

**Date: October 4, 2020**

**Scripture: Philippians 3:4b-14**

**Title: ONE GOAL SERVING JESUS CHRIST**

Let me ask you a personal question, are you one who wakes up easily and jumps out of bed? Or are you one, who needs to be shaken awake and kicked out of bed.

If the second description sounds more like you, then you'll relate to today's lesson from the Scriptures. It was written by Paul, a man who needed to be shaken awake and kicked out of bed. But he didn't need to be awakened from a deep sleep. He needed to be awakened, from a way of life, that was leading him far away from God, and closer to death and destruction. Ironically, it was a way of life that looked, on the outside, like a great success.

Paul, whose Hebrew name was Saul, was an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. He had a respected family heritage. He was a student of the Law of Israel. Paul was educated, influential and respected. By all measures in his society, he was a success. And he had a singular goal in life: to protect the Hebrew Law.

**First, we need to note, that successful people, usually have worthwhile goals for their life.** If you want to honor God with your life, if you want to make sure that you don't waste the precious gifts God has given you, then the best thing you can do, is create some worthwhile goals for yourself.

Goal setting comes from the belief that your life has purpose. If your life were random and meaningless, then setting goals wouldn't make sense. But if your life has purpose, if you have the opportunity to make an impact in your sphere of influence, then setting worthwhile goals is the best way to do it. Worthwhile goals require vision, planning, discipline, sacrifice. Successful people have a vision for where they want to go, and who they want to be, and they create a plan to get there.

Chad Williams was partying his way through community college when he experienced his own personal wake-up call. He realized that his life was going nowhere and he needed some worthwhile goals for his life. So he chose the toughest goal he could think of: He decided to join the Navy SEALs.

The Navy SEALs are an elite special operations force. Their training is so rigorous, and their missions are so demanding, that only a tiny number of people who apply for SEAL training, ever complete it.

Chad's father put him in touch with an active Navy SEAL, Scott Helvenston, who began mentoring him. In 2004, just before Chad entered the SEAL training program, Scott, his mentor, was captured in Fallujah, Iraq. He and three other SEALs were murdered, and their bodies were hung from a bridge over the Euphrates River. Their fate was broadcast by television news stations around the world.

Chad's goal in life suddenly, and dramatically changed. Chad was now focused on becoming the best Navy SEAL possible, in order to honor his mentor, Scott Helvenston. Most of us would think that's a lofty and worthwhile goal. Chad trained hard, made it into the SEAL team, and served in missions all over the world. He had

achieved a goal, few people could even dream of. Unfortunately, Chad still felt empty and restless. Think about that for a minute, as we return to the story of Paul.

**At one time, Paul proudly sought his own worthwhile goals.** He describes himself as being zealous for God. “Zealous” isn’t a word we use much anymore, meaning “enthusiastic or passionate for a cause.” Paul wanted to honor God and his religious heritage as a member of the tribe of Benjamin. He demonstrated his commitment to these goals, by carefully studying the Hebrew Law, and by persecuting those Jews, who didn’t strictly obey the Law, particularly this new sect of Jews, who followed a dead rabbi, named Jesus.

In fact, Paul’s goal, which he was totally committed to, had him go house to house in Jerusalem, hunting down followers of Jesus, and dragging them off to jail. He even participated in, an act of mob violence, when a crowd of equally zealous Jews, stoned to death, a young preacher named Stephen. By his own standards, Paul was very successful in achieving his goals. But, what does it mean, if you are very successful at achieving the wrong goals?

Jon Krakauer is a mountain climber and best-selling author of books about his climbing adventures. In his book *Into Thin Air*, he writes of the day in May, 1996 when he finally reached the summit of Mt. Everest. A number of his fellow climbers had died along the route. Krakauer wrote, “I understood on some dim, detached level, that it was a spectacular sight. I’d been fantasizing about this moment, and the release of emotion, that would accompany it, for many months. But, now that I was finally here, standing on the summit of Mt. Everest, I just couldn’t summon the energy to care.”

That’s interesting. What do you do when you finally “arrive,” and the thrill that you thought you would get from pursuing your goal, isn’t all that great?

Sometimes our goals and our definition of “success,” need to be pruned out of our hands, before we wake up, to what’s really important. That’s what happened to Paul. While on the road to Damascus, to arrest more followers of Jesus, Paul (who was going by his Hebrew name, Saul) was struck blind, by a flash of light from Heaven. And he heard the voice of Jesus asking him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” Saul spent three days in Damascus, blind and helpless and questioning the direction of his life.

Have you ever spent time questioning, the direction of your life? How can we be sure that the goals we’re pursuing, the goals we’re giving our time, strength, energy and life to, are truly worthwhile? What happens, if we achieve our goals, and discover that we spent our lives, in a pursuit, that was not God’s highest choice for us? What do we have to lose, to discover, what God really made us for?

From a young age, Stephen Sutton, a native of the United Kingdom, dreamed of becoming a doctor. But when he was diagnosed with bowel cancer, at the age of 15, his dreams changed. Stephen started a blog on Facebook, and wrote a bucket list of things, he wanted to accomplish. Among those items were “Learn to juggle,” “Skydive for charity,” and “Get my name in the Guinness Book of World Records.” As Stephen’s cancer progressed, he also added to his list the goal, of raising £10,000 pounds for the Teenage Cancer Trust, a cancer charity in the UK. He also selected one more goal: to inspire someone else to become a doctor, since he wouldn’t live to fulfill that dream.

Stephen's blog inspired people around the world. He had the opportunity to speak at numerous places, and even met British Prime Minister David Cameron. He had an amazing impact on everyone who came into contact with him. Unfortunately, Stephen passed away in 2014 at the age of 19, but people continued to donate to the Teenage Cancer Trust in his honor. As of 2017, £5 million pounds had been donated in honor and memory of Stephen Sutton.

It's amazing how one young man's worthwhile goal not only had a positive effect on others, but it lives on after him. That's the power of a truly worthwhile, God-honoring goal. And that brings us back to the story of Paul.

Paul had encountered Christ on the Damascus Road. After three days of blindness, Paul was healed through the intervention of a follower of Jesus named Ananias. And at that moment, Paul's previous goals for his life began to look like a lot of garbage. That's how Paul describes his previous life goals in today's lesson.

Paul said, "But whatever were gains to me, I now consider loss, for the sake of Christ. What's more, I consider everything a loss, because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage . . ." Later, in this same passage, he declares, "I want to know Christ, yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead . . ."

Still later he sums up his new goal: "I press on toward the goal, to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward, in Christ Jesus."

**Now, Paul had only one goal, to serve Jesus Christ.** Wouldn't it be great to have only one goal in life? One goal, that you knew in your bones, was the purpose God made you for? You were made to serve Jesus Christ. You were made, to live out Jesus' values and priorities. You were made, to do good works that express the love and hope of Jesus Christ in the world. And if God made you for that purpose, then it's only in serving Jesus Christ, that you will find your identity and peace and fulfillment. No other goal, will satisfy your life in the same way.

And that brings us back to the story of Chad Williams, our Navy SEAL, who thought he would find success in a military career, with one of the most elite special forces teams in the world.

One evening, Chad and his girlfriend were invited to attend a worship service. The speaker, Greg Laurie, preached on a passage from the Old Testament about Naaman, a commander in the Syrian army who contracted leprosy.

In order for God to heal him, the prophet Elisha told Naaman, he had to remove all his armor and bathe himself in the Jordan River. Laurie made the point that Naaman had to humble himself, give up his symbols of strength and protection, and submit to God's plan, before he could be healed. Something in the story of Naaman, spoke to Chad Williams' deepest needs, and he gave his life to Jesus that night. Today, Chad Williams is a bestselling author and speaker, who shares his faith in Jesus all over the nation. In his estimation, being a Navy SEAL is great, but being a disciple of Jesus Christ, is of far greater significance.

If you want to move forward in life, if you want to accomplish something significant in life, then you've got to set worthwhile goals for yourself. That's what successful people do. But if you want to honor God with your life, if you want to make a positive impact for God, an impact that lives on after you're gone, then you need to have only one goal in life: serving Jesus Christ. It doesn't mean you need to be a missionary in a foreign country, or a Christian worker in the inner city. It does mean, that you will seek to be the person God means for you to be, wherever you end up. It's what you were made for. It's where you will find your identity and purpose and peace. It's the one thing, that will make the most difference in the world if you Trust, Believe, and have an Active Faith in God making disciples of Jesus Christ in the transformation of the world. Amen.