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Living The Maximum Life

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Living The Maximum Life With Power and Purpose

Introduction

God in His wisdom created one unique creation, man. He created him in his likeness. All other of His creations are robotic in nature by doing only as they were created to do, no complaining and no rebelling; i.e., without the ability to choose.

Mankind was also created with a purpose and with logic and reasoning abilities. They can decide and choose. Our choices either aid or harm our productivity in fulfilling our purpose. They also help or hurt our ability to live a fulfilled life. The lessons presented in the "Living The Maximum Life with Power and Purpose" are designed to assist us in reaching our full potential.

Chapter 1

What Am I Doing Here?

Once there was a fellow who whenever he went to speak, wherever he went, he began each speech by asking the question; Why are you here? It didn't matter where he went, wherever he went, he got up and said, "Why are you here?" Well one day he spoke at a mental institution. He stood up and began like he always did. He said, "Why are you here?" There was a long pause, a fellow stood up in the back and said, "Well, we're all here because we're not all there."

How would you answer that question today? Why are you here and where are you going? Oliver Wendell Holmes, the famous Supreme Court Justice, was known for being absent-minded. One time he was on a train, the conductor came up to him and lo and behold, he had lost his ticket. The conductor recognized him and said to him, "Now, your honor, don't you worry about it. You'll find that ticket later. When you do, just mail it to us." Oliver Wendell Holmes looked at him and said, "My good man, I'm not worried about you getting your ticket." He said, "I need it to know where I'm going."

The good news is God knows why you're here and He knows where you need to go. He wants to empower you to live the life. God has a very clear and distinct purpose for your life. God does not make anything without a purpose. If you are alive, He has a purpose for you. The tragedy is

that most people live their entire life never learning what that purpose is, never discovering their niche and never finding out where they fit.

People tend to live out their lives on one of *three levels of living*.

1. Plodders

Almost half of this world are plodders. They are people whose lives are robotic. They don't really live; they just exist and just eke it out. They plod through life. If you were to ask them, what do you live for? They'd say, "The weekend" or "my two weeks vacation in August." They're plodders. They plod through life and they miss it.

2. Pushers

Almost the other half of the population are pushers. The pushers are the carrot chasers, they're the ladder climbers and they're the ones the world deems successful. These are the folks that the plodders envy because they've made money, possessions and prestige. To a plodder, the pusher's life looks pretty good. But the fact is, eventually the pusher feels the emptiness of the plodders. Because after they've earned so much money, many nice cars and given their kids everything, they ask themselves: Why don't I feel fulfilled?

It's amazing the number of books that fill the bookstore shelves in the last couple of years that show the emptiness of success. Here are four or five titles of some books that have come out: *The Price of Success, Is it Worth It?* Or how about these, *If I'm So Successful, Why Do I Feel Life a Fake?* and *The Success Trap, Re-Thinking Your Ambitions*. Here's one. *The Search for Meaning*. Let me give you one more, *Beyond Success, Coping With the Fast-Track Blues*. You don't even have to read those books to know what they're saying, do you?

What are they saying? They're saying that what this world calls success does not satisfy. Why? Because it's not our purpose. God didn't put you on this earth to make money. His motto for living is not: "Get all you can and sit on your can." That's not God's purpose. God didn't make you to climb some arbitrary ladder of success that He did not build.

3. Purposeful Living

Only a precious few in this old world ever realize it. It's called purposeful living. These are the few folks who've discovered God's plan for their lives and as they tap into that purpose, they find power, they find significance and they find satisfaction. What's more, these are the people who make the greatest impact on this old world.

When you look across history at the people who've made the greatest impact on this world, they are not the ones who are the brightest, not the best educated and not the wealthiest. No, the people who have made the biggest difference in this world, for good or for bad,

were those with the deepest convictions that stem from a genuine purpose. Whether it was Lincoln, Buddha, Marx, or Jesus, right or wrong, good or bad, the ones who've made the greatest difference are the ones who were driven by a purpose. Great lives are purposeful lives, they're not plodders and they're not pushers.

If you want to live the maximum life, you need to tap into God's purpose for your life and discover, develop and maintain it.

The following are a couple of references to men who found and lived life at the third level - purposeful living. First is David, King of Israel from the Old Testament. The New Testament says in Acts 13:36 "For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep (died); he was buried." Isn't that a great verse? Somebody says, "What's so great about that? He served God's purpose and then he died." What more could you say about somebody? He did what God wanted him to do with his life. Then he died. He died, great, nothing else to do. He was what God wanted him to be and then he died—what an epitaph. He served God's purposes in his generation.

Another example is the Apostle Paul. Now there was a man who knew his purpose in life. He said in Acts 20:24 "I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me." Underline those words in your Bible: Complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me.

In this series, I want you to discover the task that the Lord wants you to complete. It won't necessarily be exactly the same as Paul's, in fact, it will not. But by the end of our series, my goal is for you to have something that you don't have right now. I want you to have a written out life plan, Yes, a written out life plan! You might say "Well, I've never done that." Maybe that's why you're a plodder. Maybe that's why you're stuck on that pusher treadmill. I want us to Bible study and pray. I want you to write out your own life plan. It amazes me how many business people will spend weeks crafting out a written business plan for their corporation. Or how many teachers will spend countless hours working on lesson plans for their classes, and yet would never think about actually constructing a life plan. That's not just ironic, that's foolish.

Let's get started developing a life plan for the maximum life by considering God's general purposes for people. In the other lessons in this series, The Maximum Life, specific application for our own lives will be made as they are revisited.

What are God's purposes for his people?

1. To be loved by God.

In Ephesians 2:4-5 Paul said, "But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive..." He made us to love us. 1 John 4:10, "This is love: not that we loved God,

but that he loved us and sent His own Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." That's the whole motivation behind the crucifixion.

Now folks, if you miss that, you really miss the core reason for living. I'm amazed at how many people who miss that tend to think that God doesn't like them and that God put them here to run through a maze to see how he could trip them up. NO! Rid yourself of the kind of thinking that says God does not love you. Otherwise, you'll never discover your purpose in life. God loves you more than anything or anyone else possibly could.

2. To manage his Creation.

He set that purpose forth in the Garden of Eden. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." (Genesis 1:27-28)

People, this is the concept of stewardship. Our God owns everything that is and we are put here as stewards. In other words, we're put here as managers. It's like the fellow at the big grocery store. He doesn't own all of the stock on the shelf, but he's responsible for it. He was put there by the owner of that store to be in charge of it. God made humans to prudently manage the whole earth, then and now. That's part of why we're here.

3. To do good things.

He made us to do good things. Ephesians 2:10 makes that perfectly clear, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Now later we're going to look at what kind of good things that God created for us to do, and you'll even have the opportunity to analyze your own life and to prioritize the good works that God really wants you to do within the context of your own existence because all of us have different existences. We live different lives.

4. To enjoy life.

John 8, Jesus tells us the devil is a liar; in fact, he is the father of all lies. Surely, the biggest lie that Satan has ever gotten humanity to buy into is that our God wants us to be miserable. In the Garden of Eden, Satan essentially told Eve as she was looking at that fruit, "Oh, God doesn't want you to have any fun. God doesn't want you to really enjoy life." He's been destroying us by the millions with that old lie ever since.

Jesus said "I have come that you may have life and have it to the full." (John 10:10) That is our theme verse for this whole series. "I have come that you may have life and have it to the full." Read that again "I have come that you may have life and have it to the full."

Paul said in 1 Timothy 6:17 “put your hope in God who richly provides for our enjoyment.” Hear me because this will bash some of the lies that Satan has had you believe. God made you to have fun. He made you to enjoy life, but that comes by living out his purpose for us, not by believing all the devil's lies. That's part of the key that we are going to discover over the remaining lessons. People, mark these four purposes well because we will come back to them.

Why living out God's purpose so important?

1. It increases my motivation.

It increases my motivation because purpose provides motivation. When you discover the answer to the question, why am I here? It will amaze you how much more energy you have. You will hop out of bed saying, "Good morning, Lord!" instead of, "Good Lord, it's morning!" God said in Jeremiah 29:11, “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope for a future.’” How does that make you feel?

When you plug into God's purposes for your life, you get enthusiastic. In fact, do you know where we get the word enthusiasm? Enthusiasm comes from two Greek words put together—*en theos*, meaning "in God." When you are in God, in His will, in His plan and in His purpose, you are enthusiastic. It's automatic.

Now obviously, I'm not just talking about being a Christian. I hate to say this, but you already know it, way too many Christians aren't enthusiastic at all. The reason is, after obeying the gospel which is the foundation of God's purpose for their life, they quit looking for God's purpose. They quit looking here. They quit looking through other believers. It's like they obeyed the gospel, by believing, repenting, confessing and being baptized into Christ and say, "Thank you Jesus, for forgiveness and salvation, I'll take it from here." They jump in and they drive off into the desert of plodding, or the desert of pushing until they run out of gas. But by living within God's plan for your life everyday your tank stays full and you stay motivated. It makes all the difference in the world.

2. It eliminates distraction.

This is key! One of the pitfalls of this generation is we just have too many options, don't we? When I was a boy growing up, we had three TV channels we received on our old black and white television. Only one came in clear with rabbit ears. With cable and satellite and hundreds of channels, many devoted to news, sports, movies, pornography, comedy or cartoons we have many options. Now Ipods and cell phones provide even more options. Distractions are plentiful.

We've enhanced technology with mobility. The options to fill our time are limitless, but our time is limited. We still have 24 hours a day. Frankly, many of us don't have time to do

everything. I don't have time to do everything. Pushers, and there are a lot of pushers out there who need to hear this. Pushers think the more they get done, the more satisfied they will be. Wrong! Wrong! Wrong! Selection is the name of the game for effectiveness. Concentrating your energy on what God wants you to do, not what everybody else wants you to do. When you hone in on what your real purpose for life is, it not only tells you what you need to do, it also tells you what you don't need to do.

Too many of you are very efficient, but you're not effective. Do you know what the difference is between efficient and effective? Efficiency is doing things right, effectiveness is doing right things. I want to make sure I'm doing the right things, rather than just doing things right. If you're not careful, you'll end up arranging deck chairs on the Titanic. Have you ever thought about that? It looks good, it's all neat and it's in order, but the ship is sinking. Effectiveness!

Peter Drucker was perhaps the leading management guru of this past century. He was asked one time: What's the basic thing that every business owner needs to know? Drucker said, "There are only two questions related to business that the owner needs to know. Number one, what is my business? And number two, how is business?" That's what you need to ask. What is my business in life? And question number two, how's business?

Life focus has tremendous power; it's like a light that is focused. Take a light and focus it through a magnifying glass. You will concentrate the energy of the light to where it can set a piece of paper on fire. If you take it and concentrate it even more you create a thing called a laser that can cut through anything. Light concentrated has power, light diffused doesn't have that power—the same way with life. Life concentrated has power. Life diffused has no power at all. Paul understood this, he said in Philippians 3:13, "But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on to win the goal." The number one game in America right now is Trivial Pursuit and I'm not talking about the board game. I'm talking about life. The ridiculous way we fill our lives with things that don't matter.

The average American who will live to about age 85 will spend about ten years watching television. Tell me, of all the things that you have watched, have you seen enough that's worth giving up 10 years for?

Some of you are too busy. Some of you, some of us, are pulled into too many directions, not doing bad things, but chasing trivial things. The end result is disappointing. The maximum life eliminates distractions.

3. It attracts assistance.

There are so few people who know where they're going in life that if you'll figure it out; they'll want to go with you. That's the nature of the beast. If they sense you have purpose, they'll want to go. That's true with even purpose-driven people who are headed in the

wrong direction. There are lots of folks, David Koresh's, Louis Farrakhan's and Shirley MacLaine's of this world, leading others in a wrong direction. They've got followings just because they've got a purpose. If you follow God's purpose for your life, you will be respected, you will be emulated and you will be followed.

The greatest way to help other people is to BE what God made you to be. That's the greatest way to help other people, to just BE what God made you to be. If like David, you serve God's purposes in your generation. God will bless many, many lives through you.

4. It prepares me for God's evaluation.

This is really the most important of all. One of these days, we are going to die. One of these days, I'm going to die. One of these days, you're going to die. One of these days, all of what we call history is going to end and we will stand before God's judgment seat, so says Hebrews 9:26-27, Romans 14:10 and a host of other passages in Scripture. I've heard some people say that when we stand before that judgment seat, that's going to be the final exam of life. No it's not, that's when you get your test paper back. We're in the final exam right now because we've already got the questions. We're working on the answers. Every day, we are filling in the blanks.

You say, "Wait a minute, I don't know what questions are on the final exam." Well, there are just two. When you stand before the judgment seat of God, I will tell you right now what they are. There are only two questions. They are, paraphrased and stated generically, "What did you do with my son Jesus Christ?" And "What did you do with your life?" Our God is the Creator and the Master. He has invested certain talents, abilities and gifts in you and he has planned certain functions within the Body, the Church, for you to do. How are you doing on your exam? What answers have you filled in last week? What are you going to write down by your actions this week?

Our goal is that by the end of this series you will have a life plan, genuinely based on God's purposes for you. But, to close this lesson I want to ask the second question first. "What did you do with your life today?" Because living life to the best that we possibly can by our own initiative and power will not rid us of a single sin. We are so contaminated by sin that we cannot live with God forever in heaven because He is all Holy. In Him is light and there is no darkness at all. We will not go to heaven with our iniquities, and all of us have iniquities. So, what is your answer to God's first question "What did you do with my son Jesus Christ?" The good news is, He sent His son to die on that cross, so that if by faith we connect to that cross, trusting and believing that Jesus is God's Son, being willing to confess that before anybody, repenting, which means turning; i.e., turning your life away from the trivial and worldly things, changing your worldly and sinful life saying, "I want to follow Him." Then culminating that faith response by being baptized, re-enacting the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, so that you can be free from your sin. That's the beginning, that's the

birth. From that point forward, it is loving Jesus, loving Jesus for saving you, loving Jesus because He loved you first.

Question number one on the Judgment Day is: "What did you do with my Son Jesus Christ?" Are you willing to make the commitment to Him now? Remember this is the cornerstone, it is the purpose that God has for your life. This is where it starts. Come to Christ today.

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Chapter 2

What Are My Values?

In his book, *Ordering Your Private World*, Gordon MacDonald tells about a friend that was the duty officer on a nuclear submarine in the Mediterranean. On one occasion while the captain was in his quarters, the duty officer was in the very bowels of the submarine. There was a lot of naval traffic overhead so he was forced to make some rather abrupt and sudden maneuvers to avoid any potential collisions.

Within a matter of moments the captain came down to the bridge, the control room. He looked at the duty officer and asked "Is everything all right?" "Yes sir," replied the duty officer. The captain took a quick look around and began to go back up the ladder while muttering under his breath, "Everything looks all right to me, too."

When I read that little illustration, it reminded me so much of life. All around danger is lurking—above us, around us and below us. There are things that would wreck our lives. The alert captain, rather trying to necessarily handle every distraction that might come their way, immediately went to the control room and looked around and asked "Is everything all right down here?"

I want you to temporarily forget all that's going on around you. Try your best to forget the distractions, the frustrations and the dangers that go way down deep inside, all the way down to your control room. The place the Scripture calls the heart. Look around and see if everything looks all right there to you, too.

See, the key to building the maximum life is not so much of taking care of what's out there but taking care of what's in here, the heart, mind or intellect. Like that submarine, it's what steers.

Way down deep inside that determines either the success or the failure of the journey. In the human life, those things are called values. Those core things that you cherish and live for are in the very bowels of your soul. They are the essence of life. Let's go down and look at our values.

What are your values?

a. Your values determine your direction.

Have you ever noticed how many people are directionless in life? People like your neighbors or co-workers go with the flow and roll with the punch. If a fad comes up, they chase the fad. They just toss to and fro. James said "A double-minded man is unstable in all he does." (James 1:8) A couple of verses earlier, he compares that double-minded man to a cork or a buoy on the sea that is tossed back and forth by the waves.

Now we don't use that terminology often today. We don't talk about double-minded people. Well, what is James talking about there? A double-minded man or a woman is simply someone who is unsure of his or her values. There is a whole generation of people who are nowhere close to living the maximum life because they have no idea what their values are.

George Gallup did a poll not long ago concluding the number one stress factor, problem or issue facing the Baby Boomer generation is not a lack of money, a lack of time or relational conflict, and it is what he calls, "incongruent values." In other words, he says, we say we believe one thing and then we live in a totally different way.

For example, we Baby Boomers say, "We believe in family. We think that's the most important thing;" however, the average father spends an uninterrupted interaction with each child of less than two minutes a day. He worships his career. We say that good health is important. But, we admit when asked, "Do you eat right?" "Well no, not really." You ask, "Do you exercise?" "Well no, we don't really exercise, but good health is important to me." We say things like, "Materialism is bad." Then go deep in debt trying to keep up with the Joneses.

When you have competing values, you're a ship dead in the water. You are going nowhere. That's why Solomon said in Proverbs 4:23, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." He is saying: What you value directs your life. If you were to honestly tell me what you value in life, I could predict where your life is going to go. Every decision you make is based upon your values; they direct your life.

b. Your values end up determining your destiny.

Doesn't that make sense? If my values chart the course I'm going to follow then they pretty well assure where I'm going to end up. Jesus said in Mark 8, verses 36 and 37, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?" What you value is what you give your life to, and ultimately it's what you are going to give your soul to. So values are extremely important, they're the axle that turns the wheel.

Where do I get my values?

You get them from a lot of places, but ultimately there are two basic sources. You get them from Christ or culture. To put it another way, you get your values from the Word or from the world. Now it's pretty easy to determine what Christ's values are if you get to know His Book, the Bible and you'll have a real good handle on what His value system is all about.

Somebody said, "What about the world's value system, our culture? What are the values that they propose?" I suggest that the surest place to get a little synopsis of the world's values is commercials. In 15 seconds, you can find out what the world thinks you value because that's the button they're trying to push. They're appealing to your basic motivation. You can pretty well wrap it up in three words. We've talked about these before.

a. Pleasure.

Our culture values pleasure. It's the number one industry in America right now—the entertainment industry. It grosses more money than any other single industry. We are a very sensual society. We just want to have fun, so if it feels good we do it. That's a value that the world proposes.

b. Possessions.

You know Americans believe in life, liberty and purchase of happiness, don't we? We are consumed with consuming. We kind of live by the motto that the one with the most toys is going to win. The world is silently, but very forcefully giving us the message: Your self worth is equal to your net worth.

c. Power – Prestige – Position.

They're all linked together. It's the third leg of the cultural value system. Look at the commercials. Have you ever noticed how they insidiously want you? The guy puts on his racing gloves, those dark glasses, gets inside that sport coupe and the announcer says, "Own the road." That's power right there. One of the ones that's so ironic is the advertiser and the credit card which says, "Get control of your life!" Do you see the appeal to that perceived value of power?

Understand this. Contrary to the devil's propaganda, God is not against all those things. There are so many people who believe the lie that God is some prude who says, "If you're a Christian, you can't have any pleasure, no fun. If you're a Christian, you can't have very many possessions. You've got to almost be a pauper. If you're a Christian, you've got to be a meek, weak, little worm. Don't you ever have any power?" That is contrary to what God says. No! No! God never says that. He never says you cannot have pleasure, He never says you can't have possessions. He never says you can't have some power. What God says is those can't be your values. Those cannot be the core desires of your heart, or you'll miss the maximum life.

John, who was in his nineties and an aged apostle, said "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world; the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does-comes not from the Father but from the world." (NIV) The New King James Version states "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world,

the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.” (1 John 2:15-16)

Do you know what those are? Those are the three things we just talked about. The lust of the flesh—pleasure, the lust of the eyes—possessions and the pride of life—power. What God says through John is, don't love those things, they are not from the Father, they come from the world.

Proverbs 21:21 states, "He who pursues righteousness and love finds life, prosperity, and honor." We neglect this to our own downfall. Did you notice those benefits? If you will value the right things, God will give you the things the world craves. God will give you life. He'll give you prosperity. He'll give you honor. Those are roughly equivalent to pleasure, possessions, and power. If you value righteousness and love God says, "I'll take care of the rest, and I'll give them to you in proper measure to make your life all it can be." Don't praise the value system of culture. Praise the value system of Christ.

How can I build my life on right and lasting values?

How do I go about doing that?

a. Assess what's important.

"Let us discern for ourselves what is right; let us learn together what is good." (Job 34:4)
See, before we can do what is good we've got to discern what is good. Deciding what's important in one's life is one of the basic problems in America.

As stated earlier, this generation is characterized by incongruent values. That's because we seldom take the time to ask: What do I value? What is really important to me? Several of you I am sure saw the recent study which showed that television shapes children's values more than parents. Now that's sad! But we all knew that was true. A child watches television five hours a day. A child seldom spends that much time with a parent. Television shapes children's values in America today more than parents. But here's the other thing, it's not just the children. We, adults begin to assemble TV, videos and movies present values. What we first may see, we may roll our eyes, or we may even gasp, and then we just kind of keep watching and time passes. We may laugh about it and after a while, we subconsciously embrace it.

This is key. Most Americans are basing their lives, their futures, and their children's future on values we didn't even choose. That's not too smart, is it? We're basing our whole destinies on values we're not even thinking about. Stop and decide WHAT'S REALLY IMPORTANT IN LIFE! Then you need to write out your definition of success in your life.

If you these lessons to really mean something to your life, you'll write your own definition of success. Then don't you let anyone or anything move you off center to cause you to buy into their definition of success.

Do you know what success is? It is not making lots of money. It is not having a powerful position. It's not having pleasure every minute. **SUCCESS IS LIVING OUT YOUR VALUES.** That's what it is. It's not a destination; it's the journey you travel as you live out the values that you believe are important. Don't let anyone else determine that for you. Success is living out your values.

Now incidentally, teens, singles, young marrieds, middle agers or senior saints, you can be successful at any stage of your life because again, success is not some point down the road based on how you feel, what you have or what you do. Success is living out your values day by day. You can enjoy success right now if you're living out your values. Now obviously if those values are based upon Christ and His Word and His promises, then the success you enjoy is God-given and is eternal.

Let me ask you a question: Have you taken the time to analyze what you really value? Better yet, have you written them down so that you can review them ever so often? The foundation to the maximum life is to first assess what's important.

I think one of the best ways to know what you value is to answer a couple of simple questions. Imagine that you're 90 years old, some of you may be, but most of you aren't. a) Look back on your life and write down the five things you will have most wanted to do in your life. b) Write down what are the five ways or things that you most want people to remember about you. Those 10 things, the five things you most want to have done and the five things you want people most to remember, are your core values. Why don't you do that?

The problem is we rarely take the time to examine our values until we have a crisis. When things are going great and you're having fun, you don't stop and ask if that is what life is really all about? Are you focusing on what's important? No, you just go through life and have fun. But, when your life gets jolted by some crisis i.e., the death of a loved one, a divorce, bankruptcy, lay-off, major illness or the kids mess up, then in your pain, you start asking: What does it really matter? Hear me; don't wait for the valleys to clarify your values. Set them now, and if you do, you will avoid a great deal of pain and you will minimize the rest. Set those anchors deep within the very control room of your ship, assess what's important.

b. Bail-Out of what's unimportant.

I know. You don't have time to do everything. Frankly, most things in life aren't worth doing even if we did have the time. We should pass on it. The key premise to the maximum life is that life is too important to waste. Don't fill your time with junk. Look at Psalm 119:37, "Turn my eyes away from worthless things."

When I was just out of college, probably 22 or 23 years old, the video age dawned. I got hooked on video games. Back then, they only had two, for you old-timers who can

remember they had Pac Man and Asteroids. Now they can do everything. Before long and with a little skill I could play 45 minutes to an hour for a quarter. I would catch myself, silly as it sounds, on my lunch hour going over and seeing if I could beat the other scores. On the way home from work, I'd just stop by and play a little game. Then all of a sudden it dawned on me, I was spending three to four hours a day on NOTHING. NOTHING. Today you have the computer games.

Now folks, a little later on, we're going to talk about scheduling. Don't misunderstand—every life needs some recreation. Every life needs what I call some chill time, but don't let the tail wag the dog. Life is far too important to waste it on worthless books, magazines, TV or worthless games—that's almost redundant, isn't it?—worthless games.

Here's an activity you need to do. Chart how you spend your day for the next seven days. Now you should be doing that anyway. But do it this week. Then lay it along side your values and ask yourself if you're living out what's really important to you. As you look at your activities are there some things that you wish you hadn't done? Are there some things you wish you had just left undone and filled the time with something more valuable.

In Philippians 3:8, Paul said, "Everything else is worthless when compared to the price of gain in knowing Christ." There's a man who knew his values and everything about his life was shaped around what his core values were. I'm not saying you will be a Paul, God made all of us differently. But if we're going to live the maximum life, God wants us to assess what's important and to bail out the unimportant and to concentrate on the eternal—concentrate on what really lasts.

There was a book that came out a few years ago by Tony Campolla called, *Who Switched the Price Tag?* In preparing for that book, Campolla asked a large number of 90 year olds, "If you could go back and live your life again, what would you do differently that you didn't do last time?" The number one answer those 90 year olds gave was "I would invest more time in things that would outlast me." Isn't that a great answer? I would invest more of my time in things that I know would endure.

When you write out your core values this week and analyze them, close that analysis with this question: How long is this value going to last? If one of your values is pleasure, do you know what your honest answer will be—a few seconds—because that is all pleasure is designed for. It's like cotton candy—POOF—it's gone. It will last a few seconds and it's over. If one of your values is possessions, I'll tell you how long it will last, it will last until it rots, tears up, breaks, or gets stolen. If your value is power, position or authority, how long is it going to last? It is either going to last until somebody smarter, brighter or faster comes along and takes it away from you, or until you die. That's how long it's going to last. But, what does last? That's what the whole Bible is about. It's about what really lasts.

"We focus not on the things which are seen, but on the things which are unseen. For that which is seen is temporary, and what is unseen is eternal." I've given you two or three things there. But Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." I think a fair synonym for the kingdom of God is His value system, letting Him be the Lord of our

heart. The rest of that verse says, "everything else will be added to you that you need." (2 Corinthians 4:18)

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul talks about all things eventually fading or passing away, but in verse 13 he states "But these three remain:" and he goes on to say, "faith, hope, and love." You know those are the things that are going to remain when everything else fades away. They should be represented in my value system somewhere. Would you agree with that? If I want values that last, then faith, hope, and love are the only things that are going to remain. I sure want those. By the way, the verse concludes by saying, the greatest of these is LOVE.

"The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself in love." (Galatians 5:6) When you write out your values will you see if those values reflect those clear teachings we're studying? Lasting success is built on values that last; Faith, hope, love, God's Word and Jesus Christ. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. That's why Jesus said in Matthew 16:26, "What would it profit a man if he were to gain the whole world, yet he were to lose his own soul." Your soul is going to last forever, and this world isn't. It's not worth being a top value.

"For me to live is Christ, and to die is." What? "Gain." To live is Christ, and to die is gain. Paul's value was Christ and the outcome is eternity, it's the future of heaven. It's great. You plug in any other value in that and see what answer you get. For me to live is MONEY, and to die is - *I will lose it all*. For me to live is PLEASURE, and to die is - *I will never have anymore*. For me to live is POWER, and to die is - *it's over*.

When you make your values list, I want to assure you that there is really only one that should take the chief seat. It's the only one that you can fit into the blank, Paul's little sentence, "For me to live is _____ and to die is _____." It's the only one you can fit in that makes it work. "For me to live is Christ, and to die is (actually) gain." The foundation for successful, significant powerful living is to embrace right values; consciousness, to analyze them regularly and to never ever let them go.

This week, go down in the control room of your life and look around. Will you honestly be able to say, "Everything looks all right here, too." It will be the greatest thing that you can ever do this week.

Is *Christ* at the head of the list? Is he the real captain of your ship? Now a lot say yes, but many of us don't live that way. That's the incongruent value thing. But is He your Lord as well as your Savior? Success is only possible with Christ because He is the only real value in life. Lesson # January 19, 1997

Chapter 3

Your Function Within The Body

The church is a spiritual body. In fact, it is the Body of Christ with Him being the head. It is Jesus who guides, organizes, oversees and shepherds the body in order for us to be what He wants us to be and to do what He wants us to do.

“And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.” (Ephesians 1:22-23)

“It was he (Jesus) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:11-13)

The church is compared to our physical body to help us understand its structure and diversity of parts or members, all of which are necessary for the church or body to perform its task, function or work in unity and harmony efficiently. This can only happen when every body part is performing its specialty. Now it is true that our bodies can continue to function without certain parts functioning or functioning ineffectively; i.e., lack of sight or hearing, a missing arm or leg, only one lung, etc. But it is also true that it performs more efficiently when all parts are present and functioning as designed. It must also be true that the spiritual body is much more effective if all its members perform their gift (function) in unity and harmony as God designed.

Jesus organizes the church so that we may function properly. He organizes His body by giving a gift(s); i.e., assigning ministries or functions to each and every member. You are who you are in the body of Christ because Jesus decided what your part is to be. Your assigned ministry is not your decision. Jesus is the one who decides. “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:11-13) We just want to recognize and submit to His decision.

Jesus demands that all members be involved - 100%. No one is unnecessary. None are unimportant. No one is excluded or excused. All members of the body of Christ have been given a gift or ministry.

The work of the church can be roughly divided into three areas: Evangelism, Edification and Service. Through evangelism, the kingdom expands. Edification is for each Christian to grow to maturity and remain faithful. In service, we express God's character for God is love. We have active concern for others in their necessities. These three areas overlap greatly in practice.

Gifts are not natural talents or developed skills. They are not personality types. Gifts are functions, ministries, services or roles. They are each one's specialized services. Remember that all Christians should be merciful, but some have the gift of showing mercy. That is their

specialty or their special ministry. Not everything you do is classified as your gift or ministry. Many things are just a part of your duty as a Christian. "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. (1 Corinthians 12:7) But there is some service to which you are to dedicate yourself, to specialize in. This is your ministry. Through the exercise of our gift, i.e. performing our function or ministry, we all work together. Diverse personalities, ages, experiences all joined in a common enterprise requires that we get along well and that we treat each other with respect and consideration. If one or more member fails to do their task, the body fails to operate as effectively as God desires.

Some Steps To Help You Determine Your Gift(s)

Spiritual gifts (gifts of the Holy Spirit) were given to you by God when you became a Christian. The New Testament does not give a list of steps for determining one's spiritual gift. We are told to pursue gifts, to prepare and to use them, but we are not told how to determine them, at least not in a concise list. The following steps are suggestions on how to proceed and are not considered the final, authoritative word on the subject.

- 1. Place Yourself Entirely At God's Disposal:** This is an objective decision of yours which is implied by your decision to become a Christian. Say to God as Isaiah did: "Here am I, send me." Isaiah 6:8. Declare to God: "Not my will but Your will be done." Without this attitude, why would we expect God to answer us when we ask Him how He wants to use us?
- 2. Pray:** You know that God has a purpose for you in the body of Christ. So now you ask Him to show you what it is, knowing that He will answer for it is His will. Psalm 25:12. Praying for this we are simply asking for God to reveal to us what Jesus has determined for us to be doing.
- 3. Review The Lists Of Gifts In The New Testament:** You need to start thinking about what God calls a ministry. The following are some examples of gifts or ministries (not including temporary or miraculous ones) that should give you an idea.
 - a.** "And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues." (1 Corinthians 12:28)
 - b.** "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." (Ephesians 4:11-13)
 - c.** "For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members,

and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully." (Romans 12:3-8)

d. "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever." (1 Peter 4:10-11)

Since these lists are not identical we conclude that they are not exhaustive.

Shepherd, Pastor, Bishop

Evangelist, Preacher, Minister

Teacher

Deacon

One who shows mercy

One who gives aid/helps

Exhorter

One who gives

Administrator

The following summarizes some of these functions.

Evangelists and preacher

"In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage-with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry." (2 Timothy 4:1-5)

Pastors, Overseers and Elders

1. Prepare God's people for works of service
2. Serve as overseers

3. Consider a doctrinal question
4. Keep watch and be on guard over yourselves and all the flock
5. Be examples
6. Direct the affairs of the church (evangelize, edify, restore, rebuke, discipline and be an example)
7. Eager to serve
8. Hold firmly to the trustworthy message
9. Encourage others by sound doctrine
10. Refute those who oppose
11. Pray
12. Lay hands upon individuals selected for a work needed by the body.
13. Receive reports of work of others
14. Rebuke and discipline

Teachers

“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever.”(1 Peter 4:10-11)

Christians

“Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts (functions) - *charisma, charismatos, charizomai* a gift of grace; a favor which one receives without any merit of his own) according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.” (Romans 12:4-8)

Deacons

Some think Acts 6 specifies the work of Deacons others disagree. It should be noted that Luke does not call them deacons nor is there any indication that those selected met the qualifications specified in 1 Timothy. Their work is properly identified in the meaning of the *diakonos*, serve. For additional studies refer to Work of Deacons, Nov. 28, 2005.

4. Consider The Needs Of The Church: Peter plainly tells us that we are to employ our gifts for serving one another as good stewards of God's varied grace (1 Peter 4:10). Gifts are ministries or services. To serve is to meet a need. The purpose of the gifts is not to keep people busy but to meet needs of the church not our individual needs. So we must look to the needs of the church. As these needs become apparent, follow your desires in fulfilling them.

5. **Look For Opportunities:** Start a journal of doors that God has opened for you. As time goes on you may begin to see a direction in which He is leading you.
6. **Seek Guidance From Church Leadership:** Ephesians 4:11, 12 says that the gifts of church leadership are given to the church for the equipping of the saints. Make good use of these gifts of the leadership.
7. **Take The Initiative:** You have prayed to the Lord, reviewed the list of ministries in the New Testament, taken into account the needs of the church that the Lord has brought to your attention and possibly even put the desire in you to fulfill. You have noted that God is always opening up doors of opportunity in certain directions and you have talked things over with the leadership in the church. Wait no longer, take the initiative and get on with what the Lord would have you to be doing.

Should someone attempt to prevent you from performing what you perceive your ministry to be, you may find it necessary to look to Peter and the other apostles for guidance. "Peter and the other apostles replied: 'We must obey God rather than men!'" (Acts 5:29)

Chapter 4

Committing to Christ

Previous lessons in this series emphasized two critical steps: a) clarifying your values and b) identifying your God-given make-up, your shape, toward maximizing your life. But they're absolutely worthless unless you commit your life to Jesus Christ, which is the focus of this lesson.

Now we live in a time when our society fears commitment. Robert Bella, sociologist at the University of Southern California, wrote *Habits of the Heart*. He said, "Americans are committed to nothing. If we're committed to anything it's individual freedom and keeping our options open." Now the problem with that is where it leads. If I don't commit to anything, then I'm not going to get anything out of life. It's like going down a cafeteria line and saying, "Well, I'm not going to choose my entree right now, I want to keep my options open. I'll wait on the vegetables. I am going to keep my options open." By the time you get to the end of the line. You don't have anything on the tray, and that's what happens in so many lives.

Earlier in this series, we said that maintaining a focus is essential to the maximum life by not wasting time on things that don't matter. The key to focus is commitment. The number one thing necessary to living a life that is really full is to commit your life to God's will through his son, Jesus Christ. Paul said in Romans 12:1, "I beseech you brethren to present your bodies as a living sacrifice which is your reasonable service (spiritual service-ASV)." Now hear me, when I

say, "Commit to Christ," I'm talking about more than a decision. I'm talking about a commitment.

Many of you have made a decision about Christ, but I think it's fair to say that there are many of you who have not really committed to Him. You want the salvation that He offers, but you're not sure you want the lordship that He demands. That's what we're talking about with commitment.

We need to commit our life to Christ because:

1. It is part of God's plan for our life.

"We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:10) There are good things that He created us to do. Notice "We are created (how?) in Christ Jesus to do good works." In other words, apart from a genuine commitment to Christ, we will never realize life's maximum purpose, our potential until that commitment is made.

I'm grateful for my salvation.

Paul said in 2 Timothy 1:9 [Jesus] saved us and called us to a holy life, not because of anything we have done, but because of His own purpose and grace. I need to give my life to God because He's given His life to me. Amen? God made the ultimate commitment when He took on the form of man and came to earth to die on that cross for us as the perfect sin atonement. It's pretty obvious, but at the same time extremely powerful.

If God never did another thing for me, never blessed anything else in my life, never answered another prayer, never gave me another morsel of food or never said another kind word my way, I owe Him my all right now because of what He did for me on the cross. Paul writing about His own motivation in 1 Corinthians 15:10 stated, "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and I labor more abundantly than they all—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me." I commit to Christ because I'm grateful for my salvation.

2. God promises to reward that commitment.

If I'll jump in, I mean if I'll really jump in, He'll reward that commitment. Look at Luke 6:38, many consider this verse to talk about giving money, but it really refers to all of life. "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap." Matthew records Jesus stating about the same thing "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you." (Matthew 6:33)

Those are just two of dozens and dozens of fantastic promises in Scripture where God says if you'll just put your life in my hands, I'll bring you blessings and benefits you can't even imagine—if you'll just trust me. The more you commit to me, the more I will accomplish through you.

Are those not good reasons; are those not great reasons to commit your life to Christ? I can't think of any better reason. So immediately somebody says, "Why doesn't everybody do it then? Why doesn't everybody commit to Jesus?" Everybody doesn't really commit to Christ because of the resistance to commit, three of which are discussed below.

Resistance to commitment to Christ:

1. Nearsightedness- failure to take the long look.

We don't look 20 or 30 years down the road, much less from an eternal perspective. We just tend to live for now. C. S. Lewis wrote something excellent in one of His books, "We have the wrong view. We tend to think of ourselves as human beings who have a spiritual dimension, when in fact, we are spiritual beings simply passing through the human experience. The big picture is, I'm a spiritual being, and I'm going to live forever somewhere. But, we get nearsighted and see ourselves packaged in the flesh. Nearsightedness keeps our focus on what's the easy thing, the fun thing and the convenient thing, ignoring our long-term values.

Jesus said "But the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful." (Mark 4:19) Our Lord hit the nail right on the head. We focus on the urgent, not the important. We lose sight of those real values that we evaluated in the "What Are My Values" lesson. We stopped asking, "When I'm 90 years old and looking back, what is it that I most want to have done? How do I most want to be remembered?" All we think about is now. We don't commit!

I love the story of John Skulley. In the mid-70s, he was the president and chief executive officer of Pepsi Cola. He became president at age 34. He had his face on the cover of every major magazine. At age 42, he was on top of the world making more money than he could ever spend if he doled it out every second. A fellow by the name of Steve Jobs had started up a fledgling little computer company called, Apple Computer. He had taken it about as far as he could take it. He knew this man John Skulley was the man who could take it to heights as yet unperceived. He begged, and begged, and begged, and begged him to come, but Skulley was making too much money. Finally, in a New York penthouse, he looked at John and he asked him this fateful question: "John, do you want to spend the rest of your life making sugared-water, or do you want to change the world?" That did it. It broke him out of his nearsightedness, and he did take Apple Computer to unprecedented heights.

But there are heights beyond computers. The apostle John said in 1 John 2:17, "The world and all its passions and desires will one day disappear, but anyone who does the will of God will live forever." We've got to get over that nearsightedness to commit.

2. Selfishness - thinking only about self.

Many millions of people build their whole world around themselves and they don't have time for God. I don't have time for God; I'm too busy with my career. I don't have time for God's purposes in my life, I've got places to go, people to see and things to do. I've got dreams, I've got plans, I've got ambition. Now these are people who are in essence saying, "Now God, I know more about my life than you do. I know what's going to make me happy, I know what's going to fulfill me." But God says, "No, you don't. I designed you and I built you. You think you know, but you're blowing it."

Some of you read *Calvin and Hobbs*, the cartoon in the newspaper. There was one I saw some time back that I thought was really cute. Calvin was looking at Hobbs and said to him, "I'm at peace with the world, and I'm completely serene." Hobbs said, "Well, why is that?" Calvin said, "Well, I've discovered my purpose in life, I know why I was put here and why everything exists." Hobbs said, "O really?" Calvin said, "Yes, I'm here so that everybody can do what I want." Hobbs said, "Well, it's nice to have cleared that up." Calvin said, "Yes, and once everybody else accepts it, they'll be serene, too."

We laugh at that, but there are a whole lot of Calvins in the world. The world revolves around them. Once everybody else figures that out, they'll be serene, too. But when you live for yourself, you have a pretty small goal in life. But Jesus said as recorded in Mark 8:35, "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and the gospel will save it."

3. Fear.

Among those who have not yet really committed their life to Christ, pure and simple fear is probably the most common reason. As fears come up, we ask ourselves questions like: What will it cost? If I really commit to Christ, what will God require of me if I really took His hand and let Him lead me? Would I become a fanatic? What will other people think? Will I lose my secular friends? Will I no longer be cool? What if I can't keep my commitment? What if I fail?

Those are the kind of fears that keep people from committing. Now, if that includes you and those fears have kept you from being what God wants you to be, let me tell you what the source of those fears is, aside from the old devil himself. The source of the fears is you don't understand the character of God. Either you don't really trust His wisdom, or you don't really trust His love. Sadly, I think for too many people, it's the latter.

Folks, I want to tell you God is not some cosmic killjoy in the sky waiting to deal you a bumner. He said, "I know the plans I have for you. They are for good, and not for evil." (Jeremiah 29:11) Every father, every parent can identify with this. If your child was to come to you and said, "Dad, I respect you and I love you, you're my dad, and I want to live life the way you want me to live it." How would you respond to that? Dad, would you look at that child and say, "Ha, ha, ha, O boy, you don't know it, but you're going to be miserable from here on out. No more ice cream—spinach, artichokes, and anchovies for you. I'm going to break your play station. You're going to sit in that corner and wear a dunce cap the rest of your life and never go out." Isn't that ridiculous? It's absolutely absurd. Yet, that is the very concept many people have about their life if they commit it to God. He's going to put me through some obstacle course to make me miserable.

I want to tell you what, if my son walks up to me and says, "Dad, I want to commit my life to your purposes and goals, I want to be the son you want me to be." I would do everything, everything in my power to make his life as wonderful as it could possibly be. God, our Father, says, "I want to do the same." That's why Jesus said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and I'll add all these things to you."

Look at Psalm 37:3, "Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him and He will do this." That's the promise. I've got nothing to fear by committing my life to Christ. Life is going to be more wonderful than it could be otherwise.

Why we need to commit to Christ.

How do I respond with commitment to Christ? Obviously, if you're not a Christian, you need to put your trust in Christ and obey the gospel. Obviously, you need to recognize Jesus as who He is, the Son of God. You need to come to Him on your knees saying, "I believe that," confessing His name. You need to be immersed into the death of Christ being buried with Him, baptized into Christ, for the forgiveness of your sin. That is the means by which one accepts the grace that God has offered. But some of you have already done that. You've already obeyed the gospel. You have put on Christ having been buried with Him in baptism. Some of you assemble with a church regularly, but if the truth is known, you've yet to really commit your life to Christ. You've yet to really step on His power and grace saying, "I want His way more than my way."

What do you still need to do? The first thing you need to do is calculate. In Luke 14:25, Jesus is up front about commitment. He said if you're going to follow me, you'd better think about it. He said there's not a man who would build a tower without first taking inventory of his money and his materials. He would make sure he could finish. He's not going to get halfway up and quit. He said there's not a king who's not going to take care to count his own forces before he goes to war. If he's got 10,000, he's not likely to go do battle against somebody with 20,000. He said, "If you're going to commit to me, you better think about it, you better calculate it." In every commitment, there are benefits to be had and prices to be paid. You decide whether you're committed based on whether you think the benefits outweigh the costs. That's it. In other words, is the cause worth the costs?

I want you to do a little experiment. Picture in your mind two ledgers. On one side in this ledger is the question: What is the cost to follow Jesus Christ, because there is a cost? On the other side of the ledger the question is: What does it cost not to really commit to Jesus Christ? By your response to these questions you are making a commitment.

When you commit to Christ, what do you give up?

1. The right to personal sovereignty.

I'm not going to pull any punches. Don't say "I'm committed to Christ" if you're not going to commit. In other words, it's no longer what do I want, but God, what do you want? It's not what I want to do, it's God, what do you want me to do?

See, amazingly, the God who created the universe gave each of us the ability to choose how much influence the Almighty God will have in our lives. He didn't have to do that. If He wanted to, He could have made every one of us puppets, robots or animals, birds or fish. But He made us with the ability to think, reason and choose. He gave you the ability, right, to decide. So if you commit to Jesus Christ, you're saying, "God, I'm turning that right back over to you." Look at what Paul said in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." There was a commitment, and He turned over personal sovereignty.

2. Personal priority of your resources.

Whew! That one stings! It's no longer what do I want to do with my time, it is, God what do you want me to do with your time? It's no longer what am I going to do with my money, but God what do you want me to do with your money? See, it's the concept of stewardship. When you commit to Jesus Christ, you're saying, "I realize that God owns everything I have and He wants me just to manage it for just a little while for His glory. I give up "the my and mine concept." It's God. I give up priority of my resources, any kind of resource.

3. Worldly value system.

This concept was discussed in the "What are My Values?" lesson. "For everything of the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of the eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world." (1 John 2:16) Power, pleasure, prestige and possessions, it's not that you never have any of those things; it's that you don't spend all of your attention, your time, and your emotions trying to acquire it. If I commit my life to Christ, I give up a relentless pursuit of what the world says is important. Now that's a pretty big price, isn't it?

When you give up your personal sovereignty you realize you're not the manager of the universe, you're not even the manager of your life. You're going to let God call the shots. Give up the priority of your resources, the chasing after the worldly value system.

When you choose NOT to commit to Christ, what do you give up?

1. It costs me God's plan for the best use of my life.

If I decide I'm not going to commit to Christ, but just drift through life. I'll get little snatches of pleasure here and there, but I never come close to tapping into what God can and wants to do with my life because that only comes from really walking hand in hand with the Lord.

2. Satisfaction and joy

Those of you who are maybe advanced in years who have never made that commitment could testify you've felt a hollow feeling for a long time. That empty or hollow feeling is the lack of satisfaction and joy that you gave up.

3. Eternal life.

You gave up a reward in heaven, an eternity of absolute bliss where I'll never hurt, cry, or mourn again. You will never hear the Lord say "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter now into the joys of the Lord."

Once you've make that commitment, then CHARGE! I mean charge, dedicate, go for it, and don't turn back. "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship." (Romans 12:1)

When a pilot turns and starts a big 747 down the airport runway, he gets to a point of no return. He is getting more and more speed, either he's going to get airborne or crash and self-destruct. I'm afraid there are some of you who've got your engines revving. There are a lot of

other people out there who aren't even at the airport. Some don't even know there's a plane. Are some of you sitting on life's runway, revving up, building up a little speed, but not enough speed to get airborne? You've never gotten off the ground in your relationship with Christ. You know about Him, but you've never gotten off the ground in real commitment to know Him.

Some of you may have been sitting on that runway for years, revving your engines and saying, "One of these days, one of these days, I'm going to get committed. One of these days I'm going to give my life to God. One of these days, I'm going to stop living out my plan and start living God's plan." I really worry that someday you're going to stand before Jesus Christ with major regrets saying I did such a stupid thing! I invested my life, I invested my time and I invested my talent for the wrong purpose. How I wish I could do it over again. But it will be too late.

What is it that's holding you back from your commitment? What is it that's keeping you on the runway, instead of being airborne? Is it fear? Afraid of what God will do with you? Is it nearsightedness, are you just still looking at all these things around you? Is it just pure selfishness? Is it a relationship? What is it? Has there ever been a time in your life since you made your initial commitment to Christ that you made an unreserved commitment of your talent, your time, your treasure or your life without hesitation or reservation. You see the real issue is do you want to be a casual, lukewarm, Christian the rest of your life? You can't be partially committed to Christ. The one thing Christianity cannot be is moderately important. You can hide, you can stay uncommitted, and basically, nobody will know—but God knows.
Lesson # 1299 - February 2, 1997

Chapter 5

Setting Spiritually-Based Goals

Mission Statement

A good mission statement never changes. It is the constant compass point for your life, your business, your desires or whatever.

One of the best illustrations of that point goes back to the 19th century when most people traveled by horse and buggy. Henry Ford was one of scores and scores of buggy makers. As technology brought about the gasoline-powered engine and the automobile, most of those buggy makers went out of business because they thought their mission was making buggies. Henry Ford identified his company's mission as transporting people. See there will always be a need for that, taking people from point A to point B. Consequently, you know the rest of the story.

Too many people focus their life mission around temporary things. If you do, you're doomed to failure. Whatever your mission is in life, it must be permanent. Life is a journey, and whether you're 20, 30, 60 or 80 years old, your life mission should be the same. I would implore you to adopt the one that Jesus did – “Please God.”

Vision

Although one’s mission of life should never change, one’s vision should change. Vision is the optimum implementation of your mission at any point and time. Vision is your ideal picture of your life. It is the picture you paint of your desired state of affairs over a period of time, three to five years.

Let's go back to our example with Ford. In 1880, Henry Ford said my mission is transporting people. How will I best do that in the next five years? Well, the answer in 1880 was to build good buggies. In 1900, he asked that same question, how do I best implement my mission over the next five years? His answer was no longer the same. His vision had changed.

In my life, my mission is to please God. Now how do I best do that over the next five years? The answer I give to that question is my vision statement. The vision will vary from person to person. Your vision will vary based upon your gifts, your experiences, your background and your opportunities. Your vision will vary in your own life from time to time. How do I best please God over the next five years? Quite frankly, a 20-year-old will probably answer that question differently than a 60-year-old. But if you’re going to live the maximum life you need 1) a concise mission statement, written down and memorized always reminding you of what you want to do with your life and 2) a vision statement with a written picture of how you plan to be fulfilling that mission over the next three to five years.

Now because we human beings are the most complex creations in the world, a vision is not always easy to craft. It could be pretty hard to look at a total composite picture, write out a comprehensive vision statement of how we best please God and use the gifts that He has given to us. Perhaps the best way to create a vision statement for your life is to break life down into some basic areas and craft a piece of the vision statement for each major area.

There are a number of ways to do that, but here's one way that I like that appears to work very well. I encourage people to construct their vision statement around what I call the four P's.

Passion - how you approach life.

What do you love to do? How has God made you? With what kind of attitude will you approach life? When you begin to answer those questions, you've started your vision statement.

Purpose - what do you want to accomplish in life?

What impact do you plan to make in your life? How do you want to be remembered once you’re dead and gone? What contribution do you want to make to your immediate community? What is your purpose in life?

People - people whom you love and how you plan to love them.

Whom do you love? What are your deepest relationships, and how are you going to nurture those?

The irony of it is that businesses do vision statements all the time. So a lot of you are businessmen and businesswomen, but at business all they want you to do is craft a vision statement around your business. So you think about purpose, and if you love your work, you think about passion. But do you know what you tend to forget? You tend to forget the people who mean the most to you. Here you've got this picture and all these goals coming from this vision and that's why many business people end up having no family because they totally forgot about this critical element of life.

Praise - how will you worship God?

I don't mean a one-hour assembly on Sunday morning. I mean worship in the truest biblical sense of the word where biblically, our entire lives should be a worship to God, a spiritually sacrificed life. As you craft a vision statement for your life over the next three to five years, ask these questions. "How will I demonstrate my love to Him, day in and day out over the long haul? How am I going to do that?" Have you ever thought about that?

Now if you will answer those questions and paint a picture of your life, focusing on your passion, purpose, people and praise, you're a long way down the road toward the maximum life. That's your vision statement. Hear me, less than one percent of our population has a vision statement written out for their lives. But those who do are light years ahead of the ones who don't. They've got the tools for the maximum life because they really do know where they want to go. They're the ones who are not going to get distracted from their vision or life's mission.

Look at those four P's again; when you shape a vision for the passion of your life, you have excitement. If you don't shape that vision, you have boredom. If you shape a vision for the purpose of your life, you'll have satisfaction; if you don't, you'll have frustration. When you shape a vision for the people in your life, you have love; when you don't, you have loneliness. When you shape a vision for the praise in your life, you have destiny; but when you don't, you have hopelessness.

Jesus is the classic example. His mission was really the same as mine, and I hope, yours. It was to please God, remember? He said, "I've come to do the will of Him who sent me." He knew exactly what His mission was, but not only that. He knew how He wanted to fulfill that mission. In other words, He had a clear vision of what He wanted to do while He was on the face of this earth. Several times, people would come to Him and say, "Lord, come, do this, do that or do something else." Jesus would say "My hour is not yet come. Don't try to tell me what I need to do. I know exactly what I need to do." After only a three-year ministry, when He was only 33 years old, He said to the Father in John 17:4, "'I have finished the work you have given me to do.'" If we had been standing there hearing that, we would have thought, finished? Lord, you've not even got started. You're only 33 years old. You've only been at it three years. You've never traveled more than a hundred miles from home. You've not even begun. But His mission

and His vision were clear in His mind. They were not set by other people. Yours shouldn't be either.

Craft Goals

1. Goals reveal your vision.

From the vision statement of your life, you begin to craft goals. Goals simply are the statement of faith to accomplish your vision. They are the steps you must take to get to where you want to go. Goals take you to your vision and in so doing they help you accomplish your life mission. I know most of you are not accustomed to setting goals and some of you may even have a theological persuasion against them.

I believe with all my heart that God wants all of us to set goals. Some of you say, "isn't that rather presumptive. Didn't Jesus teach in the Sermon on the Mount, 'take no thought for tomorrow'? Didn't James say that we shouldn't say, 'We're going to do this or that, but only if the Lord wills?'" Yes, so let us examine those verses. The verse, "Take no thought about tomorrow." (KJV) Matthew 6:34 is best rendered as it is in the New King James Version and the New International Version, "Don't worry about tomorrow." Jesus isn't talking about planning. He's talking about fretting or being overly concerned. He's talking about an insecure spirit that sits around and says, "Oh no, what in the world is going to happen to me?" Frankly, if we did more planning, vision shaping and goal setting, we would worry less about tomorrow.

The teaching of James "If the Lord will," is not to tell us not to set goals. Rather, it is to remind us that any vision and goals we strive for should seek God's wisdom for its success; otherwise failure will be under His sovereign power. Scripture clearly, CLEARLY, points out the need for vision and goals. "For without vision, the people perish." (Proverbs 29:18) "A discerning man keeps wisdom in view, but a fool's eyes wander to the ends of the earth." (Proverbs 17:24) Do you see what that says? That says when you fail to plan you just go off in a bunch of different directions. You've got to have a game plan in life. Otherwise, you're just going to react from one crisis to another. You're going to be blown from one problem to another. Without vision and without goals, you're not controlling your life, you're life is going to be controlling you.

Jesus commended proper planning. In Luke 14 when Jesus was trying to encourage "would be" disciples to make sure they knew what they were getting into—He said, you've got to count the cost, you've got to think ahead. In verse 28, He said, what man for example would build a tower without first counting up his money and looking at his inventory of supplies? He wouldn't try to build that tower without knowing he could finish. Or in verse 31, he said, a king won't go to war in a battle unless he knows he's got enough troops to do the job. Well-formed goals help us achieve a vision. They're good, they're necessary.

2. Criteria for good goals

a. Relevant

They're relevant to your life mission and vision. You don't just set goals on a tangent; you look at the picture of how you want your life to be three to five years from now and begin to structure the goals that will get you there.

b. Specific

A well-formed goal is a target that you can tell whether you've hit or not. They're not generic or broad. They're very specific.

c. Measurable

They let you know if you're making progress. Now let me give you an example of those last two, specific and measurable. A lot of people will make a New Year's type resolution and call it a goal. They'll say, "My goal is to be a better father." That's not a goal, that's a wish. How do you know if you're a better father? That's not quantifiable so it cannot be measured to any standard. That's not a goal, that's a wish. Break it down into specifics like, "I'm going to hug every child three times a day." Now there's a goal. "I'm going to tuck each of my children in bed at night." There's a goal. "I'm going to spend uninterrupted interaction with each child at least 15 minutes a day. There's a goal. "I'm going to pray with my children every day." There's a goal. Those things will make you a better father. You can know if you've done those things or not, they are measurable.

d. Stretchable

Do me a favor. Raise your right hand. Before you put it down, can you raise it higher than that? Can you go even higher than that? Do you see the point of that little illustration? You never reach as high as you possibly can.

e. Flexible.

They're flexible so that if you reach a goal in your quest of your vision, you set the next one. If you fall short and you have not failed, you've moved closer to your vision. So you're constantly adjusting your goals, focusing on that picture that is three to five years out in your life.

Biblical Model

We will close this lesson by showing you a model that really capsulates every one of these and even more. Abraham wants to find a wife for his son, Isaac. He sends his servant Eleazar out to do that. (Genesis 24)

- a. Abraham had a mission. He was in a strange country traveling as a nomad for one reason. Do you remember that reason? God had come to Him and said, "Abraham, I'm going to make of you and your descendants a great nation; but first, I want you to pack up everything you have and move." Abraham did, didn't he? Do you know what Abraham's mission was in life? The same thing mine is—to please God. God said, "I'm going to do something with you, I

don't want to do it here. Pick up and move." Abraham said, "God, whatever you say because I live to please you." That's his mission—never changes.

- b. Abraham had a vision. The vision complemented his mission. "Abraham was now old and well advanced in years, and the Lord had blessed him in every way. He said to the chief servant in his household, the one in charge of all that he had, "I want you to swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I am living, but will go to my country and my own relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac." (Genesis 24:1-4)

Do you see the vision? Abraham knew God's purpose for him. He was going to be the patriarch of a great nation. But now for that to happen, he had one son, Isaac, and that boy needed to get married, so that he could have children and eventually that great nation could come about. So here's Abraham, in tune with his mission, and he has a vision. He can shape a plan to get Isaac a wife that will go along with God's plan.

- c. Abraham established a series of goals. He sent his servant to go find a girl from his home country. He said, I want that girl to be one of my relatives. I want her to be of my faith not one of these pagan Canaanite women. She must be willing and a virgin. Do you see all these series of goals that Abraham had for Isaac's wife?

Now here is a classic illustration of what not to do when you're shaping your vision and goals. "The servant (Eleazar) asked him, 'What if the woman is unwilling to come back with me to this land? Shall I then take your son back to the country you came from?'" Do you know what Eleazar did? He's understood Abraham's vision and the goal, but he immediately jumped to the potential problems. He doesn't even get started before he says, "Wait a minute, what happens if she doesn't come back?"

Never confuse the goal-setting stage with the problem-solving stage. Don't ever mix those two. Many people don't write down a vision because while they're writing it down they begin thinking about all the problems that may come up. They think of all the hurdles. I don't have enough money. I don't have enough time. I'm not smart enough. They talk themselves out of it. If you do that, you're going to fail with your life.

- d. Pray constantly. As soon as he gets to the place where he wants to find that wife, Eleazar bows down and he prays. (Genesis 24:12) While he is praying, Rebekah, the wife to be, walks up to him. (vs. 15) He then prays in front of the family. (vs. 52)

When you pray about your goals it does two things. a) it reveals your desire and b) it tests your dependence. If I'm not praying about goals in my life, I'm saying to God, "God, I don't need your help with this." I don't know if you've ever thought about it, but anything you don't pray about, you're telling God, I don't need you for this. Your prayers indicate your dependence upon God. Much of your prayer list should be on the goals that lead you to your vision that fulfill your mission. That's not all of it. You should pray for other things, but a big chunk of your daily prayer should be about the goals that you have written down for your life to be what it can be.

"Then he (Eleazar) prayed, 'O Lord, God of my master Abraham, give me success today.'" There was a time in my life when I thought you couldn't pray for success because that would just be selfish. But, if your mission is right and on target, you have every need to pray for success.

- e. Develop a step-by-step plan. We won't read it, but in verses 10 through 14, Eleazar developed a great plan. See once you have your goals, you've got to take a little while and figure out now how are we going to get those goals done? One by one, it all worked out.
- f. Discipline yourself to reach the goals. Nothing is ever accomplished without discipline. Do you know what discipline is? Discipline is not pain. Discipline is just delayed gratification. You give up something good now to get something better down the road. An athlete who goes through the discipline of training is giving up the comfort that he would have during those practice sessions because he believes the joy of competing and the joy of possibly winning down the road is worth what he's giving up now.

Eleazar disciplined

- a) His decision.
He watched closely that woman whose name was Rebekah. He watched closely before he decided if she was the one.
- b) His appetite
When he came before her brother and her brother wanted to eat first. Laban said, "Here sit down and eat, and then we'll talk." Eleazar said, "Nope, I'm not going to eat a thing. I want to talk because I'm here for a mission.
- c) His words
He carefully chose the words that he addressed to Laban, the man who would make the decision
- d) His time.
"Don't detain me, my master waits for me, let me go back home." If you're going to reach any goals in your life, it is essential that you learn to discipline your time. Your time is your life. If you waste your time, you're committing suicide.

Write out how you see your life three to five years from today. That's your vision. Use the four P's — Passion, Purpose, People, and Praise. Then craft the goals that it will take you to reach that vision.

Some of you are going to want to jump to those problems that you know are already facing you. Don't do that. Stay with your mission, shape your vision and craft your goals. While you work on those goals for your life, God is working on you. He is changing you for the better.

Where is your life going? Is your life even headed in the right direction? Is it going toward heaven? Is it on a road that's paved by the blood of Jesus Christ? There is no other way to the Father except by Him. Have you been distracted and need to turn to get back on the road? If you're not in Christ, a Christian, you really are not headed where you want to go. Today is the day to put your faith and trust in Jesus, confess the name of Jesus, die to sin and be buried in His blood through Immersion in water calling on Him to forgive you of your sins. Lesson # 1300 February 16, 1997

Chapter 6

Organizing My Time

What are you trying to do with your life? What is your mission, your vision? How do you want your life to look in accomplishing that mission? You've got to set goals. Goals are those steps that are going to lead you to the vision in the accomplishment of the mission and they must be specific and measurable.

This lesson is primarily about how to organize your day-to-day living to accomplish those goals. How do you manage your time? Time is your most precious asset. In fact, your time is your life. So obviously if you're going to live the maximum life, you've got to make maximum use of your time.

"Be very careful, then how you live—not as unwise but as wise... making the most of every opportunity..." (Ephesians 5:15) Do you understand what Paul is saying? "Make the most of every opportunity because time is precious." Time is worth far more than your money because, unlike your money, you can't save your time. You can't borrow it, buy it or manufacture it. All you can do is use it. If you don't use it, it's gone. If you don't learn to manage your time, nothing else will be managed in your life. It's that critical.

How many of you would admit "I just don't seem to have enough time to get everything done I want to do"? I saw a *Calvin and Hobbs* cartoon that I got a kick out of. Calvin turned to Hobbs, and he said to him, "I know that God put me on earth to accomplish certain things. Right now, I'm so far behind, I'll never die." Have you ever felt like that? The problem is not having enough time. No! To the contrary, time in many senses is the great equalizer.

Unless the world ends today, virtually every one of us will live all the way through today. If you live all the way through today, it is the one thing that you have in common with everybody else who lives through the day. You're not of equal strength, age, money or opportunity. But there's one thing all of us who will live through the day have in common, each one of us will have 24

hours, 1,440 minutes, no more, no less. The problem is not that we don't have enough time; we all have really the same amount. The question is: How do you use your time?

Are you disorganized? Are you mismanaging your time? A lot of people don't know. They have plodded along, or gone in circles for so long, they really don't realize the goals that could be accomplished and the vision that could be achieved if they properly managed their time.

Evaluate your situation. Do you recognize any of the following symptoms of time mismanagement?

1. Messiness.

Is your desk cluttered? How about the top of your dresser in your bedroom? Some of you know exactly what I'm talking about; they're just filled with stuff. What about your car? Is it dirty on the inside and the out, constantly? Do you remember the last time you had your oil changed?

2. Forgotten appointments, messages, and deadlines.

Now quite frankly, those things occasionally happen to the best of us. They happen to the most organized of people. But for the disorganized, virtually every day becomes filled with broken commitments and lame excuses.

3. Lack of productivity.

You find yourself doing small, boring tasks, just so you'll feel like you got something done. You can check it off your "To Do List." There's a tendency to daydream and to avoid making a real decision, a tendency toward procrastination.

4. Poor or lower self-esteem.

Disorganized people tend to feel poor about their work. They find it very hard to accept the compliments of others because deep down they know they're really not doing what they could do. Frankly, poor time managers often don't like themselves very much.

5. Poor quality of personal relationships.

If you're a poor time manager, you may be finding that days will pass without your having significant conversation between you and your spouse or children. When you do talk, those conversations may be shallow and devoid of self-revelation. They may be un-affirming. You may sense yourself becoming increasingly irritable at home. These are a key sign of time mismanagement.

6. Lack of intimacy with God.

Disorganized Christians want to feel close to God, but they seldom do. A preacher doesn't need to get up and say, "Now you need to set aside time for daily Bible reading and personal prayer time and time of meditation and reflection." They know all that. They simply are not doing it. They excuse themselves by saying, "Well, there's just not enough time in the day." But deep down they know it's really more a matter of priorities, organization, and personal will.

Did three or more of those symptoms hit home with you? How do you manage your time for the maximum life? Well I want to share with you now the seven laws for managing your time. Beside each of them I've given you a scriptural example. I think every one of them is as spiritual as it can possibly be. If your will, if your mission is to please God, you need to examine these seriously and apply them.

Laws of Managing Time

A. Take control of your time.

The central principle of all personal time organization is simple: Time must be budgeted. People who say, "Well, I'll get to that when I have the time," they've blown it right there. You never have the time, you make the time. Take control of your time.

Look at what David said in "Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." (Psalm 90:12) Now that may be a little bit poetic for you, but David is saying. if you're going to have a heart of wisdom, you must know where your time goes. Better yet, you must decide where your time goes so you can devote your time to the important rather than the urgent.

One of Satan's most effective strategies for Christians is just to keep us busy doing less important things. If Satan can't make you bad, he'll just make you busy. In other words, he can make your life ineffective by distracting you with worthless activities.

A few years ago *Time Magazine* came out with an issue and on the cover there was the headline "The Rat Race, How America is Running Itself Ragged." It said "What money was in the eighties, time is going to be in the nineties because we're running out of time." No, we're not running out of time, we're not scheduling our time. We're not numbering our day's right. Take control of your time.

Have you ever noticed for example that we tend to give priority to scheduled events over non-scheduled events? Let me explain. If the only thing you've scheduled on a Monday is a 2:00 dental appointment, you will revolve the rest of your day around that dental appointment. Well, I might can go here, I might can go there, but I've got to go to that 2:00 dentist appointment. In other words, you give priority to scheduled events.

Rather than always letting other people determine what's important in your life by scheduling your time, you determine what's important. You schedule time for the things that you value and that you want to accomplish. That is your responsibility. Stewardship is critical to living the Christian life. You are a steward of your money, abilities, activities, functions and time. Don't let people take it from you unconsciously. It's your decision.

B. Start with God.

When you begin to take control of your time, you make sure you're spending time with God. "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." (1 Corinthians 10:31)

I want to share with you an amazing principle. Whatever you turn over to God, He blesses and gives you more of that thing. I did not make that up. It's from Luke 6:38, "Give and it will be given unto you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap." Whatever you give to God, He gives more to you.

Now the first thing we think this means is money. Give your money and He'll give it back to you; good measure and press down. But it's true for good deeds just as it is for money. It's true God will give you more opportunities. Remember, Jesus also said, "If you're faithful in little, I'll give you the opportunity to be faithful in much." It's true for your love. Have you found that out, yet? You give your love to God; He'll give love to you in all kinds of ways. If you love other people, more of it will come back to you. It's also true for your time. If you turn it over to God, He'll give you more time.

In the *Good News Version* Proverbs 10:27 states "Reverence for God adds hours to each day." That may be physically impossible, but it is a spiritual truth. If you start each day with time before the Lord, it will amaze you how much extra time you'll have for the rest of the day. You don't have time for devotions? Get up 15 minutes earlier. Don't be like the fellow who was so busy swatting mosquitoes, he never drained the swamp. If you want more time, you've got to start by giving more time to the Creator of time. Let Him multiply the time at your disposal.

C. Plan your day around your goals.

If you have a life mission to please God with goals, then plan your day around those goals. If you do not have a life mission, shape your vision now and visualize how you want your life to be three to five years from now. Remember, a good vision covers all the facets of your life. Be sure not to omit purpose, passion, people, and praise, otherwise you'll leave out major parts of life. Now, set your goals to help you accomplish your vision. Once you've written them down, reflect on them regularly in your daily activities. This constant follow-up is where people miss it.

Almost everybody I know has set goals at one time or another in their lives. Most of us have made a New Year's resolution. Haven't you? Even if you never had a life mission, even if you never had a life vision, most of us made a resolution. That's a form of a goal.

We set goal and "To Do List" and never even thinking about them. That's because most of us are activity-driven. We think of all these things we could and should do. Then we start our day just randomly doing those things on that "To Do List," things that we believe are good and necessary. The problem with a "To Do List" is that the things on that list vary widely in value. If you're just going to start doing things on your list, you may leave out the most valuable things. If you just live by your "To Do List," you're not purpose-driven, but

activity-driven. Don't think it's time management just because you have a list. You must establish priorities.

Your "To Do List" should reflect your goals you have written down. Your "To Do List" should reflect the really important things you want to see done in your life. Each day when you shape a "To Do List," try to move toward the accomplishment of at least one goal in each of the four major areas of your life. Move toward the accomplishment of your passion, purpose, people or praise goals.

There are all kinds of books out there on goal setting, but they don't tell you the most important thing. They tell you how to make a billion dollars. But none ever mention that one day you will stand before God in the Judgment. God is going to call that billionaire a failure if he didn't construct his life around the goals of doing what is pleasing to God.

Paul said "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize." (1 Corinthians 9:24) When you have a race; a sprint, a mile or a marathon, you've got to go in the direction of the finish line. "Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly..." (vs. 26) Can you picture a hundred yard sprint and some guy takes off in another direction? How ridiculous that is! But that's what so many people do with their lives.

Your challenge will not be separating the good from the bad; your challenge will be grabbing the best from all possible good. Therefore, plan your day around your goals.

D. Focus on the important over the urgent.

Most people organize their lives around two things: the urgent and the unfinished. We wake up in the morning and we think: What's urgent today? What fire do I need to go stomp out? Remember that which cries the loudest is seldom the most important. You need to prioritize what's really important.

E. Spend time on your strengths.

We've discussed living the maximum life by doing less of what you're not shaped to do and doing more of what you are shaped to do. Do less of what God isn't expecting you to do, and do more of what you are created to do. One of the sad realities about un-seized time is that it tends to flow in the direction of our weaknesses. We tend to spend more time doing things of what we're not very good at. But with proper planning, we'll spend more time on doing those things than what we do very well.

Don't misunderstand. We need to budget some time to improve our weaknesses and to develop skills. But that should not be most of our time. "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

(Ephesians 2:10) I want to find my shape and spend as much of my time doing that which I know God wants me to do because he's given me strength to tackle those tasks.

F. Budget time in advance.

Solomon said "The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty." (Proverbs 21:5) There's a financial implication in that proverb, but look at it, he says, if you plan ahead, it will profit your whole life. If you do everything in haste, you're going to have problems. I have learned the hard way that the principle elements of my time need to be on the calendar eight weeks in advance of the date.

Do you know the type of things that need to be budgeted in advance?

- a. Spiritual disciplines.
- b. Time with spouse
- c. Time for my children and their activities
- d. Friendships
- e. Rest and recreation

This may be the most critical of the seven laws because budgeting time in advance allows me to take control of my time, it allows me to allocate time with God, it allows me to focus on my goals and it allows me to deal with the important over the urgent if I do it ahead of time. The plans of the diligent lead to profit, but haste will cause poverty.

G. Busier is not better.

There is an example found in Exodus 18. When Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, came to see Moses, the leader of the Children of Israel, Moses was judging two to three million Israelites from sun-up to sundown. Don't you know Moses was glazed over by the end of the day? Jethro said, "You're killing yourself, and you're wasting their time, too." Jethro then taught Moses how to break it down into different divisions.

Are you too busy doing good things to be effective? Are you spending your time as God would have you spend it? Are you like a hamster on his little wheel?

I found a little parody of the 23rd Psalm which may help you remember to be effective not just busy. It goes like this:

The clock is my dictator, I shall not rest.

It makes me lie down only when exhausted.

It leads me to deep depression, it hounds my soul.

It leads me in circles of frenzy for activity's sake.

Even though I run frantically from task to task,
I will never get it all done. For my ideal is with me.

Deadlines and my needs for approval, they drive me.
They demand performance from me beyond the limits of my schedule.

They anoint my head with migraines. My in-basket overflows.

Surely fatigue and time pressure shall follow me all the days of my life; And I will dwell in the bonds of frustration, forever.

What's sad is more people live by that *23rd Psalm* than the real one. They might not admit it, but they do.

Are you tired of just trying to keep up? Are you tired of being activity driven? I've got great news Jesus Christ offers you an alternative. Remember when He said in Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden" heavy laden, by the way, just means stressed out. "All you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (RSV) I don't know what you think that means, but it's a promise from our Lord. He says, you come to me, get your will in sync with my will, your life set by my purpose and it will quit being real hard. In fact, I'll make sure that it's the most productive and effortless life that you'd ever live.

People, we've have just enough time in this old world to do God's will. If we try to do more, then there won't be enough time. Stop living by a "To Do List" and start living by goals based upon your life's mission to do God's will. Schedule those activities to lead you to those goals. That's not just some kind of business mumbo jumbo, that is exactly what our Lord did. He didn't let everybody else tell him what to do. He knew exactly what he wanted to accomplish. He got up early in the morning and went to a far place to pray. I think that's telling us He did that every day. He started with God and then He planned everything around His life mission and the goals to getting there. It's a spiritual activity not some management activity. As God's steward, He compels you to do it.

But going back to Matthew 11:28-30 "Then Jesus said, 'Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke fits perfectly, and the burden I give you is light.'" (NLT) It will only happen if you're in Jesus. He is the power for life management no place else. If you are not in Christ today you need to come to Him, put your trust in Him and obey His gospel. Lesson # 1301 January 19, 1997

Right Relationships

"The quality of your life will be in direct proportion to the quality of your relationships." Now mark that well, "The quality of your life will be in direct proportion with the quality of your relationships." Therefore, you must choose and develop relationships that support your life mission, or you'll never live that maximum life.

You need models to motivate you.

Modeling is the best way to learn. Whether you are learning how to tie your shoes, drive a car, or operate a personal computer. We learn faster and better through examples. Don't just tell me how to do it also show me how. Whatever the learning objective, you learn faster and easier and with fewer mistakes as long as you have a proper model.

Now in the same way, the quickest way to achieve your goals in life is to find somebody who is already doing with their life what you want to do and copy it—that's the key. You find somebody who is already where you want to be spiritually, intellectually, financially and relationally; look at what he is doing and model after it.

This is very biblical. The apostle Paul recognized his role as a life model when he said "Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern that we gave you." (Philippians 3:17) He said, "Follow my example, and follow the pattern I've set forth." The process works this way, as you follow a model; you in turn become a model. "You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia." (1 Thessalonians 1:6-7)

Jesus openly claimed to be a model. John 13, after He had washed the disciples' feet giving them that example of humility and service, He said in verse 15, "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." It is human nature to imitate. When you were an infant the way you learned to do anything was by copying what you saw done. Now the problem with that is as a child you don't get to choose your models. You just model after those who are closest to you. Therefore, as a child, if you were around somebody who was a successful person, you likely developed into a high achiever. If you on the other hand were around a negative example, you probably developed a negative attitude. If you saw anger modeled in your home, don't be surprised if you've got a bad temper. Some of us grew up under very positive models and others under negative, but most of us probably with a mix.

Fortunately, as an adult, we can choose our models. Therefore, as an adult, no matter what your past was, you can re-pattern and re-program your mind. Choose models that will take your life where you want it to be. I don't know what kind of student you are of history, but every

great leader in the history of the world has patterned after a model. General George Patton, World War II hero, was a very, very stringent disciple of Alexander the Great. Martin Luther King's model for non-violent protest was Gandhi. Gandhi, while not a Christian, said he modeled his lifestyle after Jesus Christ.

Models are the fastest way to move forward in your life mission. Find somebody who is already where you want to be and follow that example. The beauty about models is that they motivate us. Because as they break through barriers and make accomplishments, we know we can, too.

I love the story about Roger Bannister. For years and decades, physiologists, doctors, scientists thought that the human being never could break the four-minute mile. In fact one doctor wrote a big piece in *the American Medical Association Journal*. He said, "Do you realize that your heart would explode and your lungs would collapse if a human being ever would approach that four-minute barrier?" Then a fellow by the name of Roger Bannister did it. After he ran the four-minute mile, within 15 months, so did 32 other people. Do you see what a model can do for you?

Who are your models? Who are the people that you respect, living or dead, spiritually, intellectually and relationally? Who are you modeling your life after? If you don't have anybody like that, you're losing out. You're going through life wasting time and energy, trying to learn lessons that you don't have to learn firsthand; you can better learn them through the experience of someone else. You need models to motivate you.

You need mentors to mold you.

A mentor is a counselor, personal coach or trainer; Unlike a model, whom you may or may not know personally. In fact, a model may have lived generations before your lifetime but a mentor, on the other hand, knows you very well and cares about you very much. A mentor is committed to your growth, to your goals, and to your soul. Mentors are extremely involved in your life. In fact, they are the people God uses in your life to bring out the best in you.

The need for mentors is found throughout Scripture. Look at Proverbs 15:22, Solomon said, "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed." In my Bible, I've circled those two words, counsel and adviser. No matter how successful you become, you always need a coach.

Look on television this afternoon and watch Michael Jordan. Michael Jordan has a coach. Steffi Graf has a coach. Pat Roddy has a coach. The actor Tom Hanks has a coach; there's a director coaching his every move. That's one of the reasons those people are professionals. If you find successful people who are really sharpening their skills, you can be assured they have a mentor.

"Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise." (Proverbs 19:20) As I was thinking about this point this week, I counted it up and I have had in my lifetime six different mentors—people who have cared enough about me and have given me enough of their time to mold my life. I am going through a life transition right now, I am frankly looking for a couple more. I've never been smart enough on my own to do any job I've ever had in my life

and I will never be. But mentors have taken my life and molded it. They've guided it through the choppy waters to successful conclusions.

Folks, there are people all around you who could be your mentors and you need to find them if you don't have them. They don't have to be smarter than you in every area. They just have to be good at what you want to be good at. See the fact of the matter is, we're all ignorant, just on different subjects, right? But there are people out there who could guide you to your goals. There are several ways to benefit.

How you benefit from a mentor.

1. Ask questions.

Don't be afraid to ask a question. You know the older we get, the more we act like we don't need to know anything. Isn't that foolish?

"The purposes of a man's heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out." (Proverbs 20:5) If you're going to be a man or woman of understanding, you better learn how to get that bucket down in the deep waters of a wise man's life and pull out that water. The way to do this is by asking questions.

I don't know about you, but I have a relatively standard list of questions that I'm ready to ask at the drop of a hat when I'm around wise people who can mentor me. When I'm around people who know something I don't know, who've experienced something I haven't experienced, who can help mold me, I have questions like these:

- a) "Tell me about the greatest decisions you've ever made.
- b) Tell me about the greatest successes in your life and what you learned from them.
- c) Tell me about the greatest failure in your life and what you learned from it.
- d) How do you manage your time?
- e) How do you handle stress?
- f) What are the books that you've read that have made the greatest difference in your life?"

Mark this well: The true mark of wisdom is the ability to draw good counsel out of other people. When you can do that, it will help you live the maximum life.

I read a true story about a fellow who is now preaching, but when he was an intern for a preacher, he was there for an entire year. And he said, "You know the whole time I was there, the guy got up and preached and he never preached a dud. Every sermon wasn't just a hit, it was a home run; he just knocked it out of the park. So I went in there to interview him and said, 'I've been with you a year, and you've never messed up, you've never flopped, I want to know

your secret.' The preacher said, 'I don't have any secrets.' The intern insisted 'No, no, don't give me that. There is something different about you than other people who have preached, I want to know what it is.' He said, "Really, really, I do what other preachers do.' And the intern asked, 'No, you tell me, is there anything in your life?' The preacher said, 'Thirty years ago when I went into the pulpit, I made a covenant with God. I told Him if He would bless what I do, that I would read the New Testament each week.' He said, 'In 30 years, I've never missed a week in that commitment.'" Wouldn't you hate to have left without that deep water of wisdom—staying in the Word?

2. Accept suggestions or accept feedback.

"Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance—" (Proverbs 1:5) Sometimes when you listen, you're going to have to listen to criticism. That's okay as long as it's from a good source one who loves you and who's wise. Consider Proverbs 25:12, "Like an earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold is a wise man's rebuke to a listening ear."

Folks, when you're in the presence of someone who is knowledgeable, someone you trust and someone who loves you, listen to them. Whether they encourage you or whether they correct you, the feedback is essential to the maximum life. I don't know how many of you are into rocket guidance; probably not all that many, but when NASA launches a rocket to go up to the moon or Mars or whatever, do you know how they do that? It's not that easy to do because the earth is constantly moving, the moon is constantly moving around the earth, both those bodies are moving around the sun and our whole solar system is moving through space. How do you keep that rocket on track? They don't just program in the direction and say, "All right, it's on its own." There is a computer on that rocket that every millisecond is feeding back data to the home computer which is constantly sending back to correct the course. There is a constant feedback to keep that rocket on course. That's the way it is in life and that's why we need mentors.

Now whenever I say that to an older Christian, his first reaction is, "Well, I've made so many mistakes in my life, I couldn't be a mentor." You don't have to be perfect to be a mentor; you just need to be just one step ahead. We need models to motivate us and mentors to mold us.

3. Partners to propel you.

People who are committed to the same life mission that you have motivate and spur you toward your common goals. Jesus had 12 of them didn't he? If you read the New Testament, Paul had nine. Everybody needs a partner.

Very few people ever stop and ask: "What am I going to do with my life?" If you've been serious about this study, if you've taken notes, if you have developed a life mission and a life vision and if you've got concrete goals to take you to that maximum life you are among less than one percent of the people in this nation. That means you are going to have to actively seek out

other people who want to grow with you because frankly, you're in a class by yourself. You need to find people who will want to help you grow.

Solomon said, "Two are better than one for they have a good return for their work." (Ecclesiastes 4:9) We all need partners. Benjamin Franklin had a support group that he called, "My Most Ingenious Friends." That group would get together, write papers, discuss them, ask questions and help each other. They met every Friday night for 40 years. Do you wonder why Franklin was creative and ingenious through his late eighties? Do you wonder why his very best inventions occurred after he was 70 years old? I'll tell you why, because he had partners who propelled him. Do you?

Thomas Edison had a group he called his "Mastermind Alliance." In a six-year period that group came up with 300 different patented inventions. You say, "I'm not an intellect." I'm no Edison, I'm no Franklin, and I don't need a 'Mastermind Alliance.'" If you're a Christian, you need partners to help pull you hand in hand on your mission to heaven. God designed his church in part to edify.

"So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." (Romans 12:5) But look at this, using the metaphor of the human body, Paul in essence said, "Christians, you are partners in this journey called Life and you are relating to one another like the heart relates to the lungs, or the arm to the hand, or the neck to the head. You must have each other to lean on and draw strength from."

We're like a mountain-climbing team going up Mount Everest. They're tied together by those ropes. They're tied for their safety and strength. They're all working with one another to help the team reach the top of the peak. Christians are pulling each other up. We're relying on each other's strengths. Frankly, if one of us falls, then we're all in danger of falling. We are that interconnected. So if you've got a life mission and, your life is going somewhere, it really does matter who you're tied to.

"Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14) If you have a life mission and you're in partnership with somebody who doesn't accept it, but opposes it, at very best they will resent it, at worst they will sabotage it. You'd better choose your life partners carefully. I'm talking about your business partners. But more importantly, I'm talking about your marriage partners. You need a partner who will propel you.

4. Need friends who will feel for you.

You need some friends who will support you. "A friend loves at all times..." (Proverbs 17:17a) A true friend is someone who walks in while everybody else is walking out. When other people see through you, a friend sees you through. When you make a mistake and everybody else wants to rub it in, a friend rubs it out. They're consistent, they hang in there with you, and they support you emotionally, physically and spiritually. They encourage you. They do what the Hebrew writer said in chapter 10:24, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds."

Friends are a key to a maximum life because you will never rise above the level of your closest friends. Mark that well. It's really much like what I was just talking about with partners. You never rise above the level of your closest friends. It's true. Birds of a feather do flock together. So, if you want to soar with eagles, you can't run with the turkeys.

"Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.'" (1 Corinthians 15:33) I want to be very frank with you about some relationships here, very frank. If you're serious about living the maximum life and being all God meant you to be, you may have to break off some friendships that you have right now. That's the truth. Bad company does corrupt good character. One of the reasons that some of you have stalled on your life mission or gone full steam ahead with God is because you're afraid of what that will do in a relationship. You're afraid you will be rejected. You're afraid they will disapprove. You're afraid you will be ridiculed or whatever. Do you want to waste your time, waste your life, simply seeking to be popular?

Simply stated, the bottom line is: "Do I care more about God's approval or someone else's?" If you're honest with yourself and your answer is: I really do care about someone else's approval more, the Bible calls that idolatry. That is simply putting someone else in God's place. We've got another word for it today, today we call it co-dependency. Co-dependency is letting someone else set the goals, the purposes and the ambitions of your life. You can call it whatever you want, the bottom line is it's wrong. It's wrong and it blows the maximum life out of the water.

Some of you may need to ask some tough questions about some of your closest relationships. You may need to ask: "Are they helping or hindering my life mission?" "Are they bringing out what God wants in me?" "Are they drawing me closer to God, or are they drawing me farther away from Him?" When you get to the last question and if you find they're drawing you farther away from God, that person is no friend. I don't care how long you've known them. They are no friend. Then how does one get the right kind of friends?" In a nutshell, I think it's to be the right kind of friend. You attract what you are, you reap what you sow. What you give as a friend to others is usually what you get. If you want time invested in you, you'll have to do the same, but you need friends, you need godly friends, or your life won't be what it can be.

5. You need a Savior to save you.

Jesus said "'For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.'" (John 3:17) This old illustration explains it succinctly.

If our greatest need had been an educator,

God would have sent us a teacher.

If our greatest need had been a new philosophy,

God would have sent a philosopher.

If it had been money,

God would have sent an economist.

If our greatest need had been in entertainment,

God would have sent a comedian.

But our greatest need was forgiveness,

So God sent us a Savior.

Relationships are extremely important. You need models, mentors, partners, friends and brothers and sisters in the Lord. But those really aren't worth anything if they're not built on the foundation of the relationship that you have personally with Jesus Christ.

"You see, at just the right time, while we were still sinners, Christ died for the ungodly." (Romans 5:6-8) Later in that same facet, he said "He did that so we could have friendship with God." One of the most mind-boggling concepts in all the universe is that God, the Creator of everything wants to be my friend. He wants to put His arm around me and you and say, "I love you just like your closest friend. No, I love you more than your closest friend." That's possible through the love that Jesus demonstrated.

Examine all your relationships. Start with your relationship with Jesus Christ put your faith and trust in Him through obedience to His Word. Lesson # 1302, March 2, 1997

Chapter 8

The Art of Finishing

This is the final lesson in "The Maximum Life - Living With Power and With Purpose" Series. If you have examined your mission in life, shaped a vision, set goals and secured right relationships, you need to follow through to the end.

How do you finish the race? Scripture several times compares life to a race. Paul says in Acts 20:24, "...if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me." In 2 Timothy 4 Paul wrote "I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." Notice the metaphor, not just of running the race, both times Paul talked about finishing the race. Life is a marathon not a sprint.

If you've ever watched a marathon, in its beginning there's this huge crowd all clumped together. As the race progresses, the crowd thins out. Some finish well, others not so well, and some don't finish at all. That's really pretty typical of life. It's not how you start in life that really matters, it's how you finish. What has happened to you in your life up unto this point is not nearly as crucial as what you do with your life from this point forward. It's how you finish that's important. If through this series or other experiences or teachings you get on track to live the maximum life, then let me encourage you to live it until you die. Finish it and claim the prize.

"Run in such a way as to get the prize." (1 Corinthians 9:24) You don't just run. You don't just run aimlessly, you don't run in mediocrity, if you're going to run, then run in such a way as to get the prize. As we conclude this series I hope the acrostic FINISH will help you keep that course all the way to the finish line.

Focus

If you prepared a vision statement for your life, if you prepared goals to accomplish that vision, keep those things in front of you. That's why I stress writing them down. In your life you need to regularly sit down and review your values, your visions and your goals then evaluate "how am I doing". Zig Ziglar said, "We all need to regularly do a check-up from the neck up." Plato said, "The unexamined life is not worth living." Paul said "Examine yourselves to see whether you're in the faith; test yourselves." (2 Corinthians 13:5) And in Proverbs 4:26, Solomon said "Ponder the paths that you walk." These great statements can be summarized in "Regularly looking at your values and goals and praying about them will make a bigger difference in your life." Then as you make out your daily agenda ask the question: Is what I say important and reflected in my daily time? That's the key to the maximum life in how you finish the race.

Intercept distractions

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and run with perseverance the race marked out for us." (Hebrews 12:1) The writer says in this race of life to throw off everything that is going to weight you down. You don't run a marathon in a suit of armor. You don't enter a triathlon in an overcoat. You shed anything that would hold you back, that would hinder. You eliminate the distractions.

What are the things in your life that would distract you from living the maximum life? Well, thousands of things. It might be the distraction of a) thinking about making money; b) wrong relationships; or c) the idea that busy is better. You just clutter your life with all these things. There are thousands of things. But probably the number one thing that hinders most folks from the maximum life is their past.

So many people are stuck in their past. They're holding on to the guilt of their own wrongdoing. They're holding on to the hurt of the wrongs that have been inflicted on them. If either of these described you, you're not living the maximum life. Let me remind you, if you're going to drive down life looking in your rearview mirror, you're sure to wreck. You've got to look out in front of you staying focused and not distracted by what is left behind.

"Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do:" (look at this) "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:13) Paul is remembered for his great Christian service but he was also a great Christian persecutor. Paul had plenty to feel guilty about. But knowing he was forgiven by his Savior, Paul said, "No, no, I forget the past and I press on. I won't be manipulated by my memories."

Now you who are in Christ can either rehearse those guilt feelings or you can release them. If you're going to live the maximum life, if you're going to finish the race, let go of the grief, let go of the grudges, let go of the guilt. They're holding you back, they're wrecking you and they're only hurting you. Throw aside your past, your fears, your guilt and your doubts; intercept those distractions.

Note the reward.

Let me ask you a question: Why would we want to live the maximum life in the first place? Why go all out for God? Why make the effort? It's really pretty important because if you can't answer the why, you won't make it to the finish line. The why determines the how long. The why will determine the effort you put into it. Why go to all the trouble we've talked about? Why examine your values? Why make those goals? Why worry about relationships?

1. The purpose - Remember that God put you on this earth for specific purposes. "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:10) God has some things, some good things that He made us to do. He had a blueprint for us before we were ever born. Frankly, if you don't fulfill that purpose it does not matter how much money you make, how many people answer to you or how many magazines you get your picture on the cover; if you don't fulfill God's purposes for your life, you're a failure. That's harsh, but it's true. Anything that does not do what it's been designed to do is a failure by definition. The only way you're going to have any lasting satisfaction and joy is by fulfilling God's purpose. That's why you make the effort.

2. The ultimate reward. - "Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man aimlessly..." (1 Corinthians 9:25-26) Do you see what Paul says? He says, oh yes, the Greek, those folks in their little Olympics, they run for a stephanotis, a crown of victory; a little gold medal or something else. But do you know why we run? It's not to work our way into heaven because God gave salvation free to all who claim it through faith,

trust and obedience. We want to run in a way that's honorable to that calling all the way to the finish line.

Observe, there are three kinds of motivation in life. There is:

- a) internal - when you motivate yourself.
- b) external - when people or things are catalysts to motivate you.
- c) eternal - when a heavenly reward that never disappears motivates you. The key to finishing the race in the maximum Christian life is to keep your eyes on the finish line and what's just on the other side of it.

"So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:18) Paul continues that thought in the next verse, "Now we know that if the early tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands." (2 Corinthians 5:1) Do you wake up every day and think, I'll make the most of my journey in this tent, but I really have got my eye on that mansion? The key to persistence is perspective. Do you want to finish? You've got to concentrate on your purpose and not your problems. "Obstacles are what you see when you take your eyes off the goal."

Incorporate good habits.

You know we have talked about deliberately and systematically choosing your course in life, and all that's true. But frankly, some of you, a lot of you won't try the steps to the maximum life because you're thinking that's too much work and too much trouble. But as you become consistent in your choices and as you become disciplined in your decisions, it almost becomes automatic. In other words, you develop good habits. Frankly, life would be too tedious, it would be too overwhelming if we had to break down and analyze every thought and action. What if you had to think about every breath, inhale and now exhale, think how terrible. What if you had to think about everything you went through? God didn't make us that way. He created us to become creatures of habit.

Back to the analogy of a marathon runner. When he starts for that first half-mile or mile, he concentrates on setting a pace and getting his breathing in rhythm. But after about a mile, he doesn't have to think about that anymore. In fact, he will go miles without thinking about his pace or his breathing. Most of them let their minds wander a thousand miles away. Why? Because they have developed a pace and set good running habits. Then they're actually able to relax. Inevitably, you will develop habits. Make sure that you are developing the habits that lead to the maximum life.

Strangle discouragement.

I intentionally use Strangle discouragement. Choke it before it chokes you. Galatians 6:9 states "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if (see that word) "if we do not give up." I have circled that "if" word in my Bible. Folks, discouragement is a deadly enemy of your life mission. In fact, I'm convinced that discouragement is the greatest weapon that Satan has because nothing will render you more ineffective more quickly. The moment you get serious about living the maximum life to make your life count for God, the devil will try to discourage you, especially early on. You've got to push past the discouragement to make it to the finish line.

Again using the race analogy, discouragement to me is like hitting the wall. Have you ever heard that term? Runners use the term, "hitting the wall," because late in a distance race there's a point where every part of the body just begins to scream. It begins to shut down. The only way a runner gets past the "hitting the wall," part is through pure perseverance, and that's true in the race of life.

I'd like to give you a neat little formula, something that would instantly make your pain go away and just say, "Hey don't worry about that." I can't do that. Perseverance is the key. Somebody once said, "The secret to success is to outlast your critics." Isn't that good? Wellington, the great British general, once said, "The secret of the British army's success is to fight five minutes longer than the enemy." You don't measure a man's greatness by his wealth. You don't measure a man's greatness by his talent. You don't measure a man's greatness by his education. You measure a man's greatness by what it takes to discourage him. Great people are just ordinary people with extraordinary determination. They just don't quit.

"Therefore, my brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." (1 Corinthians 15:58) Can I paraphrase that for you? "Hang in there. Hang in there, God is going to reward you for your efforts."

I do want to say this though it's no magic cure, if you're sitting there right now discouraged and wondering how life could get any harder, any tougher, or any worse, be assured that your Savior is sitting right there with you. If you're going to live the maximum life, there will be points along that life where God will test your commitment. Now He doesn't test it so that He'll know how committed you are. Our God knows everything. He already knows how committed you are. He tests your commitment so that you will know how committed you are.

How are you doing with perseverance? Do you finish? How do you handle failure? When things don't go right, when you make a mistake, do you have a little pity party and say, "Poor me, poor me." Do you complain, do you argue or do you give up? No! You strangle discouragement before it strangles you.

Hold on to Christ.

If you cooperate, God will give you the power to hold on. He'll give you the power to complete it. You don't have to do it alone. He'll help you if you'll cooperate.

"Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6) "He will keep you strong to the end so that you will be found blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 1:8) No doubt some of you studying this lesson are going through difficult times right now. You don't feel like finishing at all. You may feel like you're going under. You can't figure it out. God is not through with you. The race is not over. He who began His good work in you wants to bring it into completion in your life. Hold on to Christ.

"To this end I labor, struggling with all His energy, which so powerfully works in me." (Colossians 1:29) Some of you are just beginning the journey, seriously. Be assured those who run the race effectively and who head for the prize and who live the maximum life will do exceedingly more than all they ever thought or imagined because of the power of Christ working within them.

Have you examined your life as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 13:5? Have you tested your faith? Are you beginning at last? Are you well on your way to living the maximum life? Or are you wallowing in discouragement? Hold on to Christ. If you are not in Christ, now is the time. Put your trust and faith in Him by obedience to His gospel message, His message of reconciliation. Steve Flatt AG lesson # 1303 March 9, 1997



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