

Freedom in Christ

WHERE ARE WE HEADING?

In this day of visions, strategy planning, focused targets, key-result areas, performance related pay etc, etc,- we are aware of the word 'goals' – what we should be achieving, how we should be achieving it. But, dare I say, because of business and the society we live in - and all the pressure that we often allow ourselves to come under – we can so easily become mixed up and confused in our thinking about what goals we should try and achieve, and what goals we can let go.

Today we are going to continue exploring our Freedom in Christ material and focus particularly on 'goals', God given goals, man driven goals and wrong goals – where some of the anger anxiety and depression can come from this happens when we are moving towards ungodly goals.

Again today we are going to identify the lie that we believe about how and why we put goals into place. These goals often reflect ways in which we believe life will work for us. Some goals are not bad in themselves, but are wrong because they have outcomes that depend on people and circumstances that we cannot control.

God's goals for us are never dependent on other people or circumstances. In fact, the only thing that can block Gods goals for our lives is us. The big question we have to ask ourselves is, whether what we have come to believe will really give us that sense of satisfaction we are looking for? Will it, in fact, deliver the goals or are the goals we have developed faulty in some way?

Our goals in life spring from what we have come to believe, for example – If I believe that success in life means having a ten bedroom home and a very good career, I will spend my days trying to reach that goal. I will explore whatever I

think will help me to have my needs met, so if any opportunity comes along I am likely to take it, even if it means a compromise of straddling two worlds. Our core needs are powerful motivators and sadly not a lot will stop us from trying to reach that goal.

We have to choose to live out what we believe and walk in faith minute by minute. Remember that leads to maturity, that leads to the ability to make correct choices, that leads to greater freedom, but it can lead to a bit of a spiral downwards if we get on the wrong route.

So, going back to my goal of the ten bedroom house, if after days, weeks, years I am moving always towards that wrong goal, and all may go well for a while but something could happen that is out of my control and that means that I cannot achieve my goal – (redundancy or ill health) – so not only is the goal sabotaged but my belief in the security of that goal will make me emotionally struggle. And if I have really believed that it is my security I am likely to be devastated.

So the longer we persist in our faulty belief system the less fulfilling and productive is our daily walk with God. Another question has to be – what are we putting our faith in – is it actually in line with the truth? From a very early age, just watch children, who develop ways to try and work out and achieve what they believe will bring happiness or success and satisfaction. Throughout our life we make plans and adjust plans to try and achieve these goals. Who knows best how we can be fulfilled, happy and peaceful? – YES God! We were created by him in his image he made us so he knows us.

So how do we know whether the goals that we have put into place for this week, this year or this life are goals that God intended for you or me to pursue? Well, we have reflected a couple of times at least through this course on our emotions. We talked a couple of weeks ago about our emotions being like a red light on the dash board of a car. We need to take notice of them, remember that they are God given by Him for us to use and explore, and to help us to think about what is really going on in our souls. God has equipped us with a feed back system that is designed to grab our attention so that we can check the validity of the direction we are heading.

When we are feeling angry, anxious or depressed – three emotions that are often labelled negative emotions – we should stop (if we are wise) and embrace them as sign posts and explore the possibility that we may be working towards faulty goals – (not all our negative emotions suggest that!) Faulty goals based on wrong belief. Hopefully we can then assess where our wrong belief has come from and choose to realign it with the truth in God's word.

The following example illustrates how anger, anxiety and depression highlight wrong goals: - Imagine a teenager, for some of us that will not be too difficult, who is under huge peer pressure to go to a rock concert, she may well believe that her acceptance and happiness depend on her parents allowing her to go. Suspecting they may say 'no' she can't at this stage be certain of how they will react but because of her goal, she is feeling anxious. Anxious because she is not certain that she will achieve her goal. The goal that she believes will give her happiness and acceptance. When her parents say 'no' WOW her goal has been blocked - and what happens? Yes we've all experienced it – she becomes angry!

Can I suggest that we've all experienced a blocked goal at some time in our lives, especially if the goal we were pursuing was to make ourselves look good, feel accepted and loved. We only have to look at a two year olds temper tantrum to see how early blocked goals can cause us anger. Gently - I want to suggest many of us haven't moved on in that response to a blocked goal well into our adult life. Why? Because we are probably pursuing an ungodly goal. Next time you and I feel angry, let us stop, and think where has that anger come from? Why do I feel angry? What am I being stopped from achieving. What have I wrongly believed about what I need to achieve. Choose to realign your goal with truth in scripture.

Depression can (not always) be the result of us continuing to explore the blocked goal that will not budge – a build up of long term anger - may/can - lead to depression. Anger that never needed to be there if we had carried correct beliefs and set Godly goals. Remember if we have Godly goals they cannot be blocked by other people or circumstances that you and I have no ability or right to control. Anger that never needs to be there if we have carried correct belief and set Godly goals.

I am sure – sadly – in this financial climate we will see many families across the nation ripped apart through depression and the devastating affects that can have on family life. How and Why? Because of a well intentioned – shall we say husband – feeling that his goal in life was to provide financially for his wife and children, not a bad goal in itself, but when it becomes the thing that he believes gives him acceptance and security and success - it is ungodly – why?

Imagine this - the stock market crashes – the man’s goal becomes blocked, he feels he has failed, because he knew no difference about where his significance comes from, blocked goals lead to anger, the situation doesn’t change overnight – anger builds up – depression quite likely sets in and family life becomes very difficult, he perceives that it is his fault and the emotional journey can be very long – because his goal continues to be blocked.

If that loving husbands goal was to provide for his family financially as and when he could and he knew that his acceptance and love and success comes from God, not from his pay packet, his life goal could then be to live out a life as a godly father/husband – redundancy would still be difficult but, hopefully, not so life shattering, because of what he believes about himself in Christ.

Brothers and Sisters let us continue to encourage each other and challenge each other in our goals, not for judgement over each other, or to prove anything that we may think we know about God, or scripture, but out of perfect love to help each other set correct goals, so that we may more be free to enjoy the life God has given us.

Remember no God given goal for your life can ever be impossible, uncertain or blocked. - God’s goals are possible, certain and achievable.

Remember there is nothing wrong with godly desires but don’t allow them to become goals if they are dependent on other people or other circumstances.

So, what goals should we be pursuing? - The goal for our life should be to become the person God called you and I to be.

To be like Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 4 v 3 “It is Gods will that you should be sanctified.”

That is, becoming like Jesus. That’s Gods goal for your life and my life. Nobody and nothing on earth can keep you and I from being the person God called you and I to be. As we are very much aware, there are many distractions, diversions, disappointments, traumas, trials and temptations.

We need to remember we are in a spiritual battle day by day. We struggle against the world, the flesh and the devil, each one of which is opposed to success at being more like Jesus. But as we are all aware by now, we must not allow ourselves to believe the lies of devil.

Remember Paul teaches us however difficult the difficulties we face, far from getting in the way; they can be a means of achieving our supreme goal to become more like Jesus.

Romans 5: 3 - 5 “Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.”

Persevering through difficulties results in proven character which is Gods goal for us. God’s goal for our life is to do with character – what we are like – rather than what we do.

James 1: 2 – 4 “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

Fruit of the Spirit

We shouldn’t go around trying to change people or situations to have our needs meet. We should persevere to become the person God wants us to be. So let us take notice of our emotions, see if they reveal ungodly goals. Ask God to help us

build Godly goals. We are more likely to become less angry, less anxious, and able to move towards others in love, acceptance and peace – and see the difference that will make in our homes, church and work.

Philippians 2: 1 - 5 “ If you have any encouragement for being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interest of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.”

Paul says the goal of our instruction is to love.

1 Timothy 5 ” The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”

If Godly goals help us to build godly character the fruit of the spirit will be produced in our life:-

Joy instead of Depression - Peace instead of Anxiety - Patience instead of Anger.

Let us pray that we will all be going to the godly goal God has for us, towards becoming the person God wants you and me to be, and no-one and nothing can stop us. Imagine the transforming effect that would have.

As we come to the foot of the cross at this family meal where we give thanks to God our heavenly Father for the gift of Jesus, and because of that precious gift we can know the acceptance, peace and joy from our Lord, not what the world gives but greater than that. Let us choose to give to Jesus those wrong goals that we have put in place, that we thought were ways of making life work. Let us repent of our independence when choosing these ungodly goals. Let us afresh surrender our lives before our Maker, our Father, our Provider, and our All Sufficient One.

Let us commit afresh to choosing that Godly goal of becoming more and more like Jesus. That’s his desire for you and me, remember we are his precious children and he gives us all we need. Let us choose to be rooted and held firm in him that

we may know an end to all our striving that we may rest in his love and acceptance. That we may be ever growing in the fruits of the spirit. That we may reflect his beauty and peace in our lives.

Come to this table not because you must but because you may, recognize afresh the need to be open and willing to accept the truth of who you are in Christ.

Preached at Crawley Baptist Church by Sandra Warner on Sunday 15th February 2009