Finding God's long-range purposes for your life

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A. Introduction

If you could change yourself and/or your team, just by waving a magic wand, what you would really like to be – into what God has created you to be and called you to be in the fullest possible sense, would you exercise that power? Of course you would! But first you must know what you want to be.

"For I know the plans that I have for you declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you are future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me and I will listen to you and you will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart." Jer. 29:11-13

"***Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, 'This is the way, walk in it' "*** Is. 30:21

1. A word of caution – no quick fixes – no tricks!

"If I try to use human influence, strategies and tactics of how to get people to do what I want, to work better, to be more involved, to like me and each other while my character is fundamentally flawed, marked by duplicity and insincerity ….. Then, in the long run, I cannot be successful. My duplicity will breed distrust and everything I do will be perceived as manipulative."

"Each of us tends to think we see things as they are and we are objective. But this is not the case. We see the world not as it is, but as we are or as we are conditioned to see it. When we open our mouths to describe what we see, in effect we describe ourselves, our perceptions and our paradigms."

"The more aware we are of our basic paradigms or assumptions and the extent to which we have been influenced by our experience, the more we can take responsibility for those paradigms – examine them, test them against reality, listen to others and be open to their perceptions, thereby getting a larger picture and a far more objective view."

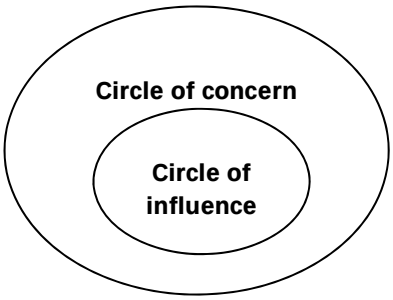
"In the words of Thoreau, 'For every thousand hacking at the leaves of evil, there is one striking at the root.' We can only achieve quantum improvements in our lives as we quit hacking at the leaves of attitude and behaviour and get to work on the root – the paradigms from which our attitudes and behaviour flow." [1]

The essence of this is the development of a "character ethic".

2. Becoming proactive not reactive

Being proactive, *"Means more than merely taking the initiative. It means that as human beings, we are responsible for our own lives. Our behaviour is a function of our decisions, not our conditions. We can subordinate feelings to values. We have the initiative and responsibility to make things happen."*

"Look at the word 'responsibility' – response-ability – the ability to choose your response. Highly proactive people recognise that responsibility. They don't blame circumstances, conditions or conditioning for their behaviour. Their behaviour is a product of their own conscious choices <u>based on values</u>, rather than a product of their conditions based on feelings. The ability to subordinate an impulse to a value is the essence of a proactive person. " [2]



The focus of the proactive person's energy is concentrated on enlarging their circle of influence. The circle of influence is the set of all those things we can do something about. The circle of concern is the set of all those things we are concerned about, but over which we have no real control.

The problems we face usually fall into one of three areas:

- **direct control** – these are the problems involving our own behaviour – they are solved by working on our habits
- **indirect control** – these are problems involving other people's behaviour – these problems are possibly solved by changing our methods of influence
- **no control** – these are problems we can do nothing about – they may be in the past or they may be situational realities – these problems may be solved by genuinely and peacefully accepting them and learning to live with them

There are two ways to put ourselves in control of our lives immediately:

- We can make a promise and keep it.
- We can set a goal and work to achieve it.

B. Making an assessment of yourself

This should be constantly re-evaluated in the light of feedback. In a sense you have a chicken vs. egg problem. Sorting out cause and effect is often problematic.

1. Assessing where you are now

You need to evaluate your assets and your current performance. Where do you stand now? What do you have to work with? How are you performing now?

This assessment takes lots of time and hard work.

On an individual level evaluate your assets. This includes evaluating your:

- talents (general abilities) and skills (specific abilities)
- intelligence and attitudes
- personality and motivation
- education and experience
- health and appearance
- relationship with family and friends
- spiritual gifts
- strengths and weaknesses

There are various books that can help you learn from these assessments. [See bibliography]

- For a general evaluation of your assets**: If you don't know where you're going you'll probably end up somewhere else!**[3]
- For your talents and skills: **What colour is your Parachute?** and/or **Where do I go from here with my life?**[4]

- For personality and motivation: **Take control of your life**[5]
- For strengths and weaknesses: **Fighting for time**[6]

There are also various **tests** that can help you. A couple that are recommended are:

The Myers-Briggs Temperament Test

The Strong-Campbell Interest Test

The books mentioned above will help you learn from these assessments.

The Myers-Briggs Temperament Test assesses you on various continuums:

Extrovert – Introvert

Sensing – Intuitive

Thinking – Feeling

Judging – Perceiving

The Strong-Campbell Interest Test tries to place you in one of six categories of occupations:

Realistic – would include specific skilled technical jobs

Investigative – more in the line of research

Artistic – creative jobs involving working with words, music, art etc.

Social – jobs working with people

Enterprising – jobs persuading other people to do something

Conventional – office jobs working with organisations, files and regular schedules

The book on spiritual gifts[7] divides the gifts in this way:

Speaking gifts: apostle, prophecy, evangelism, shepherding, teaching, exhortations, knowledge, wisdom

Serving gifts: helps, hospitality, giving, government, mercy, faith, discernment

Signifying gifts: miracles, healing, tongues, interpretation

Another helpful way of assessing yourself is placing yourself in one or more skill clusters – e.g. machine or manual skills

athletics/outdoor/travelling skills

details/follow-through skills

numerical/financial/accounting/money management skills

influence/persuading skills

performing (as on the stage) skills

leadership skills

developing/planning/organising/executing/supervising/management skills

language/reading/writing/speaking/communication skills

instructing/interpreting/guiding/educational skills

intuitional and innovating skills

artistic skills

observational/learning skills

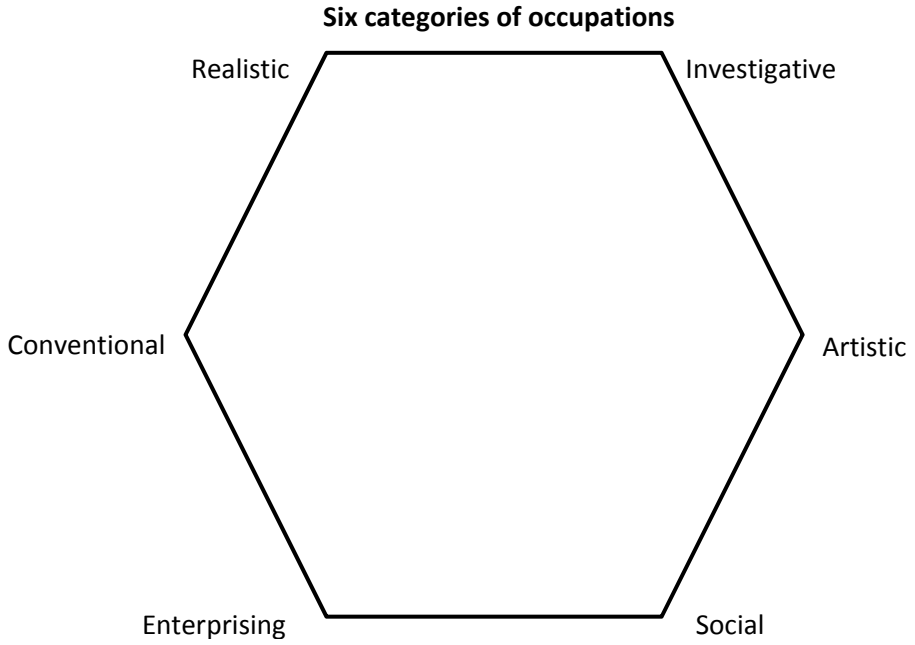
research/investigating/analysing/systematising/evaluating skills

Myers-Briggs temperament types

Extroverted	**Introverted**
Sociability	Territoriality
Interaction	Concentration
External	Internal
Breadth	Depth
Extensive	Intensive
Multiplicity of relationships	Limited relationships
Expenditure of energies	Conservation of energies
Interesting external events	Interesting internal reaction
Sensing	**Intuitive**
Experience	Hunches
Past	Future
Realistic	Speculative
Perspiration	Inspiration
Actual	Possible
Down-to-earth	Head-in-clouds
Utility	Fantasy
Fact	Fiction
Practicality	Ingenuity
Sensible	Imaginative
Thinking	**Feeling**
Objective	Subjective
Principles	Values
Policy	Social values
Laws	Extenuating circumstances
Criterion	Intimacy
Firmness	Persuasion
Impersonal	Personal
Justice	Humane
Categories	Harmony
Standards	Good or bad
Critique	Appreciate
Analysis	Sympathy
Allocation	Devotion

Judging	Perceiving
Settled	Pending
Decided	Gather more data
Fixed	Flexible
Plan ahead	Adapt as you go
Run one's life	Let life happen
Closure	Open options
Decision-making	Treasure hunting
Planned	Open ended
Completed	Emergent
Decisive	Tentative
Wrap it up	Something will turn up
Urgency	There's plenty of time
Deadline	What deadline?
Get show on the road	Let's wait and see

Strong-Campbell Categories



Realistic: skilled trades or technical jobs

Investigative: scientific and laboratory jobs

Artistic: creative jobs working with words, music or art

Social: jobs working with people

Enterprising: jobs persuading other people to do something

Conventional: office jobs working with organisations, files and regular schedules

In addition you will need to evaluate your performance in the following areas:

- **physical** – exercise, nutrition, stress management
- **social/emotional** – service, empathy, synergy, intrinsic security
- **spiritual** – value clarification and commitment to vision, study and the application to the various spiritual disciplines
- **mental** – reading, visualising, planning, writing

Also you will need to evaluate your performance in your current or most recent tasks:

- **your team mix skills** – team dynamics – contributing to the expertise balance
- **the nature of what you are doing currently**
- **your work performance** on current tasks
- **your communication style** – ability to resolve conflicts and ability to synergise

2. Assessing your environment

When assessing your environment you are trying to evaluate what or who is working in your favour around you – i.e. your supporters and what or who is working against you – i.e. your opposition.

On an individual level assessing your external environment will include:

- The national and local economy of your home country. It has an impact on your support, home assignment etc.
- The general outlook of your occupation – how easy would it be to get a job in the country and situation to which you are called?
- Family needs and demands
- Any other factors significantly affecting your options – known opportunities and leads
- The competition

In terms of your "vision place", assessing your environment includes assessing:

- The national and local economy
- Local customs and manners – hospitality demands
- The political environment
- Security precautions
- Opportunities within our company
- Known opportunities and leads in potential transformational work
- Strategic supporters
  - ✓ support at the home end
  - ✓ sending office
  - ✓ company field office
  - ✓ potential new friends
- The competition
- Any other factors significantly affecting your options

3. Defining your "mission", values and life goals

A Helpful Exercise

In your mind's eye, see yourself going to the funeral of a dear friend. As you walk down to the front of the church and look inside the coffin, you suddenly come face-to-face with yourself! This is your funeral. There are four speakers at your funeral:

- the first speaker is from your family
- the second speaker is one of your friends
- the third speaker is a company leader
- the fourth speaker is from your home church

Think deeply. What would you like each speaker to say about you and your life? What character would you like them to have seen you? What contributions and achievements would you like them to remember? This visualisation will help you to get in touch with your fundamental values.[8]

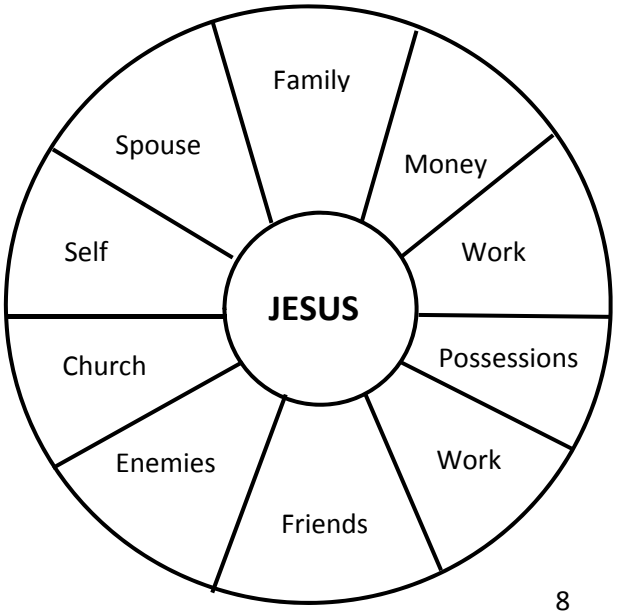
Area of activity	Character	Contributions	Achievements
Family			
Friends			
Team/company			
Church			

Defining your mission – your values and life goals

Begin with the image, picture or paradigm of the end of your life as your frame of reference – the criterion by which everything else is examined. This is called "beginning with the end in mind" and is fundamental to all planning. The most effective way to "begin with the end in mind" is to develop a personal mission statement. Your mission statement should focus on:

- What do you want to **be**? (character)
- What do you want to **do**? (contributions and achievements)
- the values and principles upon which being and doing are based

You need to start with the very centre of yourself. It is here that we deal with our vision and our values. Whatever is at the centre of your life will be the source of your security, your guidance, your wisdom and your spiritual power and authority. These 4 factors are interdependent. Our centre must be the Lord Jesus Himself and the truth revealed in Scripture. Centres of people with different worldviews may be: spouse, family, money, work, possessions, pleasure, friends, enemies, church, self. If you have any of these, you will spin off centre and rapidly destabilise and topple over.



You may find your mission statement will be more balanced, much easier to work with, if you break it down into specific **role areas** of your life and the goals to accomplish in each area. Having written the mission statement does it answer such questions as:

What is my purpose? What is the primary reason for my existence?

The key to the ability to change is a sense of who you are, what you are about and what you value.

A mission statement is not something you write overnight. It takes deep introspection, careful analysis, thoughtful expression and often many rewrites to produce it in its final form.

To summarise: the assessment process involves:

i. assessing where you are now
ii. assessing your environment

} Making these assessments is usually a frequently repeated exercise

iii. defining and writing a mission statement

C. Defining where you want to be – 10 year goals

A helpful exercise

In your imagination picture yourself 10 years older. Imagine what the world will be like then: your house, your car, fashions, politics, world events, science, travel, economics etc. Think intently about your own physical, mental and spiritual well-being on the basis that you are 10 years older. Don't divert from that path of thought and concentrate!

Think about your imaginary achievements in the past 10 years – where you went, what you did and how you overcame difficulties. Detail how you developed goals, pinnacles you reached and rewards. How did others benefit? When you have finished, you are ready to write your 10 year goals.

1. Factors to consider when setting goals

a) Maintaining a P/PC balance

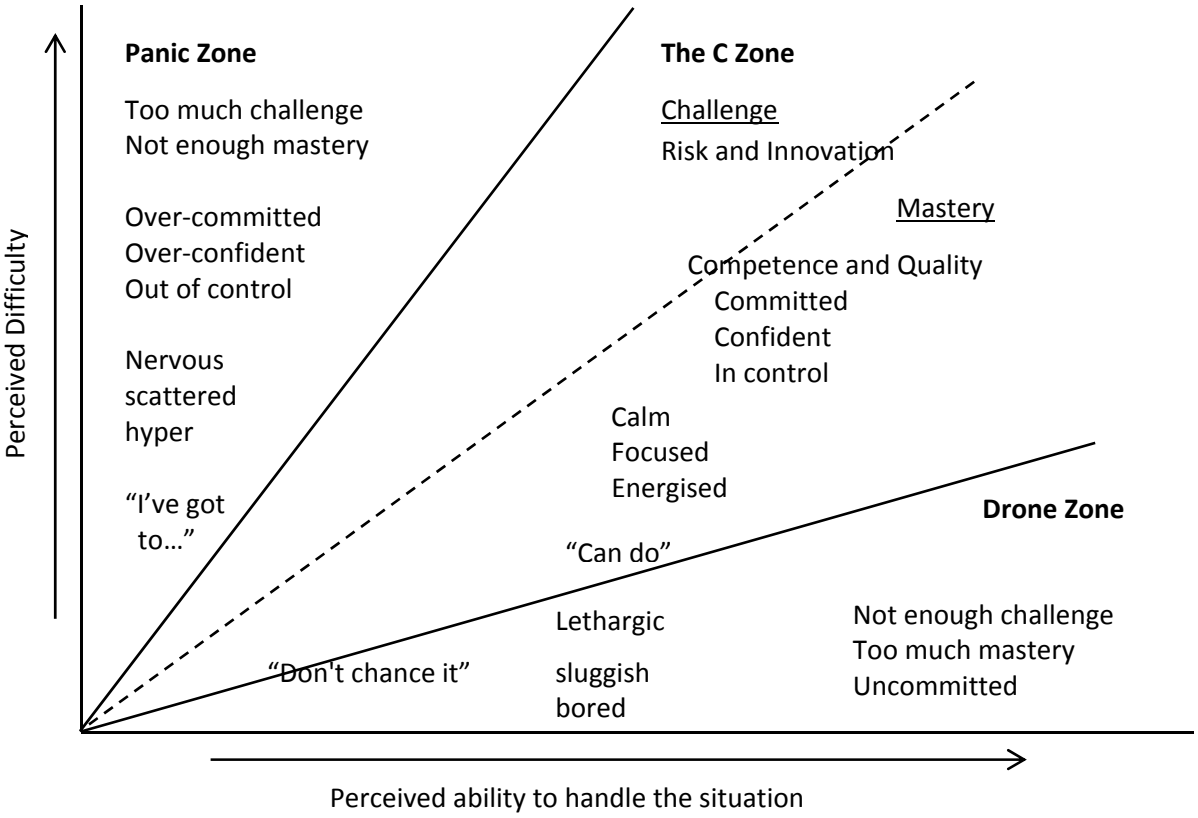
Recall the story of the Goose and the Golden Egg. True effectiveness is a function of two things: what is produced (the golden egg) and the producing asset or capacity to produce (the goose). Effectiveness lies in the balance – the P/PC balance. P = production of the desired results – the golden egg. PC = production capability – the ability or asset that produces the golden egg.

To maintain the P/PC balance is often a difficult judgement call, but it is the very essence of effectiveness. It balances short-term with long-term. P is accomplishing ministry goals. PC is being able to stay the course, avoid burnout and keep producing.

b) Zones (Panic Zone - C Zone - Drone Zone)

We **should** all live in the C Zone. Normally we will gravitate either to the challenge or mastery part of that zone. Some people devote most of their energies to honing their skills or increasing competence in one area. They enjoy mastery and control. They become very competent at what they are doing, but if they never risk losing control by taking new steps they will fall into the Drone Zone. Drone zoners want to progress and make a move because they are bored and often hate what they are doing. But the fear of failing at the next level prevents them from taking risks.

Others are drawn more to the excitement of a challenge. They love to take risks and explore new territories. However, by trying too hard to do too much in too little time, they can drive themselves into their **Panic Zone**. They have no time to plan, to develop creative strategies, to problem solve effectively or to master any skill. The irony of being in your Panic Zone is that although you use achievement as a justification for this behaviour, you usually don't achieve nearly what you are capable of. [See Take Control of Your Life: A Complete Guide to Stress Relief.]



c) Your natural rhythm – tortoise – hare – thoroughbred

Homework

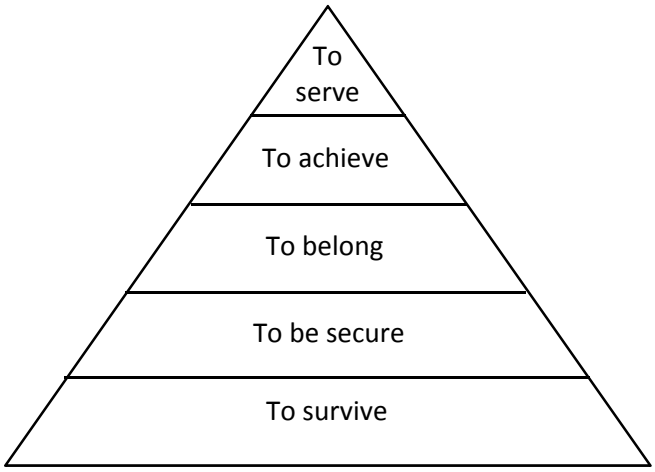
- **How do you normally respond to the rhythm of your life?**
  - ✓ I'm usually rushing ahead of my own rhythm
  - ✓ I'm usually right in harmony with my own rhythm
  - ✓ I'm usually lagging behind my natural rhythm

- **Use these questions to help identify your natural rhythm at this particular time in your life.** Write down the first thought that enters your mind
  - ✓ Maybe I don't need to be/do _____ any more (something you need to give up)
  - ✓ Maybe I still need to be/do _____ some more (something you need to hang onto)
  - ✓ Maybe I need to be/do _____ sometime soon (a future direction or goal)
  - ✓ Maybe I need to be/do _____ once again (a past resource or strength to revive)
  - ✓ Maybe I need to be/do _____ sometimes (something inconsistent or tentative)

Now is the "right time" for you! But what is it the right time for? Look at your answers so far.

Now is the right time for me to _____
_____
_____
_____

d) **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**



Where are you on the pyramid?

e) **Planning**

- Planning is a matter of probabilities
- Your planning should have different time spans
  - ✓ long-range goals – overall style of life
  - ✓ medium-range goals – 5-10 years
  - ✓ short-range goals – one month to one year
  - ✓ mini goals – one day to one month
  - ✓ micro goals – less than one hour
- Plan for intensity in at least one area
- Plan some diversity in your life
- Plan for gradual improvement

f) **Remember synergy**

Two Harvard professors, Roger Fisher and William Ury, in their book, **Getting to Yes**, outline a whole new approach to negotiation.[9] Instead of moving to opposing positions: *"I want the window open." "No, closed." "No, open."* – with occasional compromise (half open half the time); they saw the possibility of synergy. *"Why do you want it open?" "Well I like the fresh air." "Why do you want it closed?" "I don't like the draft." "What can we do that would give the fresh air without the draft?"* Now two creative people who have respect for each other and who understand each other's needs might say, *"Let's open the window in the next room. Let's rearrange the furniture. Let's open the top part of the window. Let's turn on the air conditioning."* They seek new alternatives because they are not defending positions.

g) **Finally – no puny dreams**

2. Translating your "Mission Statement" into specific objectives

Each aspect of your personal "mission" or life goals needs to be translated into corresponding, specific medium-range and short-range goals or objectives.
Goals have the following characteristics

- Written down
- Accomplishable
- Precise
- Time factor restricted
- Desirable
- Specific
- Measurable
- Capable of review

All goals face both opportunity and opposition.

3. Establishing priorities

Critical – important – nice

4. Identifying areas of planned abandonment

Let go of old goals.

D. How to get where you're going – making your dream come true

1. Identifying necessary support and information

What do I need and from whom to make the new reality come true?
Learning to make effective decisions means involving those with a vested interest upfront and building support for the outcome in advance! For example "family" needs to be involved early.

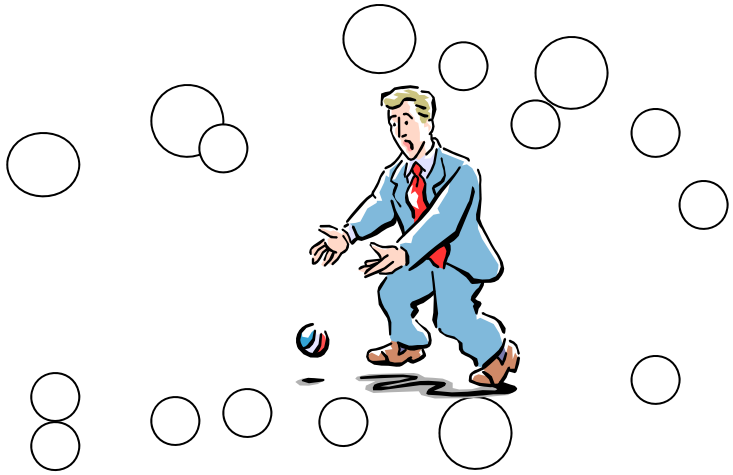
2. Writing your strategic plan

A sample outline to follow includes:

- Assessment of yourself
- Assessment of your environment
- Definition of your "mission" – values and goals
- Definition of where you want to be at various time horizons
- Steps for making your objectives and goals come true
- Identification of areas of planned abandonment
- Identification of necessary support and information
- Development of a timeline

3. Living out your priorities

A helpful exercise – juggling



a. Label the balls with the various factors and roles in your life.

b. How do you feel about the number of balls you're juggling?

c. What about the balls on the ground? Did you choose to let them fall or did they just drop by default?

d. Look at each ball separately. How do you feel about it? Is something you want to continue to keep in the air or is it going to be dropped in planned abandonment?

e. How does your body feel when under stress?

f. What parts of your body signal stress and tension? Indicate where you feel tension by drawing it on the figure.

g. How does your stress level impact you and the people and situations around you? How does it affect your attitudes? Your feelings? Your relationships? Your interactions at work? Your creativity and productivity?

4. Managing your personal productivity/time management

There is so much written on this subject! I won't attempt to cover it. Remember to review your progress regularly. It is good to do this daily, weekly, monthly and yearly. It sometimes helps to put events into the Time Management Matrix.

The Time Management Matrix

There are four quadrants in which to place the event:

I. The important/urgent

II. The important/non-urgent

III. The not important/urgent

IV. The not important/non-urgent

		Urgent		Not Urgent
IMPORTANT	I	Typical Activities	II	Activities
		Crises Pressing Problems Deadline-driven projects		Prevention, PC activities Relationship building Recognizing new opportunities Planning, recreation
NOT IMPORTANT	III	Activities	IV	Activities
		Interruptions, some phone calls Some mail, some reports Some meetings Proximate, pressing matters Popular activities		Trivia, busy work Some mail Some phone calls Time wasters & black holes Pleasant activities

5. Managing Stress

Work on your personal "drainers" and "energizers". Work on your stress buffer shield.

6. Total Quality Management (TQM)

Continuous process improvement [10]

PERSONAL ENERGIZERS: Visualize your day. List places/activities/conditions/people that renew energy.

Activities/conditions/places/people that…	AT HOME	AT WORK
EXCITE YOU		
CALM YOU		
FREE YOU		
BRING YOU JOY		
SUPPORT/NURTURE YOU		
STIMULATE/CHALLENGE YOU		
GIVE YOU MEANING		
MAKE YOU LAUGH		
ENERGIZE YOU		

PERSONAL DRAINERS

Visualize your day. Then list the draining aspects of your day – those places/activities/ conditions/people that diminish your energy:

Activities/conditions/places/people that…	AT HOME	AT WORK
ANNOY YOU		
ANGER YOU		
DISTRACT YOU		
DEPRESS YOU		
WORRY YOU		
WEAR YOU OUT		
BORE YOU		
FRUSTRATE YOU		
PLAGUE YOU		

Stress Buffer Chart

Life Experiences that have strengthened me and taught me to manage	**My Support Networks** people who nurture and console me
Attitudes/Beliefs that help me or help me to view it differently	**Physical Self-Care Habits** that prepare me or help me to release tension

Action Skills (I can use to change the situation)

E. Conclusions

Be prepared to spend prime time completing the task of defining your goals – your life goals, your major supportive goals and your minor goals. In one form or another you are going to trade your life for them! If you can't believe your dreams, then you should consider either smaller dreams or better, bigger commitments.

Time is life. It is irreversible and irreplaceable. To waste your time is to waste your life, but to master your time is to master your life and make the most of it!

We all want to hear our beloved Master say, ***"Well done, you have been a good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of Your Lord."*** [Mt. 25:21]

"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." [Phil. 1:6]

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight." [Eph. 1:3,4]

"***Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight."*** [Prov. 3:5,6]

"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." [I Cor. 9:24]

"The race is not to the swift… but to those who keep on running!" [Eccl. 9:11]

F. A Synopsis

This paper shows you how to do strategic planning in your personal life and ministry. It shows how to do an assessment of yourself in such things as personality type, spiritual gifts, aptitudes, skills, past experience, relationships, current progress and performance, etc. It shows how to do an assessment of your environment in areas such as your family, political and economic factors, the "competition", the views of your personal "stakeholders" etc.

Then, it shows how to develop your "mission", values and goals and translate these into specific objectives – how to establish and live out priorities, how to make effective decisions to set goals and how to maintain a balance between "production" (i.e. accomplishing goals such as church-planting) and "production capability" (i.e. being able to stay the course, avoid burnout and keep producing).

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