

The LifePlan Workbook

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

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Get Going on Something That Really Matters

Your life is a series of choices. If you choose to do so, you can do great things with your life. Things that matter. Things that positively influence the lives of others. Even things that will be changing lives long after you're gone.

You may not even be aware of the potential that you have, but it's there. In fact, you're the only one who can stop you from achieving it.

It's a choice, and this resource is designed to help you make that choice in a way that honors God. More specifically, *The LifePlan Workbook* is a step-by-step guide that will walk you through the process of identifying and pursuing the career paths for which you are gifted.

The premise of this workbook is not a controversial one, regardless of our worldview: **You are more likely to achieve the potential God has placed in you if you know where He's leading and you have a plan to get there.**

In the next several pages, you'll have the opportunity to walk through a step-by-step process that has helped many before you—a logical and powerful process that includes seeking God's calling on your life,

setting goals consistent with that calling, developing a strategy to pursue those goals, and habitually tracking your progress.

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 hearing God or pursuing 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 — planning a wedding, planning a vacation, financial planning, and so on — creating a LifePlan will probably enhance your chances of getting good results, perhaps even contributing to a distinctive legacy of faithfulness.

That legacy starts with the internals and then becomes relevant through the externals, so throughout this workbook, I'll ask you to consider these two related areas: God's will for your **spiritual life** (an internal issue) and God's will for your **work life** (an external issue). The former is a foundation for success in the latter.

You can skip directly to Step One if you'd like, but it may be worthwhile to first hear from God's Word about what these two dimensions entail. In doing so, we develop a more compelling **vision** for why all this matters and, pivotally, a genuine **intention** to pursue these goals in earnest.

God's Will for Your Spiritual Life

God calls 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 (or double-minded) life, relegating our spiritual life to the pews. Rather, faith and life can be a seamless tapestry.

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 indicators are: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). Such virtues 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, of course, your work life. Part of your LifePlan, therefore, will be to examine yourself on many of these dimensions, to set development goals, and to craft a plan for spiritual growth.

God's Will for Your Work Life

Consider this brief vignette. See if it resonates. It's someone else's story, but it may be yours as well:

Approximately twenty-four months into his job, Mark had become quite proficient at analyzing financial statements and performing all of the client service duties assigned to him. He was regarded as one of the more diligent employees in the department, he was earning enough money to easily pay his bills, and he was now being groomed for a promotion. Everything had fallen in place nicely for

Mark. Still, something important seemed to be missing from his work life, namely purpose.

Before him 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 managers, 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 struggle 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, relatively 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. Awhile back I read an *American Demographics* magazine story that 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 about 150 million, that translates into about *fifty million* dissatisfied employees!

But there’s something even more troublesome about this statistic. Because so many of us link our personal worth to what we’re accomplishing, when we perceive our work as dissatisfying, menial, or purposeless, we feel *personally* insignificant. Like Mark, we can experience a significant void, 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 sometimes the case, though, our perspective may not comport with God’s perspective and we thereby forfeit the precious gift of purposeful work.

So how should we think about our work? A lot of books address this question very well, as we'll see in the "Action Step" below, but here's an overview. 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"—that is, to work in 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 or to get a job, it is to serve God. When we raise a family, it is primarily to serve God. 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 sacred ground and our tasks divine service. He's our Supreme Boss, our Divine Manager. It is to God 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.

That's the primary purpose of work. Moreover, if we genuinely work to please God, He changes *us* through that activity, cultivating our character and making it more likely that others will see God through us. When properly conceived, our work, as it turns out, may be less intended to make us happy than it is to make us holy.

Note also that *none of this depends on what type of job you have*. Whether you're digging ditches as a missionary or for a construction company, your work can please God. Homemaker, homebuilder, or home run hitter, you can be serving God and others in every facet of your daily 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 and 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 our work remains the same: "S.D.G." Don't fall into the trap of thinking about it any other way.

ACTION STEP

Visit the Online Library at www.Christianity9to5.org and read some of the articles under the category "Your Work is Your Ministry."

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

Step One: Get a Clue

Assess Your Strengths and Your Passions to Identify Some Potential Career Directions

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 from him.

I asked Paul a pretty heavy question, but one that was weighing 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 be a detective, searching for clues to unlock a 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 gifted me, and I can look to the opinions of good friends who know God well.

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), meaning I should try to remain mindful of God at all times and in all decisions. And this was a big one.

Another 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? 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 may get a clue about what God made you to do.”

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). In humility, I had to approach some spiritually mature friends and solicit their advice about what God might intend for me.

It may seem strange that we should have to go through this circuitous process to get God’s counsel. Frankly, I’ve often wished to find a burning bush. Much clearer and more efficient.

But I’ve come to realize that God is pleased when we strive to hear Him, when we are active in our relationship with Him, when we faithfully wrestle with the hard questions and even with His silence. Ultimately, God communicates with us when we persevere. “Seek,” Jesus taught us, “and ye shall find” (Matthew 7:7). So why not take him at his word and do your best with the following Action Step?

ACTION STEP

The activities on the next few pages may give you some clues about God’s purpose for your work life. Complete the activities as carefully as you can, recording your insights in the “Get a Clue Worksheet.”

When you have completed the three activities, use the “From Clues to Careers” tool to identify some promising vocational options.

Activity 1 Get a Clue from Self-Assessment

Complete the Christian Character Index and any other assessments you find interesting at www.Assess-Yourself.org/surveys/. Also complete one of the many spiritual gifts assessments that are freely available online. I recommend the one from Rock Church in San Diego (42 questions): www.sdrock.com/giftstest/

Other gifts assessments you may want to consider are currently available from:

Building Church
www.BuildingChurch.net/g2s.htm
(125 questions)

Spiritual Gifts
(96 questions)
www.SpiritualGiftsTest.com

Elmer Towns (90 questions)
http://elmertowns.com/?page_id=90

All of these 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 the assessments, be sure to print out your results and to include notable gifts and strengths 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 (1) schedule some time when you will not be interrupted and (2) 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 summarize 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’re learning.

For some further guidance about God’s calling on your life, consider looking back as well. 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 kids with disabilities 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. Was God speaking to you? Maybe that was a potential epiphany that went unnoticed.

Take some time to recall a few such events 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 Steps One and Two.

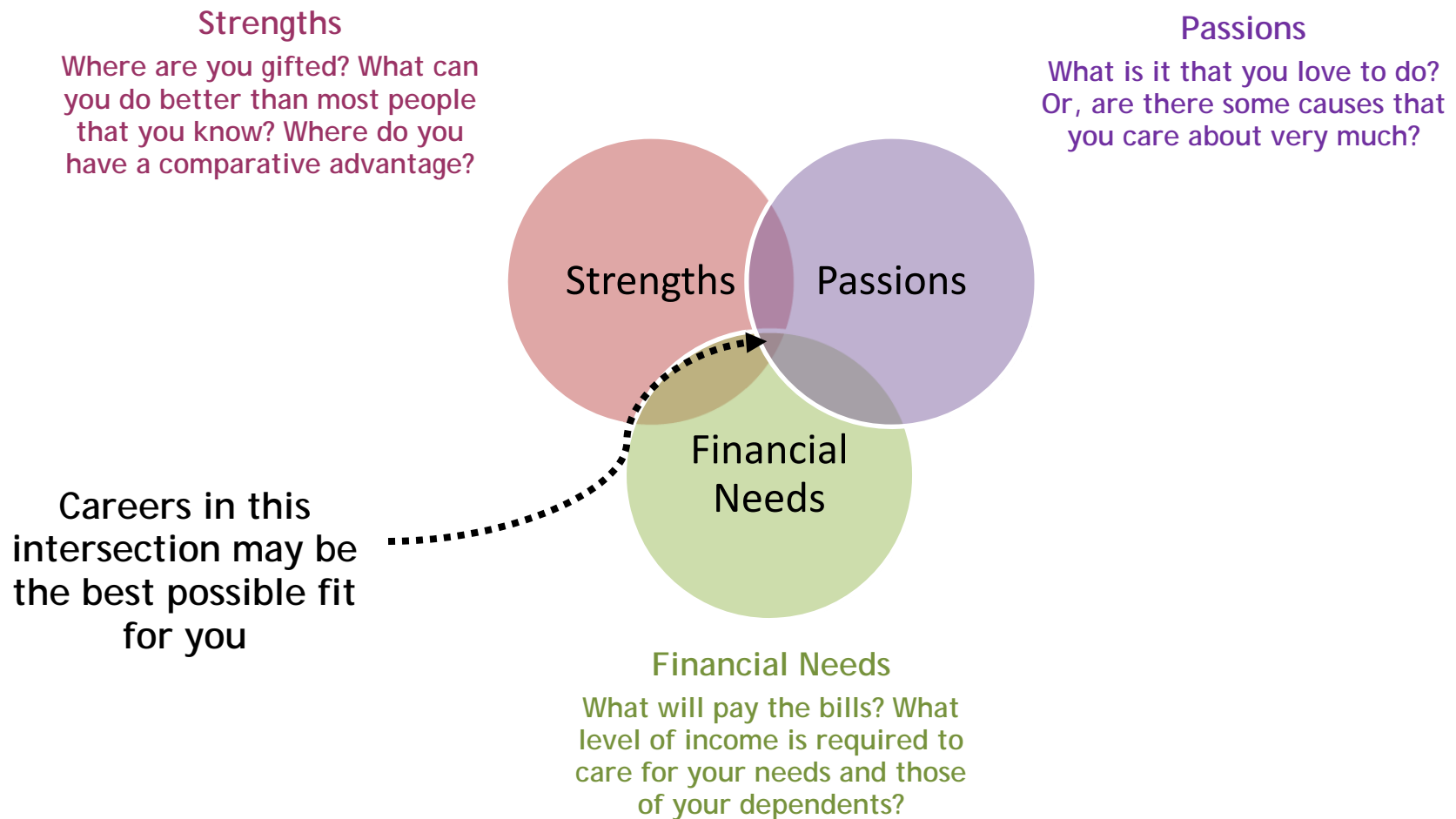
The “Get a Clue” Worksheet

Clues	Task	Gifts / Strengths / Passions
<p>Clues from Self-Assessment (Activity 1)</p>	<p>Complete the Christian Character Index at www.Assess-Yourself.org/surveys/ and complete a spiritual gifts assessment of your choosing</p>	
<p>Clues from Interviews (Activity 2)</p>	<p>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 in what vocations you might excel.</p>	

Clues	Task	Strengths / Gifts / Passions
<p>Clues from Direct Revelation</p> <p>(Activity 3)</p>	<p>Ask God about your strengths and giftings and about His plan for your life. Attempt to hear His counsel through this prayer time and through your reading of the scriptures. Record your discernment here.</p> <p>Another window through which we can see God’s calling is this: Reflect on a few experiences that you have found most fulfilling or meaningful. What have you loved to do? What causes have stirred your passions? Look for and record common themes across these experiences.</p>	

From Clues to Careers

To identify some potential career directions, juxtapose the Worksheet information about your strengths and passions with your financial realities, using the diagram below. Aiming for the intersection of these three realms has been a practical and powerful way that many have gained clarity about potential vocations.



Step Two: Get a Goal

Clarify What You're Really Trying to Accomplish

In Step One you completed several activities intended to help discover how you might contribute to the work God is doing in the world. Now your task is to use that information to set some goals that will make that potential contribution a reality.

Goal setting, when done well, can be a powerful tool to get lasting results. We can construct goals many areas of our life, but the two on which we'll concentrate here are **goals for your spiritual growth** and **goals for your career**.

As a practical matter, consider using the acronym "SMART" as a guide for goal-setting. "SMART" goals are those that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant (to your broader mission), and Time-Bound. That may sound a bit contrived you, as many acronym-based methods are, but this is one acronym that's worthwhile. Goals are more useful tools when we create them this way, so let me briefly unpack this.

"Specific" goals are focused and well-defined. "To become more generous" might sound like a motivational stretch goal, but its lack of specificity renders it ineffective for guiding our actions. Consider instead something

like: "To give ten percent of my pre-tax business and personal income to faith-based causes."

"Measurable" goals, as the term implies, are those whose progress you can track. Without being able to assess progress toward a goal, how will you know whether you're doing the right things to achieve that goal? Set goals for which you can create metrics (like the "ten percent" framing from the previous paragraph).

"Attainable" goals are reachable or realistic, given your circumstances or abilities. One of the most robust results in goal setting studies is that if people don't consider a goal to be attainable, they will not pursue it in earnest.

"Relevance to your mission" is fundamental as well. Goals exist to serve a larger, focused purpose, so try not to get sidetracked. In our context here, if it doesn't matter to God, as best we can understand that, then perhaps we turn our attention elsewhere.

Lastly, "time-bound" means that the goal has a target date by which we will achieve it. Regardless of whether the target is short-term or long-

term, for each goal that you set, try to specify a deadline. Without one, we risk having our important goals eclipsed by the seemingly more urgent matters that emerge daily.

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. Those results will imply not just strength areas, but opportunities for improvement as well. Select a few and become intentional about finally making progress.

One caution: Be careful not to overdo it. There’s a lot of terrain each one of us could cover here. So be judicious, setting goals—or maybe it’s just one goal for one virtue—where change would be particularly meaningful. Keep it simple for now to get some traction.

Setting Your Career Goals

Building on your career path conclusions from Step One, try this exercise to develop a worthwhile set of goals for whatever career you choose. It’s an approach that’s been helpful to a generation of my undergraduate and graduate students. Perhaps it will be to you as well.

“Beginning with the end in mind” is a proven productivity principle. It

turns out to be pretty helpful with career planning as well. If you complete it in earnest, you may glean surprising insights into not only what you should do with your work life, but how you should do it.

The Retirement Speech Exercise

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, about your career, about 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's perspective 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's retirement speech about you, write out two sets of goals: a set of *spiritual* goals and a set of *career* goals for the few years or so (perhaps longer, if it would be helpful).

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

Create a Strategy to Pursue 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.

This may be an obvious point, but it is worth underscoring: **We're more likely to achieve the goals we set in Step Two if we 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 brief plans, one for pursuing your spiritual growth goals and one for pursuing your career goals.

There is no one right way to do this, so we've not created a cookie-cutter template. I can say, though, that however you do this, **your spiritual and career plans should furnish you with clear destination points and a roadmap for the tasks ahead.**

For example, let's say that your strengths, gifts and passions pointed you in the direction of the teaching profession. Consequently, you set a career goal to be a high school teacher and a spiritual goal to gain more patience with others. Your plan of action, then, would conceptualize "employment as a teacher" and "Christ-like patience" as destination points—targets that you'll strive to attain.

That's pretty straightforward. The real work of Step Three is mapping out the journey toward those destinations, identifying how you'll achieve the training and credentials to teach, as well as the means by which you intend to grow your patience.

It may 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 20xx, and so on.) This links nicely to the "time-bound" dimension of your SMART goals.

Beyond that, it's 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 planning requires measures by which we can identify whether we are progressing,

stagnant, or backsliding (recall the M in the SMART goals—the progress should be measurable). It is to that issue that we will turn in Step Four.

ACTION STEP

In whatever format you find helpful, begin to create a LifePlan, a strategy for pursuing the goals you set in Step Two.

One part of the plan should describe how you can achieve your spiritual growth goals; the other part should focus on your career goals. To some extent, these will be related pieces insofar as Christian formation is a foundation for a God-honoring career, but you'll be well-served by distinguishing the plans.

There's no one right way to do this, though some find a spreadsheet a useful tool for keeping things organized. Regardless your approach, you may want to put into your plan:

- ✓ Specific **action items** for each goal you set in Step Two (e.g., complete a Master's degree in education, read that bestselling book on gaining empathy)
- ✓ A **timetable** for each action item (e.g., finish the degree by May, 2018; read the book by the end of the summer)
- ✓ The **major threats** you anticipate to achieving each goal (e.g., insufficient funds, no accountability)
- ✓ After reading Step Four, add to your plan a way to **track your progress** toward the goal

Remember, your LifePlan is a work-in-progress. Don't fall into the trap of trying to make it perfect and try not to get paralyzed because you don't have all the answers today. For now, simply put together a first draft, perhaps show it to someone you trust, and then improve it as you gain more clarity.

Step Four: Get a Gauge

Track Your Progress to Stay on Course

“You get what you measure.” It’s an old adage and it’s still around because it tends to be true.

If you want to save more money each month, start keeping better track of where your money is going. You’ll probably have more saved on the 31st than if you simply ignored your budget. If we 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 some 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 conversations 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’re more attentive to the things whose progress we track.* As a result, we are then better positioned to make changes in those areas.

Designing Your Own Measures

To this point 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 supplement your LifePlan with a way to assess your progress for each goal. A weight loss measure is easy—we get a scale. For our intangible spiritual and career goals it’s a bit more challenging, but not less important. So here’s, the final action step:

ACTION STEP

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

If your plan includes growing in patience, for example, you'll need some good measures of your patience. 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, make a priority of actually using them.

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.

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