

## “SETTING THE BEST GOALS OF LIFE”

2 Corinthians 5:5-10

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### INTRODUCTION:

1) Setting proper goal of life: “So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.” (5:9) Most people, if not all, have goals for their life, either set by themselves or by their parents. Setting goals for life gives us purpose and direction from which we pursue. Most of us set goals on things in this world: going to the best school, making the best grades, find the best job, make the most money, find the best person to marry, having the best family life and have the smartest children, and then the cycle goes around and round again. While goals like these are not bad or immoral, but they are not the best Christians should have. To Paul, his goal of life is to please Christ who died to save us from our sins to give us eternal life. Having secular goals benefits only our earthly life, but having spiritual goals benefits both this life and the life to come in eternity.

2) Be prepared for judgment day: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” (5:10) Judgment day isn't a pleasant topic for preaching or discussion, but it is a real thing. God has so much to say about judgment, punishment and rewards, both in the Old and New Testaments. Judgment may come at the final day when we meet God, but rewards are plenty and visible even in this life and the life to come. The book of 2 Corinthians isn't the last book Paul had written, but it was at his older age. His purpose of writing this book is to encourage Christians to live their lives that will bring joy to the heart of God: “We make it our goals to please Him.” (5:9) To do good for the judgment day is good but not the best because it carries the sense of “trying to avoid punishment.” But do good to please God is much better because it carries the “upward running for rewards.”

While the Bible is full of teachings on what are the things that will please God, I have narrowed it down to three practical and applicable areas of pursuit everyone can do if you put your heart on it.

THE PURSUIT OF LOVE TO GOD: “When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter: Simon, son of John, do you truly love me more than

these?” (John 21:14) This is about our relationship with God: Love God with all our heart and soul.

1) The difference of love and love more: I am sure Jesus had no doubt that Peter and all others of his disciple group loved him, but that wasn't his question. He wanted to know if Peter, the other disciples, and by extension, all of us Christians, love him MORE than “these”. There are different people who believe that the “these” may refer to other disciples at the scene, or it was about the food they had just had. When God declared through Moses in Deut 6:4-5, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength,” He demanded the total loyalty, commitment of heart and soul of his people. Just say “I love God” isn't what God wants to hear. He wants to know if we love Him with all we have, more than anyone and anything. In Re. 2:4, Jesus rebuked the Ephesian Church, “Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.” God wants the first place in our heart, the primary spot in our life, our undivided first love to him. We have to ask ourselves: Do I love God the most or someone or something else more than God? This is the dividing line of our goal as Christians.

2) The demonstration of primary love to God: After demanded the primary love from his people, God wanted them to make God the center of their family, the commitment not to put anything as the center of their focus of life as idols. Then God promised his protection and blessing if they obey and follow His commands. (Deut 6-7) In John 14:21, Jesus reiterated the importance of love God, “Whoever has my commands and obey them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.” How do we know we love God more than anything of anyone else? We see the Bible gives us some of the ways we can show it to God: Make God the center of our family life, the center of our everyday pursuits, business, job, school, and be careful not to allow anything hinders our commitment to Him. Jesus summed it up in one simple phrase: Obey his commands, do what He says. The rewards of obeying God's commands is tremendous: Jesus knows our love to him and he and his Father will love us and reveals to us in our life. Many people complain they feel God is too far away, and they didn't hear his voice when they pray. We need to ask ourselves this important question: How much do we love God and obey His commands? God had set a path we can get so close to Him: Love God and obey His commands.

3) Practical expressions of love God more: There are so many ways to check who or what is the focus of our primary love: Who/what is the person/thing that occupies our heart the most? Who/what is the object that we dedicate most of our attention and time to pursue? Who/What is the object we “give” most of our heart to, care the most, want the most? How much have we sacrificed for that person or thing? We all know love is about give, about care and sacrifice. Jesus said, he knows those who love Him, and those who don't.

THE PURSUIT OF PEACE WITH PEOPLE: “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live in peace with all people.” (Rom 12:18)

1) Peace and harmony in the Bible: Starting from words of Jesus in Matthew 22:39, “The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself,” to the teaching of Paul in Phil 2:4, “Each of you should look not only to your own interest, but also to the interest of others,” the Bible has over 100 listing on human relationship, mostly on live in peace. Peace and harmony is a huge topic in the Bible as well as our everyday life. The final prayer Jesus offered is about peace and harmony among his disciples. (John 18:20-23) All we need to know about the difficulties of living in peace in the world is about the recent election, both before and after. Differences and fighting are part of human history between people, politics and government, races and religions, classes and many others. God wants us to live in peace will all people.

2) Pursue thebest peace we can: The fact that this verse begins with the word “if”, the subjunctive and conditional, it puts us face to face with the reality and the difficulties in pursuing peace and harmony with all people, all the time. Human beings are born with so many differences, even among twins in a family. The idea of living in peace is great, but the job is a steep climb for all of us. We need to recognize the fact that there will be times pursuing peace with people, be it individual of group, is close to impossible. The world is so divided on many issues, but we are instructed to do all we can to live in peace with as many as we can.

3) We have the mandate from God: The phrase “as far as it depends on you” puts us squarely at the center of this command: We are the people God wants to do this and keep on trying. While many people in this world are very good in starting fights, incite conflicts and pushing violence, we people of God are agents of peace and love. One thing I have learned from my mentor on the art of minimizing conflict is this: Except on biblical and moral issues which we have to take uncompromising stand, we can do our best not to get involved in disagreement, conflict or fight with people on many other things, like those

on politics, good or bad, right or wrong from personal perspectives, etc. Keeping the relationship is far more important than insisting our views.

THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE ON SELF: “If a man cleanse himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy and useful to the Master, and prepared to do any good work.” (2 Tim 2:21) The importance of pursuing excellence is a universal virtue. Parents always want to see their children have the desire to do their best at school. Most of us want to do our best in things we do. Paul wants to encourage us to pursue our life, particularly our spiritual life to the best of our ability. Here are some practical steps to achieve this goal.

1) Take action of self cleansing: “If a man cleanse himself from these things, he will be a vessel of honor.” (2:21a) “Cleanse” is from *ekkathairo*, an intensified form of *kathairo*, from which we have catharsis, which means intense cleaning like power wash inside and out, to completely purge. These things refers to the vessels of dishonor mentioned in v. 20. Paul emphasized the mixture of people in God's church: the honorable and the dishonorable. In order to be an honorable vessel, one must first cleanse himself, his life inside out. Anyone who desires to be useful in God's work, be productive and honorable, he needs to cleanse his life. Sin is outrageous and dangerous. Christians who desire to be useful and honorable vessels must be separated from people and things with dishonorable, sinful, disobedient life style.

2) Allow God to sanctify our soul: “Made holy,” (2:21b) is from *hagiazō*, which has a basic meaning of being set part for special purpose or use. A Christian is set apart, or sanctified, in two ways. passively, he is set apart from sin, by the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus Christ. Actively he is set apart for the use of God to accomplish His purpose. Here sanctified is a passive participle, indicating a condition that already exists. After we were sanctified by the blood of Jesus, we need to continue our life living under the power of His cleansing process in us everyday so we are made holy for God.

3) Desire to be useful to the Master: A vessel of honor is useful to the Master. Useful, *euchrestos* in Greek, means functioning for good results. We see some Christians are very useful to the Master, others are not. God longs to have all His people become useful in His kingdom, his church, his mission. I am sure we all want to useful, but Paul tells us that we need to be useful to our Master, our Lord Jesus Christ. Master, *despotes*, from which we have despot, an absolute ruler. We need to know that we are not simply rightly related to God, but also totally own by God. He is our absolute sovereign

Master, our loving and benevolent Lord. Any thought of being independent of God will render us dishonorable and useless to our Master.

MY LOVE AND HOPE FOR FCBC:

1) Retired from a position, not servie: I want all of you to know this: My coming retirement from a paid position as the pastor of FCBC isn't the end of my love and service to the church. The difference is I don't receive a paycheck from the church. But my love and heart to the church is the same. I will continue to serve anyway I can to keep the church together, to do all I can to help growing the church and the people.

2) My hope in all people at FCBC: This includes everyone in the church, the pastor, the church council leaders and all the people: Set your goal of life the way God desires of you. Set God as your firs object of love, dedication and loyalty. Make every effort to keep the peace with others, particularly those who hold different values on things. We see the dilemma and division in the aftermath of the recent election, but that should never happen at God's church no matter how much you think you are on the right side. Finally, set your goal of personal life to be honorable vessel so God can use to achieve his purpose. Be dare to sacrifice, to obey, to serve, and wait for His rewards.