

Today is the fourth Sunday of the New Year. Has it gone that fast? This means we are on our fourth sermon of our series, "Control: Cans and Cants." Today's sermon is "Setting our Goals Aligned with God's Will."

Here is a critical question for each of us: Are we aligning our goals with God's will, or are we independently chasing dreams but then trying to fit God into them afterward?

This question cuts to the core of our spiritual lives. Many of us, including myself, have experienced times when we pursued our own desires, occasionally remembering to include God in our plans. However, this approach often leads to a difficult and disappointing path. The true challenge we face is not merely in setting goals but in ensuring these goals align with God's divine plan for us. When we move forward in life, trying to achieve our ambitions without first seeking God's guidance, we find ourselves on a journey that frequently leaves us feeling empty and unfulfilled because we treat God as an afterthought rather than the cornerstone of our decision-making.

Can you relate to this? Do you feel stressed, burnt out, or stuck in life? If so, this might be a signal that your life is out of alignment with God's purpose.

To speak to this, our guiding Scripture is Ephesians 2:10, where the Apostle Paul reminds us, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

This verse underscores that God has a unique purpose for each of us, a plan crafted before our very existence. But this verse is not just a statement but a revelation of our identity, purpose, and destiny in Christ. The Apostle Paul presents us with a profound truth that can transform our understanding of our lives and goals.

Firstly, we are reminded that we are "God's handiwork." This phrase is deeply significant. It tells us that we are not accidental beings wandering aimlessly through life. We are intentionally and wonderfully made by the Creator and crafted with purpose and precision. When we understand this, our perspective towards ourselves and our goals shifts. We start to see ourselves not as the world sees us but as God sees us—God's cherished creations.

Secondly, the verse reveals that we are "created in Christ Jesus." This is a powerful reminder of our identity in Christ. Our true purpose and calling are discovered not in the pursuits of worldly ambitions but in our relationship with Jesus. In Philippians 3:14, the apostle said about this, "I press on toward the goal, toward the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus." Not only are we created in Christ Jesus, but he is also the pathway to find and assume our purpose in life. In him, we find the meaning of our existence and the blueprint for our lives.

Thirdly, the verse states that we are created to "do good works." These are not just random acts of kindness or general good deeds; these are specific tasks and purposes that God has prepared for us. This implies that each of us has a unique role to play in God's grand design. Our life's work is not a matter of our own making but a divine assignment tailored by God self. Are you fulfilling your ministry in life? As Christians in the Methodist church, we believe we are all called to participate in the ministry of the church. All of us have direct access to God and can

minister in God's name. Doing good works is about fulfilling our calling to serve God and others. What is God calling you to do? What are the good works waiting for you to accomplish them?

Then, and most importantly, these good works are "prepared in advance for us to do." This tells us that our journey is not random. God has a plan, a path that he has laid out for us even before we took our first breath. Our challenge and our joy lie in discovering this path, choosing these works, and embracing them wholeheartedly. It is a sort of "Aha!" moment when suddenly our faith and passion merge, giving us understanding about who and what we are meant to be and do. This is not just about finding what we are good at but discovering what we are divinely called to do.

Do you know what you are meant to be? Do you know what you are meant to do? If you don't know, have you asked God? That seems to be the logical first step in aligning our life's goals with God's will. These are some of the most important questions and things you will ever do with your life. If you were a car, it is like realizing you can drive; if you were ball, that you can bounce; if you were piano, that you can make music. What would it happen if you realized you are "God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works"? What would you do differently with your life? How would you treat people? How would you use your time at home, work, school, or church?

This is not always a clear and straightforward process and can be scary. I know how many people are afraid of fully surrendering their lives to God because they believe God will take away their stuff. Of course, God will take away the stuff that is getting in your way, but in its place, God will give you the best life you could ever imagine.

It was Jesus, the one who said about God's plans for us, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." The prophet Jeremiah echoed these words when he said in Jeremiah 29:11-14,

"For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me,"

Jeremiah's words lay out a critical process for us. He emphasizes that God has plans for our welfare, not for harm, and these plans are to give us a future filled with hope. However, aligning with God's plans requires active spiritual engagement. It is not just about recognizing that God has a plan but also about actively seeking God's guidance and presence in our lives. It encourages us to call upon God, pray, and seek him wholeheartedly. The promise is that when we call God, praying, searching, and seeking him with all our hearts, he will hear us, and we will find him. We need to call, pray, and search with our hearts.

Furthermore, aligning our goals with God's will is not just about personal fulfillment but is also tied to our community's broader purpose and well-being. We will never find our calling if we are unwilling to be a part of what God is doing in other people's lives. Our purpose is tied to

the purpose of those around us, too. The “good works” that Jesus Christ gave us to do are not for selfish ambition but for the fulfillment of humanity. This means that the best thing you can do for the people you love and those around you is to align your goals, dreams, plans, and whole life with God's goodwill for you. When you realize who you are in Christ Jesus, everyone around you is blessed by you, too.

So, how do we align our goals with God's will? Start by asking: “What's your will for me?” When we ask this question, we are seeking God's guidance and have faith in his promises. This process is not always easy, but in the end, God's journey for us is far more glorious than anything we could plan for ourselves. But also remember that aligning our goals with God's will requires us to take paths we might not have chosen for ourselves, which may also involve patience, courage, and trust.

Here are some Scriptures and questions that can help us in our discernment process in this journey of alignment:

Proverbs 16:3, “Commit your work to the Lord and your plans will be established.”

Question: “Lord, how can I commit my current work and future plans to you, and what steps can I take to ensure that my endeavors align with your will?”

1 John 5:14, “If we ask anything according to his will he hears us.”

Question: “Heavenly Father, am I asking for things in my prayers that align with your will? How can I better understand what to ask for in alignment with Your divine plans for me?”

Psalm 143:10, “Teach me to do your will, for you are my God! Let your good Spirit lead me on level ground.”

Question: “God, in what areas of my life do I need more of your guidance to follow your will, and how can your Spirit lead me to a more balanced and righteous path?”

Psalm 119:133, “Keep steady my steps according to your promise, and let no iniquity get dominion over me.”

Question: “Lord, how can I stay steadfast in your promises and avoid the pitfalls of sin, especially in areas where I am most vulnerable?”

Micah 6:8, “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

Question: “In what ways can I actively practice justice, kindness, and humility in my daily life, and how do these virtues align with walking closely with you, Lord?”

I encourage you to use these Scriptures and questions as a starting point for seeking clarity and direction in aligning your life with God's will. In no time, you will have your own questions, many of them, I am sure.

I will finish with this. Each of us is a divine creation made in Christ for a purpose that is uniquely ours. Our task now is to align our personal goals with these good works that God has prepared for us. This alignment is not always easy. It requires faith, trust, and, often, a reorientation of our priorities. But the promise of living a life that is in sync with God's will is a life of fulfillment, peace, and profound joy.

So, let us ask ourselves: Are our goals a reflection of God's handiwork in us? Are we walking the path He has laid out for us? Are we living out the good works He has prepared for us? As we ponder these questions, let us open our hearts to the possibility of realigning our lives with God's will. Let us seek God's guidance in every goal we set and every dream we pursue. And let us seek guidance and wisdom from the Holy Spirit, who is always ready to lead us into the fullness of God's plan for our lives.