

## Sermon Notes

(A basic transcription with modifications for style and clarity)

# GROW SPIRITUALLY WITH GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

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Dave Register, January 11, 2025

I want to talk about New Year's resolutions today. I'm not suggesting you make any. But it's the talk of the town as they say. Everywhere you tune into a TV program or you hear on the news people are talking about New Year's resolutions.

A few years ago I went into a gym. It was a 24 Hour Fitness that I normally exercise in. I was surprised to see all the machines had lines. People are waiting in line to get on the machines. I asked one of the trainers, "What is going on?" He said, "New Year's resolutions." "Oh." He said, "But don't worry. In February you won't have to wait in any lines at all." And he was absolutely right.

Financial planning, all kinds of goals are taking place. All kinds of resolutions. My daughter-in-law, who's not a member of the Church, but she said she's doing "dry January". I said, "What's dry January?" She said, "I'm not having anything to drink. No alcoholic beverages." Dry January. I remember she did that last year and towards the end of January she was saying, "I've got to have a drink. Let's go out to dinner so I can get a cocktail."

Everybody has these lofty goals, resolutions to make. This is from CBS News. While it differs for everyone, a 2023 poll from Forbes Health found most people give up resolutions after less than four months. According to the survey, just under one in ten people (that's 8%) said their resolutions lasted less than a month. 21.9% reported two months. 22.2% reported three months. 13.1% said their resolutions lasted four months. But only 1% said they lasted for eleven or twelve months. That's why I could get a machine in my gymnasium after February.

And of course, there's nothing wrong with resolving to develop a new habit or overcome a bad habit. But we don't need to do it January first or in the month of January.

If you read carefully Revelation 2 and 3, you'll find the message after each message to the congregations or the Churches that are mentioned there, It says, "**To him who overcomes...**" will this reward be or this happen. Overcoming is a part of the Christian criteria, the life of a Christian.

Not too long ago, I listened to a recording of one of Mr. Orchard's sermons. He spoke about the work of God and the work that God is doing in each of our lives and the body of Christ as a whole. I was impressed by what he said and the references he made. It is true. God is doing a work in each of our lives through the power of His Spirit.

As I was filling out those forms right on the COG, The Father's Call sign-up sheet for messages it says, **"Our vision is the unified, spiritual body of Christ, living and representing the gospel of God's plan of salvation for humanity. Our mission is to nurture the Church family as a spiritual organism, feeding the flock and sharing the gospel."** A lofty vision and mission.

Today I want to talk about spiritual growth. And if you will, spiritual resolutions. Do we plan to grow spiritually this coming year? What does spiritual growth look like? How would we measure it; how would we describe it? How would it be measured? How much will we grow spiritually? Will this coming year be a benchmark year for us spiritually?

I'd like to begin in 2 Peter:

**2 Peter 3:17 You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness,**

Interesting word, this word 'steadfastness'. It talks about having our spiritual feet firmly planted on the ground so that when something does happen we're not blown over by every wind of doctrine that Paul talked about. Do not:

**17 ...fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked;**

**18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...**

The admonition is that we should grow spiritually. What he's talking about "Grow in grace" is the process of salvation. It begins with repentance and then receiving the Holy Spirit and then growing spiritually. Grow in that area and grow in knowledge." Spiritual knowledge he's talking about.

There are two admonitions in this particular scripture. Number one is to make sure we maintain the progress we've already **made, our "steadfastness"**. Maintain that and number two is **grow spiritually**. That's what I want to address specifically in my message with all of us today, is how do we grow spiritually? Do we just let life happen and then react to a trial?

After Linda and I first got married, about twenty-two years ago we lived in the San Gabriel Mountains up above Riverside in a beautiful place, Lake Gregory. Actually the town we lived in is called Blue Jay because there were hundreds, maybe thousands of blue jays. This little town is nestled between Lake Gregory and Lake Arrowhead. We lived up there in a cabin. At least that was the description the man gave to me when he sold me the house, sight unseen. He said it's a little cabin up there and at the time I felt

like moving into a little cabin to get away from things. It turned out to be a five bedroom, three bath house on three levels. A very nice little cabin that we lived in when we first got married.

Linda enjoyed it. We moved in there with her mother and her daughter and my parents for a while until I finally convinced them, "I'll be okay. You don't need to cook my food and do my laundry. I'll be fine."

Anyway, there was a fire in the mountains and burned over four hundred structures, which is nothing compared to the fifteen thousand that have been burned in these LA fires. But we were evacuated. We had to get off the mountain and down the hill to San Bernadino. There was a big hangar in an Air Force Base. They had cots set up and we could have stayed there but for the generosity of a good friend who lived in Redlands who had a motorhome in his driveway he said, "Hey, you guys can come down here and you can stay until the evacuation is over."

It took fourteen days before we could get back up. And the fires burned all around. And the end of the story is the house survived. The storage where we had a lot of Linda's furniture survived. And after fourteen days we went back up there. Obviously, the evidence of the fire was all around us. Structures had burned. The forest had burned pretty badly. But we survived.

But it was a trial and I'll tell you, everyday that we were in that motorhome we prayed, probably more earnestly than we had prayed in the days previous. We studied the scripture. We were glued to the television set not watching anything but the news. And the reporters, we found out, don't know anything about the geography of many of those streets. They kept saying this street burned, that street burned. And we went, "Oh no. Our house is gone." And the next day, our house had survived.

Finally there were some people who refused to evacuate and they all went to the bar in Lake Gregory and they were drinking. And after about the tenth or twelfth day I called the bar and I said, "Have all the houses on North Road burned?" And you could tell, the guy put his hand over the phone but you could still hear him. He was yelling to the guys in the bar. "Has North Road burned?" You could hear this cacophony of sound. "No, no. Your house is still there." Yay. I found out not from a reporter but from the guys in the bar who were drunk that our house was still there.

But as a result of that trial we grew spiritually. Is that the way we grow? We kind of wait for a trial? As was referred to already, James said count it all joy when you fall into different trials. When I was in high school I read that scripture and thought, "What was James smoking? This is horrible advice."

But you know, many of us grow that way, don't we? We get in a trial, we lose a job, we have a health trial and that forces us to our knees. It forces us to get closer to our God. It forces us to have confidence in God. It forces spiritual growth. Is that the way God

wants us to grow all the time? I don't think so. I think growing spiritually prepares us for those times. They will come.

**1 Peter 5:9 Resist him, (that is the devil) steadfast in the faith,**

See, there's that steadfastness again. Spiritual feet firmly planted based on the growth we've already experienced in our lives.

**9 ...knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.**

We experience the same kind of trials that people outside the Church experience. As we just heard from Mr. Orchard, a relatively few number of people that we're aware of, have had their houses burned in this fire. I don't know about you but it's heart wrenching, it brings tears to my eyes to hear these people talk about living in a home twenty-five or thirty years, in many cases their childhood home and it's gone. It's nothing but a pile of ashes now.

A lot of people are suffering right now. A lot of them are saying, "Why? Why does this happen?" And yet I think in God's Church as God's people we understand there's a reason for these trials. It helps us build character. It helps us lean on God.

The people outside the Church, often times do not have that confidence or that faith. But it's the same things that happen. There are people inside the Church and outside the Church who get cancer. There are people inside the Church and outside the Church who suffer financial difficulties or bankruptcy or trials or lose their jobs. The same sufferings, as Peter wrote, are experienced by your brotherhood in the world, by fellow humanity. Is our spiritual growth developed solely in the face of trials?

**10 But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, (a Greek word *teleios* means mature) establish, (steadfastness) strengthen, and settle you.**

That comes from the knowledge of God and the knowledge of God's working and God's Spirit. That's the difference between our brothers and sisters who are not in the Church, who don't have the same understanding we do.

Are there other ways to grow spiritually other than just what I call *reactionary growth*, reacting to a problem due to trials? Can we establish a personal program for growth spiritually? Do you have a spiritual growth plan? Paul wrote to the Church at Ephesus about the Church, the body of Christ, which is part of the mission statement of Church of God, the Father's Call. It's part of all the Churches of God. I hope, in our mission statement, is that we want to grow as the body of Christ not just individually but as a body, as a group of believers. How does that take place? This is a helpful explanation.

**Ephesians 4:11 And [Christ] Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,**

...to help us along the way and today I hope I'm here like Mr. Vail, as a teacher to help us understand spiritual growth a little better. It's part of the function that God has called us to.

**12 to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up**

**13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.** (Our goal is spiritual maturity but how do we get there?)

**14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.**

**15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will ... grow, to become in every respect, the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.**

**16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.**

The ministry is here to help us grow spiritually. A couple years ago my grandson came to me and he was talking about his graduation from high school and I asked him what he planned to do as an adult. And like many sixteen, seventeen year olds he shrugged his shoulders and said, "I don't know. I don't know." I recommended a book to him that I have recommended to a lot of teenagers over the years. I've spoken about it at camps. It's a book entitled *If You Don't Know Where You're Going, You'll Probably End Up Somewhere Else*. It's a little book but it's one of those short reads. And our grandson has, I believe. He's still looking for himself. It's been now two or three years since we had that conversation.

The book is very good though, because it describes what growth is and it describes how to get there. I'm quoting again from that book. "Growth is measured by the attaining of goals and objectives." I'll read that again. "Growth is measured by the attaining of goals and objectives."

I ask again, "What are our spiritual goals and objectives? Could you articulate them? Are they written down? We had a suggestion earlier, write things down with scriptures in fact. Do we know what a goal is? Do we know the difference? What is an objective? What is the difference between a goal and an objective?"

According to that book I was referring to earlier **a goal** is: "The fulfillment of broad needs, the achievement of an excellence level, the alleviation of a major problem, and long term statements of purpose." I'll repeat that. A goal is: "The fulfillment of broad needs, the achievement of an excellence level, the alleviation of a major problem, and long term statements of purpose."

Paul wrote down one of God's goals: He wants everyone to be in the family of God. That's a goal that God has for us. "Bringing many sons to glory" is the statement. How does God achieve that goal? He has objectives in His plan.

Interestingly enough, seven of them are outlined for us in the Holy Days. Passover is the beginning of fulfilling that goal. "He sent His only beloved Son into the world to die for us" That's what Passover is all about. The redemption of those who are repentant. That's you and me. We went through that process. We go to Passover every year to renew our commitment to God. That was step number one.

Step number two is Days of Unleavened Bread. We begin to know we have to grow, we have to overcome, we have to get sin out of our lives with the help of God's Spirit. That's how we grow towards sonship.

Then number three is Pentecost. The arrival of God's Holy Spirit. How do we get there? God gives us His Spirit to help us. You see, I could go all through the seven Holy Days but that's another sermon, to talk about the objectives that are outlined by the Holy Days for God's goal to bring many sons to glory.

What are some goals that you and I could have, that we could set? I just wrote down a few as I was thinking about this message and this whole thought. Number one is, I desire to have a closer relationship with God. That's a goal. I desire to have a closer relationship with God.

Okay now, think for a moment. What objectives could you and I have to help us reach that goal? I think it's a goal we all have, isn't it? We all want to have a closer relationship with God. What are objectives that we could have to reach that? Hold that thought.

Let me share another goal with you. I deeply desire to be in God's Kingdom. Isn't that a good goal? Christ articulated, "Seek you first the Kingdom of God" right? That's the number one goal, to be in the Kingdom of God.

Number three, I want to improve my marital relationship. Wouldn't that be a good goal? What objectives might you and I have to do that?

The fourth one I wrote down is I want to improve my knowledge of the scriptures. Now, when you get to be my age your memory starts to fail you and I can see where the scripture is on the page in the Bible but sometimes I can't always remember the chapter and verse to turn there anymore. That's why I'm going to retire in a couple of years.

Number five that I wrote down is I desire a better and more positive emotional outlook on life. Those are goals that I believe can be spiritual goals.

Let's talk for a moment about objectives. Remember growth is measured by having goals and objectives. Objectives to fulfill some of these goals that I went through (there are many more that we could write down). Objectives are, and this is the definition the book gave, "Specific obtainable and measurable steps that can be achieved on a short

term level. Objectives lead toward goals.” Again, I’ll repeat that. “Specific obtainable and measurable steps that can be achieved on a short term level. Objectives lead toward goals.”

Again I will share a couple that I wrote down. I will pray twenty minutes a day. Maybe if you already pray two hours a day that’s going to be a goal that’s way short of what you have. You might want to improve your relationship with God so you want to pray more. I just picked that out. I’m not saying that’s the standard.

I had a friend at college and he had a goal like this. He had a calendar. And on his calendar he put a mark every time he achieved a goal. His particular goal was...he said, “I read in the scriptures that David and others in scripture prayed three times a day” and that was his goal. He had a little check for three times a day on his calendar and he had so many minutes a day that he wanted to pray each time. That was how he improved his relationship with God, to improve his prayer life.

Another objective might be, I will study my Bible twenty minutes a day. There are a number of good Bible Reading Programs. In fact a member was just talking to me the other day about a program that we have on our Life, Hope and Truth website on reading the Bible in a year. That’s a goal. That’s a good goal. Read the Bible, Genesis to Revelation in a year. How do you do that? Well, you’ve got to have objectives along the way. How many chapters and verses do I have to read each day to achieve that goal? Are they measurable? Yes if you write them down. Are they attainable? Yes. People do it all the time. Can we grow closer to God through that? Of course as we were admonished in the sermonette. Become familiar with the scriptures that particularly target the issue that you want to address.

Number two that I wrote down. I will meditate on the vision of the Kingdom of God twenty minutes a day. Brethren, I believe that meditation is a lost art even among God’s people because we’re so busy. We’re so connected. Right now, if you’ve got a smartphone in your pocket and even if you’ve got it turned on mute or the sound off it’s vibrating in your pocket or your purse and you’re wondering “I wonder who that is.” “What is that?” How distracting does that get? It’s horrible. I love smartphones and I hate them because it just robs us of the ability to just sit down in the quiet for maybe fifteen or twenty minutes and think about being a part of the family of God and God’s way of life and how do I get closer to that?

You know, they talk about the basket at the dinner table that the families throw their phones in while they have dinner together and they ignore those for twenty or thirty minutes. It might be good sometimes to do that when you’re alone. Get rid of the phone. Put the smartphone down for twenty or thirty minutes and learn the art of meditation.

The third one I put down that’s an objective, I will conduct a personal study of the scriptures about a certain topic over the next sixty days. You may have a special

interest. Every year, I know as a pastor, I'm going to be asked to speak about the Kingdom of God at the Feast of Tabernacles. So about ninety days out I start studying about those scriptures about the Kingdom of God so that I can help the brethren where I'm speaking at the Feast to visualize the Kingdom of God. I start a program of studying scriptures and I begin to put them together and I write them down and I formulate a program that is objectives leading to that goal to deliver a sermon at the Feast helping all of us to better visualize the Kingdom of God. It's measurable. It leads towards a goal.

Number four that I wrote down. I will counsel with an elder in the next six months about an important decision I need to make. Sometimes I've seen members make really stupid decisions. And I said, "Oh, if you would have just talked to an elder or maybe even somebody in that business or somebody in the Church who has had similar experiences you could have saved your life so much heartache.

Another objective could be, I will fast once a month to grow closer to God. I will fast once a month. If you're like other people that I know, the Day of Atonement is the only time we fast. If we want a closer relationship with God, shouldn't we fast more often than that? It is a measurable, and obtainable objective that can lead towards that goal of getting closer in our relationship to God.

A strategy for Christian living, brethren, requires good goals, Christian priorities, effective plans that have goals and objectives and a desire to grow spiritually. More than just a reactionary growth to a trial. I think maybe for a moment we could take a look at the life of Christ. I've always been a little stymied by this verse because it covers so many years of the life of Christ and there's only one sentence that summarizes what happens between age twelve and age thirty of Christ's life.

**Luke 2:52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.**

That's an interesting statement. It was the goal of Jesus Christ while He was on this earth as a teenager (think about this for a moment) to grow spiritually and in favor with God and men. Jesus Christ was the Son of God. He had the Holy Spirit from birth, from before birth. He was not a weirdo. He grew in favor with other people. They liked Him. He grew in favor with God, the most important goal that He had. Simple statement but don't you think that Christ had objectives along that line?

We know He learned a trade. He was called a carpenter's son which meant basically a block mason in those days. And if you ever travel to Israel you realize it's not lumber they use there for building. It's huge blocks that are carved out of the sandstone and other stone you find in that part of the world. But He was also a student of the Bible. You think He just got scriptural knowledge by fiat? No, another scripture says in Hebrews that learned by the things He experienced.

He went down to the synagogue probably every day and poured over the scrolls. He knew them. He studied the word of God to gain favor with God. How did Christ grow in favor with God and man? He had a goal and He had objectives along the way. I think we can assume that quite safely. We know that He had these goals in His mind. Everywhere He went, everything He thought about was to achieve the goal that He'd been brought to earth to achieve. It talks about Christ and His disciples.

**John 4:30 Then they went out of the city and came to Him.**

**31 In the meantime His disciples urged Him, saying, "Rabbi, (teacher) eat."**

**32 But He said to them, "I have food to eat of which you do not know."**

**33 Therefore the disciples said to one another,**

Did you feed Him? Did you bring Him food? Where did the food come from? He hasn't had anything to eat, has He?

**34 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work."**

Have you ever been so involved in a project you forgot to eat? Sure, many times, haven't we? That was Christ's mental dedication to His goals on the earth, was to finish the work of God, that God had given Him. See what Christ says to the Father in the prayer that is recorded prior to His crucifixion.

**John 17:4 I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.**

**5 And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.** (referencing His preexistence)

**4 I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.**

Christ had goals. No doubt He had objectives in His life to reach those goals. In another place His disciples encouraged Him to go to Jerusalem. And He said, No, no. It's not My time yet. I'm going to wait a little bit because when I go there, I'm going to resurrect Lazarus, (that's what He thought in His mind) and that's going to be the one miracle that so excites the scribes and Pharisees they're going to bring Me to trial and I'm going to be crucified over it. My time is not yet. That objective has not yet come in my plan. He knew.

Read what Paul writes:

**Philippians 3:13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; (We're not there yet. If you're sitting here or standing here in this room we haven't made it yet.) but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind**

We can't grow if we're always immersing our emotions and ourselves in the past. Paul, of all people, was one who had to remind himself of that all the time. Because he had killed Christians of some number, apparently, as a tool of the Sanhedrin.

**13 ...forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,**

**14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.**

Paul was motivated by the goals just as Christ was and he saw in his life. We are not there yet and we must press toward the goal.

Today I brought a book for every family and I think maybe every person in the room. It's only \$19.95. it's free today for you. I'm going to give you a book. It's called, *Five Tools for Spiritual Growth* because I don't think we can talk about spiritual growth and convince everybody in the room and also share all those objectives that we have towards that goal by a sermonette and a sermon. It can't be done.

But there's a book written by a young man called Jeremy Lallier. I know Jeremy fairly well. He grew up in New England in the Church. His family were members of the Church of God in New England for several decades. He wrote this book, *Five Tools for Spiritual Growth*. I'd like to read the Preface:

This is a book for those seeking a deeper relationship with God. (That's a goal. Remember we talked about that, seeking a deeper relationship with God.) It's worth mentioning at the outset before we get too deep into things, this isn't a book that's going to convince you to believe in God or that the Bible is His spiritual word. But this book assumes you already know and believe these things because this is a book for Christians who want to grow. This is a book designed to help you understand your Bible better while developing a deeper relationship with God and your brothers and sisters in the faith. In the pages of His word God lays out five primary tools for spiritual growth. Each tool represents a fundamental aspect of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. When we invest time into understanding each of these tools and learning the best way to them we can enjoy tremendous, spiritual benefits.

Do you know what these five tools might be? They are: prayer, Bible study, meditation, fasting, and fellowship. We knew those didn't we? Do we have plans to grow in those areas? I hope we do.

Then he goes on how to use this book for a lifetime of growth. Last time I talked to Jeremy I said, "Jeremy, when you grew up in the Church in New England you took good notes on all those sermons I gave and they're all here right?" He did the same thing that

you did. He laughed. That young man has learned a lot. And today I'm very pleased to offer you a copy of this book. Not for the purpose of promoting our Church but for the purpose of helping all of us grow spiritually. That's what it's about. *Five Tools for Spiritual Growth*. So important for our salvation to grow spiritually. Let's make a plan to grow spiritually. I'd like to close my message by reading from Ephesians with the Phillips translation.. The Phillips translation paraphrases this scripture.

**Ephesians 5:15 Live life, then, with a due sense of responsibility, not as men who do not know the meaning and purpose of life but as those who do.**

Remember the title of that book that I recommended to my grandson: *If You Don't Know Where You're Going You'll Probably End Up Somewhere Else*.

**15 ...Make the best of your time, despite all the difficulties of these days. Don't be vague, but firmly grasp what you know to be the will of the Lord."**

Have a plan for spiritual growth. Each new year, each new Sabbath, each new day, God is giving us opportunity for spiritual growth. What will we do with those opportunities? What will we do with that knowledge? Will we grow spiritually this coming year?

I hope we all pray as we set goals, with objectives and resolve to grow spiritually this coming year.