



Daring to Dream Again – Establish Godly Goals for Your Future

September 28, 2003

By Rev. David Koch

Introduction:

We have been examining the topic “Daring to Dream Again,” and some barriers that keep us from being all God wants us to be. We have looked at the barrier of being bound by a painful past. We have considered the possibility of missing God at work in everyday places. Today we examine another barrier. It is the barrier created by self-centered dreams. We want to dream again, but we want to dream the dreams God has for us.

To dream as God wants us to dream, we need to get beyond our own self-centered dreams. James and John came to Jesus, wanting to sit on his right and his left when he came into his kingdom. They did not understand the kind of kingdom Jesus was building. Jesus’ reply was, “You don’t know what you’re asking for.” In the beginning, their dreams were self-centered. As they grew in Christ, they developed a different kind of dream. They learned to stand for Jesus and to proclaim the message of a new kingdom calling people outside themselves.

You and I need to move beyond self-centered dreams. We need to learn to dream the dreams God has for us.

We live in the ME generation. William Bennett, in an article published in The Wall Street Journal, describes it like this: We live in a society that “values self-expression over self-control.”

If we are going to dream as God wants us to dream, we must move beyond the ME generation. Our text today reminds us how different Jesus is from the ME generation. The text is John 13:1–7.

John 13:1-7

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.

The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him,

“Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” Jesus replied, **“You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.”**

How do you move beyond the ME generation?

I. Living beyond the ME generation means operating on God’s timetable.

“It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father” (v. 1). Jesus followed his Heavenly Father’s timetable. His life was lived out in the sense of, “What does my Heavenly Father want me to do now? What is my Heavenly Father’s timetable for my life?” Understand, church, that living that way did not mean

that Jesus never struggled. Matthew tells us about the struggle Jesus had the night before his crucifixion.

Matthew 26:36-38

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “**Sit here while I go over there and pray.**” He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, “**My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.**”

Some people have the idea that when you are following Jesus, you never struggle. Not true! Some people think that when you honor Jesus with your life, you never hurt and you are never sad. Sometimes other Christians will virtually say to you, “You look sad. You’re supposed to be a Christian. You’re not supposed to be sad – you’re supposed to be happy.”

We do have joy in Jesus. Walking with Christ brings high moments. But there are other times when God’s best people hurt. How do I know this is normal? I know it because Jesus hurt. “He began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, ‘My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death’” (vv. 37–38).

Jesus experienced sorrow. Jesus experienced sadness. Don’t think that because you know Him, there will never be a time you hurt. To follow Christ means there is always light at the end of the tunnel. It means that when you are hurting, you always have hope. It means that when you experience sorrow and sadness, you know it is not the end.

Later, Jesus falls with his face to the ground and prays, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me” (v. 39). Jesus is about to go to the cross. He has known it for a long time. For three years, he has proclaimed the truth that his Father has given him, but he has known that he was walking toward the cross. He has known his destiny. Now, the night before he is to go to the cross, he prays, “Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me.” Do you understand that? Do you understand that Jesus Christ, on the night before his crucifixion prayed, “Father if there’s a way out, please show me. If there is some way that I don’t have to do this, let it be”?

Don’t be surprised when at an important juncture in your spiritual life you find yourself holding back and struggling from what you know you should do. Moving beyond the ME generation doesn’t mean going into a hypnotic trance and automatically doing everything God wants us to do. Walking in Christ is a struggle. It is a day-by-day growing experience. Don’t expect something that is unrealistic.

Jesus, before he was crucified, prayed, “God, if there’s a way out, show it to me.” That was not the end of his prayer: “Yet not as I will, but as you will.” Jesus was in touch with his sorrow. Jesus struggled with what he knew to be right, but even in the same breath he prayed, “And yet Father, I want what you want.”

We must have a sense that something larger is happening in our lives, that God is at work, and that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

II. Moving beyond the ME generation means when life begins to turn in a wrong direction, we listen to him more carefully.

We look for him more intently. We operate on the belief that God’s timetable is working. We become submissive to his timetable. We may struggle with it, but when we struggle with it, we talk to him about it.

At times we will need to talk to another person about it. “I know this is what I ought to do, but I’m having trouble doing it. I want God’s will, but I need encouragement and I need help.”

III. Living beyond the ME generation means putting love into action.

“Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love” (John 13:1). Jesus loved them and . . . he showed them his love.

Jesus took the attire of a servant. He washed the disciples’ feet. They wore sandals. The roads were dusty. It was the custom to have your feet washed as you came into the house. Jesus did what a servant was supposed to do. Remember, he was headed toward the cross. Beyond the cross was resurrection, a kingdom.

He was the King, but he knew how to wash people's feet. I love this about Jesus. I love the fact that Jesus was strong enough that he could run the crooks out of the temple, that responding to the sheer force of his presence, the money-changers got up and ran when they saw him coming. But he was also a man who could wash feet.

I know a lot of people who are very persuasive and aggressive, people who can cleanse temples, but they are not very good foot-washers. I know some people who are good foot-washers, but they're not very good temple-cleansers.

Jesus brought both attributes together in himself – powerful, knowing where he was going; but also a servant, washing the feet of his disciples, showing them how much he loved them.

To put love in action means to let myself care what happens to other people and act on that care. Many of us have programmed our lives so intently that we don't have much left to give anybody else. It's like a big barrel we are trying to fill. We put bowling balls in it and tennis balls and golf balls and marbles and BB's and iron filings and then powder. We make ourselves busy. We push ourselves to the very edge in the use of time, energy, and money until there's not much left to give anybody else.

Jesus knew the value of staying in touch with the Father, of getting away and recharging his spiritual batteries so that there was something for him to give to other people. If we are going to live beyond the ME generation we need to set aside some parts of our lives to give to others.

IV. Living beyond the ME generation means knowing who I am and why I serve.

“Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God” (John 13:3). Jesus knew who he was. His self-awareness is significant, because a short-circuited version of service is rampant in the church. This counterfeit servanthood has its roots in an unclear sense of self.

Many people serve not out of the fullness of a relationship with Christ, not out of a clear sense of who they are in Christ, but out of a desire for others to tell them they are okay. “If I do this for

you, maybe you will love me,” or “If I do this for you maybe I will feel good about myself,” or “If I do this for you maybe I can get something that I want from you.” This counterfeit version of servanthood creates bitterness and anger. It leads people to do all kinds of things they don't really want to do and to feel angry and bitter.

Let Jesus give you a sense of self-value. Let Jesus show you who you are. Discover your giftedness in him. Get to know how he has made you. Understand how you work as a person. What is unique about you?

Out of the self-understanding God gives you, out of your relationship with him, you can begin to share with others. Do not wait until you have answered all your questions about yourself. Do not wait until you understand yourself perfectly, but do let God help you understand yourself, and out of that self-understanding find a new level of servanthood.

A destitute couple in Southern California found a wallet containing \$2,394. Having lost their jobs and their house in the past year, they, along with their 11-year-old son, had been living on toast and milk. They turned the wallet over to the police. The owner of the wallet recovered it and gave them no reward. The mom said, “I have to admit, I did think about how I could use the money to keep from losing my car. But it wasn't our money, and we didn't want to set a bad example for our son.”

When you know who you are in Christ you can do great things.

In the ME generation, we want to be independent. We want to stand alone. To move beyond the ME generation, we must understand that we are not islands. Christ calls us to live interconnected lives. He requests a willingness to be dependent on Him. Jesus came to Peter to wash his feet. “No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me” (John 13:8).

Jesus was modeling servanthood, but he was teaching Peter something else. He was saying, “Peter, you must be willing to receive as well as to give.”

We must be willing to give and to receive in such a way that we do owe one another something. The ME generation says, “I'll stand on my own. I'll do what I

feel like doing. It's my life. I'll live it how I want." But as Christians, we say, "How I live matters to you. How you live matters to me."

V. Living beyond the ME generation means establishing godly goals.

That's in contrast to self-centered goals. Your journal for this Sunday talks about Judas. Those of you who have your Adult Journals with you, please turn to page 26 (p. 32 in the Large Print edition) and follow along as I read [Dr. Sledge's original sermon here adapted to reflect new journal]:

Judas was no dummy. He could recognize a great opening when it came his way. Jesus was undoubtedly the long-awaited Jewish Messiah, and Judas was given the unique privilege of being one of the Twelve chosen to be closest to this worker of miracles. Talk about a chance to dream some really big dreams. Here was the opportunity of a lifetime.

Unfortunately, it wasn't long before Judas began to realize that he and Jesus differed about the role the Christ (a Greek word) or the Messiah (the same word in Hebrew), was to play. Because Judas was unable to give up his self-centered desires, an irreparable breach occurred in their relationship. Satan took advantage of the situation, and the rest is history.

When you set goals for your life, it's extremely important to begin by going to God for input. And, of course, his desires always need to come before your own.

Now turn with me to the application at the end of the sermon notes.

As the months of following Jesus passed, Judas came to realize that his dreams and Christ's dreams were different. Money and power were not bottom-line concerns in the kingdom of God. Unfortunately, this member of Jesus' original Twelve set aside godly goals and let the barrier of self-centered desires prompt him to make a tragic mistake.

Goals, whether stated or unstated, need to be regularly checked to see if they are consistent with Christ's desires. This acronym helps simplify that process.

Get God's input
Own it
Apply it
Live it
Seek God's input again

Get God's Input. "Don't act thoughtlessly," cautions Paul in Ephesians 5:17, "but try to understand what *the Lord* wants you to do" (italics ours). Are your dreams consistent with God's wonderful plans for your life? The writer of Hebrews quotes Christ as saying, "I have come to do your will, O God (10:7). Ask God to reveal his desires for your life.

Judas had gotten it right. Jesus wanted him to own a cross, as frightening as that sounds. Let Rome pound your hands and feet to boards and then stretch you up naked in the hot sun to scream and sweat and die. In one way or another, that's what happened to the other eleven. Go easy on Judas; it was a terrifying prospect. But the payoff was incredible – for the cause and for these brave hearts Jesus called to himself.

Own it. Fix in your mind God's answer. Here are some examples. God wants me to be a holy person. Jesus wants me to read the Bible every day. The Lord wants me to help someone in need this week. Psalm 37:23–24 reads, "The steps of the godly are directed by the Lord. He delights in every detail of their lives. Though they stumble, they will not fall, for the Lord holds them by the hand." Tell God repeatedly that his goals are important to you. Make them your own by accepting and believing them. Write them down and put them in a place where you will see them often. You may want to begin with just one goal.

Apply it. Lay out some initial plans for meeting your God-given goals, and begin putting them into action. Start living what you eventually want to become. According to James 1:23, if you hear from God and don't respond in kind, "it is like looking at your face in a mirror but doing nothing to improve your appearance." And in John 13:17 Jesus says, "You know these things, now do them! That is the path of blessing." Ask God to empower you to do what he wants you to do.

Live it. Keep working on realizing your godly goals until they become a way of life. In time, your dream and who you are should be inseparable. "For God is working in you, giving you the desire to obey him and the power to do what pleases him" (Phil. 2:13).

When the time is right, share your goals with a friend.

Seek God's input again. There is so much to experience in Christ that you will never be able to learn everything. But the upward call of God is worth a

lifetime of pursuit. In Philippians 3:12 Paul writes, "I don't mean to say that I have already . . . reached perfection! But I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be."

Conclusion:

Now is the time to learn how to set godly goals. Begin by getting God's input. Start thinking and praying about this matter until you can say with conviction, "I believe I have God's input. My godly goal for the present is:_____."

Don't repeat the mistake Judas made. Don't be a member of the ME generation. Our culture is crumbling because it is selling out to self-centeredness.

Jesus offers us another way. He calls us to service to one another and to him. May God help us to stand Christlike above the ME generation.