

## Christian Growth Course - Decisiveness, Goal-Setting

Introduction: The immature person often wants to "have his cake and eat it too." He wants to eat it, but if he does, he can't still have it. He wants to keep it, but if he does, he can't eat it. You don't have to go off into drugs or immorality to waste your life. All you have to do is have a lot of conflicting desires and want to fulfill them all, being unable to choose one direction for your life. Without clear goals and decisiveness, you drift aimlessly and accomplish little. And time is going by.

The mature person is willing to give up his cake in order to eat it. He can sacrifice lesser goals in order to reach greater ones. Once he decides what he really wants to do, he is able to move effectively in that direction.

Our modern culture has not prepared us well for this. We are a spoiled, self-indulgent people trying to satisfy all our desires at once. Discipline is not one of our strong points. Prolonged security and prosperity have dulled us to the fact that we are in a spiritual war for survival. In war, choices must be clear-cut.

1. Hesitating between conflicting goals paralyzes us and wastes valuable opportunities. We are challenged by God to make our choice and serve him.
  - A. Elijah challenged Israel to choose - 1 Kings 18:21.
  - B. Joshua challenged Israel and said, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" - Joshua 24:15.
  - C. Moses laid the alternatives of life and death before the people - Deuteronomy 30:15.
  - D. Jesus challenged the rich young man to put God before his wealth - Matthew 19:16-26.
  - E. James warns against being "double-minded" - James 1:6-8; 4:4-10.
  - F. Israel tried to serve God and idols at the same time and was destroyed - 2 Kings 17:33, 41; Zephaniah 1:5.
  - G. The Corinthians had to choose between the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons - 1 Corinthians 10:14-22.
  
2. God's great servants know who they are and what they are living for.
  - A. Isaiah - "Here am I; send me" - Isaiah 6:8.
  - B. Ezra devoted himself to study and observe and teach God's law to Israel - Ezra 7:10.
  - C. Nehemiah determined to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem - Nehemiah 1:2, 3; 2:5.
  - D. Mary of Bethany chose to listen to Jesus teach - Luke 10:38-42.
  - E. The four fishermen left their fishing business immediately to follow Jesus and fish for men - Matthew 4:18-22.
  - F. Joseph ran from the house rather than give in to the advances of Potiphar's wife - Genesis 39:6-12.

- G. Paul's purposes in life were to win as many as possible for Christ, to preach only the cross, to gain Christ, to know him, and to partake in his suffering and resurrection - 1 Corinthians 9:19; 2:1,2; Philippians 3:7-14. He gave up everything else to pursue those purposes.

3. Jesus is our greatest example of goal-setting and decisive living.

- A. In heaven, before he was born on earth, he determined to go to earth and do God's will by becoming a sacrifice for our sins - Hebrews 10:5-7.
- B. At age 12, he wanted to be in his Father's house doing his work - Luke 2:41, 42, and 49.
- C. He was determined to be baptized to begin his ministry, and to refuse the side roads offered by Satan during the temptation - Matthew 3:13-17; 4:1-10.
- D. Jesus had a clear view of the purposes of his life and ministry - Luke 4:18-21; 19:10.
- E. He always focused on doing God's will, finishing his work, and going to the cross appointed for him - John 6:38; 4:34; 9:4; Matthew 20:28; 16:21; Luke 12:50; John 12:27.
- F. He sanctified his life so that his followers would have sanctified lives - John 17:19.
- G. When the time came to go to Jerusalem and the cross, he "resolutely set his face" to go to Jerusalem - Luke 9:51.
- H. Lest he be tempted to hang back or turn aside, he walked ahead of the group - Mark 10:32.
- I. Even in the shadow of the cross in Gethsemane, he kept his resolve to do God's will - Mark 14:36.

4. It is important to have the RIGHT goals for your life. Wrong goals cause you to waste your life.

- A. The first and greatest goal of every Christian should be to glorify God as greatly as possible - 1 Corinthians 10:31; to love God with all the heart, soul and mind - Matthew 22:37, 38.
- B. The second greatest goal is to "love your neighbor as yourself" - to cause no one to stumble - Matthew 22:39; 1 Corinthians 10:32, 33.
- C. Other important goals:
  - 1) Seek the kingdom of God before all else - Matthew 6:33.
  - 2) Let Christ shine from your life - Galatians 2:20; 4:19; Matthew 5:13-16; 2 Corinthians 3:18.
  - 3) Be filled with the Spirit and his fruit - Ephesians 5:18; Galatians 5:22, 23.
  - 4) Put off the old nature and put on the new - Ephesians 4:22-24.
  - 5) Progress beyond "elementary teachings" of the gospel and go on to maturity in

Christlikeness - Hebrews 6:1-3; Ephesians 4:13-15.

- 6) Have the redemptive, self-denying servant spirit of Jesus - Philippians 2:5-8; Matthew 16:24.
- 7) Be filled with God's word and to use it rightly - Colossians 3:16; 2 Timothy 2:15.

5. To fail to decide FOR God is to decide against him - Matthew 12:30. There are certain choices which every person necessarily makes. For example, we must all choose between:

- A. Friendship with the world or friendship with God - James 4:4.
- B. Serving God or serving money - Matthew 6:19, 20, 24, and 33.
- C. Clothing ourselves with Christ, or gratifying the desires of our sinful nature - Romans 13:14.
- D. Praying in trust, or losing heart in anxiety - Luke 18:1; Philippians 4:6.
- E. Sowing to please the Spirit or sowing to please the flesh - Galatians 6:8; Romans 8:13.
- F. Traveling the narrow way or the broad way - Matthew 7:13, 14.
- G. Being overcome by evil, or overcoming evil with good - Romans 12:21.

6. Many things will tend to distract us from our main goals.

- A. Some things which distract are good things.
- B. Scriptural examples of distractions:
  - 1) Family affairs - Luke 9:59-62.
  - 2) "Life's worries, riches and pleasures" - Luke 8:7, 14.
  - 3) Farming, business, marriage - Matthew 22:5; Luke 14:16-20.
  - 4) Glory and approval from people - John 12:42, 43.
  - 5) Church work which is not in one's main area of responsibility - Acts 6:1-4.
- C. In order to effectively reach our goals, we must be willing to sacrifice conflicting goals and to suffer if necessary.
  - 1) Abraham gave up his family home and moved about, living in tents - Hebrews 11:8-10.
  - 2) Abraham was willing to give up his son if obeying God required that - Hebrews 11:17-19.
  - 3) Moses gave up royal power and pleasure in Egypt to go with God's people - Hebrews 11:24-26.

- 4) Jesus gave up wealth, comfort, popularity and political power - Luke 4:1-12; 9:58; John 6:14, 15.
- 5) Paul gave up his rightful financial support - 1 Corinthians 9:4, 11, 12.
- 6) Paul gave up personal and cultural preferences - 1 Corinthians 9:19-22.
- 7) Paul gave up a promising future and high office - Philippians 3:4-8.
- 8) Paul took on hatred and danger from his former associates.
- 9) Paul "beat his body and made it his slave" lest he fail in serving Christ - 1 Corinthians 9:27.
- 10) Paul gave up marriage and family life (this is not a norm for everyone) - 1 Corinthians 7:7, 8, 32-35; compare Matthew 19:10-12.
- 11) We are to "endure hardship as good soldiers" - 2 Timothy 2:3.
- 12) We must give up even things that are valuable to us if they conflict with vital goals - Matthew 18:8, 9.

7. It helps us greatly to have clear goals:

- A. It stops paralysis or wandering and enables us to move forward.
- B. It keeps us from being so easily side-tracked or tempted.
- C. It enables us to endure hardship - Hebrews 12:2.
- D. It enables us to make the most of time and opportunities - Ephesians 5:16; Colossians 4:5.
- E. It makes us feel good about life (one cause of depression is lack of goals to give meaning to life).

8. You need both long and short-term goals.

- A. Long-term goals give overall shape and direction to your life.
- B. Short-term and intermediate goals guide your practical daily living.
- C. Short-term and intermediate goals should support your long-term goals.
- D. Choose goals that are realistic.

9. Decide what steps are needed to reach your goals, and when.

- A. Without this, goals remain theoretical and little is actually accomplished toward them.
- B. God's servants in scripture planned and took practical steps:

- 1) Jesus took the disciples away from the crowds so he could train them - Mark 9:30-32; Luke 9:10.
  - 2) Paul planned benevolent contributions which would unite Jewish and Gentile Christians - Galatians 2:9, 10; Romans 15:25-31; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8, 9.
  - 3) In order to minister in the most effective way, Paul planned his travel so as to be in Jerusalem by Pentecost - Acts 20:16.
  - 4) Paul planned a visit to Rome partly so they could support him in a planned missionary journey on to Spain - Romans 1:10-15; 15:22-24, 28.
- C. Though you may not see clearly all the steps to your goal, take in faith the immediate steps you understand, and God will open the way further - Joshua 3:14-16.
- D. Every activity in your life should be planned and done as a means to serving Christ and people.

10. Decisively and energetically follow the goals you set.

- A. The "one-talent man" lost everything because he was too afraid of making a mistake - Matthew 25:24-29.
- B. God has not given us a spirit of timidity but of power, love and self-control - 2 Timothy 1:7.
- C. King Joash of Israel failed militarily for lack of decisiveness - 2 Kings 13:14-19.
- D. The effective servant of Christ must look forward, not backward - Philippians 3:13, 14; Luke 9:62.
- E. The Ephesian converts "burned their bridges" to the old way of life publicly and decisively - Acts 19:18-20.
- F. Zacchaeus made a striking, complete change toward righteousness - Luke 19:8.
- G. Joshua boldly stated his resolve to all Israel - Joshua 24:15.
- H. We Christians are to serve with all our power - Ecclesiastes 9:10; Romans 12:11.

11. Some sample goals for today:

- A. Become able to lead group Bible studies.
- B. Learn to hand worries over to God in trust.
- C. Learn to love myself so I can love others.
- D. Develop a gentle, quiet spirit.
- E. Learn to minister to people who are struggling and hurting.
- F. Finish the studies in the Bible Institute.

- G. Study a certain book in the Bible systematically.
- H. Become a regular in having a daily quiet time with the Lord.
- I. Overcome a "besetting sin."
- J. Eliminate the time-wasters in my life.
- K. Become a minister or minister's wife.
- L. Become an elder or elder's wife.
- M. Become the kind of husband or wife or parent or son or daughter described in Ephesians 5 and 6.
- N. Make my life and personality more attractive as a witness for Christ.
- O. Discover things I do that make it hard for others, and do something about it.
- P. Complete my education so as to serve Christ in my career.
- Q. Live redemptively every day.
- R. Get rid of influences and activities that weaken me spiritually.
- S. Get to know some strong Christians who can encourage me, and spend time with them.
- T. Perform specific services for people
- U. Understand people so I can counsel and help them.
- V. If single, make myself the kind of person who would attract the right mate.
- W. If free to marry, marry the right person to best serve God with.
- X. Put my home at God's disposal and make it a powerful tool for God's service.
- Y. Learn or understand something I need to know.
- Z. Learn to study better for test.

Conclusion: You have known some Christian individuals and families who have unusual influence for good. Invariably these are people who have decided on the deepest level who they are and what they want to do with their lives. With them the issue does not come up every few days; it has been settled. That kind of meaning and commitment is not abnormal but normal for Christ's kingdom. It is a possibility for every one of us.

© By G.B. Shelburne, III (except for any graphics and scripture quotations). May be reproduced for non-profit, non-publishing instructional purposes provided document content is not altered and this copyright notice is included in full. Format may be altered. South Houston Bible Institute, 14325 Crescent Landing, Houston, TX 77062-2178, U.S.A., telephone 281-090-8899, email <shbi@shbi.org>, web site <www.shbi.org>. Scriptures, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the HOLY BIBLE: NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION © 1978 and 1984 by the New York International Bible Society, used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers. Some courses available via Distance Learning.