

Planning for the New Year

Larry Roach, LMHC



Every New Year's Eve, the ritual is the same. Loved ones and strangers come together to usher out the old and ring in the New Year, along with declarations of what the New Year will be. For many of us we will say, "This year, I'm really going to...!" With eager hearts full of good intentions, we vow to finally make good on the pledges of years past and present. But by the time spring rolls around, these promises are all but forgotten.

Hyrum W. Smith, cofounder of FranklinCovey® states, "Most people don't realize their objectives because they don't take planned steps to achieve them.... They try to tackle a goal head-on rather than break it down into manageable parts. When it becomes too overwhelming, they get discouraged and abandon ship altogether" (Smith, 1994).

Following are just a few practical steps you can take to help you get in gear for the New Year—in order that you can plan your goals and see them through to the end.

Determine what you want and what is really of value

Begin by imagining how you want to live and how your life would change after you make the desired adjustments. Of course, what you want will depend on what's important to you. Smith states, "You can't set a goal without first acknowledging your governing values." Many of us spend a lot of our time doing things that add little value to our lives. We will often get drawn into these activities through anxiety and seek to calm the feeling of urgency (see: Philippians 4:6-9).

The things we do on a daily bases should in at least some small way move us toward the goals we have in life. The Scriptures challenge us with, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21, NIV). What is of ultimate worth to you?



Write it down

Once you have a better idea of how you want your future to look, and what is really important to you, sit down in a quiet place with minimal distractions and make a list, in order of importance, of your core values. Once you accomplish this prioritized list of values, you now have the foundation for every goal you'll ever set in your life.

Smith exerts, "An unrecorded goal is merely a wish." He recommends solidifying your goals by writing them down. He further states, "You'll have a hard time knowing whether or not you've reached it unless you do."

Set Goals

Franklin Covey (2007) offers the following guideline for achieving goals: 1. Identify Values, 2. Set Goals, 3. Plan Weekly, and 4. Plan Daily. Smith suggests that goals be:



Specific: Make sure you state exactly what will be accomplished; **Measurable:** Set a definitive time or date when your goals will be completed; **Action-oriented:** Focus on action, rather than qualities; **Realistic:** Allow for personal and professional constraints in accomplishing your goals; **Timely:** Allow yourself a reasonable amount of time to complete a goal.

Enlist others

It helps to have a "cheering section" that can actually help you reach your goal more quickly. They can help you stay true to your mission, as well as provide an outsider's perspective when necessary. The Scriptures remind us, "Encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness" (Hebrews 3:13, NIV).

Break goals down into manageable parts

Work from a to-do list, a daily list of all tasks to be completed. These tasks should directly correspond to the long-term goals and values you've established. Avoid overloading your list with unimportant items. Take a few minutes every morning to create your list, and then review your list at the day's end. "When your daily activities are in concert with your highest priorities, you have a credible claim to inner peace" (Smith, 1994).

Seeking the most important first

Above all: "Seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33, NIV). Hopefully what you value highest is relationship with God. Hopefully he is in your plans



each day. "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God" (Colossians 3:1, NIV). Hopefully your heart is not just fixed on the earthly temporal rewards, but on those things that will last forever.

"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2a, NIV, cf. Hebrews 3:1). Hopefully your thoughts and eyes are not just focused on you. Hopefully you take time and energy to walk and talk with Jesus throughout the day.

“Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires” (Romans 8:5, NIV). Hopefully you seek to live in obedience to the Spirit of God. “We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away” (Hebrews 2:1, NIV). Hopefully you are taking the time to explore the Word of God, being careful to obey its commands, hold fast to its promises, and follow closely its teachings.

In Conclusion

As you plan for the New Year with eager hearts, good intentions, and perhaps some reservation, hopefully you will focus on those things that are most important. Be assured that the Lord goes before you and prepares in advance the path he has marked out for you. As you move forward and you look to the future—refuse to worry—It’s uncharacteristic of who you are in Christ (cf. Matthew 6:25-34).



What's Your Next Step?

LR

References

Holy Bible (1983). Thompson, F.C. (Compiler and editor). The Thompson chain-reference Bible: New international version. Indianapolis, IN: B.B. Kirkbride Bible Co. and Zondervan Corporation.

Smith, Hyrum W. (1994). The 10 natural laws of successful time and life management: proven strategies for increased productivity and inner peace. New York, NY: Warner Books.

FranklinCovey (2007). FOCUS: Achieving Your Highest Priorities. Retrieved January 1, 2009 from http://www.franklincovey.com/tc/mediaengine/public/files/ss_focus.pdf