

Four Goals for Your Life

People are aimless without goals. I sometimes ask young couples, “Where do you see yourself in one month, one year, and five years?” If we never set goals, we never work toward things that are worthwhile.

Some goals we set might include graduating from high school with a 4.0, getting a college diploma, getting married, having children, traveling to Ireland, taking a Bible lands tour, achieving a personal record half-marathon, losing ten pounds, paying off a mortgage, buying a sports car. These things can’t be accomplished overnight, and so goals help us figure out what we need to do in order to get there. As Solomon says, “the plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage” (Prov. 21:5).

Still, one of the features of modern life is that our goals have gotten all out of whack. One writer said that we 21st century Americans work at our play, play at our worship, and worship our work, and that we are much the worse for it. I tend to agree.

Let’s consider priorities for a moment. Let’s set some important goals, but let’s also identify which are the goals that God has for our lives as well. In fact, while I want many good things for our teens, and especially my own kids, I would be satisfied for them if they would achieve just these four. You may not make it to the medal podium at the Olympics, you may not make it to Harvard Medical School, and you may never be the President of the United States; you may never own a Corvette, get married, or even travel beyond the state line; but if you achieve these four things, I will be exceedingly proud of you!

Go to Heaven

This deserves way, way, way more of our attention than it usually gets. I hear church people talk all the time about wanting to buy a new car, about wanting to move into a new neighborhood, about taking the kids to the beach or the mountains, about losing weight and gaining muscle—but rarely, if ever, do I hear people talking about going to heaven, nor what plans they are making in order to get there.

We rarely talk about our hope of heaven, and this is a huge mistake, since our thoughts and our words belie our real concerns. We rarely concentrate on heaven as a priority or goal. And yet, it should be our single-minded focus! Heaven should be number one in our lives. Paul said in Phil. 1:21, “to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” He said in 2 Cor. 5:9–10, “we have as our ambition ... to be pleasing to Him, for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.” I love how we find the mildly-dirty word “ambition” repurposed here for wonderful things.

The simple fact is that heaven is eternal, forever and ever. The alternative to going to heaven—going to Hell—is unspeakably awful. You may become a movie star, an oil baron, or a jet setter, but if I don't get to spend eternity with you, who cares? "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:36). The best legacy of all would be to think that every one of our descendants from this moment until Christ's return would receive training in the faith from the previous generation and that we could all go to heaven together. That may seem like a tall order, but it's worth striving for. Let's be sure that we as families and friends at church speak about our hopes of heaven.

Marry a Christian

Whom you decide to marry is the second-most important decision you will ever make. Matthew 19:3–12 tells us that this decision cannot be undone, and lasts unto death. I cannot overemphasize how big a factor whom you marry is on whether or not you go to heaven.

Spouses have gigantic influence on each other. For better or worse, a spouse is going to exert a powerful pull. Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, could not resist his wives' steady tug toward idolatry, and they destroyed him (1 Kings 11:1–8). Samson gave away his heart too easily, too (Judges 14:1–3).

Trust me—no matter the emotions you feel now, you should marry someone who will support you on your mission to go to heaven. Abraham went to great lengths to keep his sons from marrying "daughters of the land" and instead found them spiritually-minded women (Gen. 24:3–4). Pray that the Lord will find the same for you. Be a diligent Christian, and you will attract a diligent Christian. If you decide to date someone outside the church, that's ok, as long as you behave as a Christian, and convert him or her before proposing. Be sure they are washed in the blood, not just the water, so to speak.

Find a Job That Lets You Support Your Family and Serve God

There is no spiritual commandment to become rich or successful. In fact, for most, the single-minded devotion required to achieve worldly success or fame usually distracts one from the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 6:19–20, Luke 18:24). Not everyone needs to go to college or get an advanced degree. Many, such as John the Baptist and the Apostles, were ridiculed for their lack of formal education (Acts 4:13), but they made up for it with common sense and reading God's word. Some of the wisest Christians I have ever known lacked a diploma. Some of the most educated PhD's are sadly bound for eternal condemnation—and that ain't very smart at all.

I will say that it is good to maximize one's potential. A college degree often opens doors and allows you to spend the rest of your life directing your own steps, living in relative freedom (Prov. 14:23, 13:4, 22:7). There are advantages to being able to give generously, keep your kids out of the ghetto, and never have to listen to someone tell you that you must work on Sunday morning (cf. 1 Cor. 7:21–23). Besides, as the old saying goes, if you find a job you love, you won't work a day in your life. Especially in today's economy, a college diploma is a worthwhile investment of your time.

Regardless, caring for one's own is a commandment of God. Be industrious, don't waste your time with too much leisure or too many hobbies. Pursue a career that lets you support your family and serve God (1 Tim. 5:8, 2 Thess. 3:7–12, 1 Thess. 4:11–12, Prov. 6:6–8).

Train Yourself to Be an Asset to the Lord's Body

The world has enough wobbly, foot-dragging, usually-missing, high-maintenance Christians. The church could use more diligent teachers, capable preachers, constant encouragers, reliable givers, firm supporters, redoubtable bulwarks, and strong warriors!

Set your mind to raise the sort of family which moves to a new city and joins a congregation and says, "Here we are! What can we do to help?" and jumps right in with both feet. People who sign up to teach Bible class and give it time and attention. People who show up for work days on the grounds. People like Pricilla and Aquila who may not have a college education but who can spot shoddy preaching from a mile away and call it on the carpet. People who will soon become elders and elders' wives. People who are an instant asset to the body of Christ wherever they go.

But, this takes people who put God first, and who are willing to do a little bit of work to prepare. Pay attention. Read God's word. Get used to standing in front of an audience, first by leading prayers, then by presenting invitations, and finally by learning to present a lesson. Make your place in the body strong (Eph. 4:16, 1 Pet. 4:11). —John Guzzetta