

Putting First Things First! (Increasing in Holiness)
Start with the end in view!

Introduction: Today we are focusing on the 4th priority of our theme, “putting first things first.” That priority is increasing in holiness. Today we are starting with what is a first principle of increasing in holiness—start with the end in view..

If we are to increase in holiness, we must have some vision of what we are becoming. We must be able to see the end of our lives and what we will have become. Let me illustrate:

Imagine with me for a moment that you are attending a funeral. As you come into the room, you note that there is a great sense of love and appreciation for the person who has passed away. There is sadness and a sense of loss; but there is also a great sense of blessing and resonating value.

You become aware that it is your funeral. It is you that these people are remembering. There are four speakers: 1) a member of your family; 2) one of your friends; 3) a person from your work; 4) someone from the congregation. What would they say about you? What would you want them to say about you?

For this brief moment you are probably in touch with your deepest values. What did you think of?

The importance of an end-view vision

In the OT God gave Gideon a vision of what he could become:

And the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him, “The Lord is with you, O valiant warrior.” (Judges 6:12)

One could easily have imagined that Gideon looked to see if there was someone standing behind him.

God was not speaking about the man Gideon was, but the man he would become.

In the NT Jesus gave Peter a vision of what he could become:

Jesus looked at him, and said, “You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter). (Jn. 1:42)

Anyone who know anything about Peter would recognize that Jesus was not the describing the Simon that was, but the Simon that was to be!

What do these examples teach us?

Everything in life is created twice--once in our thinking, then once in reality.

You cannot become what you cannot envision yourself to be.

God’s word challenges us to live with a sense of purpose by setting end-view vision of what we can become.

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; (Rom. 8:29)
(Let's go back to our original illustration.)

What is your end-of-life vision?

What do you want your family to say about you?

God's word gives us the best picture of what could be said about any:

Father & Husband

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; (Eph. 5:25)

Wife & mother

but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. (1 Pet. 3:4)

Children:

And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men. (Lk. 2:52)

What do you want your friends to say about you?

God's word gives us the best picture of what could be said about any friend:

A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity. (Prov. 17:17)

A man of many friends comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. (Prov. 18:24)

What do you want your fellow-workers to say about you?

God's word gives us the best picture of what could be said about any worker:

Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; (Col. 3:22-23)

What do you want your spiritual family to say about you?

Perhaps we could simply think of how someone like Dorcas was remembered in death.

Now in Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha (which translated in Greek is called Dorcas); this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity, which she continually did. (Ac. 9:36)

Or Barnabas...

for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord. (Acts 11:24)

How will you achieve that vision?

Sometimes we are not aware of how our present life could never lead to the resonating value with which we want others to hold us. In fact, our lives may be the exact opposite of what we would want others to remember us for!

So let's take our visions and put them in concrete terms. Ask yourself, "What can I do to become this person I envision? How can we translate the future vision into present action?"

Ask yourself, "How can become that loving husband, submissive wife, obedient child of Ephesians 5? "

Listen more carefully to what our family is saying about us (what they praise, and yes, even when they complain)

You may need to ask your family, "What would make me a better parent, spouse, or child?"

Ask yourself, "What change do I need to make to become that loyal friend?"

You may need to pick up that phone and make a call to keep in touch.

You may need to commit some time when things are difficult.

Ask yourself, "How could I build a better relationship with my colleagues?"

Speak to every fellow worker each morning as you come in.

Express interest in the problems of those who work with you.

Perform your job with skill and energy.

Ask yourself, "How can I be a better brother or sister to my spiritual family?"

Are you living the life of the people described in Mt. 25: serving brethren? Cf. Doug's challenge to give an hour of service in calling, in encouraging, in helping with needs of members. What have we done in the last three weeks to help a brother or sister in Christ? Who did you call? Who did you visit? Who did you give some help to?

Are you making use of the abilities the Lord has given you to serve?

Do you have an action plan to put into motion some of the changes you need to make?

Conclusion: We could call this the first principle of personal growth—start with the end in view.

Now picture yourself not at the end of the your life; but before the judgment seat of Christ. Because, in the end it doesn't ultimately matter what others says about us. What matters most is, "What will He say about us?"

God's word gives us a vision of what we should think about, the end placed before us:

"His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master.' (Matthew 25:21)

"Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. (Matthew 25:34)

How will I hear that "well done, good and faithful servant?"

Start being a servant in God's house.

Start by setting aside time to get closer to God in daily study and prayer.

Make commitment to attend the services of the church to worship and encourage others.

Find a place in the work that you can do and do it with excellence.