

The Safety Net

National Church Growth Research Center

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“The Need for Destination”

Dear ones,

Do you remember the first time you ever thought of *goals*?

I'm not sure I do. In my early years my goals were pretty well set for me by others. I'm not sure I would have gone to school, brushed my teeth, or eaten my vegetables if my parents had not insisted. They had goals for me, like growing up healthy, that affected my behavior.

They also decided I should play the guitar, be in the band, and join the Boy Scouts. I enjoyed all those things, but the goals were theirs, not mine.

I do remember that at ten years of age I wanted to become a Christian. I had been greatly influenced by a number of Black preachers, as well as my own family and friends. On Mother's Day, in 1948, I decided to be baptized. My parents were afraid I was too young and they thought I might have been unduly influenced by friends. I spent hours and hours that day, arguing my decision. I had a goal, and it was to be baptized as soon as possible. I was persuasive, and that became my spiritual birthday.

Later on I learned a lot more about goal setting, and goal keeping. I was in my early twenties when I took a Dale Carnegie course and learned to differentiate between purposes, long-term goals, and objectives. I was on my way to visualizing and becoming.

Toastmasters, Norman Vincent Peale, Bill Bright, and Stephen Covey later refined the Dale Carnegie stuff. Bill Bright talked about “life messages” and Covey talked about “the seven habits of effective people.”

At some point I started making to-do lists and doing elaborate entries into my day-timer.

I still see some value in all that, but I don't do most of that stuff anymore. I frankly get frustrated with people whose lives are determined by schedules and congregations that spend months or even years writing, “mission statements.”

Dr. Claudia Black has refined it most for me. She has taught me to focus, not on day-to-day or even month-to-month activities, but on “destination.” She says that destination determines everything. If your destination is Maui for a week's vacation, you prepare one way. If your destination is Iraq for an undetermined military stint you prepare another

way. If it's going to the mall for the afternoon, you prepare still another way. Destination determines everything.

And so many people today don't have any sense of destination: either long term or short. They just exist. They are pawns, or victims, or ones who simply experience whatever comes along. Another trait of the "now" generation.

I've spent much time listening to the destinations of the folks who come to my place. The goal of some is to save their marriages. The goal of others is to find another preaching job where elders are nicer. The goal of some is to find a job other than preaching.

And then there are those that are somewhat unique. I actually had one man who wanted to find a church where he could be a preacher but still be a nudist! And then there was another who said his life goal was to speak on seven college lectureships. (At last count he has spoken at five.) Still another wanted a church that has some gay members. And there are countless more.

Having spoken on seven college lectureships myself I wanted to tell the one fellow that it "ain't what it's cracked up to be." I frankly couldn't relate at all to the nudist brother. But I've had nice elders and ones that weren't so nice and I can certainly attest to the blessedness of the former.

Frankly, if I'm setting destination, or life goals, I don't want to look to Dale Carnegie or Stephen Covey. I think there are some better guides in Holy Scripture. Like the apostle Paul.

I've tried to envision Paul writing a book on goals. But my guess is that the Corinthians and Galatians wouldn't like it. So he wrote about other stuff. (Which they also didn't like.)

But he did write about his own desired destination. I particularly like two places where he really let us see into his soul. One is in Galatians 2 and the other is Philippians 3. He had some specific places he wanted to go and some specific things he wanted to accomplish. But superceding all that there was his *life-goal*. He states it in at least a couple of places. It's worth looking at and emulating.

In Galatians 2:20 Paul says, *"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."*

Then in Philippians 3 Paul continues the Galatian thought and expands on it: *"What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ. . . I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead."* (vs. 8 & 10)

These verses not only give us Paul's goal, but his accomplishment; his spiritual autobiography.

Big churches? Most of the men I know who get invited to larger churches leave their smaller ones because they somehow rationalize that they can do "more good." If that rationale were accurate Jesus would have saved his lesson to the woman at the well in John 4 for a big crowd in Jerusalem. He didn't.

More speaking invitations? I can't tell you the number of men I know who were doing great work but stopped when the word got out and they started to be invited to hold seminars and speak at lectureships. They quit doing it and started talking about it! A real tragedy in my estimation. It's better to *do it* than *talk about it*. And I find that it is hard to consistently do both.

NOTHING that anyone can say to us or about us or give to us is on the par with **KNOWING CHRIST!**

Paul wanted to *KNOW* Christ.

Paul wanted to *GAIN* Christ.

Paul wanted Christ to be "*MY* Christ."

Now there's a destination for you: *knowing* Christ, *gaining* Christ, having Him as *my* Christ. That's worth living for, and suffering for, and dying for.

And **ALL ELSE**, without it, is *garbage*.

Smelly, offensive, unrecyclable. . . *garbage*.

My brothers and sisters, spend some time in these verses. Forget your management training and motivational speakers. Fast and pray. Look in the mirror. Fall on your knees and grab hold of the cross. It's yours. And He who died upon it is yours too. At least He wants to be.

In Jesus' Name,
Silas