

“Having A Big Goal”

Goal setting is so much a part of life we hardly even think about it. We start setting goals even before we can read or write. Little kids see a tree, and a thought goes through their heads, “I want to climb that”. Or when we were older, we decided we wanted to fly like superman, so we got a sheet from the bedroom, wrapped it around like a cape, and jumped off the garage roof. We set lots of goals without even thinking that they are goals. I want to walk down the aisle with my handsome prince, dressed in a beautiful dress. I want to be an All Black. I want to make lots of money. I have a goal to start a business. My goal is to be an Olympic athlete. When we enter the workforce, we are confronted by systems that require us to set goals, and measure whether we have achieved them. Exams to pass. Number of sales to make in a month. Much of our life is about goals, either the ones we have set for us by someone else, or ones we set for ourselves.

How is this for a personal goal? ***“To present everyone fully mature in Christ”. “He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me. (Colossians 1:28-29 NIV)***

That was the life goal of the Apostle Paul. To present everyone fully mature in Christ. That’s a goal that many of us could adopt for our own lives. When someone next asks you the question “Where would you like to be in five years’ time?” you could answer “I want to be fully mature in Christ”. That will make them sit up and take notice! Or an even bigger goal – “I want to present everyone I have influence over to be mature in Christ.” If you are a parent, that could be a personal goal you have for your kids. “I want my kids to grow up so they are fully mature in Christ”. If you are discipling someone, that’s a great goal, to present them fully mature in Christ. Paul wanted to present everyone in the Church in Colossae mature, or perfect in Christ. Not a bad goal. But how do you measure that? What does maturity in Christ look like? Fortunately for us, Paul mentions some of the things that are characteristics of spiritual maturity in Christ. They are found in the first seven verses of Chapter 2.

“I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how disciplined you are and how firm your faith in Christ is. So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness”. (Colossians 2:1-7 NIV)

So what are the characteristics of the person who is growing in maturity in Christ? I want to talk briefly about each of these characteristics, then we are going to ask ourselves a few diagnostic questions.

1. Encouraged in heart

The word for encouragement means to comfort, console or to cheer up. It’s a heart that is warm, compassionate and gracious. Encouragement puts courage into people. How can we tell if we are like that? Here’s our first diagnostic question.

• **What’s my irritability quotient?**

Do I find myself more irritable or less irritable? We are living in an age of rage. Make a mistake in driving and you will experience road rage. Post an opinion on social media that people disagree with and you will get a torrent of abuse. People are full of anger. A kid gets dropped off at kindergarten and says to his mum, “Where are all the idiots today?” She says to him, “What do you mean?” He said “Dad dropped me off at kindergarten yesterday and we saw five idiots on the way”. That’s the world we live in.

One of the signs that we are growing more like Jesus is that we will become less irritable. One of the things Paul writes to the Corinthians is that love is not easily provoked. What’s your first response when somebody tries to hurt you? Are you able to be patient and decide what the best

response is, or do you find yourself judging people and enjoying the sense of righteous indignation that comes with that? Do you more freely use words to inflict pain on people? Do you find yourself exploding more often? Do you find yourself sulking about things? One of the measures of a growing maturity in Christ is the measure to which we feel encouraged and the way we encourage others. People that feel encouraged, and encourage others are not so easily irritated.

Here's the second indicator of a growing maturity in Christ.

2. United in love.

The word united is a beautiful word. It means to be knitted together. Paul is saying "I want you to be characterised by acts of servanthood towards one another. The kind of serving love that creates community, oneness and harmony." So here's the second diagnostic question.

- **How is my servanthood quotient?**

Am I becoming more of an authentic servant, rather than just doing servant things? It's hard enough to become a servant, but even more difficult to become an authentic servant.

Let me describe a situation that reveals who we are inside. Your wife is emptying the dishwasher and she asks if you will come and help. So being very Christian, you decide that this is a good way to be a servant and work together in community as husband and wife. But after you've been working together emptying the dishwasher for a while you realise that she has gone off to sort out the family finances and left you to do it alone. So this registers with you, and you decide that this might be a good time to make yourself a cup of coffee. She asks why you stopped. You make the point that it was good enough for her to stop, so you feel it's good enough for you to stop too. Soon this leads to an animated discussion about the biblical roles of husband and wife, the relative attributes of her mother and your mother, the reason why you didn't buy her the Christmas present she wanted three years ago, and why men have to drink so many cups of coffee.

At the end of this animated discussion, it's time to practice forgiveness, but you find yourself with a little bit of resentment that you don't want to let go. And the next time she asks you to help with emptying the dishwasher, you're not so sure that you really want to be a willing, authentic servant. You find yourself withdrawing, and deciding that you want to be a victim. You decide that if you pack a sad for long enough, perhaps she will take pity on you and back down. Is this registering with you?

Spirituality rightly understood involves being united in love. That is, servanthood that builds community and knits us together. What's your servanthood quotient these days? Am I serving more and more from freedom and strength? Am I able to serve without thinking "What a noble thing I'm doing now? How fortunate my wife is to be married to David the dishwasher!"

Dallas Willard, a noted Christian author said "One of the great signs of maturity are the thoughts that no longer occur to you." When you first begin to serve you will find that there are many thoughts that come into your mind telling you that you are doing an amazing and a wonderful thing. You will wonder why people are not stopping and applauding you for your servanthood. As you grow in servanthood you will discover that is actually a better way to live. You discover that Jesus really did know what he was talking about. It really is better to give than to receive.

The third thing that Paul mentions is in verse 2.

3. Know Christ and all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge in Him.

He goes on for phrase after phrase about the wonder of wisdom. He wants the Colossian Christians to have wisdom - the mystery of God that is contained in Christ. All the treasures of wisdom are hidden in Christ. Wisdom is not just information, it's a practical thing. To have wisdom is to be able to say and do the right thing at the right time and in the right way for the right reason. We learn wisdom from scripture and looking at the life of Jesus. He is the embodiment of wisdom. It involves thinking the way Jesus would. Later on in Colossians Paul says "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly."

The sign of the lack of wisdom is when people keep making the same mistakes. They keep being defeated by the same sins. So here's the next diagnostic question:

- **Is the foul up quotient in my life going up or down these days?**

As you grow in wisdom you find yourself fouling up less and less. Do I find myself saying things or doing things that I wish I could take back on a more frequent or a less frequent basis? Wisdom comes when I let the word of Christ dwell in me richly.

Picture a father walking through a shopping mall with his two-year-old son. The kid is whining, cranky, and grisly and giving his Dad a hard time. The Dad is quietly saying "It's alright Danny, you can get through this. You can do this Danny. Just be patient Danny". Somebody says to him "Is your son Danny having hard day?" And he replies, "No my son's name is Jack – my name is Danny!"

Verses 6 and 7 are almost the theme statement of the book of Colossians. It's about being preoccupied with Jesus. We are to live in intimate fellowship with him. We are to live as Jesus would if he was in our place. Be rooted in him. Stay connected to him and receive his nourishment. Be built up in him. Stay on the foundation of Jesus.

Then Paul closes with another indicator of growing maturity in Christ.

4. Overflowing with thankfulness.

Are you grateful? Is your life characterised by an attitude of gratitude? Have you noticed that as people get older, they either get bitter, or better. Isn't it refreshing to meet people who are overflowing with thankfulness? It's not something they put on. It's who they are.

So here's our last diagnostic question.

- **How is the gratitude quotient in my life these days?**

Do you find yourself complaining more or less these days? Paul says he wants the Colossian Christians to be abounding in thanksgiving. That word abounding is the same word that is used for a bottle that is overflowing. When you have more than enough of something there is an overflow. Now here's the test to see what you are full of. If you are full of the spirit of thanksgiving, that's what's going to overflow out of your life. Whatever your life is full of will overflow when you are bumped. What flows out of you when you are bumped?

When Jesus is in charge in our lives, there is an attitude of gratitude. We are just so grateful for all he has done for us, and all the dimensions of his love we see in other people. When this attitude of gratitude is present, we begin to see events and other people through the eyes of Jesus. Don't you appreciate the musicians, who come out on cold winter nights to practice so that we can worship God together? Don't you thank God for the sound technicians, and the people doing the power point? Do you thank God for the people who teach in Children's and Youth ministry each week? What about those who cook meals, serve in the kitchen, visit the sick, do childminding? Think of all the people who have cared for you and shown you the love of Jesus in this last year. People, if you have got an attitude of gratitude, go and tell them how much you appreciate them. Write them a note, or buy them a chocolate bar and put it in their pigeonhole at church.

How about the people you work with? Have you got a good boss? When was the last time you thanked her for being a good boss? So often we wait until a person is dying, or worse still, until a person is dead, before we express our gratitude to them.

I'm grateful to God that here in the scripture is a very practical measure for me of how my spiritual life in Christ is growing. But it's also a goal for me to aspire to, to see Christ formed in the lives of others. Paul said he wanted to see the Colossian Christians mature in Christ. Apart from helping yourself become mature in Christ, who are the people around you that you are helping to become more like Jesus?