
TRANSFORMED

Setting Personal Goals by Faith

Romans 12:1-2

Paul Gauche

Steve had been a closet slob most of his life. He just couldn't comprehend the logic of neatness. His reasoning seemed airtight to him: why make up a bed if you're going to sleep in it again tonight? Why put the lid on the toothpaste tube if you're going to take it off again in the morning? But Steve was an honest guy who could do the hard work of self-reflection, and Steve admitted to being compulsive about being messy. But something happened: Steve got married to Sheila. Steve married way up, he out-punted his coverage as Shelia had the patience of Job. She said she didn't mind his habits — if he didn't mind sleeping on the couch. Well, since Steve did mind, he began to change. He said he enrolled in a 12-step program for slobs. A physical therapist helped him rediscover the muscles used for hanging up shirts and placing a roll of toilet paper on the holder. His nose was reintroduced to the smell of Pine Sol. By the time his in-laws arrived for a visit, Steve was a new man. But then came the moment of truth. Shelia went out of town for a week. At first he reverted to the "Old Steve." He figured he could be a slob for six days and clean on the seventh. But then something really strange happened. He could no longer relax with dirty dishes in the sink or towels flung around the bathroom or clothes on the floor or sheets piled up like a mountain on the bed. What happened? Simple. Steve had been exposed to a higher standard of living and Steve was changed. And that is the power of transformation.

This weekend we're embarking on a 50 day adventure of faith—a seven week spiritual journey that we'll take together as a congregation. And as we move through these weeks, we'll discover the transforming power of Jesus Christ in the core areas of our lives as we invite God's word to renew us each day, as we grow "IN...through Community" through small groups to reinforce these themes. As we let God's word transform us, we'll base everything we experience on one very powerful verse in the book of Romans, where in 12:2 the Apostle Paul writes, "Do not be conformed any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

There's a big difference between conforming and being transformed. Every day, one way or another, we're being formed, for sure. But here's the important difference between conforming and being transformed: conforming is something we do to ourselves, and transforming is something God does in us. Let me explain. According to a dictionary, to conform means to "make or become the same" or "to behave in a conventional way by accepting without question the customs, traditions and prevailing opinions of others." To say this another way, to conform is to fit into someone else's mold; it's to do things the way everyone else does things. On the other hand, transforming is something God does to us. To transform means to "change the condition, function, nature, character or personality" of something. God does the work of transforming; God transforms us through the renewing of our minds, changing our behavior by changing the way we think. If we want to be like Christ, we learn to think like Christ. So the bottom line is that God wants us to be nonconformists. Don't conform to

the pattern of this world. But be transformed into the image of Christ. We'll either be conformed or we'll be transformed.

God created you to be unique, novel, distinctive. God created you to be remarkably you—like nobody else. You have a unique voiceprint, thumbprint, handprint, heartbeat. And God wants you to know that, celebrate that, embrace that and live that out being the most remarkable version of yourself possible. God says I want you to be absolutely you and not conformed to anybody else's idea of what you should be. But the problem is that while we all start off as originals, we end up as becoming copies of other people. We get conformed and we get pressured and we get pushed into a mold.

During the next seven weeks we're going to look at seven key areas of our lives and the changes you need to make, want to make and can make because of God's power in your life. Beginning next week, we're going to look at transforming our spiritual health (week 2), physical health, our mental health, our emotional health, our relational health, our financial health, and our vocational health. But none of that will be possible—none of the transformation that God wants to accomplish create in us will be possible if we don't have a plan for getting there; if we don't set some goals for getting from right here, right now to where God wants to take us. So today, what I want to shed some light on the importance of setting some spiritual goals for our lives. I want to give you THREE CLEAR REASONS—biblically based reasons why we need to learn how to set goals in our lives.

FIRST, SETTING GOALS IS A SPIRITUAL RESPONSIBILITY.

Going all the way back to the creation poem in Genesis, God had goals for the universe; that all things would work together in harmony to support life and wholeness. Those goals were woven into us so that we would pursue life and aliveness in all we do. We see goals in the life of Jesus. In fact, Jesus often announced publicly what his next goal was. "I'm going to do this now... I'm going to go there now." Jesus often publically announced in advance what his goal was for the next phase of his ministry. The scriptures are filled with examples of people who were goal directed in their lives with God. The Apostle Paul is just one example. In Philippians 3, Paul writes this: I know that I am not yet what God wants me to be. [Anybody agree with that? I know that I'm not yet what God wants me to be...] I haven't reached that goal, but I keep moving toward it to make it mine because Christ made me and saved me for this. I know that I haven't yet reached my goal, but there's one thing I always do. Forgetting the past and straining toward what is ahead, I keep my eyes focused on the goal so that I may one day win the prize that God has called me to receive through Christ in the life above. All of you who are spiritually mature should think this same way, too.

So why is it important for you to set a goal? Because it's a spiritual responsibility. You're going to go through life either by design or by default. You're either going to set goals and you're going to decide what's important for your life or other people are going to decide it for you. If you don't have goals for your life you are giving up control of your life to somebody else and something else. If you don't have goals for your life you're not really living; you're just reacting; you're just existing. If you don't have clear goals for your life you're just coasting through life. You are drifting through life. And whenever you're coasting you're always going downhill. If you don't have goals for your life you have already decided to let other people run your life. Because you don't know what's important so you're going to let them decide. And you react to circumstances and you go through your whole life

wasting your life because you haven't clarified what's important. This is a very important spiritual discipline. You're allowing others to wreck your life. The Bible says to be spiritually mature, he says all of you who are spiritually mature should think the same way. I set my goal, I strive for my goal, I move toward my goal, I keep my eyes focused on the goal. Powerful words from the Apostle Paul.

SECOND, GOALS ARE STATEMENTS OF FAITH.

A lot of people think, a goal? Isn't that just a business thing? Isn't setting goals something people do in their jobs Monday through Friday? Isn't setting goals something only athletes do to get to the Olympics? No. Setting goals is a spiritual habit that we need to develop. And goals are statements of faith. In other words, as a follower of Christ setting a goal is like saying, "I believe that God wants me to accomplish such and such by such and such a time." That's a statement of faith. A goal is a statement of faith. This is what I believe God is going to do in my life.

But goals aren't just statements of faith; goals also stretch our faith. And the bigger the goal the more our faith will be stretched. And the more we're stretched, the more we're growing in faith. But keep in mind, if we're not growing in faith, we're not going where God is going. And if we're not going where God is going, we're not taking any spiritual risks. And if we're not taking any spiritual risks we don't need any faith. And if we don't have any faith we might even say we're being unfaithful. So, do you see how important it is for you to have a goal in every area of your life?

Whenever I think of taking spiritual risks in the life of Prince of Peace, I think of the Ephesians 3:20 where the Apostle Paul reminds us that God is able to accomplish far more than we could ever think or imagine or guess, or dare to request in our wildest dreams. And the best example of that has to be how from the very beginning God has challenged this congregation to take big risks. And with every risk, there were people who asked, "Who do you think you are?" We said, "Let's erase a 4 million dollar debt in 6 years in one of the most challenging financial times in recent memory with fewer people than the previous attempts," and people asked, "Who do you think you are?" We said, "Let's take Jesus seriously and boldly affirm that love is the last best word ever, and people asked, "Who do you think you are?" We said, "Let's trust God to do in and through us far more than we can think or imagine," and people asked, "Who do you think you are?" We said, "Let's open our doors as wide as they can possibly open and invite everyone in—no exceptions," and people asked, "Who do you think you are?" We said, "Let's pack 2 million meals in 5 days for hungry kids all over the planet," "Let's put everything under one roof; let's reimagine what God can do in and through us, let's reimagine who we're called to serve and serve them, let's reimagine ministry, let's reimagine everything!" And people asked, "Who do you think you are?" Who do we think we are? You know what? That's the wrong question. The question is not, "Who do we think we are?" The question is, Who do we think God is? Big God, big goal. Tiny, God tiny goal. No God, no goal. Let the size of God determine the size of your goal. Let me just say this: as your brother in Christ, as one of your pastors, as somebody who loves you and cares deeply for this place and loves what God is doing in and through Prince of Peace, during the next fifty days I dare you to dream great dreams. I dare you. Let me be very direct: Stop your puny little thinking. Stop being satisfied with being in a little bitty box. Stop thinking "I'm too young or I'm too old or I'm not smart enough, I'm not this, that or the other thing enough, or whatever enough. Stop all your arguments. And let's start

dreaming together of what God could do in your life if you would just trust him. Goals are statements of faith.

THIRD, GOALS BUILD CHARACTER.

Goals build my character. Drifting won't build my character and it won't build yours either. Goals build your character. And when your character begins to develop, God will be able to do all kinds of things in your life. Listen very carefully to what I'm about to say. The greatest benefit to your life over the goals you're going to set in the next fifty days – the biggest benefit to your life is not going to be the accomplishments and achievements you acquire because of those goals. The biggest benefit for you will be what happens inside you while you're moving toward the goal. God is more interested in your character than in your accomplishments. Here's what I mean by that. God is more interested in who you are and what you become than in what you do and accomplish and what you succeed at. God is interested in you.

So here's the idea: While I'm working on the goal, God is working on me. Does that make sense? That's what God wants to do in your life. Goals help build your character. And that's what's going to last for eternity. That's why Paul says in Philippians 3:12 "I keep striving toward the goal." If you've got your bible open, circle the word "striving." That means it takes energy, it takes effort, it takes intention. It takes purpose in order to reach your goal. God says while you're doing that, while you're working on the goal, God is building character in you. You will never become the person God intends you to be unless you intend to become that person. Goals build my character.

So here's the deal: you'll want to use the journal. And side bar here: I know that the word 'journal' is somewhat confusing for some of you. Some of you admittedly are not journalers. I get that. Then call this a workbook. Because that's really what it is. It's already full of notes and information that will help you. So please, just get the workbook. For those of you who are journalers, just journal in the workbook. In your journal, do this: Set some Goals: at least one for each week by asking: these three questions of your goal: "Does it honor God?" "Is it motivated by love?" and "Does it require depending on God?"

PRAYER

Gracious, loving God, we already know that you're going to do some amazing things in our midst as we begin this Fifty Days of Transformation. Lives are going to be changed. We know that families are going to be strengthened, marriages will be renewed, friendships will be made, some people are going to get engaged. We know that miracles are going to happen. It would be a waste of time for us to not expect you to do a great thing. So we already thank you for what's already happening in the hearts of people. We especially thank you for all of those people who've taken the step of faith, moved against their fear to become a small group host – by saying "I'll start a group of two, three, four, five, six people for the next fifty days." We thank you for these hosts who are stepping out in faith. Help them to realize they're already a success, that it doesn't really matter who shows up and who doesn't show up, because if you're doing it in faith and love the Bible says, love never fails. So really, Lord, you're more interested in their attitude than even in the results. Most of all we thank you for the cross because we thank you and we do everything we do for Jesus' sake.