

Why Your Goals Might Not Be High Enough

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) released a strong November employment situation report. Nonfarm payrolls were 228,000 higher than October (about 30,000 above expectations and 16,000 below hurricanes impacted October). Private payrolls increased 221,000 for the month (approximately 20,000 above pre-report forecasts and 26,000 below October).

The national unemployment rate remained unchanged at 4.1 percent (equal to October and pre-report forecasts but at a 17-year low). Hourly earnings increased 2.5 percent over the year-ago level (2.3 percent in October). The average workweek increased to 34.5 hours (34.4 in October). The number of part-time workers for economic reasons increased by 48,000, but the number of workers that could only find part-time work fell by 70,000.

The higher-paying manufacturing and construction sectors increased 31,000 (23,000 in October) and 24,000 (10,000 in October) respectively. Lower-paying leisure and hospitality services increased by 14,000 (104,000 in October). Temporary help services added 18,300 employees (17,900 in October; 10,100 in September). Temporary help services are often a precursor to full-time employment.

In other news, the major U.S. stock indices (Dow Jones Industrial, S&P 500 and Nasdaq) again set all-time record highs). Initial jobless claims fell 2,000 despite Puerto Rico adding more than 7,000 to the number. The current conditions portion of consumer sentiment is at a 17-year high.

If Real GDP increases at 3.0 percent or more for the fourth quarter, it would be the first time the economy has had three consecutive quarters of 3 percent growth since January 2005.

The Federal Reserve Bank of New York is currently predicting fourth quarter growth to be percent (the Fed Bank of Atlanta is at percent). If tax reform passes, annual growth of 4.0 percent or more is possible in the following years—barring war or other major geopolitical challenge.

We as believers, and the church, need to move our goals higher. His ways and thoughts are higher than ours. We have a tendency to settle for the mediocre instead of God's best. We may look at circumstances instead of the faithfulness of God. We can look at our power and might instead of the power of the Holy Spirit. We can look at our personal worthiness, instead of the sacrifice that makes us the righteousness of God.

"For I know the plans that I have for you, says the Lord, plans for peace and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11).

"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Is. 55:9).

"And he said to me: 'This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel, saying: Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts'" (Zech. 4:6).

"But because of Him you are in Christ Jesus, whom God made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30).

The Israelites had spent their lives in slavery. Their parents and grandparents were slaves serving at the whim of their Egyptian taskmasters. Through Moses, they had seen the miraculous intervention of God. They had looted their captors and, at the expense of the entire Egyptian army, had been delivered. But the Israelites still had the mentality of slaves. On occasion, they still missed the security of having their physical needs met by their captors.

At the Lord's direction, Moses sent 12 men to spy out the promised land of milk and honey, the land of Canaan. The spies brought back some samples of its fruit and all agreed it was truly a land of milk and honey. But 10 of the spies brought back a report which looked at their lowly status and the obstacles before them—instead of the greatness of God.

“They reported to him and said, ‘We came to the land where you sent us, and surely it flows with milk and honey, and this is the fruit of it. However, the people are strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are fortified and very great, and also we saw the children of Anak there,” (Num. 13:27-28).

“And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come from the giants, and in our eyes, we were like grasshoppers, and so we were in their eyes,” (Num. 13:33).

In contrast, Caleb and Joshua counseled to go and take the land. They also recognized the obstacles they would face, but their confidence was in the promises of God. They knew and had seen His power before. Specifically, Caleb and Joshua told the people to not rebel against God, to not fear, and to recognize that God is with them.

“Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, ‘Let us go up at once and possess it, for we are able to overcome it'” (Num. 13:30).

“And they spoke to all the assembly of the children of Israel, saying, ‘The land which we passed through to explore it is a very, very good land. If the Lord delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land which flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land because they are bread for us. Their defense is gone from them, and the Lord is with us. Do not fear them'” (Num. 14:7b-9).

Sadly, this generation of Israelites missed God's best. They refused to cross the Jordan to inherit the land of promise,

and instead spent the rest of their lives in the wilderness. God still loved them. They were still God's people. But they would never inherit the land of milk and honey in this life.

Today, just like the Israelites, answered prayer depends upon our obedience (1 John 3:21-22). But we have even better promises. We know that if we ask anything according to His will, we will have it. Let us move our goals higher.

"This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. So, if we know that He hears whatever we ask, we know that we have whatever we asked of Him" (1 John 5:14-15).