

INTRO:

Alright friends, come on back...*Parents if you want, feel free — (KIDS)* — Well... Welcome to the South Boston Neighborhood House and what, by God's grace and the generosity of folks here, will be/I'm excited to say our gathering home for the foreseeable future!...(CLAP)... Yeah, as Matt said, just so glad to be here, especially after a year+ all the gathering space changes that we've endured... I gotta say, (BREATHE). Yeah, just such a blessing to have a place where, each week, we can just look forward to simply pausing together and learning to trust and rest in Christ for every area of life! **Amen?** Yeah!... But I'll also tell ya: As I spent some time this week just thanking God for this space, I sensed Him/ever so gently reminding me/maybe reminding you that as much as this space really is a gift, at the end of the day, it is NOT church. You/WE are the church. As good as this space is/and it is, God intends for it to simply be a vehicle for helping us AS the church reach the goals God has for us. **Cuz we all have goals right?** When Abby and I first God married, I had the goal, you might not know this of becoming a Marine/was convinced that what I was supposed to do... UNTIL a friend of mine, who was a former Army Ranger told me that to be a Marine, I needed be, what he called, a "trigger-puller," meaning I'd better be ok with shooting people. So needless to say I quickly changed goals and sought to become a Police Officer/actually got admitted to the Police Academy UNTIL I again realized that whole gun thing... I got real bad aim. **But we all have goals right?** Often when I talk with folks about their goals they tell me things like, "I wanna be a great doctor" or "successful businessman or woman." Some say, "I wanna OWN my own business so that I don't have to work for anyone," or "I wanna teach kids" (though I'd venture to bet that after COVID, that one's not quite as popular as it once was)... Others'll say, "I wanna get married" or "I just wanna do what I'm passionate about." We all have goals! And it's your goals, you understand, that in many respects, shape both your decisions AND the direction of your life. As Yogi Berra once said with respect to goals, "If you don't know where you're going, you'll end up someplace else."¹

So this morning, as we continue our *True Myth* series through the Bible in 2021, I want us to talk about goals. Feels appropriate for our first time in a new space like this right? But specifically, I want us to look at a passage in which the Apostle Paul, who of course was a man who had his goals radically re-shaped for the better when he encountered Jesus, explains how the Gospel OF Jesus shaped those goals in a really clear and powerful way. So let's follow along as we hear the reading of God's word from **Romans 15:14-24**. Let's follow along together... **Brooklyn reads**...

TEXT:

Thank you **Brooklyn**... Could we thank BOTH God AND **Brooklyn** for the reading of His word!... So the Book of **Romans**/or I should say, "*Letter to the Roman Church*," is a great place from which to consider our goals BECAUSE the first 11 chapters of it are all about what God has done in providing us salvation through Christ; such that the LAST 5 chapters then, tell you all about how you should be and live in RESPONSE. In other words, **Romans** really shows the Christian life to be one in which we plan, strive, and work toward our goals FROM a state of acceptance rather than FOR it... from acceptance rather than for it, which if you think about it is

¹ <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/goals>

incredibly different than every other message we often get/certainly every other religious message right? Cuz every other message teaches us some form, right, of: if you plan, strive, work, obey THEN you'll be accepted/God will accept you. **But the Christian life/the Gospel though is different. It says NOT "obey and therefore I'm accepted" but "I'm accepted THEREFORE I obey."**

Which is WHY, you see, the Apostle Paul use all these personal terms. For example in **v.15** he speaks of *"the grace given TO ME by God for ministry."* **V.16**, *"MY offering."* **V.17**, *"MY work for God."* And **v.20** *"MY aim."*² Highly personal language BECAUSE Paul understood that when you don't just know ABOUT Jesus, but actually get to KNOW Jesus; ya know, see that He wasn't just a historical/religious figure in a series of figures, but rather **THE God-man, who literally lived the perfect life you and I should've lived, but couldn't; died the death we deserved, but didn't; and then rose from the dead to prove that it's all true;** when you PERSONALLY take-that-in, it begins to recalibrate everything in response to it; perhaps ESPECIALLY your goals.

Which is why, if you keep going, you see in **vv.20-21**, Paul say that HIS personal goal/his *"ambition,"* BECAME *"preaching Christ in places where Christ had not been heard of."* In other words, in RESPONSE to all that Jesus had given Paul, Paul felt very much indebted to give Jesus to others! Cuz when he says *"preach Christ,"* you understand, he doesn't mean stand on some street corner yelling about Jesus like ya might see in Downtown Crossing. He means sharing the truths and promises of Christ in a way that those who were listening could become, as **v.14** says, *"full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another"* ... which is to say, BOTH themselves able to trust and rest in Christ BUT ALSO able to help others do the same! In other words, disciples making disciples!... Which when you think about it, is really the goal of EVERY Christ-follower isn't it? I mean to be sure, Paul's "angle" on it WAS unique to Him. He was an Apostle/one who as **vv.15-16** say, had been *"given grace by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God."* And that was by virtue of him having witnessed the resurrected Jesus. So the "office," you could say, of being an Apostle, that was unique to him. BUT the calling? - To as he says, be *"in priestly service of the gospel of God?"* That's for ALL of us. Since **1 Peter 2:9**, among other places, says, *"But YOU - that's all of us - are a chosen race, a royal PRIESTHOOD, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that YOU may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."* ... You're a priest!... Ya know what a priest is? The word literally translates in Latin, pontifex or bridge: A priest is a bridge-person; a person who connects two things, in this case God to people and people to God. That's what we are light of Jesus having become our perfect high-priest. And MORE than that, Israel you know was the chosen people of God in the OT right? Not choice/not better than others, but chosen. God graciously CHOSE to set His love on them. And IN Israel there was a specially chosen tribe OF priests/the tribe of Levi. So when Peter says there that in Jesus you and I are a *"royal priesthood"* what he's saying is that **YOU - if you've surrendered your life to Christ/turned from living for yourself to**

² Obedience statement and Insight about personal language from "Living with Purpose" // Romans 15:14-33 // Romans #30x - J.D. Greear

living for Jesus - YOU are the chosen of the chosen...AND chosen to help others become part of God's chosen family as well!³...Paul KNEW that/was living in RESPONSE to that, and as such enjoyed such a clear set of goals and sense of purpose that as **v.22** shows, he felt even the freedom to turn down, listen to this, "good ideas" like hanging with his church family, in favor of "God's idea" of sharing Christ with those not yet IN a church family.⁴ As he says, "*This (meaning preaching Christ to those who'd never heard) is the REASON why I've so often been hindered from coming to you.*" As one person says, "*(Paul) had the confidence to say 'no' to opportunities, because he was sure of God's 'yes' in his calling.*"⁵ ***I mean how great would it be to have that kind of clarity about YOUR goals/your purpose/your direction in life?***

APPLICATION:

Well, not ironically, I think we can! Because, what this passage/in it's totality shows us, is that Paul found that clarity, because He did 2 things very intentionally - things that if you/WE as a church do, will likewise do, allow US to live with a really clear set of goals and sense of purpose. 2 things: Write these down: **First, You Have To Put Yourself UNDER GOD'S Purposes:** Ya notice in **vv.20-21** when Paul says, "*I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named...*" he then includes a quote/says, "*as it is written, 'Those who've never been told of him will see, and those who've never heard will understand.'*" And he's quoting ***Isaiah 52:15*** there, which if you were to read, you'd see was a prophecy about Jesus dying on the Cross, and ***in order to bring forgiveness, freedom and salvation/the Gospel to the world/to YOU!*** And so what Paul's saying is: BECAUSE God's purpose/GOD'S goal has always been to bring the Gospel to the world, PAUL was willing to make the same...HIS goal/willing to put Himself/His purposes UNDER Gods...And aren't you glad he did, because you understand, the people who didn't have the Gospel in Paul's time...they were Europeans - as **v.24** says, "*Spaniards,*" Romans, and the like. In other words...our descendants. Had Paul not understood God's purposes and put himself UNDER those purposes, OUR descendants might've never received salvation, which means WE might've never received salvation.

See, when you put yourself UNDER God's purposes/subordinate your goals to His, ironically, what happens is, you don't lose your goals; you actually begin to really find em. ***Let me explain:*** Recent studies show that 91% of Americans agree that "*the best way to find yourself is by looking within yourself.*" 91%...say that if you wanna discover who you are/what your purpose is, the place to look is inside your heart. Go with your gut, which to be sure can feel exhilarating, cuz we feel like we're free to define our destiny/our purpose. But here's the thing: That whole project?...It depends entirely on you. So what happens when you try to determine your destiny but everything falls apart? Or when you chase your dreams but never reach em? Set out some goal but fall short of it?... You see, if you're the sole authority in your life/you're not UNDER anyone and anything greater than you, then WHEN you fall/and we all do, there'll be no one to pick you up! And that's because, try as we might, it's a myth to think that we can discover and

³ Insight about priests from "Grow Up" / 1 Peter 2:1-10 - Together We Endure: The Letter of 1 Peter, #3 - J.D. Greear

⁴ Insight about decision-making matrix from "Living with Purpose" // Romans 15:14-33 // Romans #30x - J.D. Greear

⁵ "My Role in the Mission" // Romans 15:14-23 // The Whole Story #39 (Multiply 2) - J.D. Greear

define ourselves without reference to the God who created us.⁶ That's like asking a painting to define itself apart from the painter...BUT when you put yourself/your goals/your purposes under God's, which is to say you, affirm that because HE created you, He knows what's best FOR you and what you're best made FOR, then you begin to really discover yourself. ***You have to put yourself under God's goals and purposes if you want to begin to discover yours.***

But ***Second and Finally, You Have To Redirect Your Boasts:*** What do I mean by "boasts?" I mean in the healthy sense of the word: simply the celebration of what you most value. And if you don't know what that is, just check your most recent 3 or 4 social media posts...But if you look in ***vv.17-18***, you see Paul explain that HIS boast/the only thing about which he was willing to truly celebrate, because it's what he most valued, was what Jesus was doing through Him to save and sanctify others. As he says, *"I will not...speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience."* ***See that?*** Paul is celebrating/boasting-in the salvation of others BECAUSE that's what he'd come to value more than anything! And see, here's the key with not just Paul, but understanding the Gospel as a whole: With the "discovery," shall we say, ***OF the gospel - of the fact that with Jesus' arrival, death, resurrection and ascension, God the Father has graciously declared His dealings with your sin to be finished, and apart from any of your religious or moral efforts, so that you're now totally free to be nothing in yourself, but one learning to trust and rest in no one but Jesus*** - with the discovery of THAT Gospel, you begin to realize, comes the responsibility to be a part of SPREADING that Gospel. Paul not only knew that/rejoiced in that. You say, *"why? I mean it's great to help other people but isn't it a little extreme to have someone else's prosperity/their salvation by the one thing you boast in? After all, I mean what had ANY of the people to whom Paul had ministered done for him?"* And the answer is: Nothing! They hadn't done anything! A lot of em had actually made his life really difficult, and as such we NO more deserving of salvation...than Paul was...or than you and I are. ***But that's what salvation BY GRACE, through faith in Christ means. It means we DO and deserve nothing. Jesus has DONE everything. And we simply receive and reap the benefits. GRACE: G.R.A.C.E: God's Riches At Christ's Expense!***...Paul understood that/understood that with his reception OF that grace, he was in a sense, under obligation to let the defining purpose and goal of his life be the bringing of THAT grace to those who didn't yet know about it...I mean, think about it this way: ***Where would you be today without Jesus?***...You and me both would be in the same place millions of people/just here in our city, are without you, which is to say ***separated from and in need of God's forgiveness***. This is why Pastor David Platt rightly says, *"Every saved person this side of heaven owes the Gospel to every unsaved person this side of hell."*⁷

Can I be a bit candid with you for a moment? There have been a number of times over the last almost 10 years of living in Boston and 9 years leading Hub Church now that I have thought to myself, *"what the heck am I doing? Maybe I'm not the right guy for this. Maybe God, I missed a text from you and you have different plans for me, or just maybe...things would be easier, nicer,*

⁶ Explanation of putting yourself under God aided by language and insights from: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/finding-yourself/>

⁷ Insights and language regarding our debt as well as Platt quote adapted from "My Role in the Mission" // Romans 15:14-23 // The Whole Story #39 (Multiply 2) - J.D. Greear

more comfortable if I did something different/WE did something different.” But can I tell you; to the best of my knowledge, in almost 100% of those instances, God has in some way brought to mind...a neighbor or a friend, who doesn’t yet know Jesus, and subsequently, pushed me to ask myself: *“Would I be willing to trade the possibility of that friend/that neighbor having the chance to hear about and be saved by Jesus...for a little less stress, warmer weather, more convenient schools for my kids, being closer to family?”* If so, then I clearly don’t understand the Gospel and what it means to live in response to it...And friend, the same is true for you. Some of you/most of you are incredibly sensitive to the needs of others and just SO smart and skilled at meeting needs. Like it’s ridiculous/one of the reasons why I just love pastoring you. You genuinely wanna make a difference and be proud of the difference you’re making...***But can I tell you?:*** Until you see that YOUR greatest need/the greatest need in this neighborhood/this city/this world is for people to hear about who Jesus is and how ***He’s graciously died and risen to free us from the penalty of our sin and brokenness, be freeing us from the power and pollution of it and one day free us from the very presence of it altogether;*** no need you actually meet/no goal you ever accomplish, will go deep enough. It’ll only ever be like giving a bandaid to a cancer patient - never actually relieving the deeper suffering of people’s eternal separation from God!...**You Have To Redirect Your Boasts.**

CONCLUSION:

So let me close with this: As we kick off meeting in this wonderful space each week, my prayer for us is really pretty simple: I pray that each week we have opportunity to gather and pause like this together, our goal would NOT be to get all our comforts and preferences met, as if the church is supposed to be in the business of dispensing religious goods and services or something. But rather that we’d anticipate GETTING to meet with God; open the Scriptures together; hear FROM God; learn a little more about how to trust and rest in what God has done through Christ for us...SO THAT, we can then be sent out together, into our neighborhood, networks, workplaces, and the like, overjoyed/even boasting in the fact that God is pleased to use US to bring those we know and love back into His pleasure! After all, THIS (POINT AROUND) is not church. WE (POINT TO CROWD) are the church...***Let’s Pray...***