

Several years ago, some folks we know bought a patch of ground and built a house on it. It was a beautiful home and when they showed me through it, I commented on how nice it was, and said something about it being a pleasant home to grow old in. It turns out they had no intention of growing old in it, because a year later they sold it, and bought another house, which they're now restoring. I'll probably get to see that one too, and when I do, I'm not going to say anything about growing old in it, because from what I can tell our friends have no intention of staying put anywhere long enough to grow old in.

Joan and I were talking about their habit of never living in one home very long and I said, in a rather pious manner, "How sad. They keep thinking another house will make them happy."

And Joan said, "Maybe they just like fixing up houses."

I hate it when I'm trying to be pious and Joan introduces a note of reason into the conversation.

But I knew what she meant. After we had renovated the farmhouse, my mother said to me, "I bet you're relieved to have that done." But I wasn't relieved, because I had really enjoyed the entire process.

Every week, I looked forward to Wednesdays, when I could meet with the carpenters and drywallers and plumbers and painters. I loved it when they brought problems to me and I would have to make decisions. When the carpenter told me the whole second story and all the rafters would have to be replaced, I was actually excited because I knew it would open up some opportunities that had not been previously possible. I went home and told Joan, "You'll never guess what happened. We get to replace the entire upstairs!" It was one of the best years of my life, and I've had some terrific years.

When we were done, I went into a funk and when Joan asked me what was wrong it occurred to me that having a goal had made me very happy. It had given me a reason to jump out of bed and get going on my day.

The next year, we decided to have the farmhouse garage renovated. I phoned the carpenter who had worked on the house and asked if he could fix up the garage. He said, "I can do it, but not all at once. It might take several months."

"Take your time," I told him. "Take as long as you want."

And now I'm happy because we have a barn, corn crib, chicken coop, equipment shed, and smokehouse that need fixed up. That's one building a year for the next five years. How could I not be happy?

You show me a person who has a goal that engages the mind and body and spirit and I'll show you a happy person.

Last Sunday, we began talking about happiness. For the next several weeks I want to talk about what creates happiness. What are the things in our lives that must be present for us to be happy? Of course, this won't be an exhaustive series, because I don't know every factor that leads to happiness. But as I reflect on the lives of happy people, and reflect on my own happiness, there seem to be some common ingredients.

Today, I would like us to think about the relationship between goals and human happiness. Goals, objectives, aspirations, dreams. Targets toward which we aim our lives. This past week, I was thinking about how often in the Bible, when God would visit someone, God would give them a goal, something significant toward which they could aim their lives.

*Adam, Eve, be fruitful, multiply, and organize.*

*Abraham and Sarah, start a nation.*

*Moses, lead my people.*

*Jesus, feed the hungry, heal the sick, give good news to the poor, and set the prisoners free.*

I was talking with a young man this past week. He's 20 years old and doesn't know what he wants to do with his life. He's discouraged because his friends are in college and when they come home he gets together with them and they talk about their plans and their goals. He told me how anxious he gets and my heart ached for him. I felt the same way when I was 20, the fear my life would amount to nothing. Well-intentioned people would tell me not to worry, but I did worry, because I wanted my life to matter. I wanted a goal, a purpose. I tell you, there is nothing as discouraging as waking up, morning after morning, with no goal toward which you can strive. And nothing quite as wonderful as waking each morning to a good and noble purpose. But no one can give that to us. We must get it for ourselves.

What is your goal? What is your purpose? What are you doing to get there? I met a man in Iowa last week who's a social worker. He works with mothers and fathers developing their parenting skills. They are referred to him through a variety of agencies and he pours his life out helping these people be better people and wiser parents. He's been doing this over 40 years. I asked him what his dream was. He said, "My goal is for every child to have a parent or guardian who loves and cares for them." This is the passion of his life. Now that's an awfully big goal, and I don't know whether it will ever be met in his lifetime. I suspect not. But you know what; sometimes we have to be like Moses and journey toward a land we will never inhabit.

We can't say, "I won't attempt that, because it's unrealistic or too difficult or too unlikely." Because it isn't *meeting* the goal that is of utmost importance. It is *having* the goal. It is remaining faithful to the goal. It is aiming your life toward a great good that might never be realized in your lifetime. But you will be a better, happier person for having tried, for having advanced the runners. And the world will be better because of your effort.

Have you ever heard of Karen Freeman-Wilson? She's an African-American woman from Gary, Indiana. She grew up in Gary, her father worked in the steel mills, her mother worked for a social services agency. They instilled in her a deep sense of commitment to your community. You must give back, they told her. After high school, she went to Harvard for her undergraduate and graduate work, coming out with a degree in law. While her classmates went to New York and Washington D.C., she returned to Gary, with the goal of becoming mayor and bringing it back. She worked as a city judge for several years, then ran for mayor in 2003. Lost. Ran again in 2007. Lost. Ran a third time last year and won.

Her first act was to open the door of her office to anyone who wanted to speak to her. They could come to her with any idea to improve the city of Gary, so long as they committed to doing their part. She believed nothing ever improved until people had a stake in it. She said her goal is nothing short of a safe and revitalized Gary.

I saw a picture of her in a magazine. Big, wonderful smile on her face.

We cannot say, "I am too young to accomplish my goal." Malala Yousafzai, the 14-year-old peace icon from Pakistan, who labors for peace and a child's right to education, even after being shot by the Taliban.

We cannot say, "I am too old to accomplish my goal?" Don't you remember that the sign of God Kingdom's was that old folks would dream dreams?

We cannot say, "I am too poor to accomplish my goal?" Rosa Parks was poor.

We cannot say, "I am too busy to accomplish my goal?" Remember what Thoreau said, "It's not enough to be busy. So are the ants. The question is: What are we busy about?"

You want to be happy? Have a goal. And let it be bigger than yourself, let it be larger than your own satisfaction, so that when you die, people will gather at your casket and say, "How in the world are we going to make it without them?"