

The Message: How to Set Personal Goals by Faith Part 1 of the Transformed Sermon Series

I want to begin this message by sharing one of my favorite stories about a senior who set new goals in his golden years. This is a summary of a Korean article titled “An Old Gentleman’s Decision to Learn Something New,” which I have translated into English... What an inspirational story!

I recently looked at the statistics on the average life expectancy in Canada, which is around 83 years old. As time goes by, advances in medical science and improvements in living conditions continue to increase life expectancy. With God’s blessing, I believe many people may live to be 100 years old or even longer.

Today is the first Sunday of the second half of this year. It seems as though only a few weeks ago we began 2026. We are often surprised by how quickly time passes. Around this time of year, many of us, including myself, reflect on what we have done well so far and what we regret. We also begin thinking about the decisions we want to make for the rest of the year. What new challenges would we like to take on in the coming months?

I believe every day, indeed every moment, is a precious gift from God, and the Lord wants us to make the most of it as we journey in faith. Regardless of the challenges we may be facing today, from God’s perspective and with His help, we are never too old or too weak to expect great things from Him and to attempt great things for Him.

Today, we are launching a new sermon series called “How God Changes Us,” based on our spring Bible study, as we explore what the Bible teaches about the transformation. This series is based on Pastor Rick Warren’s DVD study *The Transformed*, and our theme passage is Romans 12:2. This scripture also connects with one of our church’s ministry objectives for this year: Transformation.

This morning, I would like to introduce this series. Then, over the next seven Sundays, we will explore seven essential areas of our lives: our spiritual health, physical health, mental health, emotional health, financial health, relational health, and vocational health.

To begin with this introductory message, I would like us to read our key verse aloud together. Are we ready? Okay. “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” Whether we realize it or not, throughout the course of our lives, we will either be conformed or be transformed.

Through the Bible, we have learned that God created each of us to be unique. He created every one of us to be like no one else. That is why each of us is precious in God’s eyes, regardless of our background, personality, or life experiences. We should accept one another as God’s beloved children.

In the Scripture we have just read, God is saying something like this: “I want you to be unique. I don’t want you to be conformed to someone else’s idea of who you should be.” The problem is that we all begin life as originals, but many of us end up becoming copies of other people. We become conformed to the world around us.

To become the person God wants us to be, we need to set personal goals in each of these seven areas of our lives. Today, I would like to share four reasons why setting healthy, faith-filled goals is important.

Number one, the Bible teaches that setting goals in faith focuses our energy. The Apostle Paul says: “Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air” (1 Corinthians 9:26). Paul does not want us running through life without direction. Instead, he encourages us to set godly goals and make steady progress, one step at a time. As I mentioned earlier, without goals, we often wonder why time seems to pass so much faster than it used to. We simply do not have time for everything. Therefore, we must make time for what matters most, establish our priorities, and use our time wisely.

Number two, the Bible teaches that setting goals in faith builds our character. Remember that God is more interested in our character than in our accomplishments. His primary concern is not simply the results we achieve but the kind of people we become through process. Do you know what God’s greatest goal for our lives is? It is not merely to make us happy, although happiness is often a wonderful by-product. God’s greatest goal is to make us more like Jesus Christ. That is why, whenever I face difficult situations, I try to ask myself, “If Jesus were here with me, what He would say to me in this situation? How would He want me to respond?” I believe Jesus wants each of us to grow in character and become more like Him. As we pursue our goals by faith, remember that God is also working on us. While we are working toward our goals, God is working within us.

Number three, the Bible teaches that setting goals in faith gives us hope. Someone said: “You can live without food for many days. You can live without water for a few days. You can live without air for only a few minutes. But you cannot live without hope.” Hope is essential to life. To illustrate this, let me share the story of American Admiral James Stockdale (1923-2005). During the Vietnam War, Admiral Stockdale became a prisoner of war and was held in captivity for nearly eight years... Then he was asked how he had managed to survive. He replied: “I never lost faith in the end of the story. I never doubted not only that I would get out, but also that I would prevail in the end.” He always had something to look forward to. That hope kept him going. Those who had nothing to hope for often gave up. But those who held on to hope, like Stockdale, endured.

The prophet Isaiah speaks about this same truth: “Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall, but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (Isaiah 40:30-31). This passage reminds us that, whether we are young or old, those who place their hope in the Lord, seek Him faithfully, and make Him the first priority in their lives will find their strength renewed by God. Their weakness is exchanged

for God's strength. They will soar like eagles in their spiritual lives. This is God's promise to us. When we put our hope in Him and faithfully follow Him, we can remain young at heart no matter how old we become physically. By His strength, we will continue to rise above life's challenges and soar in our walk with Him.

Number four, the Bible teaches that setting goals in faith is our spiritual responsibility. In our Epistle reading today, we see that the Apostle Paul was a man with a clear spiritual goal. His lifelong desire was to know Jesus Christ more deeply. To understand today's passage, we need to remember Paul's background. Before becoming a follower of Christ, he was known as Saul of Tarsus, his Jewish name. He was proud of his heritage and described himself as "a Hebrew of Hebrews" (Philippians 3:4-6). Before his encounter with Christ, Saul sought to become righteous before God through his own efforts. However, he eventually discovered that no matter how faithfully he tried to keep God's law, he could not change his own heart or make himself righteous. Finally, overwhelmed by his spiritual struggle and inability to overcome the power of sin, he cried out to God. Then after encountering the risen Christ and accepting Him as his Lord and Savior, Paul came to understand this wonderful truth: "This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe" (Romans 3:21-26). From that moment on, everything changes. The name Paul means "small" or "humble," and after experiencing God's saving grace, he desired to make Christ greater while becoming smaller himself. His greatest ambition was to know Jesus more deeply and to make Him known. From the very first day of His Christian life, that became the goal toward which he continually pressed.

In Philippians 3:13-14, Paul summarizes his practical attitudes toward the goal he had set. "But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead..." One of Paul's favorite illustrations for the Christian life is a race. Every runner knows looking backward slows you down. A runner must keep looking ahead toward the finish line. That is exactly how Paul viewed his spiritual journey. As far as we know, Paul became one of the greatest theologians and biblical scholars in Christian history. He possessed an extraordinary knowledge of the Scriptures. By the time he wrote this letter to the church in Philippi, he was an older man and was writing from prison. At that point, Paul could have looked back on his remarkable ministry and proudly said, "I have accomplished enough. I have finished my work." He could have retired with satisfaction. Instead, Paul humbly admitted that he had not yet reached his goal. He refused to live only on the memories of past victories. At the same time, Paul undoubtedly remembered many of his failures and mistakes and failures. He could have condemned himself because of them. Satan could have used those memories to fill him with doubt, despair, and discouragement. Forgetting painful memories is not simply a matter of trying harder to forget them. Most of us discover that the more we try to forget them, the more we remember them. The best thing we can do is to bring our sins, failures, and regrets honestly before Jesus, ask for His forgiveness, and receive His grace by faith. Then we trust His promise that our sins have been forgiven because His precious blood, shed on the cross, has completely washed them away. God no longer holds those sins against us.

The second part of Paul's race is this: "...straining toward what is ahead" (Philippians 3:13). What was Paul looking toward? He answers that question in the very next verse: "I

press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14). Paul kept pressing forward because he looked forward to the eternal reward that God had prepared for him. The promise of that heavenly prize motivated him to give his very best to the Lord throughout his life. The eternal reward became the focus of his race. Because his eyes were fixed on God’s calling, he had no need to compare himself with the other apostles. Instead, as he wrote elsewhere, “I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10). When Paul chose to follow Christ, he was not making a commitment for thirty or forty years. He committed his entire life to the Lord. He wanted to serve Christ for as long as God gave him strength and continued to entrust him with new opportunities for ministry.

Although Paul did not compare himself with other people, there was one Person by whom he measured his life: Jesus Christ. Hebrews calls Him “the pioneer and perfecter of faith” (Hebrews 12: 2). Paul’s desire was to “grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ” (Ephesians 4:15). Like Paul, God wants us to grow into mature followers of Jesus. He calls us fight the good fight of the faith and to press on toward the heavenly prizes. We often remind ourselves that we are no longer under the law but under God’s grace. That is absolutely true. Every day we depend on His grace. We are justified by His grace, and we are sanctified by His grace. Yet sometimes we misunderstand grace and use it to excuse our spiritual complacency or our failure to obey God’s Word. Certainly, we cannot become holy or perfect through our own efforts. But we should never forget what Jesus said to His disciples: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). As followers of Christ, we are not called to live according to the standards of this world, even though we live in an imperfect world. By His grace and through the power of the Holy Spirit, we continue pressing forward, becoming more and more like Christ each day.

Paul says in Philippians 3:8 and 9, “What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him...” Paul was eager to seek God and set his mind on things above. If he had wanted to, Paul could have placed a great deal of confidence in his earthly identity—in his race, his religion, his reputation, his ritual, and his rules. But none of those things could compare to knowing Christ and sharing fellowship with Him. When we hear about Paul counting everything as rubbish or garbage, we might ask ourselves: Do we have to throw everything we own into the trash? No. What Paul is saying here is that if there is anything blocking him from coming to Jesus or leading him to rely on his own strength rather than on Christ—he counts it as garbage. It is something he needs to let go of. Remember, Paul still worked as a tentmaker to support himself, even though he was called to be the apostle to the Gentiles. He used his knowledge and intelligence to write a number of wonderful letters to early believers. Paul gave his absolute best to share Jesus Christ with others. But to know Jesus Christ and to become more like Him each day were the highest values in his life. That was God’s higher calling for him.

How do our own life goals compare to Paul's? I recently read an interesting story reported in a San Francisco newspaper about a young man who once found a five-dollar bill on the street... I am afraid that we sometimes walk just like that man. While we might not literally stare down at the sidewalk, we can become so consumed by the things of this earthly life that we give very little attention to spiritual and heavenly values. Every single one of us craves happiness and satisfaction. In fact, the desire for happiness is a God-given trait. The problem is not the desire itself; the problem is how and where we seek to satisfy it. Ever since the Fall in the Garden of Eden, humanity has been pursuing happiness in all the wrong places. What do we crave? Think about it. Wealth! Power! Pleasure! Fame! Success! Knowledge! These pursuits are not unique to our generation. And please understand me: these things are not inherently evil. There are many people who possess wealth or success and remain incredibly effective Christians. The mistake happens when we desire the things of this earth more than we desire the things of God. To set our minds on things above simply means to turn our focus away from the world and fix it on Him.

As followers of Christ, we are all called to press on until we attain to "the whole measure of the fullness of Christ," as Ephesians 4:13 tells us. The fullness of Christ doesn't mean living a sinless, flawless life right now. Instead, it means having an ongoing, lifelong passion for Jesus. Some of us might get deeply discouraged because the growth process in our journey of faith feels so slow. We face so many ups and downs. But we must remember that maturity takes time. One of my favorite trees is the oak. It can take 70 to 80 years for an oak tree to fully mature and produce acorns. It is a slow-growing process. But once that oak tree is fully grown, its wood is incredibly dense, strong, and resistant to disease and decay. It becomes a reliable building material. When we look back on our own spiritual journeys, many of us, myself absolutely included, have to confess that we have had plenty of ups and downs in following Lord Jesus. But we can be so thankful that God continuously provides the strength, wisdom, and endurance we need fulfill His higher calling.

Let us pray that our goals in this coming season look a lot like Paul. Let us remember that while we can map out our plans, God is the only One who allows us to reach them. Let us ask Him to help us rely on His mighty power, so that we can see our faith goals to come to life in every area of our lives.

**In this sermon I have incorporated ideas from various sermons, particularly the sermon series titled The Daniel Plan prepared by Pastor Rick Warren, based on Philippians 3:7-14.*