

Setting Goals in Faith

Part 2 - A New You for a New Year

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How many times have you started off the New Year saying, "This year I'm going to get my life in order, this year I'm going to do some things I know I need to do to live a healthier happier life." You start off with good intentions for about two weeks and then nothing really changes. What does it take to make lasting changes in your life? All those things you want to improve: your health, your finances, your relationships, your marriage, your career, what does it take to make changes that will last? What does it take to really change?

Last week we looked at the very first element of change and that is your **PERSPECTIVE**, how you see things. That's the number one thing that will influence how you live in the coming New Year. Will you look at things through eyes of fear or eyes of faith? If you missed that message you need to go back and read it. I've put some copies out on the table in the entry area or you can find it on the church website, but you need to go back and read it. The title of that message is "What You See Is What You Get" because if you can't see yourself getting better, it's not going to happen. The Bible says, "*My people perish for lack of vision.*" (Hosea 4:6) The second element of change is faith. You have to not only see the possibility of change, but you have to see it through the eyes of faith and not fear.

A world famous psychiatrist was once asked, "In all of your practice over the years, what has been the most helpful advice you've given to people that has made a difference in their lives as they were seeking real change in their lives?" He said, "There's no question about it: I've discovered the most helpful thing I can do for people in a personal or relational problem is help them to set personal goals."

Personal goals, why is that? Why do we need to set personal goals?

You've probably read a self-help book on goal setting or been to a seminar on the subject, or maybe even viewed a video on goal setting. I'm not really interested in talking to you about that. I'm interested in the spiritual dimensions of what happens when you set goals in faith. What happens to your soul when you set goals in faith? **There are FIVE important reasons for setting goals.**

FIRST, GOAL SETTING IS A SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE. It's far more than just a good idea. It's a spiritual discipline like prayer or fasting or giving. Like these things, setting goals will help you grow and mature in the faith. In fact, setting goals is a type of stewardship where you say, "God, I want to make the most of what I've been given." It may be your body or your relationships or your finances or your marriage or your career that you are trying to make the most of. Setting goals can be an act of worship where you say to God, "Lord, I give you back the life you've given to me and I want to use it the way you would have me use it." Setting goals can be an act of discipleship, a way to become more like Christ. When you do it with other people it becomes an act of fellowship.

Setting goals can actually fulfill all the purposes for which God made you. You can set goals in the areas of: worship, discipleship, fellowship, service and mission. Setting goals is certainly a way to keep from wasting your life or spending it on the wrong things. We need to set goals that will enable us to invest our lives on things that will outlast us. In other words, there are three kinds of people in the world. There are people who make things happen. Then there are people who watch things happen. Then there are people who have no idea what's happening. Actually, there's a fourth group which are those who never do anything themselves but criticize those who are making the effort. That's the worst group of all because they just sit around taking pot shots at people who are at least trying to do something with their lives.

One of the reasons why we should set goals in every area of our lives is because God models this for us. God is a goal setter. You may not have realized this, but God has goals for history that haven't been fulfilled yet. He has goals for all of creation that haven't been fulfilled yet. He has goals for your life and for mine that haven't been fulfilled yet. God is a planner. He is a goal setter. In Ephesians 1:10 it says it is God's plan *"to bring all of history to its goal in Christ. Then Christ will be the head of everything in heaven and on earth!"* History is moving toward a climax where one day *"every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* (Philippians 2:10-11) History is moving toward a goal. We should be too!

Remember some thirty years ago when the movie "Lion King" came out and everybody was singing that song, "The Circle of Life." That's a great song, BUT the idea of life being a circle is not a Christian concept. That's a Buddhist concept. The Bible doesn't teach us that life is a circle, that we're all just being reincarnated over and over and over in a circle of life. No. Life is linear! Life is moving toward an ultimate goal. One day God is going to create a new heaven and a new earth. There are seasons in life, but all of life is moving toward an ultimate goal. Life is not a circle, like a never ending Ground Hog Day.

When we set goals in faith, we are imitating our heavenly Father. It is a spiritual discipline.

SECOND, GOAL SETTING FOCUSES MY ENERGY. Energy that isn't focused gets wasted. It gets diffused rather than used. Energy that is focused has enormous power. Paul models this for us in 1st Corinthians 9:26 when he says, *"I do not run without a goal. I fight like a boxer who is hitting something—not just the air."* Friends, you don't want to run around in circles in 2012. You need to set goals so your energy can be focused. You only have so much energy. You only have so much time. You don't have energy to do everything and you don't have time to do everything. The good news is: God doesn't expect you to do everything because not everything is worth doing. A lot of time is being wasted in our lives on things that aren't worth doing. These things betray us. Trivial Pursuit is not a game; it is the description of our culture. Most of what is going on in our culture isn't worth doing. What's most important in your life is not what's most urgent. What's most important in your life is the stuff that's the easiest to set aside. You know you need to spend time with God, reading His word and talking to

Him, but you set it aside for what's urgent. The urgent almost always pushes the important out of the way. Goals enable us to focus our energy on what's most important.

The Bible says, *"Make the most of every opportunity for doing good in these evil days."* (Ephesians 5:16) That means you're not to waste your time on nonessentials. It means you need to know the difference between pressures and priorities. You need to know the difference between activity and achievement. You need to know what matters most. The secret to an effective life, if you want your life to count, is focus. Don't try to do fifty things that you dabble in. Know what's most important and do those things and don't worry about anything else.

THIRD, GOALS STRETCH MY FAITH. Actually, goals are statements of faith. Godly goals are statements of faith. They affirm your trust in God. When you say, I believe God wants me to accomplish this goal by this date, that's a statement of faith. Goals give you the opportunity to grow in your faith as you see God empower you to reach your goals.

Goals are not the same thing as dreams. Dreams are good, but dreams don't do anything unless you wake up and go to work. A lot of people have dreams, but don't do anything about them. They just keep dreaming. Goals, on the other hand, have accountability built in to them, and the power of the Lord built in to them. Goals are dreams with a deadline! A goal says, by the end of 2012, with God's help I'm going to accomplish this.... Goals are measureable. Goals are specific.

When we set goals it stretches our faith and that's very important because the Bible says, *"Without faith it is impossible to please God."* (Hebrews 11:6) Jesus tells us, *"According to your faith it will be done unto you."* (Matthew 9:29) You have never really trusted God until you have attempted something that can't be done in the power of the flesh. If you can do it in your own power, then you don't need faith. Setting goals in faith involves attempting something that is so big that it forces you to depend on God.

The Christian faith is about ordinary people setting goals and attempting extraordinary goals in faith and then watching God do it. It's not about being better than anyone else, or smarter than anyone else, or more talented than anyone else. It's about setting goals in faith and watching God demonstrate his power in your life and giving him the credit for enabling you to reach your goal.

FOURTH, SETTING GOALS BUILDS MY CHARACTER. They build character. They develop character. They cultivate character. God is more interested in developing your character than he is in what you accomplish. The greatest benefit of setting goals in faith is not that you reach your goal and accomplish what you set out to accomplish; it's what happens to you along the way; what you become along the journey; what changes in you along the journey.

This is the plot of a thousand movies you've seen. Whether the plot of the movie is to win the war, go to the moon, climb the mountain, or get the girl. During the movie there are so many obstacles to overcome and along the way the main character changes. They grown up. And

that is what God wants of you. He wants you to grow up in the faith. He wants you to develop Christ-like character. He wants you to mature in your walk with the Lord. After all, that Christ-like character is the only thing you're going to take with you into heaven. You won't take any of your accomplishments to heaven. You won't take any of your achievements to heaven. You're not going to be able to take any of your awards or trophies or certificates or honors. You won't be able to take any of your possessions, not your wealth or your positions of power. The only thing you get to take to heaven with you is you. You'll be taking your character that you've developed while here on earth and nothing more.

One of the best ways to develop your character is by setting a goal and going after it and not giving in when you have all kinds of difficulties. It is in the process, in the struggle, that you develop the kind of character God wants you to have. While you are working on the goal, God is working on you. All of life is a course in character development. This life is to get ready for the next. Otherwise, God would have simply whisked you off to heaven the moment you came to a saving knowledge of Christ Jesus. God left you here so you can develop your character and prepare for your life in heaven.

The apostle Paul says, ***"I do not claim that I've already succeeded or have already become perfect. I keep striving toward the goal for which Christ Jesus has won me to himself."*** (Philippians 3:12) What is that goal he is speaking of? It's the number one goal God has for your life. It's not to make you happy - that's a side benefit to striving after God's number one goal for your life. It's not to make you comfortable or secure. It's not even to land you on the other side, in that place called heaven. That's not even God's number one purpose for your life. God's number one purpose in your life is to make you like Jesus Christ. He wants you to grow up into the character of Christ. He wants you to learn to respond to everything the way Jesus did, to handle trials and tribulations the way Jesus did, to handle criticism the way Jesus did. He wants you to handle your enemies the way Jesus did. He wants you to learn how to be kind to people who can't pay you back. He wants you to learn to love people who are unlovable. He wants you to learn how to forgive people who have hurt you. That's what it means to become like Jesus and develop Christ like character. The Bible says, ***"Then we will be mature, just as Christ is, and we will be completely like Him."*** (Ephesians 4:13)

There's something you should know about becoming like Christ and maturing in the faith - it's not automatic. It doesn't come easy. It's not instant. It takes time. In fact, it is going to take the rest of your life. There are no shortcuts. There's no magic formula to make you instantly like Christ. There's no seminar or book to read that will make you instantly like Christ. It's a process. It's a process of setting spiritual goals, with accountability and measurability built in to them.

FIFTH, SETTING GOALS GIVES ME HOPE. You cannot live without hope. Setting goals gives you hope. You can live without water for a few days. You can live without food for even longer. You can even live without air for a brief time, but you cannot live without hope. Hope is essential to life.

I once read a study on the holocaust survivors. These people went through hell in Auschwitz and Buchenwald and Dachau and had the smell of death literally all around them. Thousands were dying every day. How in the world did some people survive the death camps when others simply gave up and died? They did a study of those who survived and actually made it through. They discovered one common denominator among the survivors and it was this: Those who survived has something to look forward to, they had a goal that kept them going and gave them hope.

The truth is: life is tough. Life is difficult. Life is full of losses and illness and disease. None of knows what lies ahead for us. I do know this: there will be problems. There will be pain. I'm going to lose people I love. But I also know this: having goals will give me the hope to keep moving forward even in times of loss. Without goals, there's no reason to get out of bed in the morning. Job went through this when he had lost everything. He said, ***"I do not have the strength to endure. I do not have a goal that encourages me to carry on."*** (Job 6:11)

Some of you are feeling like that right now. You're going through hell right now. You certainly don't want to stay in that place you're in right now. What keeps you going is the hope that things will get better and by God's help they will if you have a goal. You need a goal. If you aim at nothing, you're going to hit it!

It's important to realize that not every goal is a good goal. Not every goal is a godly goal. Not every goal is a goal that gets God's blessing. So how do we know if a goal is good and godly? **What kind of goal does God bless?**

FIRST, GOD BLESSES A GOAL THAT BRINGS HIM THE GLORY. 1st Corinthians 10:31 says, ***"Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."*** A godly goal, the kind that God blesses, is the one that brings glory to God. It's the one set with the right attitude and the right motivation. What is the right attitude? Gratitude. And what is the right motivation? To bring glory to God.

SECOND, GOD BLESSES A GOAL MOTIVATED BY LOVE. The Bible says, ***"Do everything in love."*** (1st Corinthians 16:14) That's the number one reason why God put you here on earth: to learn to love. If you don't learn that, it doesn't matter what you accomplish or what you acquire or what you do or what you experience. God is love and he wants you do everything in love.

THIRD, GOD BLESSES A GOAL THAT ENABLES YOU TO FULFILL ONE OF GOD'S PURPOSES FOR YOUR LIFE. The Bible says, ***"Do not use any part of yourselves to sin or to be used for wicked purposes. Instead, give yourselves to God...and surrender your whole being to him to be used for righteous purposes."*** (Romans 6:13) A goal that God blesses is a goal that enables you to fulfill one of God's purposes for your life.

FOURTH, GOD BLESSES A GOAL SET IN FAITH. It's a goal that is beyond your reaching without God's help. It's so big that it requires faith to achieve it. The Bible says, ***"Without faith it is impossible to please God..."*** (Hebrews 11:6) The kind of goal that God

blesses is a goal that's big enough, that stretches you, maybe even scares you a bit. Then you have to trust God to help you achieve it.

FIFTH, GOD BLESSES A GOAL THAT IS ACHIEVED BY HIS POWER. It's not something you do in and of yourself. It takes the power of God to achieve. That's the goal the God blesses. That's the kind of goal worth setting.

The other day I looked up "self help" books on Amazon. I found 86,981 self help books. That's a lot of books and some of them actually have some good advice in them. But none of them have what the Bible has. Only the Bible offers the power to achieve your goal. That power is the presence of God within you both to will and to do. The Bible says, *"You will not succeed by your own strength or power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord."* (Zechariah 4:6)