



I Want Happiness Now!

By Dr. Henry Brandt with Phil Landrum

LESSON 9: YOUR INNER LIFE: GOALS

GOALS BRING LIFE INTO FOCUS

I'm firmly convinced that the goals we set for ourselves account for one of the most crucial factors of all in building our self-respect or self-love.

Goals bring life into focus. They give meaning and purpose to life.

ASSAULT ON MT. WHITNEY

I have a friend who was determined to climb Mt. Whitney, which is the tallest mountain in the continental United States—more than 14,000 feet high. He invited me to go along.

It is a long, hard, two-day climb. Each person has to carry a heavy backpack with two days of food, extra clothing in case it rains or snows, a sleeping bag, and a tank of oxygen.

The day came when we stood at the foot of the trail, thrilled as we looked up and saw the peak high up in the sky.

We had many trails ahead of us. There were long, easy sections. There were fast-moving mountain streams. Also ahead were long, steep climbs that left our muscles aching and our lungs panting for breath.

Toward the end of the first day, the shrubbery and grass began to disappear and we had left the tall trees behind. There were rocks and some small, gnarled, tough little trees.

As we looked up, the peak seemed as far away as ever.

A HARD NIGHT'S SLEEP

We stopped for the night and removed our packs from our weary backs. There was a cold, biting wind blowing. We built a fire, heated up some soup, and sat back to enjoy the breath-taking scenery. We didn't mind the aching muscles. We accepted the pain and the cold as a part of reaching our goal.

Finally, we rolled out our sleeping bags, crawled in, and tried to sleep on the hard rocks with a howling wind blowing that made us huddle as far down as possible in our sleeping bags.

In the morning, when we crawled out of our bags, our bones ached from spending the night on that hard rock, and our muscles ached from yesterday's climb, but we were happy and wouldn't have wanted it any other way.

After a breakfast of dried meat and peanuts, we hoisted our packs up on our aching backs and started out. The trail became steeper and steeper.

IT FOOLS YOU

Many times at the foot of a long, steep climb, it looked like we had finally reached the peak. But when we reached the top, we discovered that there were more peaks beyond. We climbed down, up, down, up. The air became very thin, and we had to breathe oxygen from our little tank in order to keep going.

Those little peaks seemed to keep coming forever.

Climbing those lesser peaks made sense only because we kept that final peak in view. Finally, after some eight hours of climbing, sometimes through deep snow banks, and seemingly having expended every ounce of energy, we stood on the peak, 14,000 feet up—with a breathtaking 360° view to enjoy.

Our long-range goal of reaching the peak gave meaning to subjecting ourselves to the expenditure of energy, pain, sleeping on a hard rock, eating coarse food, and lugging a heavy pack on our backs. It was an exhilarating, rewarding experience. High up on the peak of Mt. Whitney, we vowed to climb some other mountains—which we have done.

A LONG-RANGE GOAL GIVES MEANING TO LIFE

The Bible says:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:10).

In the long run, we will all see Jesus and give account of how we managed these bodies of ours. He has given us instructions for living, and we will be evaluated on the basis of them. We will do well to prepare for that day.

GIVING ACCOUNT

A few years ago, I received an official-looking envelope in the mail. It was from the United States Government, inviting me to appear before the Internal Revenue Service to give account of what I had done with my money for the three previous years.

There was nothing to fear, because I had retained the services of a competent CPA who had guided me across the years in properly accounting for the use of my money and paying taxes as necessary.

After a very thorough review, the IRS announced that we had made some errors and were entitled to a \$500 refund.

So it will be when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ. There is nothing to fear if we have managed our lives as He instructed us. Be assured that we will be judged according to His commandments.

When Moses died, it is recorded that God gave Joshua some specific instructions as he took over the leadership of the Israelites:

Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go (Joshua 1:7).

King Solomon, who tried everything under the sun, came to the following conclusion:

The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. Because God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

In his first letter to Timothy, the apostle Paul advised:

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

The central theme of this book is knowing and obeying God's commandments. One reason for this emphasis is the fact that one day we will be judged according to them.

In the meantime, keeping them leads to joy and blessing. They keep us from stumbling, give insight and understanding of righteousness, and will make our way prosperous and help us to have good success. For the long run, here is a good goal:

Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on the earth
(Colossians 3:2).

EARTHBOUND GOALS LEAD TO FRUSTRATION

Robert Burns penned some insightful lines many years ago:

*But pleasures are like poppies spread—
You seize the flower, its bloom is shed.*

We tend to get involved with people, activities, and things with a great surge of energy and pleasurable expectations.

I once watched in amazement as a young lady who had gained weight steadily, suddenly proceeded to shed twenty-five pounds.

Why?

She was to be a bridesmaid in a wedding. After the wedding, her weight started to climb again.

A boy who aimlessly spent his allowance on bubble gum, candy, or gadgets for his bicycle suddenly was interested in all the odd jobs he could get so he could save his money.

Why?

His father said he could buy a car.

We all know of young men who were normally careless about their appearance but who became eager to bathe, comb their hair, or wear a suit. They became interested in a particular girl.

We watch people who “fall in love” suddenly go places and do things that no one could have forced them into.

We watch people work two jobs, stop spending money on clothes, drive a cheaper car, or do anything else if they decide to save for college, or to get married, or to buy a house.

In airports, we can see eager people waiting for the arrival of a plane. They pace up and down, eyes shining, highly elated. When the expected person shows up, they get all excited, clap their hands, jump up and down, fly into each other's arms, hug and kiss, oblivious to anyone else around them, and walk arm in arm toward the baggage claim area eagerly talking together.

Anticipation fans our expectations. Our hope is that reaching an objective will result in great satisfaction and pleasure. Then, after several months or years of effort, we end up disillusioned.

Many people have made plenty of money but have no good reason for spending it. Shopping malls are full of people aimlessly wandering from store to store, not looking for anything in particular, perhaps ending up eating something or buying something they don't need.

Others have developed their talent and ability and now have no desire to use it. Many people approach me these days about changing careers. They have learned a trade or a profession, but receive no satisfaction from their work, even though they are using their talent and the pay is good.

Some people can't wait to retire so they can pursue a life of leisure, yet thousands of them, retired and on a good pension plan, are hopelessly bored with luxury and ease.

There are many surprises for a counselor. For instance, a very unhappy man asked me for counsel. He had nothing to live for. What made this a particularly pathetic case was the fact that he was a multimillionaire, owned more than a dozen manufacturing plants, and had hundreds of employees.

He was a rabid student of management, and had all the duties and responsibilities related to his business delegated to competent, highly trained people.

Why, then, would he show up in a counselor's office? He had delegated himself into uselessness. No one needed him. He was lost without his responsibilities and bored without them.

Many beautiful, healthy, affectionate people end up in the consulting room because there is no one they want to please or respond to. Marriage has turned to ashes.

Family life doesn't satisfy, they say.

Couples are abandoning marriage and their families by the droves. The demands of the relationship are too great, so either the husband or wife lashes out at the other or just walks away and abandons the whole thing.

GOOD GOALS DON'T SATISFY

I have described some goals that should have satisfied, but they didn't. Let me list some:

1. Making money
2. Acquiring things
3. Building your own business
4. Retiring with a good pension
5. A trim figure
6. Using talent and ability
7. Marriage
8. Parenthood

These are all good goals. Everyone must make a living and provide for his future. We all need to do what is necessary to maintain health and use our own talents and abilities. Who would quarrel with having marriage and a happy family life as a goal? Surely everyone who has worked until age sixty-five or seventy is entitled to an easy retirement.

Isn't it strange that after years of sincere effort pursuing good goals, multitudes of people still end up in the consulting room looking for meaning and purpose in life? I am reminded of what King Solomon said:

I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind (Ecclesiastes 1:14).

And I have seen that every labor and every skill which is done is the resulted rivalry between a man and his neighbor. This too is vanity and striving after wind (Ecclesiastes 4:4).

His gloomy conclusions have a strangely modern ring to them. I hear almost the same words in the consulting room:

"I'm fed up with competing."

"I end up frustrated after all these years of hard work."

"I've poured my life into this family and nobody cares."

Doing good things all your life is like climbing a steep section of a mountain trail. It only gives you aching muscles unless you keep the peak in mind.

Doing good things only gives meaning and purpose if in the doing of them you keep the real long-range goal in mind.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:10).

This will be a great day if you have kept the greatest commandment of all:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind (Matthew 22:37).

If you love Him that much, you will have done as Jesus asked us to do:

If you love Me, you will keep My commandments (John 14:15).

If you know and keep the commandments, it means that in the process of making a living, making money, acquiring an estate, using your talent, keeping fit, maintaining a marriage and a family, you do it all in a way that pleases Jesus, whom you love and who one day will evaluate you.

If your behavior, your conversation, your reactions, your mind, and your goals are pleasing in His sight, the day-by-day duties will have meaning and purpose.

YOUR LONG-RANGE GOAL GIVES PERSPECTIVE TO LIFE

The day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up (2 Peter 3:10).

I was reading this verse one time while preparing for an overseas trip. At the time, I was a partner in a chain of eight large restaurants. I visited them all before leaving, which was a long, tiring chore.

The thought occurred to me then that it doesn't make sense to put your heart into something that eventually will be destroyed. I could picture all eight of those restaurants going up in smoke. No wonder riches don't satisfy. We all sense, at least vaguely, that things are temporary.

A few years ago, I was a partner in an apartment house project. At the time we had the roof on and the doors and windows were installed in a three-story building containing twelve apartment units.

That night a strong wind blew down that building. As I studied the wreckage, it was as though an audible voice was telling me not to put my hopes in buildings. They are a puff of wind...or an earth tremor...or a touch of fire away from being destroyed.

Why should things like this happen? Perhaps to tell us to review our goals.

Jesus said:

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Matthew 6:19-21).

What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? (Mark 8:36).

Granted, everyone must make a living. In the process, we acquire wealth. If we follow the laws of economics carefully, we can acquire great wealth in the same amount of time that someone else barely ekes out a living. The futility of it is not the possession of wealth; it's putting our whole heart and soul into something that will eventually be destroyed.

What, then, is important? The Bible says:

Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness? (2 Peter 3:11).

A SHORT-RANGE GOAL

What sort of person ought we to be? When we meet Jesus, we will be evaluated on the basis of our "deeds done in the body, according to what you have done, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Everyone must live out life every day. How should we conduct ourselves in the process? Look at some Bible verses:

Not every one who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven (Matthew 7:21).

If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself (John 7:17).

Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you (Matthew 6:33).

For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved of men (Romans 14:17-18).

He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8).

Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood, and has not sworn deceitfully (Psalm 24:3-4).

What credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously (1 Peter 2:20-23).

The Creator of the universe is interested in what manner of person we are. These are the qualities important to Him as we go about our daily tasks:

- righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit
- justice
- kindness
- walking humbly with God
- clean hands
- a pure heart
- honesty
- being able to take mistreatment patiently.

Looking at life from God's viewpoint, these verses make sense:

Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life (Proverbs 4:23).

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me (Psalm 51:10).

GOD'S WILL—TRUST HIM

We say that life is enjoyable if all is peaceful in the marriage and family, we are well housed and well clothed, no conflicts are present on the job and with neighbors, we have no financial problems, all is well at work, we have ample income, and the weather is good.

Then, there are those times, we say, that take our joy away—like disagreements with our marriage partner, trouble with the children, illness, death, going broke, problems at

work, getting fired, or dirty tricks. If our hope for joy depends on things turning out right, then we are thinking earthly.

This next group of verses indicate that God wants us to entrust the people in our lives and the events of our lives into His hands. We can do everything possible to make things come out as we judge they should knowing, however, that our thoughts are not His thoughts, neither are our ways His ways. These verses indicate a commitment in advance of accepting whatever happens as from His hands:

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight (Proverbs 3:5-6).

The LORD will continually guide you, and satisfy your desire in scorched places, and give strength to your bones; and you will be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail (Isaiah 58:11).

I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me (Philippians 4:11-13).

But as for me, I trust in Thee, O LORD; I say, "Thou art my God." My times are in Thy hand (Psalm 31:14).

In God I have put my trust, I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me? (Psalm 56:11).

Cast your burden upon the LORD, and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken (Psalm 55:22).

Who is among you that fears the LORD, that obeys the voice of His servant, that walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the LORD and rely on His God (Isaiah 50:10).

Life doesn't always make sense. I recently talked with a lady, age thirty-two, who lost her eyesight at age sixteen. Another lady in her early 40s, seriously crippled with rheumatoid arthritis, told me of her husband walking out on her.

My friend's twenty-four-year-old son died unexpectedly. Another good friend lost a daughter in a collision. Yesterday, I heard about another friend, in his early 50s, who slumped down into his chair and died.

I'm constantly hearing about crisis experiences that parents are having with their children.

This is the stuff of life. I have a long list of questions to ask Jesus when I see Him. In the meantime—I trust Him. You do the same.

WHEN THE CRISIS COMES...

Before the crisis comes, when all is peaceful, you can commit your ways and your loved ones into His hands. You can do as those verses say:

Learn to be content in whatever circumstances come along...

Put your times in His hands . . .

You will not fear what men can do to you . . .

Let Him sustain you . . .

When you walk in darkness, rely on God . . .

It's not a question of *if* some crisis will come. It's a matter of *when* it comes. You will be ready. A football player knows there will be painful physical contact in the next game. So he gets his body ready. You know there is a crisis down the road. So get ready. As Jesus said:

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world (John 16:33).

GOD'S WILL—TO SERVE

And He summoned the multitude with His disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; and whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's shall save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? (Mark 8:34-36).

The older we get, the more of this world's things we accumulate, the more acclaim comes our way, the more we realize that there is an emptiness to it all.

Jesus gives us the reason here.

All such activity is marginal in His sight. We find ourselves by losing ourselves in working for His sake and the gospel's.

James and John, two of Jesus' disciples, once came to Him with this request:

"Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You." And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for You?" And they said to Him: "Grant that we may sit in Your glory, one on Your right, and one on Your left" (Mark 10:35-37).

That's long-range planning. They were applying for two key positions in heaven. Jesus explained that He did not have the authority to grant that request. When the rest of the disciples heard about it, they began to feel indignant toward James and John.

Then Jesus called all the disciples to Him. Instead of reprimanding James and John, as the disciples may have done, He told them *how to be first*. His instructions are most surprising to me. He said:

... whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many (Mark 10:43-45).

The spirit of a servant.

The happy physician, dentist, counselor, lawyer, builder, banker, husband, wife, father, or mother is the one who gives himself completely to the task. There may be rewards or there may not be. There may be appreciation or there may not be. A servant doesn't perform services for rewards or appreciation. He serves in Jesus' name and for His sake. He gives because he is a servant.

SUMMARY

Everyone must make a living, provide for the future, maintain health, use his talents and abilities, associate with family and friends.

Doing these things causes a weariness of the flesh, unless he sets proper goals.

LONG-RANGE GOAL

We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:10).

We will anticipate this event as eagerly as people greeting one another in an airport if we have the right short-range goals.

Trust Him to guide you to people and events in life.

SHORT-RANGE GOALS

1. Grow in your knowledge of the commandments.
2. Live righteously, peacefully, justly, love kindness, have a pure heart, take mistreatment patiently.
3. Trust God to guide you—trust Him to bring people and events into and out of your life.
4. Have the spirit of a servant—to serve rather than be served—to lose your life for Jesus' sake and the gospel's.

To sum up, let all be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing (1 Peter 3:8-9).

If you accept these goals, your life will have meaning and purpose, and you will be on the way to becoming indestructible.

Review Questions

1. What do goals do for our lives?
2. The author names 2 Corinthians 5:10 as our long-term goal. What does that verse say? Commit it to memory.
3. The author also suggests some good short-term goals. The first is to grow in your knowledge of the _____.
4. The second suggested short-term goal is to live in what way?
5. The third is to trust _____ to guide you.
6. And the last suggested short-term goal is to have the spirit of a _____.

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