



Roadmap for Life

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Do you know your destination?**

Lester Sumrall

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King James Version of the Holy Bible*

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MAKING LIFE COUNT

Knowing Your Destination

Do you know your destiny? Do you want to make your life count? In striving to make life count, you must inevitably establish the basic priorities of life. To go through life without having thought through and determined your priorities, and then periodically measuring your life against those priorities, is like setting out to sail the ocean with no navigational instruments. You drift aimlessly, never knowing where you are or where you're going to land. To use another metaphor, if you aim at nothing particular in life, you're sure to hit it. The way to know you are accomplishing your goals is to establish and stick to those priorities that will lead to the desired ends.

The purpose of this mini-book is to define and to provide examples of Christian values in terms of completion and achievement. Let's first identify three

basic priorities for every Christian.

Know God

The first and most important priority in life is to know God. We must know that God is our heavenly Father, as the Lord's prayer declares: "Our Father in Heaven, Hallowed be Your name" (Matt. 6:9). In order to know God as our Father, we must understand our relationship with Him. We must not think of God as a mean, vengeful, hateful destroyer of mankind. Our heavenly Father loves us dearly and allowed His only son to die so that we might join His family.

If a person has a poor "father image," he is likely to have a poor image of God as his or her Father. In order to change that image, we must look into the Bible to see the true image of God as our loving heavenly Father who watches our every step and is willing to forgive our mistakes. Philip said to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." Jesus replied by saying, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me?" (John 14:8-9). By this Jesus meant that to see Him was to see the Father.

The essential nature of God the Father is clearly shown in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son. The word

parable is derived from a Greek word meaning “to throw alongside”; thus, a parable is a story “thrown alongside” certain truths in order to illustrate and explain them better. A parable is simply a convenient way to teach spiritual truths, and Jesus used parables frequently to communicate profound lessons in an easily understood manner.

The parable of the prodigal son was about a wealthy man and his two sons. The younger son was rebellious toward his father and wanted to get away from home and live the way he pleased. The Jewish law stated that a father was to give a double share of his possessions to his first son (see Deut. 21:17); thus, an older son inherited two-thirds, and a younger inherited one-third. Occasionally a father would divide his property before his death, but it was very unusual for a son to ask his father to do so. In this story, the younger son selfishly desired his share of the inheritance while his father was still living. The father then divided his property between his two sons.

The younger son ran away to a distant land, perhaps to a large city like Antioch or Rome. Eventually he spent all his money and was left without food or shelter. Jesus did not tell us exactly what the boy did

with his inheritance, saying only, he “wasted his possessions with prodigal living” (Luke 15:13).

The boy probably had a wonderful time at first, but after all his money was gone, his new “friends” also disappeared, and he was left alone. To make matters worse, a famine spread over the country, and many people went hungry, including the boy. Finally he found work on a farm, feeding pigs. Remember that the Jews considered pigs to be unclean animals and would not even touch them, much less eat them. Thus, in Jewish society, a person who tended swine had sunk as low as he could go.

Coming to his senses, the younger son realized how selfish and proud he had been, and how foolishly he had lived. He regretted what he had done to himself and to his father. He blamed no one else for his deeds, but said, “I have sinned” (Luke 15:18). He decided to go home, to confess his sin, and to ask for forgiveness. Since he had already asked for and received his inheritance from his father, he planned to return as a hired hand on his father’s farm.

The father saw the boy coming while he was still far away and ran out to meet his wayward son. He welcomed him back before the boy even could finish

his confession, and he called for his servants to bring clean robes to replace his son's rags. He gave his son a ring and a pair of shoes, indicating his full acceptance of the wandering child. A prize calf, to be used only on a special occasion, was killed to make a feast, and a joyous celebration began.

What about the older son, the sensible one who stayed home while his brother strayed? He was working in the fields when his brother returned, and as he approached the house he heard the sounds of celebration. When he learned that his brother had returned, in disgrace, although forgiven, the older brother was angry. He refused to join the celebration despite his father's pleas. The older son was harsh in his judgment of both his father and his younger brother, and he accused his father of being unfair. The story ends with no indication at all that the older brother ever changed his attitude and joined the celebration.

By examining the actions of the father in the parable, we can learn what Jesus was trying to teach us about our heavenly Father. The father in the parable treated both sons with tenderness and affection. Even though one son rebelled and went to a faraway land and the other son stayed home, their father loved them

both equally and was always willing to forgive their faults. The two sons did not have to earn their father's love, for his love was not based on good behavior. He loved them because it was his nature as their father. Thus, we learn that God's love is free, not earned.

Also, the father's love did not cease after the younger son rebelled; even when the boy went away to live recklessly, the father still loved him. In the same way, God's love for us never changes—it is constant no matter what we do.

Remember that in the parable, the father ran to meet his son. He put his love into action and demonstrated his love for his son by celebrating the boy's return. Similarly, God's love for us is active, not passive, and He celebrates our return to Him after we stray.

Finally, the father loved both of his sons the same, even though both were rebellious in different ways. Likewise, God's love for us is impartial. He loves the poorest just as much as the richest, the most rebellious as surely as the greatest saint.

The love of God for man is revealed by His Son's death on Calvary. The Word says, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13). We realize how much God loves

us in relation to the price He paid when He allowed His only Son to stand in place of the world's sins.

Just think—the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit was in harmony before time began, and the presence of Jesus on earth was the first time there was any separation in the communication, love, and togetherness of the divine Godhead. We will only begin to appreciate adequately what Jesus did in becoming man when we get to heaven.

The Old Testament demonstrated God's love in Jeremiah 31:3: "With lovingkindness I have drawn you." Notice He did not say "beat you," or "destroy and harm you"; by and through, lovingkindness is God's way. The concept of a loving, heavenly Father is misrepresented when storms, floods, volcanoes, hailstones, lightning, and other disasters are called "acts of God." Nothing could be farther from the truth because the Word reveals to us that God is love. God allows calamities because he allows man to have freedom of choice, as in the Garden of Eden, and sometimes man makes wrong decisions and has to suffer the consequences. Also, the whole creation bears the adverse effects of Adam's decision to sin in Eden (see Rom. 8:20-22).

Of course, the greatest verse in the Bible regarding God's love is John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." God's essence is love. He demonstrated His love when He sent the best heaven had to offer. God then gave His people the option of receiving or rejecting His gift. Rejecting God's gift takes the form of sin, and the penalty for sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life.

Examples of God's love are numerous. Look at the background of John Newton who wrote the inspiring hymn, "Amazing Grace." He was at one time a pirate who traveled the world in slave ships. Newton had run away from home at an early age and boarded a pirate ship as a stowaway. He was later discovered and was taught the evil tricks of the trade. He became a brawler, a whoremonger, and an altogether vile character.

At home, his prayerful mother believed her son would be a changed man one day and would be saved. But John Newton belittled and berated anyone who talked about God. He knew the right way, but was opposed to it, and he continued living his pirate life and rebelling against God's authority.

Finally, John Newton was caught in an immense storm while rounding Cape Hope in South Africa. He cried out for mercy and gave his all to the Lord. From that experience came the hymn “Amazing Grace.” Thus John Newton, like the prodigal son, returned to a loving, heavenly Father who was glad to receive him, and he left a memorial to God’s amazing love in music.

God’s Peace

When any person comes into contact with almighty God, that person will encounter His peace. Peace is the assurance that one’s relationship with God is positive. It does not mean the absence of difficulty. Rather, it means that in the midst of difficulty, all is well. Today there are people who have tried everything to gain peace in their souls, but they will never find it until they find the Prince of Peace.

Whenever angels encountered humans in the Scripture, they brought messages of peace and goodwill. The biblical concept of angels is often neglected and frequently misunderstood, but regardless of what their appearances might mean, angels have always been messengers of God’s peace.

In one case, an angel approached Gideon and gave

the Word of the Lord to him, calling him a “mighty man of valor” (Judges 6:12). The angel of communication was Gabriel, whose appearance always brought peace to those he visited. Daniel received a message of peace from an angel, and the shepherds watching their flocks the night of Christ’s birth were told, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” (Luke 2:14).

Mary, the mother of Jesus, was visited by an angel who saluted her and gave her a message from the Father. After Jesus had risen from the dead, the angels gave glad tidings to Mary Magdalene, as well as the other Mary who had come to bring spices for Jesus’ body.

The Bible tells us in Romans 5:1, “We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” When we know how much God loves us and shows us this peace, then we are candidates for the total plan God has for us.

Recently the topic of fear was discussed in a leading national magazine. The primary contributor toward fear was listed as “having no particular direction of life.” This is where Christians should excel, since their direction comes from God.

God's Plan

God's plan in our lives is determined by two factors, the Word and the Spirit. The Word of God gives us God's direction through revelation. Solomon, who asked God for wisdom and was granted it more than any man who ever lived, said, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (Prov. 3:5-6).

John 16:13 indicates that the Holy Spirit will also direct us: "However when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come."

Mankind has always sought direction in life. Those people who are washed in the blood of Jesus, who know their names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life, have complete rest in the knowledge of God's sovereignty over their lives. They know that a good, kind, loving, heavenly Father will guide His children with the utmost care and concern for their well-being.

What Jesus told His disciples also applies to us: "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). Your pleasure is in knowing God's

will for your life. The Word of God is the will of God. If you follow the direction and purpose that God gives through His Word, which gives us clear guidance in the vast majority of decisions we need to make each day, and then place the application of the Word in your heart, God's Spirit will lead you along His perfect path.

Know Yourself

The second priority of life is to know yourself. You must know the strong points of your character and personality. Recognizing your assets, you can develop them to their fullest God-given potential. After knowledge of God, there is no more important knowledge than self-understanding, and there is no better investment than self-improvement. Knowing your abilities, how you relate to people, and so on also helps you to more effectively judge how you can best serve Jesus and His church.

As vital as it is to know your strengths, it is equally crucial to know your weaknesses and limitations. No one person can do all things well. In certain areas, you will never develop great proficiency no matter how hard or long you work. The key again is to know yourself and to be happy with the way God made you, doing

your utmost to develop your strengths and leaving other abilities to people more gifted in them.

Examine your life periodically, especially in the light of God's Word. Ask your friends and family members what strengths and weaknesses they see in you. Seek the leading of the Holy Spirit. Strive to know yourself, and then capitalize on those capabilities with which God has blessed you.

Know Your Neighbor

Our third priority is a directive from Jesus: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 19:19). It is very important for us not to judge others, for judging is God's exclusive right. Instead, we must endeavor to understand and love the people who come into our spheres of influence. We must gain insight into the strengths, weaknesses, and attitudes of those who surround us. We can become sensitive to others by studying their likes, dislikes, and habits.

So we need to work at knowing, loving, and serving others. This must be a top priority of the believer's life. To love God is to love the people for whom His Son died.

Applying Priorities

Now that we have learned about the three key priorities of life, from a Christian perspective, let's apply them to our culture's predominantly competitive atmosphere. Many people are under the impression that Christians who "turn the other cheek" are unable to compete successfully with less scrupulous persons. In this section, we will show how and why Christians can, should, and do compete successfully without violating their Christian values.

In America, and in most other developed nations, competition is one of the cornerstones of society. At an early age people are taught to compete, to rise above the crowd, and to achieve the most possible in the shortest period of time. Competition provides the necessary motivation for many people, and when it is kept under control, it is a good thing. Competition is the basis for our free enterprise system in America. However, because of its importance, it is possible for the competitive drive to become a consuming passion that can threaten our very existence. Competition provides motivation, but it is essential for us to be motivated toward Christian goals with our priorities where they should be. Preoccupation with competition, not for the

Lord's sake, but for its own sake, distorts our perspective and causes us to have a self-centered attitude.

Most often, competition becomes harmful to the individual who is overly concerned with accumulation of material possessions. This is an example of wrongful goal-setting. With his life out of balance, such a person may find he has neglected to serve the Lord. Jesus pointed this out in Luke 21:34-35: "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth."

At one time or another, most of us do become overly involved in worldly concerns and accumulation of goods. At such times we fail to attend to family, prayer, Bible reading, and all the things that God would have us enjoy. Psalm 34:9 says, "Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints! There is no want to those who fear Him." There is nothing wrong with competition or with striving to get ahead, but we must never allow such ambitions to become our top priorities.

Some people rely on their own abilities to raise themselves above their peers. While not necessarily bad,

this attitude can lead to using cutthroat methods to gain promotions and to handle stress and pressure. Such methods are unnecessary when God is in control. The psalmist wrote, “Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD!” (Psalm 119:1).

But you may ask, “How can I get ahead? What better way is there than promoting myself?” The answer is simple: allow God to promote you rather than trying to promote yourself. This does not mean you should allow others to take advantage of you, but be wise as God gives you wisdom. James said in the first chapter of his epistle, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (v. 5). Psalm 73:24 says, “You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.” Letting God work through you to achieve His goals is the only way to succeed without developing future troubles. Paul wrote that God...

will render to each one according to his deeds: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking

and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish” (Rom. 2:6-9).

Wisdom may require that you change the ways in which you compete. An executive once said about building his business: “Inch by inch, it’s a cinch: yard by yard, it’s hard.” Making big changes all at once is hard for anyone, but small consistent changes will bring lasting results. It’s like the story of the hare and the tortoise: the long-distance runner, not the sprinter, finally wins. Proverbs 4:18 says, “But the path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day.” If we work each day toward our goal of living in the light of the Lord and receiving His guidance, we will achieve lasting results, and our success is assured.

It is important to be motivated toward success, but it is more important to be motivated by Christian priorities and values, and to seek Christian goals. Some people prefer to blame others rather than their own lack of effort for their failures. But God gives to each a measure of abilities and talents. In his first letter to Timothy, Paul said, “Do not neglect the gift that is in you” (I Timothy 4:14).

In the parable of the talents told in chapter 19 of Luke, each servant had the responsibility to make the most of what was given to him. The individual must decide whether to emulate the servant who invested a large portion for his master or the one who hid his money and produced no more.

Your motivation for succeeding must be proper in order for God to bless and help you. A desire to provide for your loved ones and to return to the Lord the tithe that belongs to Him is the correct attitude toward material gain, rather than the greedy desire to hoard wealth for its own sake. This may be difficult for many people to do, especially since there are many day-to-day pressures that encourage greedy behavior. However, giving to God is the most important part of success. And the best gift you can give Him is your love, expressed in a life controlled by His priorities.

Prayer of Salvation

If you have never made God your most important priority and have realized it is time to do so, then please say this prayer:

Lord Jesus I confess I am a sinner and I repent (stop sinning and turn away from my sins). Please forgive me. I accept you as my Lord, Master and Savior. I thank you for taking my judgment of death for my sin debt, by being nailed to the cross and shedding your blood for the forgiveness of my sins. I thank you for giving me your righteousness for my sins.

I promise to love you and with your help obey you all the days of my life. I will confess you before all mankind and never be ashamed of you. Please change me, and give me your grace and love for all people. Show me the plan you have for my life and help me to fulfill it. Amen.

Sign your name

(1) -Be sure to read your Bible daily, (2) -Pray daily, and (3) -Attend a Bible-believing church.

Prayerline: 1-800-365-3732

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