

29 June 2014

7 Habits for Christians - 3

“Habit #2 - Begin with the End in Mind”

Number 3 in the sermon series “7 Habits for Christians.” Habit 1, Be Proactive, is based on the theology that we are created co-creators with God, that God has put us in charge of God’s creation and given us self-awareness and responsibility. If we have response-ability, we have the ability to choose how we will respond to what happens to us. No one makes us do anything; that’s a cop-out; what we do is our choice. We can choose to be proactive rather than reactive. That’s Habit 1.

Habit 2 says, “Before you start making your choices, begin with the end in mind.” I once listened to this tape series on visualizing your future. Or something like that. I never finished it, because the first two or three tapes were all about how wonderful this tape series was without actually saying anything. And the next several tapes were all about how if you just visualize your future it will happen that way. And I thought, “What a crock! I can’t visualize or will myself to be taller or younger or less silver haired. I can stand up straight, stretch, think young and take care of myself physically, and I could color my hair. But I can’t will being taller, younger, or darker haired So I quit listening to the tapes and sent them back.

On the other hand . . . we *are* created co-creators. And when we create something, it is often the case that we do so in our heads before we do so with our hands. Our visualization of the building project, of the musical composition, of the job advancement, of the grown child, of the future marriage does make a difference, quite often a large difference.

I’m gonna cut right to the chase this week. The sermon challenge this week is for you to write a personal mission statement. That’s something that, if you take it seriously, you’ll probably work on for some months. To get us all started I’m going to ask you to begin with THE END in mind. The end as in your funeral. As you take your seat and wait for the service to begin, you look at the program and see that there will be four speakers: one is from your family. The second is one of your friends. Another is from your work or neighborhood. And the last is from your church. What do you want them to say?

During the week ahead, I’m asking you to write down what you want them to say. As you do, you’ll be tapping into your fundamental values. You might want to identify and write down what those values are. That would be a great start to your personal mission statement. And you might ask yourself how those values line up with Kingdom of God values. You know, being repentant and bearing fruit; choosing Kingdom of God values over other competing ones; not worrying because we trust that God will take care of us; avoiding self-deception and self-righteousness; and living with wonder and innocence; so that mercy begets mercy; mercy trumps justice; and forgiveness is required.

Write I t down. Now you have the end in mind. What’s left if figuring out how you’ll get to that end. Here’s some help. Think of the different roles you play in our life. Which ones are important

to you? Here are mine in order of importance: husband, father, pastor, musician, baseball player. By the way, I want no one who saw me play ball to speak at my funeral.

Here's another help. What you're doing is writing your own, personal mission statement based on your deepest values and the values of the Kingdom of God. Once you've got a first draft, ask yourself what is God's mission for you? I wouldn't start there because that's a really hard one for most people to get their minds wrapped around. But once you've got that first draft, it's time to ask what is God's mission for you. How do you hear God calling you to be the best child of God you can be, given the life you have? How can *you* be the best follower of Jesus? How can you bring good news, healing and forgiveness. See if asking those questions that moves you to tweak your mission statement.

Knowing that we have a mission and a purpose gives deeply satisfying meaning to life. Your mission statement might be short. Mine is. Mine is to leave people I interact with and organizations with which I work better off so that they are healthier, more faithful, more secure, more giving. I can't make anyone do this. But I can work and interact with them in a way that might lead to that.

Your mission statement might be longer, even much longer. In his book Covey quotes this rather good one: succeed at home first; seek and merit divine help; never compromise with honesty; hear both sides before judging; obtain counsel of others; defend those who are absent; be sincere, yet decisive; develop one new proficiency a year; plan tomorrow's work today; hustle while you wait; maintain a positive attitude; keep a sense of humor; be orderly in person and in work; do not fear mistakes--only fear the absence of creative, constructive, and corrective responses to those mistakes; facilitate the success of subordinates; listen twice as much as you speak; concentrate all abilities and efforts on the task at hand, nor worrying about the next job or promotion.

Another approach might be to start with a summary mission statement and then flesh it out. Here's one: my mission is to live with integrity and to make a difference in the lives of others. To fulfill this mission I have charity, I sacrifice, I inspire, I am impactful. These roles take priority in achieving my mission: husband, father, son/brother, Christian, neighbor, change agent, scholar.

There's very little we can control outside of ourselves. But we can have influence. Begin with the end in mind. And keep in mind God's end for you. You can't control that either, but you don't have to. You have been baptized into the death and rising of Jesus. Your end is covered--and I don't mean that in the way usually do when we say that phrase. Because our end is covered we have great freedom to try and fail and try again.