

Ser20-39 "What Are The Goals For The Life In Christ"? Philippians 3:4b-14  
tucc 10-4-20 (other texts: Ex. 20:1-4, 7-9; Is. 5:1-7; Ps. 19 or 80:7-15;  
Matt. 21:33-46)

**In our Biblical text from Paul's letter to the church at Philippi, Paul is Focused on Goal-setting in his walk with Jesus. He says:** <sup>12-14</sup> *"I'm not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. Friends, don't get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I've got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back."*

Laurie Beth Jones, in her classic little book titled, Jesus CEO, discusses what she calls the "heavenly lotto"—you know, those moments in Scripture when God asks a leader what they want/ what are their goals and then God promising, "I will give you whatever you ask." As she reflects on the many responses of biblical leaders she "noticed that all of them asked only for noble things." Jones does an interesting thing, at least interesting to me in these uncertain times (times when we need to focus on the future and that means thinking about goals for our lives.) She lists some of the prayer requests of great characters from the Bible. I see these as their goals for God: ■ Abraham's request: "Help me follow you." ■ Moses' request: Help me free your people." ■ David's request: "Help me slay the giant threatening our people." ■ Esther: "Help me save these people." ■ Solomon: "Give me wisdom to rule your people." ■ Isaiah: "Give me clean lips." ■ Peter "Help me feed your sheep." ■ Jesus: "Help me show them your love." (Jesus CEO; pages 55-56). These are some of the great goals of the Bible.

Beyond being noble prayers, I would suggest that these are passionate goals they want to achieve. This leads me to the question for myself and for you this morning: What are your goals for your life in Christ in these days? Indeed, what are your spiritual goals in these days? What is even one goal stirring in you as you live into these days ahead?

And to these we can add the prayers or goals of our own lives and hearts this day in this worship. What is a goal for your life, for this church and for the world this morning? Yours might be to: ► Help me love my family; ► Help me to be moved by this worship today; or ► help me live my life of faith as if life depended on it; or ► Help me live by Christ's commandments; ► Help me make a difference in someone's life today; ► Help me allow the Bible to speak to me in my attempts to study the word; or ► Help me to love God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength; and to love my neighbor as myself.

These are great goals---great because they affirm what really matters in our lives; they signal what we're passionate about. One scholar has said that "In every one of the great biblical leaders—culminating in Jesus Christ—there was a clarity of purpose that empowered them to choose what was noble rather than what was self-serving. Abraham chose obedience to God instead of security. Moses chose liberation for his people rather than the contentment and wealth of shepherding his father-in-law's sheep. Esther chose to use her position to save others rather than to amass the wealth and power of her position as queen. Peter chose servant-hood instead of the power of position. And Paul, that up and coming rabbi, chose knowing Jesus above career success and all the accoutrements that would bring."

These are some of the stories of real living – real faith – real worship in the Bible. And you know, these stories connect with our stories in some place and time. That's in part what we do here in worship and Christian education—discovering how our stories intersect with the stories of God's action in the world.

A successful businessman, John's life and career were on the upswing. He had just closed a major deal that led to a large bonus. Membership in the country-club, driving a luxury SUV, and having a fine home and cabin up north, just seemed to be standard fare for one whose accomplishments were so many and frequent. Then it happened: his wife was diagnosed with a terminal disease. Putting his career temporarily on hold, he made certain that

she got the very best medical care and, when he didn't like the diagnosis and treatment plan, he took her to a world-class medical center. But the doctors all seemed to come to the same conclusion: she would die after a long time of decline.

They recommended that he put her in a nursing home, visit her regularly and go back to his career. But John couldn't do that. Every time he looked at her, he didn't see the sickness—he saw the woman who he loved, the partner in life with whom he had shared family and faith. And after one night of restless prayer, he made his decision. He quit his work to care for her saying, "I'll never get a chance to love her again. But I can always go back to work." So, he sold his cabin and house and moved his wife into a single-level simple home where he loved her until the end.

My friends, you know as well as I do, that real life does not consist of easy choices—but of right decisions, of setting and then working to achieve goals that are noble, that are God-centered, that are faithful to our deepest convictions of how God is working in our lives...and in the process faithful to our relationship with Jesus Christ.

The story teller says that "When despair threatened John's hope he came to church. When his courage seemed to be slipping out the back door, he came to worship. And when he got in touch his real goal, his most noble and faithful thing to do---to care for his wife---his life was changed.

Worship sustained and nurtured good values in this man, John, as he considered what the priorities were in his life and family. You might wonder what worship in a church and rules and faithful living have to do with each other. In this man's case, Worship empowered love to rule in John's heart. The vows he had made years before to his wife at the wedding altar took over the desires for success and rich living. Those marriage vows stood for him as sacred rules by which he lived—relationship to God and to his wife.

I want to say that the value and power of our worship has not decreased over these past months...not being in the facilities, in the sanctuary of TUCC

has not diminished the power of our worship or our relationship with God in Christ Jesus. Even for those who have and still worship at home with our packet or worship materials mailed each week, If you have put your heart into it or at least tried in the most basic way to open your heart to God's love and Jesus' grace, your worship has been meaningful and touching. That is also to suggest, even warn, that moving the methods from our shared virtual experience on zoom, or in person in your own home, to in-person worship in the sanctuary, for some of us, and for others participating via Video on FB live will not finally after all these months make it all better. Regardless of the methods of gathering, we still have our goals and passions and prayers for our lives.

Let me close with the lyrics or text from this hymn by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette, written in 2013 based on our text for today and a hymn that draws our reflections of this text from Philippians to a strong conclusion:

**Whatever Gains I've Had** (LEONI 6.6.8.4 ("The God of Abraham Praise"))

*Whatever gains I've had, whatever my success,  
 Whatever I've accomplished when I've done my best —  
 I count it all as loss compared to what was done  
 When God redeemed my life by sending Christ the Son.  
 I've lived through many days; there's much that I have learned.  
 I've planned and prospered, faced new challenge, worked and earned.  
 Yet no affirming word, no merit or award,  
 Can ever be as great as knowing Christ my Lord.  
 There's power in his death — in loving sacrifice.  
 There's power in God's gift of everlasting life.  
 Because I am God's own, I press on toward the goal:  
 To know my Savior and in him to be made whole.*

Indeed, may it be so for you and for me this day. Amen!!!