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Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke
Bible passage or verse: 1 Timothy 4:7-10, Ephesians 1:1-5
Title of sermon: **Resolute - Set Your Focus**
Series: Set Your Course - #1

1 Timothy 4:7-10:

⁷ Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. ⁸ For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. ⁹ This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. ¹⁰ That is why we labor and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe.

Ephesians 1:1-5:

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: ² Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—

Let's build a dream. I was just sharing a little bit about that, and what I want to do over the next three weeks is flush that out. What does it look like to build a dream? I've titled it differently, and the title of this series, it's three weeks -- it's called "Set Your Course." It really is the flushing out of how do you build a dream? How does 2021 become different, better, more effective than 2020?

I was frustrated, you know, when they're canceling everything, and one of the things I was just frustrated that they canceled -- I understand it - fully support it -- was the Olympics. I love the Olympics. For a couple of reasons. Number one, certainly the activities, and I love watching them. But actually, I'm a storyteller. I love stories way more than even the events. I love the stories of people who go and work out at five in the morning, and then do a whole eight-hour job, and then work out again before they go home. I love the stories of just perseverance. I love the stories of their discipline. It inspires me. Never inspires me to run -- I hate running -- but I'm just -- I'm moved by them. And every story, or every person, usually has kind of two aspects. The incredible discipline. Oh, I know some of them, you know, get millions and millions of dollars, and others of them have their day jobs. They are probably the ones who inspire me the most because their discipline is just remarkable. But the other thing that always is in their story is what I called "fortitude" -- it's the ability to overcome obstacles, barriers, challenges, torn Achilles -- whatever the case may be. And every time they do a story, they have those. They inspire me. I love them. And what they teach you in life is that if you're going to accomplish anything significantly -- anything -- it's going to take discipline and fortitude. It does. You can't accomplish -- no one ever accomplishes something of greatness accidentally. No one. And so, it takes that kind of intentionality. And so, this series, we want to look at that in terms of building this dream that we talked about a couple weeks ago -- what do we need to do? And there's three words that I want to give you that we're gonna look at.

Number one is you must make a resolution of focus. That's time.

And secondly, you must restore or renew your energy on an ongoing basis because 2021 -- even if it's just a normal year -- is gonna have challenges to it. Well, 2021, I think, is probably gonna be a

second punch to 2020! It's not exactly started off easy -- right? I mean, if you own a restaurant, you're slugging it out hoping that you can survive. And the story goes on. I mean, there's probably only, you know, a half a dozen companies that hope 2021 looks exactly like 2020. Probably -- what -- Amazon, Nike, Walmart, you get the story. But everybody else is like, "Oh, God" -- and you have to have this resolution of focus, but also this renewal and restoration of energy. How do we create endurance?

And last, is regimen. Who do you do this with? People that achieve greatness seldom, if ever, do it alone. One of the things that is often in the story of a great Olympics person is the individual that doesn't compete in the Olympics but got up with them every day and challenged them and pushed them. I'm not talking about the coach -- I'm talking about a person who paced. I'm talking about a person who pressed. It's true. People seldom, if ever, achieve greatness alone. They do it with a regimen. And those are the things that we want to look at.

Tonight, we want to look at a resolve. And a resolve is the willingness to make an intentional decision. Why? Because intentionality is key to success for anybody. I know a lot of you hate goals because you say, "Ah, I never achieve them." Well -- it's because you never intentionally set out to achieve them. To be quite honest with you, I want to challenge you tonight. I'm going to challenge you straight up front to have some lofty and God-honoring and stretching goals. And yes, you're going to have to develop a level of significant intentionality. Where's it come from? Well, let's just look at a couple of passages of Scripture. You see intentionality all over them. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. That's intentionality. It's intentionality to compete in the games. To set the course. I want to be here in 2024, or whatever the case may be. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. You see, Paul is assuming this. Number one, you're going to compete -- not against people, but you're going to enter into the race of the kingdom of God, of pursuing God; it's going to take strict training, discipline, and -- my word -- it's gonna take fortitude. You're gonna have to intentionally set yourself up for this. Because you're not going to grow this year unless you intentionally set yourself up to grow. You're not gonna advance in the kingdom of God, you're not going to advance in your use of your spiritual gifts, you're not going to become somebody that is at a different level than you were in 2020, unless -- what? You set out to intentionally do it. He says in another passage that I want to focus more on tonight -- "Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales. Rather, train yourselves to be godly." Physical training? It's of some value -- of course it is. It's a lot of value. But godliness has a value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. "This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance." That's Paul's way of saying, "Let me tell you a trustworthy saying that deserves your attention and your application." "That is why we labor and strive, because we've put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe."

You see, intentionality's gonna be key to you building a new dream this year. Intentionality's gonna be critical in us as a church setting new and God-honoring goals. And, so therefore, there's a couple things that I think are essential. Number one -- achieving my -- or your -- God-designed expectations requires discipline. It's going to. I'm not gonna share you all my goals, that'd be way too long and just worthless. But I each year kind of set a goal in the area of learning and growth, and so this year, inspired, actually, by a couple of people in our church, I've ramped up my book learning. I love to read. I love to grow. One of my favorite quotes, I saw in Singapore years ago -- "Those who read lead." It's just true. If you're not a reader, get after it. I've got plenty of suggestions. So, this year I decided I'm going to do 52 books. I am going to memorize 52 new passages of Scripture, and I am going to read through the Bible completely. Now, for me to achieve those, I cannot do certain things. I cannot have a lot of TV time. I can't. You just -- you can't accomplish that much reading, you can't accomplish Scripture memory -- I mean, my Scripture memory when I was 12 and 15 -- man, I could memorize anything. Nowadays -- good night! I can name a dog and forget the dog's name tomorrow. I mean, it's just hard to get that stuff in here. And so, you might think -- 52 verses, that's nothing. Oh! For me? That's gonna be a great

achievement. But I'm gonna make it. But there's things I can't do. Can't have a lot of TV time, can't watch too much football. Like none. And so, I've had to discipline myself, and I've had to set the course, and I have certain days if I don't get into certain areas or levels, if you will, of meeting my goals, I have make-up periods put in there. I had to be intentional about it. Why? Because achieving my God-designed expectations is going to require discipline. And achieving our -- your -- God-designed expectations is gonna require focus. You know why? Because I'm gonna have a thousand distractions that will come my way every week. There are going to be. And some of them are so innocent! "Hey, Pastor, have you seen this new show, it's on -- you know, you gotta watch it!" Ahhhh! Distraction. "Hey, have you seen this new movie?" I know they don't do movies anymore -- remember when they used to create movies and we used to go to the movie theater? We're gonna be doin' that forever. Well, the fact is -- I need focus, because there's gonna be a lot of things that come along -- a lot of distractions. And even a lot of opportunities.

You know one of the things I found last year the hardest for me to do, is to stay focused, because every week it seemed like the governor was giving us new restrictions or new issues to face. And I found myself kind of like I couldn't get pressed into something. And so, some of the disciplines that I used to never struggle with -- this year, I did. I did. I wasn't resting a whole lot. So God took care of that -- I had 14 days where I didn't budge from the couch. So -- I have to focus on those things. Why do I have to focus on them? Because I'm gonna have distractions, I'm gonna have barriers, we're gonna face disappointments. I think a lot of people get completely derailed by disappointments. They don't know how to process them. They don't know how to get beyond them. Disappointments can almost sometimes for people be like quicksand -- you get in it, and you just don't feel you can lift your leg, you can't move forward. It just grabs you. And so, I'm going to be intentional. And if I'm gonna achieve this, then I have to have a focus. And Paul gives me a focus that I want to encourage us to consider together. To focus my life, your life, you will need to focus on the living God. That's what Paul says in this text. He says, "This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance." That means, full practice. Full embrace by you and me. "And for this, I labor and I strive." What's the saying? "I have put my hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe."

See, Paul starts off, and he tells us that one of the things that you want to do is to focus on the greatness of God. Do you realize he tells you three great things about God. Number one, He's living. So He's significant. We're gonna press into that more in a minute. "He's the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe." You say, "Pastor, what does that mean?" Well -- there are probably a number of interpretations, or options of this one -- in what sense is God the Savior of all people? Well, He is potentially the Savior of the world, is He not? Jesus Christ died for the world. Therefore, the capacity of all people being saved is met in Jesus Christ. That means that every person in the world, every sin, can be taken care of by the greatness of the blood of Jesus Christ. Another option -- I prefer the first one, probably more than the second -- is that there is the sense of which, in Acts, where it says that He rains, you know, He brings rain to the just and to the unjust. There's a sense of which God oversees in His goodness and His love and His care the whole world. He uniquely -- what? Displays His greatness in salvation of some. I think the capacity of God is that He is the Savior of the world. All seven billion people today could trust Christ. All people of all time have the capacity to be saved by Christ. And the text says, uniquely, "...especially of those who believe." What's great about that? God took a sinner like you -- wretched, an enemy of God -- and made you a friend of God. God took a person who was estranged. God took a person who had no hunger and thirst for righteousness. God took a person who was bent on destruction, headed for Hell, going to experience the full wrath of God, and God by His unbelievable grace loved you and saved you.

Part of focus, Paul says, is to get your eyes onto the greatness of God. Daniel says it this way, and I love this: "Oh, Lord, you are a great and an awesome God. You always fulfill your promises of unflinching love to those who love you and keep your commands." Oh yeah. When did he pray that? He prayed that when he was in a window. He prayed that when he was in the lion's den. He

prayed that when he was friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were in the furnace. He prayed that when he had a death sentence. "Oh, Lord, you are a great and awesome God." The psalmist says it this way. "Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, 'The Lord has done great things for them. The Lord has done great things for us.'" So, what are they? What are they for you? You know what that was for me tonight? That was my family. I put a blue one in there. I could've put three in. Why? For 15 days, I was infecting the air of my home with COVID virus. I don't know if it was 15 days -- probably more like about 10. God masterfully removed my mom, who lives next to us, because she had two cataract surgeries and so she was down with my sister. Oh God, thank you for the perfection of your timing. My wife -- she'd been -- we normally sleep together, just in case you were wondering. And about five days into this thing, I'm -- you know -- find out I'm symptomatic and everything else, and then I found out -- yup, sure enough, you have it. And I said, "Well, honey, do you want me to sleep in the other bedroom?" She goes, "Why? I mean, we've been together." "Oh, yeah, let's just live free, right?" We're products of the sixties. And so -- we just hung it out. But straight up -- Kerri's way healthier than I am, probably. At the end of the day, she's gonna bear this thing out.

The one I was scared of is my daughter. You know. She has a patch in the middle of her heart that separates her chambers put there by a doctor. She has a left ventricle that leaks. And I could go on and on. And I thought to myself, "God, if she's gonna live, it's honestly just simply because you're going to make a declaration -- 'Annie, your days aren't done.'" Now, I don't know how this virus works. I have no idea. But some on our staff -- did I tell you that they really tick me off that they had no symptoms? Yeah. They do. Some on our staff -- God bless 'em -- they had no symptoms! I'm happy for them. One dear family in our church -- dad got it, mom got it, daughter got it, son's probably got it -- they got it all. It just tends to work that way. I don't know why, other than the greatness of God, my daughter lived with me in the home the entire time and it never touched her. You want to have a great year? Start grabbing things in pebbles, whatever you do, and just keep filling them in there. And every time you do, you are saying to the world, "Our God is the greatest God in the world!" The only one who can bring life out of death, the one who can put an angel of purification around my daughter's nostrils. That's my theological perspective.

Our church -- it's been a rough year. It has. It's been a rough year for any church. It's a horrible year for church leaders. And yet -- man, our church slugged it through. I went into a store this past week, and this guy comes up to me -- he knows I'm a pastor, and, you know, and so he comes up and he goes, "Pastor, how ya doing?" And I said, "Well, I'm doing well." And he said, "Are you recovering from your COVID?" And it's like -- "How'd you know I had COVID?" He said, "I know more about your church than you do." [Chuckles] "Oh!" And he goes, "I just want to tell you how much I appreciate the way your church is loving this city." Guy doesn't go to this church. And I said, "Do you mind telling me a little bit more about that?" And he did. He told me of the ways that people in his shop and in his life, and he said, "Mark, week after week after week it's like somebody sent somebody from your church to encourage me." Friends -- if you want to focus your life, focus your attention on the living God. And when you do, you will discover all over the city and all over your life the greatness of what God is doing. And then you will discover that because God is living, He wants you to do what you do with other living people. See, I talk to living people. I don't talk to dead people. I don't talk to gods that are dead and in the ground. You don't talk to Mohammed. You don't talk to the Baghwan Shree. You don't talk to people who are dead. You talk to living people -- did you ever notice that? And Paul says, "I want you to talk to the living God. I want you to strive, and I want you to labor, and I want you to talk to Him. And what I want you to do is, I want you to talk to God about everything. The first thing I want you to do every morning is, I want you to talk to God." CS Lewis said it this way -- "The moment that you wake up each morning, all the wishes and the hopes and the worries for the day will rush at you like wild animals, and the first job each morning consists of shutting all of that back and then listening to the only voice that you need -- God."

Have you ever looked at the rhythm and the pace of Jesus's life? Always busy -- absolutely busy. But as best that we understand, do you know what He did every morning? We don't have it regularly recorded, but when it is -- when a day is recorded -- the disciples were out looking for Him. "Where were you?" "Oh, I was praying." "What were you praying about?" "I was talking to my Father. I was asking him for instructions for the day. I was asking him to remind me why I'm here. I asked him to remind me of what the future was, and I asked him to tell me what I should even say today." As best we understand it, Jesus, every morning, the first thing He did was talk to His Father. Talk to God first. Talk to God about every aspect of your life.

A dear friend of our church -- she's now in Heaven, Chris Luther, if you remember her -- she taught me to pray about little things. She was so delightful! She frequently told me about the number of times that she prayed and asked God to help her find her keys. She would inevitably lose her keys. And she goes, "You know, when you lose your keys as much as I do, you have to trust God." She goes, "I'd go somewhere and lose my keys, and I couldn't get home." And so, she would pray for her keys. One of the things that delighted me is, when Kerri and I were going down, just the last years of their life, when they moved back with Paul, their son, in San Diego. We would periodically go down and see them. And she knows that I love Thai food, and she loves Thai food, and her favorite restaurant down there was a Thai restaurant, and so, we would go there every time. And she would pray on the way, "Dear Lord, would you please give us the waitress that I love." "What kind of prayer was that? Is it you don't like the other waiters or waitresses?" "No, no, they're okay. I just love one of them. And I want to make sure that she's in Heaven with me." Do you realize every time we went down there -- dead serious -- every time we went down there, we got her. Now, maybe it's because Chris tipped so well. This lady said, "I got her!" Or maybe it's because she prayed about everything. She prayed about her keys, she prayed about her waitress, she prayed and she asked God. Why? Because she loved that woman.

What is it that you care about? That's what the Father wants to hear from you. If you're gonna focus your life, you're gonna need to focus it on the living God. And maybe one of the best ways to do that is to pray about every aspect of your life and to talk to God about your future.

I was doing a little long-range planning. I just had a birthday and I hit 59. That's pretty cool. I know some of you are -- you know, 70, 80, 90, and you're like way ahead of me. And others of you are barely out of diapers, praise God. But I'm 59! And it really kind of struck me -- next year, I'm gonna be 60. I know that's some fairly good insight -- 60 comes after 59. But I was doing one of those things, that -- typing in to my dashboard, talking about retirement -- and did you know what they sent back? It was really kind of them. "You might want to consider saving more." [Laughs] In other words, I retire at 80. Got it down. As I was looking at those future thoughts, I realized what this year taught me is -- it's really hard to plan when everything changes all the time. And then a thought struck me. "You know, Lord, I was almost surprised every day of this last year with something that changed." And here was my thought. "You did not have one day where you were surprised. Not one day." There was not one day where something happened that God said -- "Hmm, didn't see that one coming!" And therefore, as I pray, about our future, my future -- I'm thinking, "God, I'm praying to the One Who knows perfectly what will happen tomorrow. Perfectly where I'll be in a year. Perfectly where we will be at as a church in 10 years." And therefore, a man can plan his steps, but the Lord determines -- a man can plan the course of his life, but the Lord determines his steps. Pray about your future. But what you're really praying is, "God, you need to lead me. Oh, I can put things in place, but only you know what the future holds." Talk to God about our detours. We're gonna have some detours this year. We're gonna have some barriers. We're gonna have some things that challenge us. All from as simple as the boilers that go down and heat that doesn't come on in the basement, and -- you know, phones that melt down, and internet that doesn't work quite that well, and -- oh, we're gonna have those. Small things. And we might even have some big things, like -- a mass on our brain. A kidney that quits. And it's then Paul says, "To focus your life, you will need to focus on the living God." Discover and celebrate His greatness, and talk to God about everything this year. And -- then trust God and get to work.

Paul says it this way -- "This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance, and for this we labor and strive." For this I get to work. For this I am gonna make my highest priority -- trust God and get to work. That's why we labor and strive. Why? Because we have put our hope in the living God. You see, I think Paul was actually one of the greatest visionary leaders of his time. I know some people think that mission and vision is kind of the business world. It wasn't at all. Do you remember Paul's mission statement? "To present everyone perfect in Christ. Toward that end, I labor and toil." Colossians 1:28. Do you know what his vision was? To go where the gospel has never preached. To go to cities of major intersections so that the gospel can spread. To go to a place where the gospel has been preached, to go to cities that are of major influence and commerce, to go into the house of religion -- that's usually the synagogue -- and preach until he gets kicked out, and then go to places of prayer, preach the gospel, lead people to Christ, disciple them, identify leaders, form a church, and split. And I will do that, God, as many times as you will allow me. Focus? The guy was lasered. When he says he labors and strives, he was lasered. And so, what about you and me? Number one, focus on the end of the race. That's the end of this year. Strain every day to reach the end. What are the goals that you have set out? Set your goals this year. Maybe you're not a goal person -- give me two. Something that focuses your attention on God this year. And as you pray, even ask God, "God, give me something that I can strive for." Maybe it won't be as elaborate as Paul -- but please, don't go through 2021 simply accepting whatever this world gives you. Set your goals. Set achievable steps to reach your goals.

I'm now heading into week three. I should have three books down. I do. I know where I'm right on course. I should have three verses in my attaché case of memorization. I do. I'm right on course. Oh, I've got a bunch of goals. Some of them are worthless, but I still write them. Set achievable steps and take it a day at a time and enjoy watching God work this year.

So, to finish, I want us to pray together. I want you to stand with me if you would. And the resolution is this -- "God, I resolutely in my heart that I will intentionally focus my life on the living God, that He might give me a life-transforming hope. God, I will intentionally focus my heart and my life on the living God, that He might give me a life-transforming hope." Here's our prayer, and let's pray this together. Would you read with me? "God, I'm not going to give up. I'm going to keep running the race. I bring to you this decision, this commitment to build this habit into my life. I want to think about you -- how great you are. I want to talk to you the first thing every day. God, I focus on you because no one loves me like you do. No one cares about me as much as you do. No one can give me the kind of life that you can give. So, right now, instead of letting my mind go to what's next today or what's going to happen the rest of the week or this year, I pause for just a moment and focus on the fact that you love me."

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