

LESSON 2

Christ-Centered Goals

Some people love goals; others do not. No matter your feelings, goals are the road map to progress. Yet, most of us will spend more time planning a vacation trip than planning our lives. Many people leave their lives to chance and happenstance. But success is not accidental. All successful people learn how to achieve. Goal-setting is not just for performance-driven overachievers. We all need to learn how to set goals before we can ever expect to achieve those goals. This lesson is about the power of Christ-centered goal-setting.

LESSON OUTLINE

Understanding God's Will
The Importance of Balance
Why Set Goals?
Goal-Setting Is Biblical
Faulty Motives, Faulty Goals
Goals that Honor God
Prerequisites to Goal-Setting
Creating SMART Goals

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- 1: Identify wrong assumptions about God's will.*
- 2: State the importance of balance in the life of the Christian.*
- 3: Discuss how goals impact success.*
- 4: Explain how setting goals is biblical.*
- 5: Discuss why faulty motives produce faulty goals.*
- 6: Identify keys to setting goals that honor God.*
- 7: Name vital prerequisites to goal-setting.*
- 8: Indicate the characteristics of SMART goals.*
- 9: Evaluate goals as needed.*

Understanding God's Will

Objective 1:

Identify wrong assumptions about God's will.

I had a friend, Tom, who was so heavenly-minded that he never made plans or set goals because he wanted

to be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit. His practice was to just pray before every decision or action. He would ask God whether he should go to work that day, brush his teeth, make a phone call, or go to the hardware store. Obviously, Tom had a hard time keeping a job.

Tom's view of God's will was narrow. His understanding was based on three wrong assumptions of the will of God:

- 1) Tom believed his intuitive feelings were the ultimate guide in knowing the Holy Spirit's leading. Yet, even Jesus knew this approach would not always work in His own life. For instance, in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus' emotions disagreed with God's will (see Matthew 26:39).
- 2) Tom assumed that the Holy Spirit leads people only in spontaneous ways and that there is no need to plan. Yet, Scripture provides evidence to the importance of planning. Paul made plans (Romans 1:13), the apostles planned (Acts 6:1–3), and even Jesus used plans (Matthew 10:5–15; 16:21; 26:17–19). Surely these great leaders were Spirit-led.
- 3) Tom subconsciously rejected the fact that we most often discover God's will through the Scriptures. The Bible is our normative guide to determining the Spirit's leading for our lives. Nothing can overrule the Word of God (Psalm 119:9–16; Matthew 4:4; 2 Timothy 3:15–17). God's will is much broader and easier than we may initially understand.

The Importance of Balance

Objective 2:

State the importance of balance in the life of the Christian.

Some Christ followers can be so rigid with their schedules and plans that any interruption in their day is bothersome. Some people plow through their plans even when they receive a caution from the Holy Spirit. Still others, like Tom, lack predetermined plans and never

quite know what they are going to do next. Somewhere between these two extremes is a place of balance.

The apostle Paul was a man of balance. Paul planned to minister the gospel in a certain region only to switch plans as the Holy Spirit redirected him (see Acts 16:6–7). Although the apostle Paul made plans, he was sensitive to the Lord changing those same plans. That is Christ-honoring balance.

The person who does not plan and the rigid person approach life from opposite perspectives. The first may be humble but does not use his or her God-given intellect to make wise decisions. This person struggles with loving God with the whole mind. The rigid planner uses his or her mind but neglects the heart. Even when his or her plans go wrong this planner stubbornly sticks with the original objectives.

The Bible speaks to these extremes. Proverbs 6:6–9 rebukes the person who does not plan. The proverb writer says we should be like the ant and prepare ahead of time if we intend to reap a harvest. James 4:13–16 instructs us to recognize our human limitations, submit all our plans to the Lord, and be willing to be flexible. James suggests that failure to do so is an act of arrogance. James is not negating the use of goals but rather endorsing our submission of such goals to the Lord's wisdom and revision.

We should balance both extremes by using our minds to set logical goals and action steps while humbly running them through the filters of prayer, godly counsel, Spirit-led guidance, and God's written Word. Setting goals is important! Be careful not to be so anxious about life that you make rigid plans that are not even humanly possible to keep. Nor should you be so lazy as to not plan at all. The balanced approach makes logical plans that are submitted to the Lord for final approval.

Why Set Goals?

Objective 3:

Discuss how goals impact success.

Goals move us beyond our past successes. Perhaps you view your best days as those high school football days, your fun college years, your first year of marriage, or when you were in your thirties. Dwelling on past success, however, can prevent you from stepping into future success. In Philippians 3:13–14, Paul writes about forgetting the past and anticipating the future. Goal-setting moves us from our fixation on the past to embracing the future.

Goals also shift our thinking off past mistakes. Haven't we all given in to depression, bitterness, and negative emotions because we looked back at our failures? Haven't we all had pity parties and dwelled on the "what ifs"? Fear will keep us stuck in the past. Goal-setting, however, moves us from a fearful fixation on past mistakes to embracing tomorrow's success.

Thus, goals give us a future to work toward. Our past successes give us the faith to do greater things for God. Our past gives us the framework for our desired future in God. Setting Christ-centered goals aligns us with God's will, God's power, and the success of God's prevailing kingdom.

Goal-Setting Is Biblical

Objective 4:

Explain how setting goals is biblical.

Some Christians shun setting goals because they believe God does not work through man-made rules. They feel our spiritual lives cannot be reduced to the performance of a formula. But goals are different from formulas. A goal is a target or desired end. Having a goal does not mean we always hit it. It does mean, however, that we are getting closer to our target than we would if we had no goal or desired end in mind.

Other believers avoid setting goals because they do not want to brag about their plans. But the Bible does not forbid setting goals. Isaiah 32:8 says, “The noble man makes noble plans.” Proverbs 16:3 promises, “Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.” Setting Christ-centered goals and making plans are good as long as we remember that God has the power to veto any of our plans.

In 1 Chronicles 28:12, King David gives Solomon all the plans that the Spirit had put in his mind for building the temple. Following are other biblical indications of the significance of planning:

- “The plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations” (Psalm 33:11).
- “May he give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed” (Psalm 20:4).
- “Many are the plans in a man’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails” (Proverbs 19:21).
- “In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps” (Proverbs 16:9).
- “The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty” (Proverbs 21:5).
- “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’” (Jeremiah 29:11).

Goal planning is not bad in itself; it is a powerful neutral tool. Goal planning for evil and unethical purposes, however, is wrong. And God thwarts evil plans (see Job 5:12; Psalm 33:10; Isaiah 29:15, 30:1).

Faulty Motives, Faulty Goals

Objective 5:

Discuss why faulty motives produce faulty goals.

What is the true motive behind setting any particular goal? Is it selfishness or self-gratification? If our lives

are unguarded, we will be consumed with the futile search for things that confirm our self-worth. This thirst for materialism does not involve only money. It includes prestige, power, and other personal rewards we use to stroke our egos. While there is nothing wrong with having desires and goals, our appetites and desires have been distorted by sin. So rather than having eternal motives, we often can have fleshly motives driven by the desire for temporal things. Our faulty motives then produce faulty goals that momentarily fill our emptiness but, in the long run, are detrimental.

Romans 1:22–25 suggests that when we live like that we exchange God's glory for a lie, and we serve the creature rather than the Creator. Having worldly success and fulfilling God's purposes are rarely the same thing. Jesus talked about a successful man who seemed to have it all, but because of skewed motives he had not been rich toward God (see Luke 12:16–21). Jesus therefore challenges us to derive meaning and purpose from our relationship with the infinite Creator rather than from finite creations.

James 4:13–17 reveals three faulty actions that often lead to failure: 1) ignoring God (v. 13). 2) underestimating the brevity of life (v. 14). 3) disobedience (v. 17). "Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins." Remember that faulty motives produce faulty goals.

Goals that Honor God

Objective 6:

Identify keys to setting goals that honor God.

Judas somehow believed his plans were better than Jesus' plans (see John 13:18–30). As treasurer of Jesus' ministry he was upset at what appeared to be a waste of resources when Mary poured expensive perfume on Jesus (John 12:4–6). His anger was not because he cared for poor people but because he was a thief. Sadly, Judas later sold out Jesus for thirty pieces of silver

(see Matthew 26:14–16). Judas demonstrated that self-righteousness can cause a person to do hideous acts of harm. His goals were not in agreement with Jesus' goals.

Following are eight keys to setting goals that honor God:

Alignment

We need goals that are in agreement with the goals and mission of God. Judas disagreed with and was disappointed in Jesus. Judas probably wanted a military leader, not a martyr savior. We need to cooperate with God, and this often involves surrendering our way to do things God's way.

Aspiration

To aspire for goals that please God, we must get God's direction. Ephesians 5:17 instructs, "Do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is." Goals must begin with an overall vision of what we believe to be our life mission. That vision or mission then dictates all our other goals and decisions.

Aim

We must be consistent in our effort to achieve the objective and remain fixed on accomplishing it. Consider the example of Jesus, who set His face to go to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51). He was sent for the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 15:24).

Acceptance

To honor God, we must accept God's goals and will for our lives. God's will is useful only after it is recognized and accepted.

Association

Believers should share their goals with someone who can hold them accountable. Also, it is critical to associate with faith-filled people and encouragers. A good way to do this is to plug into a healthy Bible-based church.

Attitude

Paul notes, “It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Philippians 2:13). Our attitude matters! Therefore, we must cultivate a positive attitude and believe that we can do all things through Christ.

Asking

James writes, “You do not have, because you do not ask God” (James 4:2). Ask God to be the center of your decisions and to empower you to carry out His will for your life. Seek God first and He will direct your steps. Life is the succession of small moments, each one adding up to a lifetime. Therefore, small changes applied to any life can make a big difference.

Action

Jesus said in John 13:17 that you are blessed if you do the will of God. Honoring God while we pursue our goals requires courage, the willingness to take action even though the outcome is uncertain. Such courage is attained only as we develop a lifestyle of conscious dependence on God.

Prerequisites to Goal-Setting

Objective 7:

Name vital prerequisites to goal-setting.

In setting goals, we may ask questions such as: what does God want most from me? Where do I need to grow? What have my prayers been focused on recently? Where do I begin in setting Christ-centered goals? The following are important steps to goal-setting.

Do a Reality Check

Identify your strengths and weaknesses. What are your tendencies, gifts, and experiences? As you commit to being yourself, pay attention to your weaknesses.

Keep the End in Focus

What is the end result you are after? Envision your victory and success. What do you want to accomplish? Start with the end in mind and work backwards. Imagine the benefits of reaching your goals.

Identify Your Values

What is really important to you? What matters most to God? Make a list of your values, and create your goals to be in alignment with your values. We work hardest at what we care about the most.

Pray

Spend time with Jesus every day. Prayer brings supernatural results! "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5).

Establish Priorities

Decide on your three most important goals. Work backwards listing three things you want to accomplish in twenty years, ten years, five years, this year, this month, this week, and today.

Make a Progress Plan

Break down your Christ-centered goals into progressive steps. Small steps can bring big changes. Take action! Take a sheet of paper and divide it in half vertically. Write "God's Part" on one side and "My Part" on the other. Under "God's Part," write the promises of God's Word that need to be appropriated to accomplish the goals. Under "My Part," write your specific action items and deadlines.

Eliminate Clutter from Your Life

Reduce the unnecessary things from your life. For example, unplug the television three nights a week; have an email-free day a week; or turn off the telephone two nights a week. Do not give in to things that distract you from your purposes.

Write

Jot it all down. Make out your top-ten list. Include goals, action steps, strategies, and deadlines.

Ask Questions and Consult Experts

Ask how you can accomplish your goals. Learn to ask questions that produce good direction and results. What can you do in cooperation with God to make it happen? Consider action steps. What are the logical steps to making that goal happen? Follow those steps.

Also, gather the skills and knowledge you will need to accomplish your goals. Seek the advice of wise people in your life. Find those who are farther in the journey, those who have been where you want to go. Solicit the encouragement and support of family and friends, and avoid the nay-sayers.

Study the Bible

As you study the Word, apply its truths to your situations and you will find success. God clarifies things to us when we read His Word. Consider each goal and discover as many Bible verses about each as possible. Identify and memorize key verses that will encourage you as you reach for the goals.

Dream

In many ways, we become what we think. So dream your future. Live it out loud and in living color. Project into your future.

Focus

Do not work on too many things at one time. Do not spread yourself too thin. Focus on what you can control and what you can change. Do not set yourself up to be overwhelmed.

Be Flexible

Our lives are unpredictable at best. Our goals are dependent on God's grace and mercy. Goals can be readjusted and changed along the way, so review your

progress often. If it is not achieving your desired end, then come up with new action steps that will. Spiritual growth can be agonizingly slow. But knowing our God-given goals keeps us focused and moving toward our destiny in Jesus Christ.

Be flexible, also, with your due dates. They may need to be adjusted along the way. Setbacks are not failures. Spread out your due dates. Do not get too discouraged. Recognize partial success. Stay on track and persevere. Adapt to the changing times and environment. Failure happens only when we stop trying. Start to apply several of these prerequisites, and you will be on your way to developing life-changing and Christ-centered goals that will produce huge dividends.

Creating SMART Goals

Objective 8:

Indicate the characteristics of SMART goals.

Goals are the roadmaps to success. Instead of setting the goal of “I’m going to eat better,” a SMART goal would be “I will eat five to eight servings of fruit and vegetables each day.” This goal gives a specific time frame (daily) and measuring tool (5–8 servings) and sets realistic and attainable boundaries. It is also tangible in that you can easily determine whether you accomplish your goal or not. Here are the characteristics of SMART goals:

Specific

“I want to lose weight” is not a good goal because it is not specific. A specific goal would be “At the end of six months, I will have lost thirty pounds.” After six months I will know specifically if I have met my goal. Goals are personal to you. Express your goals in the positive.

Measurable

How will I know I have achieved my goals? Write them down. A measurable goal would be, “I will write and send one thank-you card per week this month.” At

month's end I will be able to evaluate whether or not I met that goal. That goal was measurable because it was specific and had a time frame.

Be precise. Break down your goals into smaller steps. Set performance goals rather than outcome goals. Goals based on outcomes are extremely vulnerable to failure and are out of our control. Personal performance goals put you in control over the achievement of those goals. If you set an outcome-based goal of finishing a race within the top three, then you stand a great chance of personal defeat. If you set a performance-based goal of finishing within a certain time frame, then you stand a greater chance of achieving that personal goal.

Attainable

Our goals need to be reasonable and reachable. Most people can handle somewhere between five and ten goals. Limit the number of challenging goals you have at any given time lest you become overwhelmed and frustrated. Simpler goals are easier to handle, for we can work with more of them simultaneously. Be careful, however, not to set goals too low as challenging goals force us to grow. So strike a balance between these two extremes, and set your goals around priorities.

Time-bound

Goals should be both short-term and long-term. The short-term goals are the smaller steps that lead to the greater long-term goal. Short-term and long-term goals together create comprehensive life goals. Always have at least one short-term and one long-term (2 years or longer) goal at any given time.

The more short-term goals you have, the more tasks you are likely to have coming due soon. Short-term goals assure you that you will have frequent victories. Set reminders as often as needed. Timing can often determine the order of priority in action steps taken and setting deadlines. SMART goals really do work if you use them!

Evaluating Goals

Objective 9:

Evaluate goals as needed.

Reflect

Honestly evaluate the progress, successes, and struggles of the previous months and year. Answer questions such as: What did I accomplish this year? Where did I struggle most? What have I learned? How did I overcome my obstacles? What surprise changes happened? Were my techniques faulty? Was my goal set too high? Do I need to adjust my goal? Did it happen too easily or quickly? These reflective questions help you to build on your successes and develop new strategies for continued success.

Revise

All plans need revision along the way. Things do not always play out the way we originally think. Revision is not defeat; it is just recalibrating. The closer we get to the target the more clearly we see things. Sometimes it is just the little things that keep us from reaching the goal. Revision is simply revisiting the dream and deciding what it will take to realize that dream. Goals change as you mature. Goal-setting is your servant, not your master.

Reward Yourself

Reward yourself for your progress and the short-term goals reached. Celebrate your wins! Keep a list of the victories and give God the glory! Focus on the successes and build on these positive gains.

Renew

Life wears us down over time. Ever so often we have to step back, evaluate our progress, and renew our commitment to the causes and goals Christ has put in our hearts. We need to renew often our commitment to

live a lifestyle that honors God's purposes. Proverbs 16:3 says that if we will commit our activities to God, our plans will succeed. Whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God. Evaluate often and revise your plans as needed.

Finally, Jeremiah 29:11 notes that God has a master plan for each of us. Our happiness comes from living in conjunction with our Creator's master plan. Christ-centered goals help move us along in our journey to become more like Christ. Christ-centered goals are our way of cooperating with the sovereignty and will of God for our lives.

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE VERSES TO MEMORIZE

Psalm 20:4

Proverbs 16:3, 9

Proverbs 19:21

Proverbs 21:5

Philippians 3:13–14

SELF-TEST

After studying the lesson, please read each study question carefully and circle the correct response. There is only one correct response for each question.

1. *We discover God's will most often through*
 - a) *Scripture.*
 - b) *friends.*
 - c) *circumstances.*

2. *The rigid person uses his or her mind but neglects his or her*
 - a) *relationships.*
 - b) *past.*
 - c) *heart.*

3. *Goals are necessary for success because*
 - a) *success will occur by chance.*
 - b) *goals help move people into the future.*
 - c) *only rich people have goals.*

4. *Which is a true statement?*
 - a) *The Bible forbids our setting goals.*
 - b) *In building the temple, Solomon was given no plans.*
 - c) *God's purpose prevails over human plans.*

5. *Faulty motives*
 - a) *produce healthy goals.*
 - b) *produce faulty goals.*
 - c) *please the Lord.*

6. *Judas' anger over the pouring of perfume on Jesus was*
 - a) *justified and righteous.*
 - b) *an example of godly stewardship.*
 - c) *motivated by Judas' greed.*

7. *One key to setting goals that honor God is*
 - a) *acceptance.*
 - b) *selfishness.*
 - c) *greed.*

8. When goal-setting, start with the _____ in mind.
 - a) beginning
 - b) middle
 - c) end
9. A false statement about SMART goals is that they
 - a) are attainable.
 - b) cannot be measured.
 - c) are specific.
10. Goal-setting is
 - a) your master.
 - b) not necessary for people of faith.
 - c) your servant.

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

Note: If you answered a study question incorrectly, you can find the objective it was drawn from by looking at the reference in parenthesis.

1. *a* (2.1)
2. *c* (2.2)
3. *b* (2.3)
4. *c* (2.4)
5. *b* (2.5)
6. *c* (2.6)
7. *a* (2.6)
8. *c* (2.7)
9. *b* (2.8)
10. *c* (2.9)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS LESSON

Dr. W. Mark Elliott was born and raised in the rolling hills of southern Indiana in the USA. He entered full-time ministry in 1982. Mark holds two master's degrees and a Doctor of Ministry degree. Mark is the lead pastor of New Life Community Church in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. He has been married for over twenty-five years and has four children. Mark enjoys sports, travel, preaching, writing, and reading.