

CALIBRATE TO COLLABORATE



Scripture:

Isaiah 63:7-9

⁷I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD, because of all that the LORD has done for us, and the great favor to the house of Israel that he has shown them according to his mercy, according to the abundance of his steadfast love. ⁸For he said, “Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely”; and he became their savior ⁹in all their distress. It was no messenger or angel but his presence that saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

Romans 12:1-8

¹I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

³For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, ⁵so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. ⁶We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ⁷ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; ⁸the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



NEW YEAR'S DAY

It is New Year's Day 2017. Can you believe another year is over and a new year lies ahead of us? January 1st, New Year's Day, falls on a Sunday this year. When Cindy Alloway asked me to preach this Sunday I gladly agreed to preach but figured it would be a very small crowd. There are a lot more of you than I expected. You are obviously the die-hard church goers. Thanks for making the effort to be here.

HOW WAS YOUR 2016?

So how was your 2016? Was it everything you hoped for? How many of those New Year's resolutions you made on January 1, 2016, were you

able to accomplish? I did okay, but I have great hopes that I will do better in 2017.

I think for me to be successful I need to be more realistic in what I can accomplish. I need to understand what I can and can't do; I need to calibrate. And I need to understand that I can accomplish so much more when I work collaboratively with others.

SIMPLE LITTLE ACTS

I also need to understand that sometimes the simple little acts I do in life can make a huge difference in someone else's life.

I recently heard several stories that support that very idea.

THE VOLUNTEER FIREMAN

Our first story is from a small town in mid-America. Like most small towns, this town had a volunteer fire department. The fire chief and his assistant were the only paid staff of the fire department; all of the rest of the fire personnel were volunteers. The town had a significant house fire one evening in the late fall several years ago. All of the volunteers were called to help with the fire and all of them raced to the scene.

One of the newer recruits to the volunteer fire department thought that with the size of this fire he might for the first time get to play an important role in helping with the fire. When he arrived, he reported to the fire captain who was talking with a barefooted woman who owned the house that was on fire. He could hear the woman explain to the captain that she was especially concerned about her dog. The dog was in another part of the house when she fled the fire. She was pleading with the captain to send someone in to rescue her dog.

The new recruit did everything he could to get the captain's attention in hopes that the captain would send him in to save the dog. He would save the dog, he would earn the respect of the more senior volunteers, and the home owner would be incredibly grateful for his actions, for his bravery. He could imagine himself being the hero of the story.

But being one of the newest recruits, the fire captain instead sent in one of the more experienced volunteers to see if the dog could be found and saved. The new recruit instead was given the task of retrieving a pair of shoes for the bare footed home owner. Well he wasn't too excited about the task he was given, but he did as instructed. He found a pair of shoes in one of the smoke filled bedrooms. The home owner was still in conversation with the captain when he returned with the shoes. He placed them on the ground next to her. Yes, he had had to go through some heavy smoke to get to the bedroom, but it was not an especially difficult task, certainly not hero worthy.

Within a few minutes of his delivery of the shoes the dog was rescued and returned to the woman. She was ecstatic upon seeing her dog alive and safe. She thanked the captain and the volunteer fireman who rescued the dog. She was filled with joy in the reunion with her dog, but she barely even noticed the shoes.

Several days later the fire department got a letter from the woman expressing her gratitude for the hard work of all of the fire personnel in containing the fire to such a small portion of the house and for going the extra mile in saving her beloved dog. She concluded the letter with a special thanks to the young man who was kind enough in all of the chaos to retrieve a pair of shoes for her. The fire was on a very cold night and she didn't realize how fortunate she was to have had the shoes until the fire was almost out. It was hours before she left her fire damaged home that evening and her feet would have been in terrible shape had the young volunteer fireman not retrieved the shoes for her. She was most grateful.

It turned out that young volunteer fireman who thought he had played an unimportant role the evening of the fire, was one of the people most appreciated in all of what happened that night. He wanted to be the hero, wanted to make a big difference, to make a lasting impression in helping the fire victim, and in the end, he did just that. The fire department was successful because they were able to calibrate the skills of the fire fighters. In doing so they collaborated as a unit much more cohesively and as a result the outcome was as positive as it could be in such a bad situation. Calibrate to collaborate, that was the key.

Sometimes in life, it is those small, seemingly unimportant, insignificant actions in life that make the most difference in other people's lives.

You have no idea what impact you might have in someone's life in the year ahead. Whatever goals you set for 2017, include some of those small, unimportant things, like showing kindness to a stranger, helping out a neighbor, driving a co-worker to the doctor when they are sick. And when the opportunity arises to do one of those small acts of kindness, don't hesitate to act. Your caring act may make all of the difference in the world for the person you are helping.

THE TEACHER'S NOTE

The second story I have to share is about a very young boy. This story happened many years ago. The seven year old boy brought a note home from school one day that his teacher told him only his

mother was to read. When he got home he asked his mother to read the note from his teacher to him. The mother's eyes welled with tears as she read the note.

She read, "Your son is a genius and the school too small to train him properly. Please teach him yourself."

Many years later, long after his mother had died, the now much older man was going through some of his mother's things and he found the folded note from the teacher from so many years earlier. He wept as he read the note.

It said, "Your son is mentally deficient; we cannot let him attend our school any more. He is expelled."

The boy in the story was Thomas Edison, one of the greatest minds, innovators and inventors of the early 20th century.

If it had not been for his mother, our world today would be a very different place. She no doubt had to sacrifice a tremendous amount of her life to teach her son at home. What a teacher she must have been. What love she showed to her son.

Upon reading the note Edison wrote in his diary, "Thomas Edison was a mentally deficient child whose mother turned him into the genius of the century."

Positive words and actions on the part of one person can make a dramatic difference in the world. It can change any ones destiny.

WE ARE MEMBERS OF ONE ANOTHER

Our scripture reading from Romans speaks to that very idea. It says, "For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members of one another."

We are members of one another. We individually can't all do everything that needs to be done in life. But we all have a role to play. Sometimes the role we take on may be a bit part. At other times it may be front and center. No one part is any more important than another; they are all critical to getting the job done, to accomplishing Gods goals.

The only way to accomplish God's goals in life is to follow the path that Jesus has blazed for us. We need to calibrate our individual gifts and skills and collaborate with one another to have the most positive impact in our world.

And that, like our new year's resolutions is where it can be difficult for us to accomplish our goals, God's goals for our life. The society we live in offers so many options on how to live life. The options available to us each day are staggering. We can choose to follow path A or B or C or D or E. And yet many of the opportunities available for us won't lead us to the place God has in mind for us.

SUMMER JOB

In the early 1980's I spent several of my summers leading bicycle trips for the American Youth Hostels organization. They have chapters throughout the country. I worked for the branch located in New York City. The New York branch offered dozens of bicycle trips throughout the United States and Europe. The first summer I worked for them I led a trip in North Carolina. I had ten teenagers that I led by myself for two weeks, touring the coast of North Carolina. It was a great group of kids and a fun trip.

The second summer I led a five week trip in Europe. I was the only adult, and again I had ten teenagers I was responsible for. American Youth Hostels paid me a whopping \$6 a day to lead these trips, but in return my trips were completely paid for, food, transportation, lodging, everything. I loved traveling, and leading these bike trips seemed like a great way to see the world and get it all paid for. But after I led the trip in Europe I had second thoughts about whether it really was a good deal or not.

When I started working for the New York branch of American Youth Hostels they had been organizing and leading bicycle trips for many, many years. One of my concerns in going to work for them was how could one adult possibly lead ten teenagers travelling by bicycle on backcountry roads without the kids constantly getting lost. But they convinced me that they had developed a very effective way for one adult to lead ten teenagers.

SIMPLE SYSTEM

It was really a rather simple system. It worked this way. Each morning the group would gather and the leader (that was me) would go over the day's

route, what roads we would be taking, where we would be changing from one road to another, where as a group we would be stopping for lunch and where we would be spending the night. One of the riders would be the designated lead rider each day. He or she would be in front all day, and each time we would turn from one road to another the lead rider would stop and wait for the second rider to catch up to them. When the second rider got to the turn they would stop and the first rider would continue on the predetermined route. The second rider would wait for the third and continue on. The third would wait for the fourth, etc., until the leader of the trip, riding at the back of the pack, came in at the end. It was a simple, basic system.

WHAT COULD GO WRONG?

What could possibly go wrong? Right? Wrong!

I quickly came to realize the system only works if everyone, and that means everyone, all ten kids, follow the instructions. It only takes one person to really mess it up. And boy did it get messed up and more than once, on that five week trip. Several times the group had to stop and look for the lost rider. Usually that meant me leaving all of the other kids in some small town at some trust-worthy store or park or someplace safe. I would then have to back track and search out any possible side road the lost rider might have turned on thinking it was the correct road to travel on to our destination. I would stop cars and ask if they had seen the bicyclist. I would stop and ask passers-by. I would stop at the police station, at the post office, any place that might seem reasonable.

On one of these occasions the lead rider was one of my strongest riders. He knew how to read maps, he was capable of repairing flat tires and could do basic bike repairs, and he spoke decent French which was especially helpful since we were in France.

On this particular day in his zeal to be the lead rider and out in front of the group, he passed right on by the first turn we needed to make. And, of course, he didn't realize his mistake until he had ridden over twenty miles on the wrong road. But being competent at reading maps he found an alternate route to get to our destination for the night, which was great for him, but not so great for the rest of us. We spent hours looking for him. We wasted a lot of time, and it was all because he didn't do his part, he didn't collaborate.

I quickly came to realize that the free trip to Europe really wasn't free at all.

I tell that story only to remind us that following the lead Jesus left for us, calibrating our skills and abilities and then collaborating together, is the only way to stay on track in life. Doing your part, when called upon by God is critical for it all to work out.

The Message translation of Romans 12 reminds us, "So here is what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life-and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for God. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out."

So as we start a new year, we need to remember that in order to have full and meaningful lives we need to calibrate our lives to God and collaborate with others in order to be truly impactful in the world where we live. God is counting on each of us to do our part. God needs every one of us in the year ahead. Without each of us doing our part and working together it just won't happen.

CALIBRATE TO COLLABORATE

Calibrate to collaborate! If each of us makes that one of our New Year's resolutions, the positive impact we can collectively make on the world is limitless.

Amen



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