

Setting Personal Goals by Faith

Welcome to 50 Days of Transformation! Our theme verse for the next fifty days is Romans 12:2. And it's also our memory verse for this week. Let's read it aloud together, Romans 12:2 *"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."*

God wants you to be a nonconformist - not to conform to the pattern of this world. God wants you to be transformed. You'll either be *conformed* or you'll be *transformed*.

God created you to be unique; special; not exactly like anyone else. But the problem is we get conformed and we get pressured and we get pushed into a mold. You have a unique voiceprint, thumbprint, handprint, heartbeat. God has a unique role and purpose for you and God doesn't want you conformed to anyone else's idea of what you should be.

During the next seven weeks we're going to look at seven key areas of your life and the changes you have the opportunity to make ONLY because of God's grace and God's power in your life.

We're going to look at your health: your spiritual, physical, mental, emotional, financial, relational, and vocational health, and we're going to look at transforming the way you think.

What I want to do today is explain why you must set goals for your life. A lot of times we talk about problems and pressures in our lives. This series is about the potential for your life; it's about your possibilities; about making the best of the rest of your life. I'm really excited about it.

I want to begin by giving six Biblical reasons why we need to learn how to set goals in our lives. **Why are goals important to changing my life?**

1. Goal-Setting Is a Spiritual Responsibility. Did you realize that God sets goals? In the Gospels we often see Jesus talking about the goals of his life and ministry. In fact he often announced publicly what his next task was. "I'm going to do this now..." He would announce in advance the next phase of his ministry.

The people in the Bible who walked with God show us great examples of being goal directed. Let me just give you one of the best examples: Paul. Philippians 3 says this *"I do not mean that I am already as God wants me to be. [Anyone agree with Paul on that?] I have not yet reached that goal, but I continue trying to reach it and to make it mine. Christ wants me to do that, which is the reason he made me his. Brothers and sisters, I know that I have not yet reached that goal, but there is one thing I always do. Forgetting the past and straining toward what is ahead, I keep trying to reach the goal and get the prize for which God called me through Christ to the life above. All of us who are spiritually mature should think this way, too."* Paul was goal oriented and tells us that it's a spiritual matter. That's why it's so important for you to set goals - Because it's a spiritual responsibility.

If you don't have goals for your life you are abdicating control of your life to other people, pressures and powers. They'll be happy to decide for you what's important for your life or what you should do in life. If you don't have goals for your life you're not living; you're just reacting. If you don't have clear goals for your life you're just coasting through life. And whenever you're coasting you're always going downhill. This is a very important spiritual discipline.

Paul says that if you're spiritually mature you should think this way. He says, I set my goal, I strive for my goal, I move toward my goal, I keep my eyes focused on the goal. That's what Paul did and he was one of the greatest Christ-followers who ever lived.

2. Goals Are Statements of Faith. A lot of people think, isn't goal setting a business thing? Isn't that like a secular thing; something athletes or politicians do? No. Real goal setting is a spiritual habit we need to develop. Goals can be statements of faith. If you're a believer in Christ and you set a goal in the right way, with the right preparation, what you're saying is, "I believe [that's faith] God wants me to accomplish such and such by such and such a time."

When goals are a real statement of faith, they can stretch your faith. If you don't have any goals, you really don't need any faith. The bigger your goal, the more your faith will be stretched. And the Bible says *"Without faith it is impossible to please God."* So it's important for you to have goals and it's good to have them in every area of your life.

Ephesians 3:20 says, *"With God's power working in us, God can do much, much more than anything we can ask or imagine."* I don't know about you but I can imagine some pretty big things. And yet God says, "Rob, that big fat

audacious thing you've been imagining, that incredible dream you imagine I could do in your life? Well, guess what? I can top it! I can beat it! I can do far more than you would ever imagine in your wildest dream." Let the size of your God determine the size of your goal.

In the research I'm doing on revitalizing churches, I'm finding pastors and churches that had big dreams and at first it seemed ridiculous! Sure they're booming now or I wouldn't be studying them, but when they put their ideas into practice they actually declined at a much faster rate. But they kept their trust and stuck with the vision they believed God had given them. Sometimes it took years and years. When the other United Methodist churches in the area would hear the big goals these churches that weren't showing much promise had, the question always came up: Who do they think they are?

Let me tell you: that's the wrong question. The question isn't, who do we think we are? It's: who do we think God is? Let the size of God determine the size of your goal.

I guess what I want to say to you as your pastor, as someone who loves you and wants the best for you is: I dare you! I dare you to dream great dreams. I dare you to stop any puny thinking. Stop saying, I'm too young, too old, not talented enough, strong enough, whatever. Stop all your arguments. Start dreaming what God could do if you'll just trust God.

The only thing that can limit the potential of God's grace and power in your life is your failure to believe just how much God can do. We limit God by our unbelief.

During the next fifty days each week we're going to set a goal in each of the seven areas. You'll set one for yourself in that area. I challenge you to think bigger than you ever thought before – big enough so you have to trust God.

I am living my life in such a way that I'm bound to fail unless God bails me out. I can't tell you how many times I've painted myself into a corner and God came through.

Here's the cool thing: dreaming doesn't cost you a penny. You can dream great dreams. What do I dream about in my relationships? What do I dream about in my career? In my relationship with God? How healthy would I want to be?

There are two common mistakes we make in goal setting. We set them too low and we try to accomplish them too quickly. We overestimate what we can do in a year and we underestimate what you can do in ten. So instead of thinking puny goals and trying to accomplish them quickly, my challenge to you is, get a big goal and then spend your life going after it. By the way the difference between a goal and a dream is when you put deadlines on it. You say, this is what I want to happen by 2022. In 2012 I set a goal to be accomplished by 2022. If you don't have a deadline, it's not a goal. It's just a dream. Dreams are good but you need both.

Matthew 9:29 NIV says *"According to your faith let it be done to you."* So when we start setting one goal a week, as you set your goal, ask yourself, "Will this require me to have faith? Is it a big enough that I'm bound to fail unless God helps me?" I'm challenging you to go out on a limb. Don't ever be afraid to go out on a limb. That's where the fruit is. You don't get the fruit by playing it safe. It's out on the limb.

3. Goals Focus My Energy. Another reason you need to set goals in every area of your life is they focus your energy. They keep you from wasting time, resources, reputation and energy. They keep you focused and focus is the key to an effective life. The more you focus your life the more powerful and effective it will be. If you spread out your potential and diffuse your life over a whole bunch of different things you make little or no impact at all. But if you focus your life, it's going to be powerful and it will change the world.

The world is full of distractions and you don't have time to do everything. Here's the good news: God doesn't expect you to do everything and not everything is worth doing anyway. There are only a few things really worth doing. The key to being effective in life as a believer, is to do what matters most and not worry about everything else.

Paul says this in 1 Corinthians 9:26 CEB *"I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing."* He's not playing around. He's not just pretending he's boxing, he's fighting to win. He's saying, I'm not just messing around with my life. It's too important. I'm going to do something with my life. I'm going to bring honor and glory to God.

Some of you may be running without a goal. And as a result you're just running in circles or you're caught up in the rat race. You don't want to be in the rat race because even if you win the rat race you're still a rat!

4. Goals Keep Me Going. They give me hope to keep moving; to endure; to persist. You may have heard me say this before, when you're going through hell in life what do you do? You keep on going! You don't want to stop in hell. Don't camp there. When you're going through hell, keep on moving.

The way you do that is you have a goal beyond. Hebrews 12:2 says *"Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame."* He looked beyond the pain to the payoff.

They did a study once of Holocaust survivors. In World War II you know the Nazis killed over six million Jews and millions of others – disabled people, Muslims, gays, others that they just didn't like were put in the death camps. They studied those who survived those terrible places and recovered to lead a productive and relatively happy life. They discovered only one thing in common with all those people: Every one of them had something to look forward to. They had something waiting for them; something that they wanted to live for. They had a goal.

Those who didn't have anything to live for or look forward to, those who didn't have any goal, lost hope and they simply gave up the will to live. And they died or withdrew from life.

When you have long term goals they keep you from being discouraged by setbacks. Everyone has setbacks. Everyone makes mistakes. Everyone has failures. In fact, failure is the only way you succeed. You can't succeed in life without failing. Why? Because that's how you learn what works and doesn't work. So never call it a failure; call it an education.

Some of us are highly educated. We're good at failing.

If there's any one important piece of advice as a friend I could give you, this is it: Learn to fail fast. You're going to fail. Everybody fails out there all the time. Fail fast. And then learn from it. Don't waste failures. We'll continually do this as a church - try something and if it doesn't work, try something else and if that doesn't work, try something else. We may do ninety-nine things that don't work, but then one hundred does. Then we pretend like we knew what we were doing.

A goal doesn't have to be big to motivate you. For instance, If you had to go to the hospital and have surgery for some reason, your first goal after surgery could be, Can I sit up in bed? Not a very big goal but an important one. And the second goal, Can I hang my feet over the side of the bed and sit up? Then the next goal can I get enough strength to stand up after surgery? Then, Do I have enough strength to walk?

All of those are very small goals but they're all important. Because success isn't one big leap. It's many small steps. So a goal doesn't have to be big to be important.

You may have come here feeling a little discouraged; a little down. If you're discouraged the best thing to do is to set some new goals. So that's what we'll do in the next fifty days. You need to set new goals in several different areas.

5. Goals Build My Character. Listen very carefully to what I'm about to say. The greatest benefit to your life about these goals you're going to set in the next fifty days won't be any accomplishments or achievements you acquire because of those goals. The greatest benefit will be what happens inside you while you're moving toward the goal.

God is more interested in your character than your accomplishments. You're not taking your success or your career or your home to heaven. But you are taking your character. So God is more interested in who you are and what you become than in what you succeed at.

While I'm working on the goal, God is working on me. While you're working on the goal, God is working on you. Does that make sense? That's what God wants to do in your life. Goals build your character. And that lasts for eternity.

Paul says in Philippians 3:12 *"I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me."* Notice he says "I press on." That means it takes energy, effort, intention to reach your goal. And while you're doing that, God is perfecting you in love. You'll never become what God intends you to be without being intentional about pressing on.

So What Kind of Goal Does God Bless?

Not every goal that you can set is a good goal. Not every goal is a goal that God's going to bless. So you want to set goals in these seven areas over the next seven weeks, you want to set these in your life, but you want to set the kind of goal that God is going to bless, God's going to give you the power to do.

Of course the real rewards in setting good goals is going to come in eternity. 1 Corinthians 9:25 *"All athletes practice strict self-control. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run [Paul says] straight to the goal with purpose in every step."* He was a purpose driven goal setter. You need to be that too.

So how do I know the kind of goal that God will bless? Let me close by giving you three questions. When you get ready to set a goal ask yourself these three questions:

1. Will It Honor God? That's the first question to ask of any decision. Will this honor God? What kind of goal brings honor and glory to God? One that causes you to trust God more, depend on God more, love and serve God and other people more, be more unselfish. Those are honorable goals. 1 Corinthians 6:20 says, *"God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body."* Are you using your body to honor God? Or are you using it mostly for your own reasons? 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, *"So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."* Everything can be done to bring glory to God. You can take out the garbage, wash dishes, clean out your car to honor God. How? We honor God by doing it with the right motive - out of gratitude - and in the right way, with the right attitude. In life and in death our goal is to honor God. 2 Corinthians 5:9 says, *"...whether we are here in this body or away from this body, our goal is to please him."*

Question: **2. Is It Motivated By Love?** Is this goal motivated by love? God is not going to bless a goal motivated by greed. God is not going to bless a goal motivated envy. God is not going to bless a goal motivated grudges. God is not going to bless a goal that's motivated by ego or by pride. That doesn't mean you can't or won't accomplish it, but you won't get that spiritual blessing from it.

When you set a goal out of love for God and other people, God's going to bless you in that because our faith is all about love. Life is all about learning how to love.

1 Corinthians 16:14 says, *"...do everything with love."* Everything. 1 Corinthians 14:1 says, *"Let love be your highest goal!"* It should be the number one goal in your life - learning to love unlovely people; learning to love the loveless and the unloved; learning to love people who are hard to love - that's loving like God.

If you set loveless goals, you'll treat people as objects and projects. You'll step on or over them to get to your goal. You'll run over your marriage, your friends, other people. It's not about accomplishments. It's about relationships. It's about learning how to love.

Question: **3. Will It Require Me to Depend on God?** Remember, Hebrews 11:6 says, *"Without faith it's impossible to please God."* This series is meant to help you make the rest of your life the best of your life if you'll depend fully on God to make it so. God provides the three things you must have to reach your goal and change your life.

First - **I Need God's Spirit to Empower Me** - This is not something based on willpower. It's based on God power. It's not based on trying; it's based on trusting,. I need God's Spirit to empower me. Zechariah 4:6 says *"It is not by force nor by strength, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of Heaven's Armies."* I need God's Spirit to empower me to make changes I can't make on my own.

Second - **I Need God's Word to Guide Me** - The Bible, is the owner's manual for life. The more you get it into your mind, your heart, your life; the more you read it, study it, memorize it, meditate on it, the more effective, fulfilled, and strong you're going to be in life.

When Joshua was given the great task of taking over the Promised Land - a goal that was going to take him the rest of his life - God had these words to say to Joshua. Joshua 1:8 **I** *"Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do."* Keep it in your heart. Read it, memorize it, live it, practice it, study it, obey it. Then you will be successful and attain your goal.

That didn't come from some self help guru. That comes from God. I need God's Word to guide me.

The third thing I need is **I Need God's People to Support Me** - You will not be able to reach your goals on your own. It takes a team to fulfill a dream. You need other people in your life. This is why we say that everyone in our church family should be in a small group. That's why, back when our United Methodist Churches were United Brethren or Methodist Episcopal churches that we absolutely required each person be in a small group and discontinued their membership if they weren't.

A crowd can't support you. But a small group of five to twelve can. They can know when you're sick; when you're having a tough time, when you've had a bad day.

Ecclesiastes 4:12 says, *“By yourself you’re unprotected. But with a friend you can face the worst. And a group of three is even better because a rope braided with three strands is not easily snapped!”*

And guys, this is going to be fun. But it’s going to be more than fun. It’s going to change your life. If you will do it. If you will hear and read and watch and talk and do, you will grow. If all you do is come to church and hear, you’re not going to be transformed. But if you’ll hear it and read it and watch it and discuss it and do it, in fifty days, you will be a better person. Let’s pray.