

“DEFINING YOUR TARGET FOR 2010”

Mark 3:13-19

INTRODUCTION

In just a few short days, the ball will be dropped by officials in the Big Apple...and hopefully not by the Buckeyes in Pasadena! In just a few short days, we will turn the calendar on a New Year. This is a time to reminisce about 2009 and anticipate 2010. News agencies will help us to reminisce by reporting the top news stories of the year and Billboard Magazine will count down the top songs. Meanwhile, companies anticipate the months ahead by developing plans and projections for the New Year.

But, these exercises of reminiscing and anticipating aren't limited to news agencies and major corporations. People like you and me will likely reflect on our favorite experiences of 2009. In fact, part of the emphasis of Pastor Bob's sermon on December 6 included the encouragement to spend an hour considering our top 10 experiences of this past year. Did you follow through with that?

Rating right up there for me were the times spent with my family: four uninterrupted days spent with Celeste as we reached the 25-year milestone in marriage; time walking with Jacob at Spangler Woods discussing Bible truths; the joy of listening to Pete laugh as we enjoyed a table game together; early morning summer walks with Elise as we laughed and made up our own games. Maybe you could summarize some of my personal highlights under the umbrella of *“deepened relationships.”*

Another favorite memory took place in May of this year. It was the culmination of months of preparation and the end product of the Team Hope effort. It was finally time to put all of the conversations about a half marathon into practice, time to take all of the training to the actual Cleveland Marathon course, time to participate in the 13.1 mile race at the Cleveland Marathon.

Now, though I run daily, I don't run that far! Thirteen miles was going to press me beyond myself and it was going to benefit orphans in Asia. This highlight was one I would call a *“stretching adventure.”*

A third personal highlight happened every Tuesday as our staff got together for a staff meeting. Yes, not every moment of those meetings is lived on the edge of my seat.

Nevertheless, there is a sense of fulfillment that comes as we as a group pull together for godly purposes. The fulfilling part of what takes place there is something I want to call *“meaningful community!”*

No doubt, your list of personal 2009 highlights is much different from mine, but my guess is that your fondest memories would likely fit somewhere under these three headings. They were likely situations where a relationship was deepened, where you did something you thought you would never do in a stretching adventure, or where you experienced meaningful community and accomplished something with others. And, it is also my guess that one year from now, your highlights will probably fit somewhere in these categories.

That's somewhat ironic because those are often the areas of our lives where we are least intentional. Right now, our new year's plans and resolutions likely deal more with exercise programs, weight loss plans, financial objectives, or household projects than with setting the wheels in motion for relationship, adventure, and community. But, what if we were intentional in targeting New Year's resolutions that would really become year-end highlights? Oh, by the way, I think you will be surprised in discovering that these three represent God's desires for you for 2010. They are like the bull's-eye on a target He has drawn for all people.

That bull's eye will become clear later this morning in our study of Christ's ministry. But, in order to best understand the bull's eye, we need to first gain a bird's-eye view of the entire target. We need to begin by backing up and making some general observations about His ministry and work our way towards the center of the target. Let's define some of the circles on the target and see where you would place yourself.

Target Statement #1 is this...

- *"Welcome to the crowd!"*

Did you know that this morning, you are one of about 1800 people who will likely attend our church today in one of four different services? You are part of a large crowd that has gathered. Each of us has come for different reasons. Some of you came because a family member invited you. Some are here because it's Sunday morning and that's what you do on Sunday morning. Some of you are here because you love it here. Whatever the reason, you are part of a large crowd.

Christ's ministry had a broad dimension to it that attracted large crowds. Some Bible translations use the word *"multitudes."* At times, we read references to groups of thousands. No matter how you count them, there were lots of people who showed up where Jesus was!

At one point, He fed 5,000 men - total crowd size could easily have been 10,000 -15,000. That's a crowd!

At another time, the group was so large and enthusiastic that they almost crushed Jesus! That's a crowd!

He was teaching at the edge of the Sea of Galilee once, and the crowd was so large and so near that He had to get in a boat and put out to sea a few feet in order to be able to project His voice beyond those nearest Him. That's a crowd!

You know why these crowds gathered?

No one taught like He did! He taught with authority. So crowds gathered!

No one made the kind of wine that He made...He made some of the best wine of the day. So multitudes came.

No one healed sickness and disease the way He did. So people flocked to Him.

No one forgave sins like He did! He did what only God can do! So people came together to check it out.

No one had control over the elements the way He did. Even the wind and waves responded to His voice. So crowds gathered.

No one multiplied loaves and fish the way He did! He took 5 small loaves of bread and two small fish and converted them into a meal for multitudes. So crowds gathered.

When we think about the miracles He performed, the way He taught, the compassion He demonstrated, it is no wonder crowds assembled wherever He went. It is no wonder it was difficult for Him to find time alone, to break away for some quiet time with His disciples. Jesus had a ministry that attracted thousands!

Our church has had the privilege of drawing a crowd...a crowd you are part of this morning. Now, none of us here at church makes any claims of being or even wanting to rival Jesus. The closest we come to turning water into wine is when we turn it into coffee and make it available at the coffee kiosk. And rather than multiplying bread and fish, our student ministries seem to be more successful at making pizza disappear.

Nevertheless, what is it that brought you here this morning?

The biblical, creative, relevant, transformational and Spirit-empowered teaching from Pastor Bob each week appeals to people! Quality worship music makes it worth coming! Great children's programs including unparalleled Vacation Bible School draw people! Sports ministry like Upwards basketball have brought out more than 600 boys and girls on a weekly basis. Student ministries that rock and are

rock solid have brought together more than 200 students on any given Sunday! Quality women's ministries draw out more than 600 for Women's Day Away and over 1000 for Holiday Extravaganza. Meanwhile, there are specialty studies that helped more than 200 people this year through their grief, unemployment, divorce, financial challenges, hurts, habits, and hang-ups. You see, where God is at work, people gather!

The sheer fact that you are here this morning makes clear that you are part of the "*Grace Crowd*" where 1800 people gather together on any given weekend. That is parallel to Christ's ministry that attracted large crowds!

But there was another level to Christ's ministry. There was another circle of relationship that helps to define our target for the year ahead. Christ intentionally drew the circle tighter, and so do we. That leads us to the

Target Statement #2:

- Become a follower!

You see, beyond the fact that crowds gathered as He satisfied the felt needs of full stomachs and healed sicknesses, His words called people to become disciples! Jesus really was inviting individuals to take a step from the comfortable crowd to become one of His faithful followers. Here is the way that one man described what He did:

What Jesus invited people to do was neither easy nor comfortable.

He invited people to leave behind their former life and aspirations, to turn from their sin, and set new priorities that involved both Him and others. So, He said, *“Follow me!”*

He pointed out that following Him might necessitate the sacrifice of some of the comforts of life. But He invited those in the crowd to get serious about commitment.

He asked people to leave behind lives of deceit and lives that took advantage of others. He was inviting the crowd to step into a smaller circle.

He told people that in losing their life in Him they would find real life. He asked those in the crowd to take the risk!

The life He offered was one that included denial and even a personal cross. He was suggesting a life of sacrifice.

This kind of wholesale commitment is best defined by words like repentance and faith.

In repentance, people acknowledge their own personal sin before their perfect Lord. They see the ways they have fallen short of the demands of a holy and perfect God. They identify they have had all kinds of other gods before Him. And then, by faith they come to trust in the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for them. In so doing, they become disciples - taught ones, learners, adherents, apprentices.

You see, this circle was smaller than that of the crowd. The disciples / His followers were a subset of that crowd. Many like to watch a quality show, but fewer are those willing to follow the Savior. Now, as we have defined it

here, you are a part of that larger circle, but are you part of that inner circle?

Having witnessed the love, perfection, holiness, and righteousness of God, have you embraced Jesus as the One who forgives your sins and gives Him the title of Director of your life? You become a follower when you allow Christ to direct your life by coming to Him in repentance and faith. Have you done that?

We have learned that Christ’s ministry attracted a crowd. His words called people from the crowd to become His followers. But there is another circle. There is still the bull’s eye of the target made clear in Mark 3. Would you join me there this morning?

Although this text is found early in Mark’s Gospel, some theologians place this event at nearly 2 ½ years into Christ’s ministry. Just so you know, these first 2 groups are not circles of relationship that I am imagining, look at verse 7.

“Jesus withdrew with His disciples to the lake, and a large crowd from Galilee followed” (Mark 3:7).

There they are, the crowd and the disciples: the committed and those that were intrigued by Him.

But what we discover starting in verse 13, is an invitation from Jesus to *“Go out as a messenger!”*

Look with me at Mark 3.

Jesus is about to select a subset of the subset. Now look at verse 13:

“Jesus went up on a mountainside...” (Mark 3:13).

Luke's Gospel gives us a stereo version of this event. It indicates that Jesus spent the entire night on that mountain in prayer. Why did He pray? What was the outcome? He was identifying another subset of the group.

"...and called to Him those He wanted, and they came to Him."

Again, Luke's Gospel indicates an additional detail: Jesus was narrowing the field. He was selecting from that larger group of disciples and...

"He appointed twelve..." (Mark 3:14).

These 12, He was
"--designating them apostles."

Crowds come and witness a spectacle. Disciples follow after a leader. But apostles, by definition, are people who are *"sent out."* They are representatives of another. They are ambassadors sent with the authority of the one who sent them. They are messengers. In fact, His defined purpose in selecting the twelve was that...

"-- that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach..." (Mark 3:14).

" and to have authority to drive out demons"
(Mark 3:15).

Here in this bull's eye is where we discover the three objective we outlined earlier. Christ's objective for the apostles was that they experience a deepening relationship with Him by spending time.

Christ wanted to spend time. He wanted to have a deeper relationship with them. Don't forget that during His earthly ministry, there was somehow a difference between the physical presence and the omnipresence of Jesus. He could not be physically present with all. The very nature of group dynamics and the limitations of His physical presence cause Him to narrow His focus. He wanted these 12 to know Him and to know Him deeply.

Be assured, that is different today. Jesus is not limited in the number of intimate friendships He can have. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit indwell all who come into a relationship with Him. Meanwhile, the complete Word of God make that kind of personal revelation and a deepening relationship with Christ possible for all! There is no shortcut to a deeper relationship with Him. It will always include time spent with Him! The Creator of the universe wants to know you! He wants to be with you. He wants you to be with Him. He has done everything to make a depth of relationship desirable and possible. You can deepen that in the coming year by spending regular time with Him.

But the second dimension to this apostolic life was that they enjoyed a stretching adventure by serving Him.

Can you picture fisherman speaking eloquently? Can you envision tax gatherers releasing demons? This was going to require some major transformation! This was going to stretch them! This was going to be the kind of thing that caused butterflies in their stomachs before it happened but brought about the "high fives" afterward.

This would be the kind of thing they would list at the end of the year as one of their highlights for the year. These were going to be the kind of adventures that would last beyond the thrill of taking down the 12-point buck, landing that

sought after client, winning the district title, or having a retirement account that was to die for. This was going to have an eternal impact!

Can you imagine an engaging conversation about Christ as being a highlight? A mission trip on a "2nd Saturday" or even to a far away destination? Those may seem next to impossible because they will stretch you beyond your current abilities. But they will be highlights in 2010 for you!

But there is yet one other element here that we discover perhaps in part by reading between the lines. It was that of "meaningful community."

Jesus called these 12 into relationship with Himself and with one another, where they would get to know one another, spend time with one another, where they would bond together through the collective responsibility of passing out bread and fish and collecting the scraps in baskets and say, "How did he do that?"

Their hearts would melt together in fear as the storm rose on the sea and it seemed that their boat was going to sink. Their hearts would rise together as they witnessed His power in calming it. Together, they would observe a ghost on the horizon that turned out to be Jesus. Together, they would try and fail as they sought to cast out a demon without pausing to pray and to fast. For eleven of them, the flame of passion would dwindle after the crucifixion only to have it re-ignited after the crucifixion.

These 11 would need each other in some very difficult days. They would mourn together, pray together. But they would also celebrate together in some of the highest points that life has to offer. That was meaningful community! They would share experiences together that they would remember for a lifetime.

Don't be surprised if that kind of community relationship doesn't come easy for you.

Basil Pennington describes us like this:

"We are broken persons and live in broken communities in a state of brokenness. We are alienated from ourselves and from each other. We do not readily fit together.

We are like a bunch of porcupines trying to huddle together for warmth, who are always driven apart out of fear of the wound we can inflict upon each other with our quills."

Though the risk is significant, the potential benefit of meaningful community is worth it!

That is the heart of our Adult Bible Fellowship Communities for adults, our life groups for young adults, and our small groups for students, and our Sunday School classes for children. These are groups where you are known and get to know others, where you learn together from the Scriptures, and where others pray for your biggest concern and celebrate your biggest victory. These are groups that bond together to promote your spiritual development and the cause of Christ in the community and in the world. And, it is that kind of group affinity that will catapult you to new heights in the year ahead!

Can you envision next year at this time? As you are reminiscing and recounting the highlights of the year 2010, can you picture one of the highlights of your year being the fact that you today decided you would go to the next level in your relationship with God?

Can you imagine saying the best thing that happened to me in the last year was the fact that I consciously decided to move beyond merely being a member of the crowd... I moved into a vital and personal relationship with Christ by trusting in Him and Him alone for my eternity and my day to day?

Can you picture saying that the highlight of your year was a decision to join a smaller group of people in meaningful community, where your relationship with Christ was deepened, and you headed out on a stretching adventure.

I am not suggesting you lay aside your weight loss plan, exercise program or financial objectives. I am saying, let's target the things that will truly end up on your "*highlights list*" next year!

Communication card:

- Today, through repentance and faith in Christ, I am stepping out of the crowd to become a follower of Jesus.
- I plan to deepen my relationship with God by reading the book of Acts this month.
- Sign me up to receive the daily devotional readings of the book of Acts. My e-mail address is _____.
- I plan to experience meaningful community in a group in 2010.
- I am open to a stretching adventure in serving God in 2010.