

Creating Your "Life Plan"

A worksheet by Peter Haas

To watch the sermons that correspond to this, see the teaching series "Changeable" - Parts 6, 7, & 8 [delivered at Substance Church in January-February 2019].

There is something almost magical about a written life-plan. Years ago, at the beginning of each year, I would write down my "roles & goals." And over time, I started revising and expanding that plan every three months. In some ways, it's a master plan for my year; but, it's also a prayer journal. As I look back, it's amazing how many goals I've achieved and habits I've acquired. In many ways, I'm a completely different person because of the discipline of Life-Planning.

All throughout the Bible, God has given his people strategic plans. But many don't know how to go about getting this plan. So, in this worksheet, I will take you through a series of questions that will help you assemble a working plan of your own. Some of you may want to get help from a friend. And remember, this is a working document that should be altered every few months. So don't get too perfectionistic.

After doing this process hundreds of times, I've refined it down to 6 Golden Rules that will help you maximize the fruitfulness of your life-plan. The rules don't necessarily work in a sequential fashion. So, plan on going back to refine your previous thoughts with each successive step. And remember: All of these questions are based on a large number of studies pertaining to goal-making and habit formation. So, by answering each and every one, you will statistically increase your odds of execution!

#(1). Write down your Roles / Goals / Plans & Dreams

Habakkuk 2:2 "Write the vision down. Make it plain. So people can run with it!"

Success in *one* area of your life will not compensate for failure in another; therefore, it's critical you think about your life in a holistic way... not merely your professional or financial goals.

What are the Various Significant Roles God has you playing this year? (Feel free to list volunteer roles & prominent hobbies too.) For eg. I am a Father, Husband, Christian, Pastor, CEO, Small Group Leader, Musician, etc.

What one thing could you do (or stop doing) that if you did on a regular basis, would make a tremendous difference in your personal / professional / spiritual life? (Eg: exercise; Bible reading; Get new friends; Date nights with Spouse etc.) Or, what one change would make 60-80% of the difference in each area or role in your life?

If God was to suggest an adjustment in your life today, what do you think he would tell you?

What area would he point out? What would he call you to do?

(For help here, I created a short self-assessment tool that can help you evaluate how "depleted" you are in 15 different categories...from financial health, to physical health, to sexual health, to spiritual health, etc. Just search "Holistic Health Assessment" at www.PeterHaas.org)

What are Some Goals for Each Specific Role and /or Issue? What are you going to actually do? (Hint: Avoid "to be" statements like: "I want to be a better spouse," or unmeasurable dreams like, "I want to know God more." Or "I want to be in shape." Your goals must be numerically assessable or be applicable to a

time-line, like "I will purchase this book and read 2 chapters /week until May 1st!" Or "I will go on a date with my spouse twice/month.") List a few sub-goals for these as well.

What could be the best imaginable outcome of you achieving these goals? I.e., Visualize your success. What would it look like if God added his miraculous power to your effort? How would you feel? How might it change those around you? Try to get specific by making a few bullet points.

What could potentially stand in the way of accomplishing each goal? Create a list of obstacles. Or, alternatively, expand on your 'sub-goals' or baby steps that are critical to the success of your main goal.

(2). Submit your Plan to the Lord through Scriptures, Mentoring, & Prayer.

*"Call to me, and I will answer you, and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know!"
Jeremiah 33:3*

"If anyone lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives wisdom generously without finding fault." James 1:5

In this critical step, you are acquiring wisdom about how to truly hear God's plan. God speaks in three ways: (1). Through the Bible; (2). Through godly mentors; & (3). Through prayer. Most people are predisposed to seek one of these three types of wisdom to the exclusion of the others. However, each play a significant role in helping us experience God's best. So, with this in mind, take some time to answer the following questions:

Would any of your plans contradict the teachings of Scripture? What encouragements or cautions would your spiritual friends give you about your plans?

Who are the godly people in your life who have successfully navigated some of the goals and/or problems you are facing? And what are you going to do to earn the right to be around them? Be sure to add a few coffee-appointments, books and paid-consultations to your list of goals. "If you walk with the wise, you will grow wise" (Prov. 13:20).

After refining your goals through the previous two filters, what does your gut tell you? I call this the "Prophetic Filter." Between good ideas, what is the "God Idea? When you pray, do you feel a supernatural peace about one option verses another? Do you sense any additional nudges about how to prioritize your goals? Remember, the prophetic is not a substitute for Scriptures or Godly advice. (Eg., If you feel a "peace" about having pre-marital sex... it's probably your hormones, not God.) So, don't use the prophetic filter to commit the "sin of presumption." And if you're not accustomed to praying like this, simply allow God to prophetically impress ideas on your conscience. Let your imagination flow as you worship the Lord. If you're worried about your "gut impressions," simply submit them to your godly mentors. The net result will be more wisdom.

(3). Convert all dreams into Fun Goals... then into Small Habits:

Dreams tend to be hard to measure, like "get in shape." Goals are objective, like "I want to weigh 170lbs by the marathon I'm running on June 1st." And once you start adding sub-goals, be sure to add in "Fun Goals" – goals that are intrinsically motivating, experiential, or rewarding. For Eg. "I want to fit into my sexy pants and run this particular marathon while vacationing in Hawaii!" Or, let's say your dream was to learn Spanish. Don't just set a goal of "read a book or finish a class;" rather, make *fun* goals like: "I want to watch my favorite movie in Spanish... Sing Despacito at a Karaoke Bar... or, take a trip to Spain & carry on a 10-minute conversation!"

But you see, goals all by themselves have limitations: (A). They don't necessarily motivate us; (B). They point us in a direction but don't necessarily tell us how to get there. (C). They trick some people into thinking: "I can't be happy until I... get married or achieve [fill-in-the-blank]." Of course, we know, milestones and fulfilled goals are exciting but they do not fit the God-shaped hole in us. And the final limitation of goals, (D). Goals are often tragically temporary: For eg., What good is losing 20 lbs if you fail to deal with your bad habit of "stress-eating" and then gain it all back? What good is getting rid of debt and clutter if you fail to deal with the hoarding and materialistic thinking that got you there in the first place? I.e., Goals tend to lock us into short-term thinking.

So, it's imperative that we think *beyond goals*, about the person God wants us to be. And ultimately, what are the small habits would prove to us that we are becoming that person? I.e., Habits are the holy grail! So, don't merely "aim to be in shape...to reach a certain weight or even 'wear sexy pants in Hawaii;" rather, think about the small habits that would sustain health for a life-time like: "Always take the stairs instead of the elevator." Or "Drink sparkling water instead of soda." Or, "Always be working out when watching tv or Youtube." (See Golden Rules #4 & 5 for insight on creating habits).

(4). Detail Your Plans Ten Times More than you think Necessary:

Motivation increases in proportion to the clarity of our plans. What often looks like a motivation problem is more often a 'clarity' problem. What decisions would your goals require? (For eg.). Will you need a membership at a club? If so, which one? What's your budget? Will you need new workout clothes? Where will you purchase them? How might this change your daily routine? How will this affect your kids' drop off or pick up from school?" Quite simply, the more you pre-decide these issues and detail them out, the more likely you are to accomplish them. Research shows, when you add a simple "Where & When," to each of your sub-goals, you increase your likelihood of execution by 55%. Habit researchers call this an "Implementation Intent: "I will work out at my home on Monday, Wed. & Fri. every week at 8am." But remember, if you're detailing your plans correctly, you will have to return to your life-plan regularly to update and expand them.

(5). Positive Habits Form because of Frequency not Quality & Quantity:

Habit Researcher James Clear, invented something called the 2 minute Rule. It states: "*Whenever you start a new habit, it should take less than two minutes to do.*" For Eg. If you struggle with reading your Bible on a daily basis, the best way to establish the habit is to pick a time & place & then read the Bible for only 2 Minutes. Some of you might struggle with this 2 minute approach saying: "How in the heck is that going to help me? I mean, two minutes is almost nothing?" However, *you can't improve a habit that doesn't already exist.* The goal is not *quality* but rather *frequency*. & Here's why:

Research shows it takes an average of 66.5 days to neurologically train a habit-craving into your brain. I.e, Your first step is to *establish* a basic habit craving, not improve it. Thus, "standardize before you optimize" by employing 2 minute habits for 2 months. For eg, if your dream is working out, take the first 2 minutes of

your favorite tv show, and exercise during it; Or, literally drive to the health club, even if you're only there for two minutes (establish the habit before improving it). If your goal is a better marriage, take 2 minutes to text your spouse what you're thankful for. If your goal is to be a better parent, take 2 minutes to "be present" for your kids before bedtime.

What are some tiny "2-minute" habits that would prove to you, you are becoming the person you hope to be?

(For Eg). Let's say, you dream of quitting smoking by being less stressed out; so, every time you go on a work break, you start by doing 2 minutes of deep breathing and prayer. Or, you dream of being a better mentor (or being better-connected to a mentor) so, you take 2 minutes every week at church and you introduce yourself to someone new in the foyer. Pick things that would be reasonable for you to do for 2 months (or 4 months, if it's not every day).

What will be your daily trigger for these habits? By simply clarifying a "where and when" to each habit will increase execution by 55%! Will it be a phone alarm? Will it be a particular stop-light you always cross? Will it be a Habit formation app (like "Streaks"). Research shows that when we attach these mini-habits to other daily rituals, it will also increase our odds of follow through: (Eg., Every time you brush your teeth, you send your spouse a short affirmation text. Or, every time you finish a shower, you take 2 minutes to read your Bible. Or, Every time you watch tv, you floss your teeth. Every time you commute to work, you listen to an audio book.) Even better, when we attach 2-minute habits to rituals we already love (like drinking coffee; reading the news), it increases our odds of developing the habit even more.

(6). Negative Habits Die because of Dissection and Displacement

A bad habit is a neurologically trained behavior. In fact, your brain already releases "reward chemicals" by merely anticipating the bad ritual (be it smoking, eating, porn, drugs, etc.) Science has shown us that, when you study brain activity (during a bad habit), it doesn't even stimulate the conscious parts of our brains (the parts that make decisions). Thus, for a bad habit to be eradicated, it must be replaced. But How? By dissecting your triggers rituals and rewards (a.k.a. "Habit loop") and by replacing it with a better one. Here are four questions to help you diagram your habit loop and replace it:

(A). What is this bad habit (or sin) my answer to? I.e. What is the legitimate need I'm trying to meet in an illegitimate way? Eg., Turning to cigarettes for a stress break or social interaction.

(B). What would God have me do instead to meet this need? I.e. If we're turning to cigarettes or porn as a substitute for loneliness, stress, and lack of communication with our spouses, then, what habit(s) would help replace those needs with healthier rituals? What goals, behaviors (& ultimately, habits) would deal with the root need or reward). You probably will need to create multiple new habits to overcome the triggers of 1 bad habit (Then go to 2 minute Rule explained in Golden Rule #5.)

(C). Who or What are the conditions, environments and triggers for this negative behavior? (Bad habits thrive on certain environmental conditions. When and where do you struggle with this habit the most? Are there certain days, certain times or locations where you struggle more? Many bad habits increase when we're Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired (H.A.L.T.) Or, ask: Are there certain people who trigger this habit more? Why?

(D). How can we control our conditions to avoid triggers or Pre-decide an alternate response to overcome triggers?

For Eg. It's easier to quit smoking when you stop hanging with your smoking buddy. Or, when presented with a "Church Social Option" verses your "Bar/Coworkers Social Option" you'll pre-decide to *choose church*.

Alcoholics *pre-decide* they'll always order a club soda when offered an alcoholic beverage. Athletes pre-decide they'll always eat the salad/protein option at a restaurant (unless it's Friday ;) Or, it's easier to grab a smaller bucket of popcorn (portion control) than it is to simply "stop eating" with a giant bucket of popcorn remaining in front of you (desire control). It's easier to avoid pornography or impulsive shopping when, you leave your phones and internet devices outside your bedroom at night. I.e., "*It's easier to avoid temptation than it is to resist it.*" Thus, how will pre-decide your reaction (when you're triggered by situations you couldn't avoid); And, how will you avoid triggers altogether?

Remember: the greatest habit we could develop is...

the weekly, monthly, and yearly discipline of refining your habits in light of God's call.

It's not about how much Bible knowledge we acquire. It's not how many religious rituals we perform – or church programs we attend. It's not how many tears we cry in worship... Rather, it's this: Are we do-ers of the Word? (James 1:22-25); I.e., How good are we at systematically implementing God's mandates into small daily behaviors? And in light of them, how well do we internalize these habits to the degree that we can say 'No' to the endless demonic distractions that crowd God's mandates out of our lives? (Mt. 13:1-23)

For Further Reading on Habit formation and Life-Planning that inspired this worksheet:

"Atomic Habits: Tiny Changes; Remarkable Results" – by James Clear

"The Power of Habit: Why we Do what We do in Life and Business" – Charles Duhigg

"The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People" – Stephen R Covey

"Switch: How to Change Things when Change is Hard" – Chip and Dan Heath

"When: the Scientific Secrets of Perfect Timing" – Dan Pink

"Your Best Year Ever: a 5 Step Plan for Achieving Your Most Important Goals" – Michael Hyatt