends and the small group of men I meet with each week. Such accountability has been in place in one form or another most of my Christian life. It isn't a threat, but a great blessing and has kept me on the rails any number of times. In the early church clear accountability was established through a number of different church or home group structures. How are you accountable in your Christian walk? Proverbs 16:3 says, **“Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and He will establish your plans.”**

This morning we are handing out a four week self-check chart that you can use as a form of self-evaluation as a starter in this process if you don't already have a plan. You can use it as you will or dispose of it. The aim is to provide a simple framework that makes us aware of how focussed and active we are in the different aspects of our lives that God wants to speak into. It is easy to say we pray regularly, or go to church or serve God. But how much do we actually do so? What does that look like in real, practical terms and how often do you actually do it? When you keep a simple basic record like this it serves as a reminder and honesty test against who we think we are and what we think we do. You don't have to show this to anyone it is simply for your own benefit if you think it might be helpful. You can create your own version if you want that has particular aspects of life that you want to focus on. At the end are two columns: good and unworthy. If we have done something in the day that we are particularly proud of, in a good way, we can tick the box. Similarly, if there is something that you have done that you are not so proud of you can also tick the appropriate box. Again, this is just for you. If you use this as part of a daily quiet time it can help direct your thoughts and prayers to areas you need to work on. This is a simple start point.

On top of these, on the other side of the sheet, are areas for our own personal goals that we can establish. Of course, if you are perfect you want need any of this but for the rest of us ... setting goals in the area of our own spiritual development, addressing attitudes we want to improve and determining and acting on ways to serve the Lord in our various ways of giving provides a good starting point.

From hard life experience King David wrote : **“Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun.”** David learnt it was much better to make the Lord one's focus and align one's goals with those of God than to plot and plan and scheme otherwise. When we align our will with God's blessing flows into our lives. How much better the wisdom of the writer of Proverbs 3:5-8, we said, **“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones.”**

So what are your goals for this year? Do they align with what the Lord wants for your life? Did you consult God in developing them? Or don't you have any goals. Remember aim for nothing and that's what you will achieve and in God's kingdom that is never acceptable. God wants us to go forth and bear fruit in our lives and as we travel with Him He will provide all we need so long as our eyes on Him, we are following in Jesus footsteps, listening to His Spirit and we are deliberately, consciously being His disciples, His learners. And as you are, as you develop those spiritual disciplines, characteristics and attitudes that are Christ-like, God will bless you and keep you because He promises to do so. Anything else is, well, futile as Solomon concluded. So, praise God and walk the walk. AMEN

MY PERSONAL GOALS ...

Spiritually I want to develop in the area of :

(e.g. prayer, fasting, awareness of God's presence, sharing faith, praying for others)

What I am doing about it

Week 1:

Week 2:

Week 3:

Week 4:

One attitude I want to improve is :

(e.g. patience, anger management, graciousness, loving service, compassion, forgiveness)

What I am doing about it

Week 1:

Week 2:

Week 3:

Week 4:

One area of service I am going to improve in is :

(e.g. of my time, serving the community (church & wider), resources, money)

What I am doing about it

Week 1:

Week 2:

Week 3:

Week 4: