

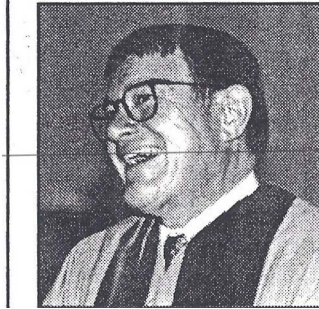
A good simplification keeps life on course

Why do I do what I do? What goals motivate and guide my activities each day? I've been thinking about these questions not only for what they mean to me personally as this new year begins, but what they mean to my ministry as a Christian. After all, the goals I hold for my church should be the same. Where this happens provided the goals are good ones—a convergence of ministry and life happens that has altogether good results.

My three goals are straightforward and plain to tell, but take a lifetime to experience. First, I want a faith centered clearly and unmistakably upon Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Second, I want to be a growing Christian, daily discovering the implications of Christ's reign in my own spiritual journey. Third, I want to make a difference where I live so that Christ's love is shared first in our family and then through my life toward the complicated world around me.

These are my goals. Now how can they happen? The goal of first importance is the one that makes every other goal possible. This fact is basic, if this beginning place is vague or confused, all the plans, programs and strategies of my life or my church will lack a durable foundation. My first goal, then, is to be a centered person who knows who Jesus Christ is, a person assured of the kingly claim and the kindly love of Jesus Christ in his own life.

This centering and assurance happens as I discover the character of Christ from the Old Testament in its narratives of anticipation as well as from the New Testament in its narratives of witness. The encouragement that comes from other Christian believers also helps me to make the discovery for myself. But the mystery is that God the Holy Spirit confirms the



From Your Pastor

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Scripture and the witness of the Christians so that I am able to say that Jesus Christ is my Lord. Several exciting moments, we hear ourselves and someone else say, "Yes, I see what it means." It has never been enough to tell people that God loves them; they must discover themselves that God loves them. It seems to me that in the church there can be too much telling and not enough discovering.

By every means and strategy I know, therefore, my first goal is to try to get a hearing for the witness of the Old and New Testaments, and then I leave the conviction of sins and the assurance of love to God.

I believe that God uses the friendship and caring witness of our lives as an endorsement of the gospel to other people, and that is why I am convinced that friendship is God's best evangelistic ministry. But we must not distort this truth and make the mistake of thinking that we are the gospel. For the

gospel is true and good even when we are not. This is why we stay Christians even when other Christians let us down. Jesus Christ is the one who wins each of us to faith, because faith is our trust in His trustworthiness, not in the trustworthiness of others—not in other Christians or the church or the doctrines of the church

When I have this first goal firmly established in my life, there are two results. One is a refreshing simplification of my ministry and life. I am simplified because I know that there is only one true source of meaning. I do not need a dozen backup strategies if it appears that Jesus is not enough—for there is no other source. The best strategy is to faithfully point to Christ and then to wait for His relevancy to become known and understood.

The second result of being settled in my primary goal is a refreshing broadening of my life. The sheer size of the Lordship of Jesus Christ does this for me. The reign of Christ's love and faithfulness open up subtleties that go far beyond what I think are possibilities in life. This is why Christian faith has been a persistent inspiration for the poet and the artist and the philosopher. This is why the gospel makes the most ordinary tasks meaningful.

Christ at the center makes everything better, both the large and the small, so that we write songs in praise to His grandeur and we drive kids to a youth meeting because His song is in our hearts.

Although there is no other first goal, this goal opens up all other secondary goals. "Do great things as though they were small because of Jesus Christ," wrote Pascal, "and do small things as though they were great because of Jesus Christ."