

Goals, Glimmers, and New Year's Resolutions

Sermon by Reverend Rebecca M. Bryan

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When was the last time your heart skipped a beat? I apologize to those who have had medical conditions and scares. My question is meant to be poetic, not insensitive.

I want to know when your heart last skipped a beat in anticipating a new idea, connecting to something delighting you, or imagining a dream come true. That's how I want you to feel when we talk about goals.

Goals as I am inviting you to consider them today make us perk up or come alive. They make our hearts skip a beat with unadulterated imagining. Goals, when they truly come from within us, are signposts to our souls. They are sure through-lines to our uniqueness and beauty. They show us where we long to go and who we long to be.

Goals like those I describe *glimmer*. They make us take notice, wake up, and sometimes even lose our breath. Thus, today, I am going to talk about glimmers, not goals.

Don't we all want to find what glimmers for us? Don't we want to feel the energy of life pulsing through our veins, want to know the quickening of our hearts in anticipation, and want to allow the softening of our hearts to compassion and love?

A glimmer is defined by how it makes us feel, not by what it looks like, by its usefulness or the impact it may have on the world. Sure, glimmers may lead to big, purposeful, and important things, but they can also be deceptively small, apparently irrelevant, and even comical. And yet, they make us come alive.

Allowing ourselves to see what glimmers and to follow it where it goes is risky business. It is safer to focus on "goals." Glimmers, you see, hold our hearts, and they may require us to change.

Do not underestimate the need of first finding and naming your glimmers. They often live just out of sight. Even more often, they sit right under our nose. So too, they may come and go like a mountain behind a cloud. You must pause to catch a glimmer. Watch, listen, and be patient. And always make note when you find it.

After naming a glimmer, you should befriend it

and seek to understand it. This asks that you be slow to judge and open to lengthy curiosity. A glimmer is a gift. You must be discerning of who to share it with and be protective of its existence. At this early stage, glimmers can too easily be blown out by other's criticism, doubt, or disregard.

After noticing and befriending comes a time of liminality. This is the time when a glimmer is known, but not yet actualized. In this time of in-between, a glimmer holds great possibility and is delicate. It is still forming. Perhaps you are uncertain if you will stay with it. You may remember that you have seen and tried to realize this glimmer earlier in your life.

One of our tasks during the liminal time is to commit to the glimmer even if we don't know why we are following it or how it will come to fruition. Glimmers are rarely logical.

At this point, goals come into play. They help us move toward and stay connected to our glimmers. They can help us focus, which, as James Clear, author of *Atomic Habits*, says "is about knowing what to ignore."¹ Goals can help us to change our behavior and ways of thinking to support the commitment we have to the glimmer. They help form a path, with all of its twists and turns.

My journey with glimmers and goals is long and windy.

As a child, a burgeoning writer and organizer of ideas, I loved to make New Year's resolutions. My list of goals for the year filled a legal pad, including the margins. In many years, I surpassed one hundred goals, including, of course, some things I already did well but wanted to keep in my sight.

This comprehensive and exhaustive approach to New Year's resolution and goal setting continued until young adulthood when I went through a painful and growth-filled experience that had to do with recognizing the power of my thoughts.

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/cn-lp-543-james-clear-on-the-backstory-behind-atomic/id912753163?i=1000591970292>

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For a long time, I turned things like affirmations and goal setting into a merciless exercise of beating myself up and trying to “fix” myself.

For many years after that, I kept any kind of goal setting at arm’s length. “Not for me,” I would say when asked if I had any New Year’s resolutions. During that time of abstinence, my glimmer began to return. It was faint at first. I often ignored it or judged it as ludicrous. Yet it remained.

I finally took the steps to befriend the glimmer, and you know the rest of that part of my story. Yes, it was to the ministry. And yes, “to know God” had been on my list of New Year’s resolutions from the first list to the last.

For a time, I was so busy befriend my glimmer and then changing all that it took to realize its message that I didn’t have many other goals, except those that helped get me to the glimmer. My goals included “Manage to not fall asleep driving to seminary from CT, find the right church, sell your house,” and so on.

Five years later, I’m now in relationship with new glimmers. I’ve made some mistakes this time around, such as trying to rush the process and sharing about my glimmers with the wrong people.

But I’m wiser this time. I know to trust the glimmers, whether they are learning to do a flip turn while swimming or things I’m holding a little closer to my heart. (Don’t worry. You will be among the first to know, for you are helping make the glimmers possible.) I also know to love the process more than a preconceived destination and to realize that glimmers change and evolve as we are in relationship with them.

You may be asking how do I know what glimmers? What if it feels out of reach? Or why does the landscape appear so desolate? We all go through these phases, many times in fact. It can’t be otherwise.

During those times, we need to snuggle closer to ourselves and those we love. Remember the times that we did befriend a glimmer and that every time has its gifts, even the painful times. When you’re in desolate times, stay small in your connection to glimmers and let those be more than enough. Hold the warm mug of lemon water

against your closed palm, hold the photographs of days gone by, and hold the funny comedy you discover on HBO. Those glimmers are majestic too.

The journey of following glimmers will change you, often in ways you could never imagine. It isn’t always easy or a straight path, though it is always authentic and true. The journey with glimmers will amaze you, even if it’s realizing you have everything you need just as things are, right now, right here.

What about you?

What glimmers are on your path right now?

Let’s start there.

I’ll walk us through a time of reflection for the next five minutes or so.

Everyone hopefully has been given a note paper and gold seal when you entered the sanctuary.

We are going to do an exercise where we focus on your glimmers for this year and on what you may need to let go of in order to make connection and commitment to your path forward. You are invited to write your thoughts or insights onto the paper as we go along. I will leave time for that.

Personal Reflection: Close your eyes and get still. Feel the ground under your feet. Perhaps open your palms or put your hand on your heart and allow your eyes to close. Give yourself this time and space to go within and know peace.

As I do this exercise, know that there’s no way you can do this that is wrong. If you follow along with me, great. If your mind wanders, wonderful. If nothing comes to your mind, no worries. It may come later or in another way.

Imagine yourself in a meadow of wavy grass. The air is just right, beautiful and clear, not too hot and not too cold. A breeze crosses your face, and small violets grow in the grass. Off to your left is a stream flowing steadily but gently, its water gliding over the stones and pausing in the mosses. You kneel and place your hand in the water, feeling its healing as it flows over the top of your hand. You cup it and take a drink. The cool clean water runs down your throat.

Now you either allow yourself to sit by the stream, maybe keeping your hand in the water, or

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lie on your back. Or you may continue walking in the meadow, feeling the spring sunshine on your face.

Take a breath in this place of peace, and another. Loosen your hold on your thoughts and allow them to flow easily through your mind. Just notice them as they go by. No judgment. No strain.

As you stay in this relaxed place, I invite you to ask yourself, "What glitters in my life? What am I called to explore, notice, or learn more about?" Perhaps it is an interest or a next step. It may be a little thing or something quite big. Where do you want to spend your time this year? To what do you wish to devote your energy? Whom and what are you calling to love? I'll give us a minute or two with these questions.

(Wait two minutes)

Now having made these connections, what is standing in your way? What are you being called to release? It may be a habit, a behavior, or a belief. What is no longer necessary for you to bring into this new year?

You can seal up what you've written with a gold seal to offer blessing and protection.

Take the paper with you and put it into a safe place, perhaps under a plant, tucked into a favorite book, or in a drawer with your favorite clothes. You may want to revisit it in the days to come or spend more time reflecting on what this glimmer means for you.

January ministry's theme is change. We started today by asking ourselves what this means to us personally. From here we will move into looking at what that means to us as a congregation and a community, specifically as it relates to racial justice.

To make personal and collective change, we need to know historical truth. We need to live as fully as possible in the present and be willing to notice and befriend what glitters, those things that expand our hearts and help us grow into a richer expression of who we are today and who we are becoming.

May all that glitters in your life bring you closer to that sacred truth.

Amen and blessed be.