

## **Devotions for the Week of March 17, 2019**

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent**

### **LARGE-PRINT**

### **North East United Methodist Church**

### **By Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian**

### **Sunday, March 17, 2019**

#### **Read Philippians 3: 12-21.**

Paul writes, *“I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us up to heaven.”* Another translation reads, *“I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.”* Paul had a goal. Each day he went out, he went with that goal in mind. His goal was to share the gospel message, to preach about the change that took place in his life, to grow closer to the God who forgave him for his persecution of the church and took him in.

Everything Paul did was centered around this goal. God is asking us to work toward His goal for our lives, to center on what it is that God wants us to do and to do it. Unfortunately, many of us are not sure what our goals are, are not sure what our purpose is, are not sure “what’s next,” what the cross is that we are called to bear. As John Richard Wimber said, *“If you’ve nothing to shoot for you’ll hit it every time.”*

Michael Slaughter, in his book, Momentum for Life, writes, *“The architects who designed your office, church, or home didn’t start with a bulldozer. Before a shovel was ever put into the ground, they saw something in their minds – a picture in detail. The articulated it through a blueprint that was used for actual construction...the building was designed by beginning with a picture in the person’s mind.”*

Slaughter goes on to write, *“The vision process works the same for you and me. You must be able to conceive an idea before you can achieve it! God wants to birth a miracle through your life’s work, but you must be willing to receive it by submission to Jesus’ authority in your life. You then have to conceive the bid idea of God...[then] God will achieve miracles through you.”*

Therefore, the first step to determining what goals you need to be working toward is to surrender to God. Like Paul, after his Damascus road experience, we must surrender and ask God what He wants from us, where He wants us to put our focus and time. Once we surrender, God will give us a picture, a vision, of what our lives could become with Him. We then set goals to achieve the vision God has given us.

Have you surrendered to God? Have you turned your life over to Him? Have you embraced your cross? What picture are you seeing of your future with God? What purpose will you serve? What difference will you make? Whose life will you touch? Pray that God will give you a clear picture of the goals you need to be aiming at and working towards.

### **Monday, March 18, 2019**

#### **Read Galatians 3: 1-5.**

Paul writes to the church in Galatia, *“Have you lost your senses? After starting the Christian lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort?”*

Many times we have goals in mind. But often our goals are too small, too shallow, because we are afraid of not attaining them; therefore, we set them low enough to hit. Sometimes our goals are “God-sized;” yet, we fail to reach them because we rely on our own strength.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow writes, *“If you would hit the mark, you must aim a little above it; every arrow that flies feels the attraction of the earth.”* In other words, our goals must be “God-sized,” big goals and we must realize that without God’s help, we will not hit the mark.

One of the greatest football stories I have read is the story of Dennis Byrd, New York Jet, paralyzed when his neck was broken during a play against the Kansas City Chiefs. In his book, Rise and Walk, Byrd writes about after the injury. He told the doctors, nurses, and friends that he would walk again. He says, *“It was faith speaking, as well. And determination. And even obligation. I had cards and snapshots mounted all around my bed, pictures of Ashtin and Angela, of my mom and dad, of Jeni and Dawn and Doug and Dan and my nephews, of Angela’s folks, David and Betty, and of her brother Chris. This was my family. These were the people who knew me best and loved me most. These were the people I was going to walk for.”*

He goes on to say, *“it was time to turn back to fighting and praying for a miracle of my own. Jesus Christ had been with me during the past...I knew I would need Him even more in the days ahead...I had two cards taped to the way by my bed. One said, “I can’t;” the other said, “Never.” These were two phrases I would not allow myself to say or even think. And I didn’t.”*

Byrd set a “God-sized goal.” He was going to walk again, something his doctors did not think possible with the spinal cord injury he had received. Byrd set his goal and began working toward it, giving it everything he had and seeking God daily for strength and help in achieving the next step toward his destination. With God’s strength, Dennis Byrd walked again.

What God-sized goals have you set for your life? Are you allowing God’s strength to carry you or like the church in

Galatia are you trying to rely on your own strength, your own effort? Put God in the driver's seat and watch what miracles He accomplishes.

## **Tuesday, March 19, 2019**

### **Read Genesis 11: 1-9 and 2 Corinthians 5: 1-10.**

Paul writes in his letter to the church in Corinth, "*So we make it our goal [our aim] to please Him.*" Paul's goal was to please God, to serve Him, to love Him. As St. Augustine of Hippo wrote, "*God is the only goal worthy of man's efforts...*"

Paul tried to please God with his life, his words, his actions. Compare that to the people in Genesis who built the tower of Babel. They had a goal in mind. Their goal was to build a huge tower; a tower that "*reaches to the skies – a monument to our greatness.*"

Even though this was a God-sized goal, God was not behind it. God had not been sought in its conception, nor had God been sought in helping achieve the vision; therefore, it brought destruction and heartache among the people.

Our goals must be determined through much prayer. We must seek after God and ask for His help and guidance in determining our purpose, in determining our next step. Then, we must take action on what God has laid on our hearts. As Michael Slaughter writes, "*My life – and yours – is too short to live for anything less than a fulfilling, fruitful, faithful purpose. Take time every day to dream God's dream for your life. God gives great vision to those who are willing to take great action!*"

Are you seeking after God for your goals? Are you allowing Him to give you a picture of what's next? Or are you stepping out on your own, quickly and without prayer? Ask God to show you what He wants for your life, to lead you in the

direction He wants you to go.

### **Wednesday, March 20, 2019**

#### **Read Luke 4: 14-21 and John 19: 16-30.**

Jesus knew His purpose. Jesus knew His goals. He was sent to “*preach Good News to the poor...to proclaim that captives will be released...the downtrodden will be freed.*” Jesus understood that He must go to Jerusalem, to the cross, to death...this was His goal. When Peter cried out that He must not go to Jerusalem, Jesus replied, “*Get behind me, Satan,*” for He knew what He must do, what His goal was, regardless of the difficulty.

Erwin W. Lutzer writes, “*Jesus knew where he had come from, why he was here, and what he was supposed to accomplish. He came down from heaven, not to do his own will, but the will of the Father. That determination controlled every decision he made. As a result he was not distracted with trivia. He was never in a hurry, for he knew his Father would not give a task without the time to do it. Christ was not driven by crises, feeling he must heal everyone in Israel. He could say, “It is finished,” even when many people were still bound by demands and twisted with disease. What mattered ultimately was not the number of people healed or fed, but whether the Father’s will was being done. His clearly defined goals simplified his decisions.*”

Bill Hybels, in his book, Courageous Leadership, writes, “*In Acts 20:24, the apostle Paul says, “I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me.” What is Paul saying? I think he’s saying, “The moment I received my vision from God, fulfilling that vision became the pressing priority of my life. Whatever*

*personal agenda I had has given way to the marching orders I received from God.” Paul took that vision as far as any leader can – to his death. When God asks leaders to subordinate their own personal agendas to fulfill the visions he has given them, he knows that if they do that they will never be sorry.” Paul carried His cross.*

Again, are you allowing God to set your goals, to give you a vision of what He created you to become? Are you giving up your personal agenda for God’s agenda for your life? Pray that God will help you determine the goals He wants set in your life and wants you working toward.

### **Thursday, March 21, 2019**

#### **Read Psalm 106.**

The psalmist cries out, *“They wouldn’t wait for His counsel...”* And because Israel wouldn’t wait for God’s counsel, because they *“quickly forgot what He had done,”* because they *“refused to enter the pleasant land”* and *“mingled among the pagans,”* God says that his anger burns against them.

Jesus said, *“Seek first the kingdom of God...and all these things will be added unto you.”* Unfortunately, like the Israelites, we often set our own goals, do our own thing, and forget to seek God’s counsel.

Bill Hybels, in his book, Courageous Leadership, gives a set of questions that we need to ask as we seek God’s Will for our lives, as we set goals based on God’s direction.

1. Have you yielded yourself fully enough to God?
2. Have you asked God to unveil his vision for your life, or are you asking him to bless a plan that you’ve already come up with? We must come to God with empty

hands and an open heart and ask, “What is your vision

for my life?”

3. Have you fasted?
4. Have you prayed?
5. Have you been quiet and waited on God in solitude?
6. Have you cleaned up the sinful patterns in your life?
7. Have you weeded out the distractions and ambient noise that would keep you hearing what God is trying to say to you?
8. Have you read avidly? Have you traveled widely? Have you exposed yourself to the kaleidoscope of visions that God has given others so that you can be inspired by the variety of options? See what God is doing [and then join Him].

Take time tonight, this weekend, to seek God and His vision for your life, to ask the tough questions, to pray and be quiet with Him...to show you the next step.

### **Friday, March 22, 2019**

#### **Read Psalm 135 Jeremiah 29: 11.**

The psalmist says, *“I know the greatness of the Lord.”* The ultimate goal of our lives, the goal we should focus most on, is to know God. E. Brook writes, *“My goal is God himself, not joy nor peace, nor even blessing, but himself, my God, ‘Tis his to lead me there, not mine but his...At any cost, dear Lord, by any road.”*

Shaun Alexander, 2005 NFL MVP, writes, *“We can’t do the will of God unless we know it. We learn the will of God through knowing His word and through allowing Him to lead us.”* God has plans for us...plans to prosper us and not to harm us. We need to trust Him and get to know Him.

Take time today just to get to know Him...that is the highest goal.

### **Saturday, March 23, 2019**

**Read Mark 8: 31-38.**

When Peter corrects Jesus, telling Him not to go to Jerusalem and to suffer at the hands of the chief priests, Jesus tells Peter, *“Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”* Jesus then goes on to explain to His followers that anyone who wants to follow Him, *“must deny themselves and take up their cross.”* Thus, as we have spoken about all week throughout the devotion, we must surrender to God, placing our thoughts, not on the world, but on Christ and His calling on our lives.

Paul C. Shupe talks about how every church has a cross as its central symbol, but asks, “Where are our own crosses?” He goes on to say that *“perhaps what we need is a multitude of cross, one for each of us, at the back door of our sanctuaries, to be taken up as we return to the world of home and family, work and commerce, service and lay...Opportunities are daily before us, times when we may give our lives sacrificially to acts of love, compassion, justices, and peace, even in the face of the same imperial forces of sin and death that confronted Jesus. In this season, we are wise to ponder, not only the cross or crucifix in our sanctuaries, but the picture of Jesus on the road to Jerusalem, calling all his disciples to take up our own crosses and to walk with him in paths of love and service.”*

How might you carry your cross this week? What opportunities are before you to live your life in acts of sacrificial love and service? Keep your eyes open this week and pray that God will show you where you can be His disciple. And remember to invite someone to church tomorrow.