

*A Step-by-Step Guide for
Developing, Pursuing, and Achieving
Your Spiritual and Career Goals*

THE
*Personal
Development
Plan*

WORKBOOK

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INTRODUCTION

Get Going on Something That Really Matters

Your life is a series of choices. And if you choose to do so, you can do great things with your life. Things that matter. Things that greatly affect the lives of others. Even things that will be influencing people long after you're gone.

You may not even be aware of the potential that you have. But it's there. So if you've not already done so, consider deciding this very day – perhaps this very moment – that you **will** pursue in earnest your potential in life. Make that choice. Verbalize it. Believe it. No one can stop you but yourself.

Then, use this workbook or something like it as a springboard to success. It's designed to help you reach important life goals and to live a life that honors God. More specifically, *The Personal Development Plan Workbook* is a step-by-step guide that will walk you through the process of identifying, pursuing and achieving some things God cares about very much – your spiritual and career development.

The premise of this workbook is not a controversial one, regardless of our worldview: ***you are more likely to***

achieve your potential in life if you have a plan to get there. This plan for moving in the direction God has ordained is what we're calling a "Personal Development Plan" (PDP). You'll be invited to construct your PDP via a step-by-step process that, as you'll see, is logical, time-honored, and battle-tested. It's a cumulative process that entails seeking God's will for your life, setting life goals consistent with His will, developing a strategic plan to pursue those life goals, and habitually tracking your progress toward your goals.

Much of this is straightforward and even fun to do, but we seldom make the time to do it in our frenetic, over-extended lives. Instead, many people take a cavalier approach to pursuing their goals, an approach that often leads to spotty results, dead ends, wasted time and effort, and often, later regrets over what might have been.

Like other types of planning we do in life – planning a wedding, a vacation, financial planning, and so on – creating a PDP will enhance your chances of gaining the results you seek. It can empower you and keep you on track. It can help you to do

even greater things with this micro-second that we call life. In the end, it will likely contribute to a life well-lived and a distinctive, admirable legacy.

To create your PDP, you'll need to invest several hours up front. Indeed, if you experience the power of this planning approach and truly take it to heart, you'll probably invest a lifetime refining, updating, and implementing your plan. The dividends, though, will be enormous and they will be eternal.

Throughout this workbook, I'll ask you to consider two related areas: God's will for your *spiritual life* and God's will for your *career*. Before proceeding to Step One, let's briefly unpack the theology behind these two dimensions.

God's Will for Your Spiritual Life

God wants us to live a life that puts Him at the center—that subordinates our will to His will and that makes a priority of growth toward holiness. More basically, He created us for relationship with Him and, through the power of that relationship, to be salt and light in the world. He did not create us to live a “dualistic” life, relegating our spiritual life to the pews while we live independent of God elsewhere. Rather, faith and life are to be seamless.

Christian scripture speaks generously to this issue, both in the

Old and New Testament, encouraging believers to “commit to the Lord whatever you do” (Proverbs 16:3), to “do everything to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31), and to let your “light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16; cf. also Colossians 3:23-24, 1 John 2:6, Psalms 37:5). In Galatians 5, Paul gets even more specific, identifying *nine distinct measures* of the extent to which God is revealed in our daily lives. Collectively called the “fruit of the Spirit,” the nine measures are: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). These dispositions and behaviors reveal our Christian maturity since they are *a reflection of God working in and through us*. After all, it was Jesus Himself who taught: “No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain on the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me” (John 15:4).

Clearly, then, from a scriptural standpoint, God calls us to remain in Him and to become like Him – to become “fruit of the Spirit” believers. And that maturation process will touch every aspect of your life, including your career success. Part of your PDP, therefore, will be to assess yourself on these nine dimension, to set development goals, to craft a plan for spiritual growth, and to identify metrics to gauge your progress.

God's Will for Your Work Life

Approximately twenty-four months into his job, Mark had become quite proficient at analyzing financial statements and at performing all of the client service duties assigned to him. He was regarded as one of the most diligent employees in the department, he was earning enough money to easily pay his bills, and he was now being groomed for management. Things had fallen in place nicely for Mark. Still, something important seemed to be missing from his work life, namely purpose.

Before him on the desk sat yet another balance sheet from yet another new client. Mark rubbed his eyes and looked at his watch. 3:32. He glanced at the statement. Accounts Receivable: \$25,100, Inventory: \$68,055.. He took a sip of coffee and checked his e-mail. Nothing. He peeked his head out of the cubicle to see if there was someone – anyone – to divert his attention from the incessant parade of debits and credits. No one there. He looked at his watch again. 3:34.

“What an empty existence,” Mark thought. “Crunching numbers day after day. Answering to clients and bosses, jumping through their hoops. Spending 50 or 60 hours a week simply to make money for this thankless company. There’s got to be something more to work than earning a paycheck, moving up the ladder, and retiring.” 3:35.

There is. And the good news is you won't need to change jobs to find it.

Many people perceive work as mundane and their jobs as little more than a means to an economic end. Often, like Mark, they to find personal fulfillment in their work, even when they perform their jobs well. Some eagerly await Fridays and lament Monday morning. Their bosses are too critical and their families take them for granted. So to enhance the quality of their work lives and to gain a sense of accomplishment, they pursue raises and promotions and power, only to later learn that even here, the satisfaction is fleeting. Then, work returns to its routine, meaningless state.

That's a pretty dismal portrayal, I know, and I wish I could say that it's an overstatement. But for millions of people in the workforce, it's a daily reality. In fact, *American Demographics* magazine recently reported, consistent with the results of many similar surveys, that more than one out of every three U.S. workers is not satisfied with his or her work. In a workforce of 100 million, that translates into about *thirty-five million* dissatisfied employees!

But there's something even more troublesome about this statistic. Because we link our personal worth to what we're accomplishing, when we perceive our work as dissatisfying, menial, or purposeless, we feel truly insignificant. Like Mark, we can experience a personal void as a result, sensing that we are

missing something essential in our lives.

And, in fact, we are. This feeling of emptiness is far removed from what God intends for us. ***God created work – all work – to be primarily a spiritual activity, not an economic or social activity.*** As is so often the case, though, our worldview does not comport with God’s intent, and we thereby forfeit the precious gift of purposeful work.

So how, exactly, are we to conceptualize our work? Several books address this question eloquently, as indicated in the Action Step below, but just by way of overview, we can say that the Bible, from its very first chapters, illustrates that work is by God’s design. Genesis opens with God working, creating the heavens and the earth, the day and the night, the water and the land, the sky, the birds and all of the animals. God then creates people in His own image, calling us to imitate Him in everything that He does, including work.

And God communicates not only through His example that work is intrinsic to our existence; He also teaches this directly: “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth *and subdue it*” (Genesis 1:28, emphasis added). To “subdue” the earth is to cultivate it, to transform it, and to adapt its resources. It is a task that clearly implicates work. Perhaps even more plain in this regard is Genesis 2:15, which says: “The Lord

God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work and take care of it.” God has therefore created us to work, taught us by example to work, and specifically directed us to work.

But to what end? What exactly does God want us to accomplish through our work? Did He simply invent work so that we could earn a living and survive? That’s unlikely. If survival were His concern, He could simply provide, as we do for our own children, food and shelter without requiring any labor. God, it seems, must have created work for another purpose.

The New Testament clarifies this purpose. Perhaps Colossians 3:23-24 says it most poignantly:

“Whatever you do, work at it with all of your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”

This straightforward, trenchant passage tells us to conceptualize whatever we do – *everything we do* – as service to the Lord. In other words, when we go to school, it is more than to become educated, it is to serve the Lord. When we raise a family, it is primarily to serve the Lord. When we exercise, it is, first and foremost, to serve God by stewarding this body He lent us. Even when we do something as seemingly frivolous as yard work or

housework, it is for Him. And, most pertinent here, when we pursue His command to “subdue the earth” – when we go to work each day – we are to consider our workplace holy ground and our tasks divine service. He’s our Supreme Boss, our Divine Manager. It is to Him that we ultimately report. You see, God created our work not as a curse and not as just a means to survival, but to allow us to glorify Him through it.

This is the primary purpose of work, as it is with all things. Moreover, as we emulate and obey God by working, we essentially become more like Him thereby gaining greater dignity and fulfillment as a person.

Note also that none of this depends on what type of job you have. Whether you’re digging ditches as a missionary in China or digging ditches for a construction company in Texas, your work can give glory to God. Homemaker, homebuilder, or home run hitter, you can be serving God in every facet of your work.

An often-related story along these lines is that of Johann Sebastian Bach, the great composer, who inscribed “S.D.G.” on all of his compositions, standing for *Soli Deo Gloria*: “to the glory of God alone.” Bach was an independent contractor who perceived himself as completely dependent. He could have been his own boss, but like Rembrandt, Michelangelo, and countless others of their time, he accepted direction and inspiration from a wiser Boss.

Now, hundreds of years later and thousands of years after the Garden of Eden, God’s purpose for work remains the same. He calls each of us to view work through His lens, finding lasting purpose and fulfillment in everything we do on the job.

ACTION STEP

Visit the “Articles Library” at Christianity9to5.org and read some of the articles under the category “Work for God in all we do.”

Consider how this perspective about work differs from how we usually think about work. What difference that might make if we adopt that perspective as our own?

Step One: Get a Clue

To Discern God's Calling on Your Life, Consider Assessing Your Gifts and Your Character

I sat down with my friend Paul recently and he taught me a few things. I always seem to learn something from the man. Yeah, he stutters a bit and he's a couple millennia older than I am, but I have no doubt that God communicates through this guy. If I concentrate, I can often get a clearer picture of God's will through him.

I asked Paul a pretty heavy question, but one that was weighing mightily on my mind: "How do I know what God wants me to do with my life?" I have some definite ideas about what *I want to do*, but if there is some divine plan for my time here on earth, I want to discover and follow that plan instead.

Paul told me, in his quintessential no-nonsense manner, that I basically had to play detective, searching for clues to unlock the mystery. This was no game, though. The stakes are high, he said. The consequences are real.

My friend suggested that there are at least three places that I can look for clues about God's intent for my life: I can look to God for direct counsel; I can look at how God has designed, gifted and equipped me; and I can

look to the opinions of good friends who know God well.

The Three Clues

Regarding the first clue, God's direct revelation to me, Paul told me that I should do more of what I was already doing – reading scripture, praying for counsel, meditating to hear God's voice. Specifically, he said that "all scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16) and that I should also "pray continually" (1 Thessalonians 5:17, Philippians 4:6). Additionally, he told me to find some good resources regarding how to improve my prayer life and my scripture comprehension. Since that time, I have found the following resources to be invaluable:

- *Hearing God* by Dallas Willard
- *Prayer* by Richard Foster
- *Celebration of Discipline* by Richard Foster
- *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart
- *Christianity 101* by Gilbert Bilezikian

The second clue, Paul confided, involved looking at myself in the

mirror – looking *very closely* and well beyond the physical appearance (1 Corinthians 11:28, 2 Corinthians 13:5, Galatians 6:4). What was inside? How had God created me? Paul said that God gifts each one of us in specific ways and that these giftings indicate what God might like us to do with our lives (Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:28, Ephesians 4:11). Paul also said that I could look to the virtues that were being manifest in my life to see how these might complement the giftings. Was I strong in patience? Compassion? Self-control? Joy? (Galatians 5:22-23, Colossians 3:12-17). What kind of hard-wiring had God set in place in the womb? “Discover those qualities,” Paul asserted raising a finger, “and you’re well on your way to discovering God’s purpose for your life.”

Lastly, Paul taught me that other people – godly people whom I know and trust – could benefit me greatly in my quest. I should ask them what they see in me, what they sense God is calling me to do. Specifically, Paul looked me right in the eye and said that we in Christ are “competent to instruct one another” about these most important of issues (Romans 15:14) and to “admonish one another with all wisdom” (Colossians 3:16). He even offered to me the advice of an ancient sage who wrote that “Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisors they succeed” (Proverbs 15:22). I could see in his expression that he was dead serious. In humility, I had to approach some spiritually mature friends and solicit

their advice about what God might intend for me.

So I set out to do all these things, donning my detective cap, determined to unearth whatever God had in store for me. I admit, though, that I thought it somewhat strange that I should have to go through this circuitous process. Why didn’t God just leave a note on my desk? Why couldn’t he just send an email? It would be a lot more efficient that way – much less doubt and much less guess work. Then I remembered something that Paul’s mentor taught him: God does not want us to be complacent in this process. He wants us to be active, to seek Him. He is glorified in our commitment to find Him, in our searching Him out, in our persevering to do something for Him that is attainable, but not necessarily easy. God communicates with us when we seek His face. As always, Paul’s mentor was right on target: “Seek,” He says, “and ye shall find” (Matthew 7:7).

ACTION STEP

The following activities may give you some clues about God's purpose for your life. Complete the activities in earnest, recording your insights in the "Get a Clue Worksheet." When you have finished, integrate the information into a profile of your gifts, strengths and weaknesses to "get a clue" about what God might be calling you to do with your life.

Activity 1

Get a Clue from Self-Assessment

Complete two assessments that are available on the Web site www.Assess-Yourself.org. On that site you will find a "Motivational Gifts Test" to measure your spiritual gifts and the "Christian Character Index" to measure strengths and weaknesses in your character qualities. Both assessments are free of charge and anonymous, so be candid when completing them. The more accurate the information you enter, the more accurate your results will be.

After completing each assessment, be sure to print out your results and to include notable gifts, strengths and weaknesses in your "Get a Clue Worksheet."

Activity 2

Get a Clue from Your Friends

Sometimes God speaks through people, especially people who know Him well. And if those people know you well, too, they may be in a position to speak into your life.

This activity entails seeking the counsel of those Christians closest to you. Ask them what they discern to be God's will for your life. *Spend lots of time listening and little time talking.* Without revealing to them your results from Activity 1 above, see if your friends' opinions comport with those results. Consider whether they clarify, illuminate or extend those results.

There is no one right way to do this. I recommend, though, that you schedule some time when you will not be interrupted and that you simply explain to your friend the purpose of the conversation. Then, a good opening question might be: "Given what you know about me – my gifts and talents, my strengths and weaknesses, my personality traits – what do you think God wants me to do with my life?"

Whatever your friend says, be sure to write it down as he or she says it or very soon thereafter, and be sure to contemplate it closely (even if you don't like it). Then enter a synopsis of the conversation in your Worksheet.

Activity 3
Get a Clue from Direct Revelation

God is our ally in this process. He will reveal much to us, if we have ears to hear.

Throughout the centuries, people have “heard” God and understood His will through His written Word, the Bible, and through their prayer life. So Activity 3 is relatively open-ended and unstructured. Set aside a certain amount of time each day to specifically seek God’s intent for your spiritual and professional development.

What is it that God desires for you to be and to do? Ask Him regularly and read the scriptures, keeping track of what you hear.

Activity 4
A Supplemental Clue: Defining Experiences That You Have Found to be Clarifying

For some further guidance about what you might be called to do with your life, consider looking back. Oftentimes, the experiences that we have found to be most life-giving can provide clues regarding God’s plan for our lives.

For instance, you may recall that a few years back, you served at a soup kitchen or assisted for a day with some disabled kids and that you found the experience strangely fulfilling – perhaps as fulfilling as anything you had known to date. But then you went about your life,

allowing this moment of possible revelation to dissipate. That may have been a potential epiphany that went unnoticed.

Take some time to recall at least three such experiences from your past. Think about your most emotionally and spiritually fulfilling experiences. What talents, gifts, strengths and skills were most important to the quality of the experience? What was the most enjoyable facet of the activity? What aspects of it left a lasting impression and are perhaps calling you back to it? Most importantly, through this experience, in what direction might God have been pointing you?

Write down your conclusions in the Worksheet and consider them in juxtaposition with the other information you’ve compiled from Step One.

Putting it All Together: What Does this Mean for My Future?

Bobb Biehl, a noted Christian personal development specialist, has aptly recommended that we seek and accept jobs where we can flow in our strengths and gifts at least 85 percent of the time. From all the information you have compiled through these activities in Step One, identify the best jobs / professions that are a fit for you (i.e., where you can operate in your giftings the vast majority of your time). Record these in the final row of Worksheet.

Get a Clue Worksheet

Clues	Task	Strengths / Gifts / Passions	Weaknesses / Areas in Greatest Need of Growth
Clues from Self-Assessment (Activity 1)	Complete the Christian Character Index and the Motivational Gifts Test at www.assess-yourself.org		
Clues from Friends / Family Interviews (Activity 2)	Ask two or three spiritually mature people whom you know well (parents, siblings, friends, etc.) what they think are your greatest strengths, what you are passionate about, and where you most require growth.		

Clues	Task	Strengths / Gifts / Passions	Weaknesses / Areas in Greatest Need of Growth
Clues from Direct Revelation (Activity 3)	Ask God about your strengths and weaknesses, and about His plan for your life. Attempt to hear His counsel through this and through your reading of the scriptures. Record your discernment here.		
Clues from Defining Experiences (Activity 4)	Reflect on three experiences from your life that you have found most fulfilling or meaningful. Look for and record common themes (especially strengths and passions) across these experiences.		

Clues	Task	Strengths / Gifts / Passions	Weaknesses / Areas in Greatest Need of Growth
<p>Summary of the Clues</p>	<p>Assimilate and summarize the columns to this point.</p>		
<p>Jobs / Careers</p>	<p>Identify those jobs / careers that may make the most fruitful use of your strengths, gifts and passions.</p>		

Step Two: Get a Goal

What Are You Really Trying to Accomplish?

The Parable of the Ineffective Meeting

It was the meeting from beyond the grave and there was nowhere to run. Kelly sat fidgeting in her chair, a chair way too far from the door to exit discreetly. Next time, she told herself, she'd arrive early and get a seat on the escape route.

After two hours of platitudes and pap, Kelly tried to appear engaged, nodding, occasionally jotting something on her notepad – something that of course would be instantly round-filed upon the group's exodus. Kelly didn't speak, though, at least not in the past 90 minutes. No sense prolonging the agony, she reasoned. If the conversation were going somewhere, if something were actually getting done, then she'd have all sorts of things to say. But with the chatter meandering from one pet agenda to the next, verbal contribution was pointless.

In the wake of this agony, Kelly contemplated sending an email to the group that would say what was on the minds of many in that meeting. She had it all planned out in her head. The memo would have lamented the inefficient use of time and would have suggested guidelines for future meetings –

guidelines that really would just boil down to setting clear, relevant objectives and remaining focused on those objectives throughout the meeting.

However, Kelly never got around to typing up that corrective. Seemingly more important matters assaulted her as she approached her desk after the meeting and consequently, she never sent the memo and nothing ever changed. Ironically, everyone knew what needed to be done about meetings, but no one did anything to fix them.

Have you ever felt like Kelly did in that chair? Have you ever been stuck in a gripe session masquerading as a meeting? There may have been an objective or two at the outset, but then the group just wandered, one tangential comment giving license to the next. Little was accomplished. Important goals were orphaned. Lots of time was wasted.

If this resonates at all with you, then you surely understand the folly of not setting – and sticking to – clear goals. Identifying goals and relentlessly pursuing those goals is one way that things get done well.

And in this case, what's true for meetings is true for life generally.

This “Parable of the Ineffective Meeting” is actually a parable about ourselves when we have some goals in life but allow distractions to sidetrack us from pursuing those goals. Just as the conversation moved away from the goals of the meeting, culminating in few results, so too, some of the things we do in life move us away from our real goals. As a result, many of us tend to make glacial progress toward what we really want in life, an outcome that is frustrating and disheartening.

This is also an unfortunate outcome because it doesn’t have to be that way. Just as Kelly and some of her colleagues knew what had to be done – setting meeting goals and pursuing nothing but those goals in the meeting – no one did anything about the problem because “more important” things got in the way. So too, more pressing matters get in the way of our personal goal setting, eclipsing the possible, derailing development, cementing the status quo.

Things can be different for you. ***Setting goals, keeping those goals in front of you, and faithfully pursuing those goals will help you move toward the destinations God has ordained for you.*** In Step One above, you completed several activities to further discover God’s will for your life. Now your task is to use that information about your gifts, strengths, passions and weaknesses to set short- and long-term goals that enable you to live a more God-honoring life.

As we’ll see in the Action Step below, you should construct goals for at least two areas of your life: **goals for your spiritual growth and goals for your career.** You may set goals in other areas, of course (e.g., goals for your marriage or parenting or finances), but for our purposes here, only a set of spiritual and career goals is required.

I would also recommend that you consider using the acronym “SMART” as a guide for goal-setting. “SMART” goals are those that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant (to your life mission and interests), and Time-Bound (i.e., they have some sort of timetable attached to them).

Setting Your Spiritual Growth Goals

From a Christian perspective, we can think of “setting spiritual growth goals” as articulating our goals for becoming more like Jesus Christ. If you’ve completed Step One of this workbook, you’ve already done much of the groundwork here. Consider beginning this goal setting process by returning to the “Weaknesses” column in your Get a Clue Worksheet. If your worksheet looks like mine, that column will provide fodder for more goals than you might care to list!

There’s a lot of terrain you could cover there, regardless of how sanctified you may already be. So be judicious in selecting those areas

where you have really discerned God prompting for your development.

Setting Your Career Goals

To articulate your career goals, start by completing the following exercise (it may also assist you with some of your spiritual goals as well). This exercise has helped many to clarify what it is they should be doing with their time in the workplace.

The Retirement Speech Exercise

After reading the following excerpt from a book entitled *Faith at Work* (Moody Press, 2000), think through the retirement speech you would like someone to deliver in your honor someday. Think big. There are no boundaries here. The more thought you put into to this exercise, the more clarity you should receive about the goals you could set for yourself in your work life and perhaps, in your life generally.

Fast-forward the tape of your work life to a few years down the road. You're now retiring. There's a dinner to honor you and all the others in your cohort who have earned the gold watch (or pewter plaque, depending on the generosity of your employer). Look around the room. Who's there? Who is speaking with whom? What's the mood in the place? Do people seem to be enjoying themselves? From across the room, a co-worker glances over at you and whispers to a friend. The friend responds with a nod, eye contact and a casual wave. A lot of people are

talking about you tonight because this is your night. What are they saying?

The time comes for the obligatory short speeches commemorating, thanking, sometimes roasting the retirees. One by one, employees come to the microphone to share stories and raise a glass. Some stories are funny, some are touching, some seem merely polite. Obviously, there wasn't much to say about that person. Then up steps the person slated to say a few words about you, your career, your contribution...about all you've meant to the organization. What will this person say? What is it about you that will be remembered as significant? What is it about all of those years – about all of that effort – that this person thinks really mattered?

If you would, let that set in for a second. Don't sell yourself short by rushing through this exercise. What's being spotlighted in this short speech? Accomplishments? Securing clients? Work ethic? Your personality? What will stand out when others reflect on the job to which you gave your life?

Now take this scene one last step. Imagine for a moment that the person at the podium is not your co-worker, but Jesus Christ Himself. You didn't know he had a ticket to this shindig, but there He is, scars and all. He even managed to somehow get around the jacket-only requirement.

Unlike the other speakers, though, he elects to sit down with the microphone – and right next to you. The room falls strangely silent – more quiet than it was for the others – as he says your name. A smile comes to his face, a smile of caring, a smile of friendship. He says your name again. “I’m going to tell you good folks what this employee did at work all of these years that really mattered,” he begins.

You listen in awe at what’s chronicled over the next few minutes. Everyone in the room is captivated by just how different this speech is from all the others. What Jesus emphasizes as important is quite unlike what was emphasized by the other speakers. Had you only known Jesus’ opinion about what your goals should be on the job...had you only been able to see what was preventing you from pursuing those goals...had you only heard His words decades ago...

ACTION STEP

In light of what you have learned from reflecting on your spiritual condition and from thinking through Jesus’ retirement speech about you, write out two sets of goals: a set of spiritual goals and a set of career goals for the next year, five years, and twenty years. As a guideline, ensure that the goals you set are SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant to your life mission, and Time-bound.

Step Three: Get a Plan

Developing a Strategy for Reaching Your Goals

The goal was to persuade Pharaoh to release the Hebrew slaves. The goal was to take Jericho. The goal was to defeat Goliath. The goal was to convince the world that Jesus is the Christ.

Throughout scripture, we see lofty goals pursued by quite ordinary people. Each goal required a plan to get there, though, and in each case, God provided that plan. Without a plan, goals are merely hopes and dreams.

This may be an obvious point, but it is an important one: ***you're more likely to achieve the goals you set in Step Two if you have a plan of action.*** Less obvious, perhaps, but no less true, is that no matter how lofty those goals, if they are in God's will, God will assist you to meet and even exceed them! So here in Step Three, you'll have an opportunity to construct at least two plans, one for pursuing your spiritual growth goals and one for pursuing your career goals.

There is no one right way to do this. I can say, though, that ***your spiritual and career plans should be specific and they should furnish you with a clear roadmap for the tasks ahead.***

You'll likely find it helpful to ***map your plans to each of your goals.*** For example, if your strengths and gifts pointed you in the direction of the teaching profession and, consequently, if you then set a spiritual goal to gain more patience with others and a career goal to be a college professor, your plan of action would conceptualize "Christ-like patience" and "employment as a professor" as destination points. Your plans would map out the journey, identifying the means by which you intend to grow patience as well as the credentials you will pursue to move toward your career goal. It would benefit you greatly if you also ***create a timetable*** for making progress, e.g., read these books on gaining patience by the end of the summer, finish my degree by (fill-in-the-date), and so on.

Furthermore, it is essential that you consider the threats to your progress. What might inhibit your journey? What obstacles stand in the way of reaching your goals? Think about such impediments as you plan and consider strategies for overcoming those obstacles.

Finally, there is the issue of ***tracking your progress.*** Effective strategic planning requires measures by which

we can identify whether we are progressing, stagnant, or

backsliding. It is to that issue that we turn in Step Four.

ACTION STEP

In whatever format you find helpful, write two separate personal development plans, one for pursuing your spiritual growth goals and one for pursuing your career goals. To some extent, these will be related plans insofar as Christian formation and a God-honoring career are related, but you'll be well served by distinguishing the plans.

For each plan, be sure to:

- ✓ Map your action items to the goals you set in Step Two (you may want to create a spreadsheet for this)
- ✓ Put a timetable on each action item (this will be connected to the "Time-Bound" dimension of your SMART goal)
- ✓ After reading Step Four, create measures to track the extent to which you are making progress toward the goal

Remember, your Personal Development Plan is a living, evolving work-in-progress. As you learn more about yourself, and as your interests and life circumstances change, or as you discern more from God, be sure to update and refine your plans.

Step Four: Get a Gauge

Constructing Measures to Track Your Progress

“You get what you measure.” It’s an old adage. And it’s often true. If you want to save more money, start keeping better track of where your money is going. You’ll probably end with more than if you had not paid attention to your budget. If you want school children to improve in math and reading, require schools to test them frequently in these areas. Chances are, the schools will make what’s measured a higher priority.

No doubt, you could add many more examples of this principle. Notice, though, that the converse is true, too: ***we often become complacent about the things we don’t monitor.***

I have several friends, for example, who got married and then put their marriages on autopilot, neglecting to ever gauge their spouse’s evolving needs. Not surprisingly, the unmeasured needs ultimately became unmet needs, leading to unanticipated needs for marital counseling! The counselors wisely advised them, among other things, to keep closer track of what the other person wanted from the relationship and to make such assessments a habit. You get what you measure.

It’s not an automatic cause-and-effect, of course, but the principle is a useful one. ***We tend to be more***

attentive to the things whose progress we track. As a result, we are then better positioned to make changes in those areas.

Here’s a typical example:

Matt and Linda have been trying to lose weight for some time now. They’ve made – and broken – New Year’s resolutions more times than they can remember. They’ve tried fad diets, read countless magazine articles about the latest panacea, and dutifully watched Oprah when the guru-of-the-month dietician graced her stage. They even tried writing a mission statement for losing weight and setting some goals, complete with timetables and deadlines (Matt’s an MBA, after all).

For all of their effort, they have seen some progress, but it has generally been fleeting. Lose five pounds, gain back four pounds. Lose five pounds again, gain back eight. Those holidays can really be a killer.

Then they finally got it right, joining a weight reduction program that closely tracked their daily intake of food. In this program, each food and beverage is assigned a number of points, based on things like its caloric and fat content. Matt and Linda are permitted to eat so many points worth of food each day. Consequently, throughout the typical day,

they meticulously count how many points food they've consumed, seldom exceeding their allotted daily total. They stuck to the plan, they lost the weight they intended to lose, and they've kept it off ever since.

What changed? Why did this latter approach help them reach their weight loss goals, while the former approaches did not? The difference is that Matt and Linda implemented a system that had good measures in place to control the weight loss process. Their original attempts set worthy targets and were replete with good intentions, but the absence of measures undermined their ability to stay on track. There was nothing except their own will to regulate their intake of calories, fat, fiber, etc.,

so progress toward the goals was haphazard. Under their new system, there is daily accountability and scrupulous measurement of the extent to which they are progressing. Matt and Linda got a gauge and it changed everything.

Designing Your Own Measures

Thus far in the Workbook, you've done some self-assessment, set goals, and drafted a plan for pursuing those goals. To make lasting progress, though, you should complete your plan by constructing your own metrics for tracking progress toward those goals. Hence, the final action step:

ACTION STEP

For each goal you have set, develop some way of measuring your progress (if you've set SMART goals, this should be feasible since the M in SMART stands for "measureable"). Add these measures to your plan from Step Three.

If your plan includes growing in self-control, for example, you'll need some good measures of your self-control. Maybe it's the number of times you raise your voice every day. Maybe it entails getting weekly feedback from your spouse. Maybe it means using the CCI instrument from Step Two every six months or so. Whatever the measures you choose, be sure to have one or two for each goal.

The same is true with your career aspirations. You have a plan in place for moving toward your desired destination. Now you need a speedometer and odometer to tell you how fast and far you're moving. Develop some gauges. Perhaps it's a quarterly personal retreat to reflect on your progress. Perhaps the measure involves others providing feedback. Regardless, put something in place to monitor yourself and to hold you accountable. That's a key to permanent progress.

About the Author



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