

## Chapter 3

# Map Making—Planning Your Future

*A man's heart plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps.*

Proverbs 16:9, NKJV

“Don't wait for your ship to come in—swim out to it!”

Anonymous

When I was 23, my mentor challenged me to write out a life plan. I took his assignment seriously and planned out my life up until age 85. When I shared my life plan the next time we met, he seemed amused by my level of detail. Apparently, he expected only broad strokes of the life I imagined while I produced something quite specific. Embarrassed then, over time I've been amazed at how closely my life has followed this plan.

For example, in my imagined trajectory, I included a trip to Australia at age 38, which seemed rather random at the time. Sure enough, though, when I was 38 I unexpectedly began to receive invitations to speak in Australia, resulting in eight trips there within five years!

I have often pondered that exercise completed when I was a young man. Did God put it in my heart regarding my future or did he look at my plan and say,

“Let’s do it”? Either way, planning and casting a vision for my life has shaped the direction it has taken.

### **Take Aim**

Few of us would haphazardly venture on a trip or vacation without a map or plan. Similarly, as you discover and utilize your prophetic life map, you need to know where you are going in order to set your course for that destination. Someone once said, “Aim at nothing and you’re sure to hit it.” If we don’t think about where and how we want to finish, then it’s much more likely to drift on the current of circumstances or default to the decisions of others.

As followers of Jesus, the target for our faith is to finish well. Few of us would haphazardly venture on a trip or vacation without a map or plan. We all want to stand before God and hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21, NIV). Toward the end of his life, the Apostle Paul declared, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7, NKJV).

Our temporal and eternal lives are summed up in this verse. We are in a fight to the end, a race to the finish, and we want to finish strong! A heavenly reward awaits us for our labors. Our desire to please the Lord gives us a second wind. We do all that we do in order to experience the eternal fulfillment of our divine legacy.

Jesus said, “For which of you intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it.” (Luke 14:28, NKJV). We are called to assess and count the cost. I believe in constant assessment in this life to create course corrections when necessary. I don’t want my life ending up somewhere that I didn’t intend or that’s out of line with where God wants to take me. We want to cooperate

with God for the best outcome. That's why we must speak with Him constantly and pay attention to the many ways He communicates with us.

As we consider how to find direction for our lives, it's important to consider how we want to finish our journey on this earth. We explore our dreams in order to construct our future. Your dreams provide the key to knowing where you're going, and your plans provide the map for how you're going to get there.

### **Plans Require Faith**

There's something powerful about imagining your future.

Such an exercise can be taken to extremes, though. Planning your future is scorned in certain parts of the church because we're told to focus only on today, while in the world at large vision casting is often idolized. In between such extremes, however, a plan is simply a dream with a deadline. Planning is meant to be the servant of the vision, not vice versa.

Sometimes the process of moving toward a dream is dynamically initiated by God, and at other times it begins as a burden of the heart, a compelling urgency from within. Undoubtedly, we can say the burden was placed in our heart by God and therefore nothing of the kingdom doesn't begin outside of heaven. In other words, what appears to be our idea is only the latent discovery of God's true intention for us moving forward. Nevertheless, planning your life's path, while knowing your route will be diverted, allows you to set goals and work hard while also relying on God's ongoing guidance and direction.

The way I see it, *planning is an act of faith*. When you plan, you're saying that you believe in this dream enough to give time, energy, and money to make it happen. The combination of thinking, planning, and acting demonstrates to heaven that you're serious in your intention. You're taking steps as if your vision is really going to come to life.

God's Word explains, "Faith is a substance of things hoped for, an evidence of things unseen" (Hebrews 11:1, NKJV). Shifting your life to move toward something hoped for but not presently seen definitely requires faith. Enrolling in school to complete your education is an act of faith as you imagine holding your diploma someday. Going on a date is an act of faith as you keep the hope in your heart alive with the dream of a loving spouse. Cleaning out your garage in order to put your home up for sale requires faith that someday soon there will be a SOLD sign in your yard.

Who you are and how you live is a tangible expression of what you really believe. Guarding your dream, by not selling it short or taking a quick but questionable route, is an act of faith. Monitoring your friends and involvements so as to protect your dream exercises faith. Are you on the path to your God-given dreams? Do you have a plan for how to get there? Is it measurable? Do your daily actions move you closer to this heavenly vision of your future?

### **See Your Seasons**

An easy way to begin thinking about how to make a map for the rest of your life is to "begin with the end in mind," as Stephen Covey urges in *The Seven Habits of Highly*

*Effective People*.<sup>1</sup> Imagine your life as you reach your 90<sup>th</sup> birthday and look back. What would you see? Or think about how your eulogy would read after finishing a long, productive life. When I teach leadership training, I often have students imagine the rest of their lives and then write their own eulogy to summarize their vision. Often one of the most powerful exercises you can complete, writing your own eulogy forces you to look long and hard at where you are right now and where you want to be—and therefore, how you're going to get there.

For the sake of convenience, I encourage you to consider your life in three segments of thirty years each: from birth to 30, from 30 to age 60, and from age 60 to 90. In the first third of your life, there's a sense of growing, learning, and beginning. It's no accident that Joseph, David, and Jesus entered into public service at age thirty after having been prepared by experiences in their first three decades. Similarly, you may have learned much from your training and formal education but lack the experience that comes from actually doing what God has equipped you to do.

The second span of thirty years is often focused on doing, trying, working, running, and persevering. This is when you take what you know and gain experience. Experience can be equal to or greater than book knowledge in some fields. Your financial engine tends to increase during this second section of life, your key earning years. For many people, this span is also the season for marriage and family building. Many life lessons are learned as your soul gets shaped and crafted by the Master Potter.

Finally, your third and final season focuses on your legacy. This is the time that you are hopefully enjoying the fruits of your labor and transitioning your legacy of wisdom, wealth, and wonder to another generation. These truly can be the golden years,

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, (New York, Simon and Shuster, 1989) 98.

the pinnacle of your life's pursuit of your divine path. Perhaps no other season, however, relies on planning as much as this final third of your life.

### **Face Your Future**

Whether you use these three categories or your own, I urge you to map out your life on paper. Perhaps you've done it before, but it never hurts to update your previous plans. Feel free to write, draw, doodle, sketch—whatever feels helpful as you attempt to cast a vision for where you're going. Writing your own eulogy, perhaps start with writing a paragraph that summarizes your response to each of the following questions:

*Who was I?*

*What did I do?*

*What did I leave?*

If this exercise feels overwhelming or depressing, then keep it simple. As you try to describe who you are and who you want to be, start by listing words that describe you or that are meaningful to you. For example, mine include: lover of God, wife, family, motorcycles, coffee, travel, Italy, books, writing, beach, mountains, and water, just to name a few. What would other people say about you that would be unique or descriptive of you? Write those down, too. This paragraph sets a preferred future for who you're becoming. It describes how you want others to remember you, the kind of person you are and the role you played in their lives.

Next, think about what you want to be known for doing. This involves your day-to-day actions, accomplishments, and activities, as well as any major achievements, recognitions, or honors bestowed during your life. Allow your mind to dream about the

totality of all your endeavors. How do you want to be remembered? What are the temporal and eternal goals you want to accomplish in your lifetime? What does it look like for you to finish well? Again, just to give you an example, mine would include planting and building up churches, coaching and mentoring others, and writing books to share the wisdom God has revealed to me.

Your third and final paragraph describes the eternal impact you will leave on this earth. It speaks to the people, accomplishments, and endeavors that you invested in most. What will last and transcend your time here? For my life, I want to be known as someone who invested in the lives of others and helped them to experience more of the grace, love, and power of God. I want to be remembered as a risk-taker, an adventurer, someone who kept his feet on the ground and his eyes on heaven.

After you've come up with a response to all three main questions, put them together to form your eulogy. Here's what mine looks like:

*Steve was a thoughtful, engaging, enthusiastic person that loved to drink coffees and travel to new places and passionately know Jesus. He enjoyed a life of adventure with his wife Cindy, four children, and numerous grandchildren. He was a risk taker, motivator, and cultivator of people around the world. He was a creative dreamer and finished what he began.*

*Living well into his nineties, Steve is survived by three daughters and a son, numerous grandchildren and a wife of 70 years. Churches were built and established in several countries. He was responsible for the digging of hundreds of water wells in Africa. The winning of souls became his passion in later life and countless conversions were recorded worldwide.*

*Steve reached his goal of writing ten books, including a bestselling novel, that continue to inspire and delight readers. Friends were made around the world with special ones in Canada and England. He leaves a legacy of a storyteller, pastor and friend.*

Yours will naturally be unique to your experiences so far, but don't limit yourself based on what seems logical or probable. Dream big! Focus on the broad strokes, but feel free, just like I did at age 23, to make it as detailed as you wish. Hold onto this plan and then revisit it at regular intervals. Revise it and add to it. Let it be shaped by new relationships, new adventures, new goals. Ask God to move in you and through you as you pursue actualizing this vision of your life.

Will your life follow this plan? Not necessarily—or maybe not at all! But thinking, reflecting, imagining, and committing it to paper will begin to reveal where God might be leading you next. Creating a written plan of what you hope your life will look like allows you to move in directions that will realize your dreams.

### **Plan the Work, Work the Plan**

Once you have a plan, then it becomes a matter of how to actualize it. Just as measuring miles allows us to reach our destination, setting attainable goals provide similar milestones for measuring your progress. They are demarcation points that allow you to look ahead and yet glance back to assure yourself of continued progress. Without breaking your dreams into smaller steps, you may become tempted to focus on what appears to be impossible, unlikely, or improbable instead of relying on God.

In the Bible Nehemiah faced such a dilemma. Burdened to rebuild the ruined walls of Jerusalem, he was in a society, however, that limited his movement. Functioning basically as a slave, he was severely restricted in his ability to fulfill the vision he had for restoration. Nonetheless, he apparently thought and planned based on “what if?” As a result, he was prepared when the king said, “*What is your request?*” Nehemiah’s response demonstrated deep thought and precise planning. His method could be a lesson for any planner today. Here is a breakdown of Nehemiah’s method based on his requests and subsequent actions:

1. **Cast a clear and precise vision:** “*Send me to Judah...that I may rebuild it.*” People tend to ramble when asked about their dreams. Key authorities that have the power to fulfill your plans need understanding quick and clear. Some people call this the elevator speech. It’s a clear summation of a dream. Give prayerful thought to your destiny statement.
2. **Anticipate questions:** How long? When will you return? These are good basic questions that many are not prepared to answer. Nehemiah was! He had thought through the process and had answers ready for the proper moment. A well thought out dream gives you ammunition for an expanded conversation. Have you traveled down the corridors of your dream to explore potential challenges and how to solve them? Start thinking through the who, what, when, where, how and why’s of your dream...Nehemiah did!

3. **Set a timeline:** Nehemiah set a time for the king. The ability to put time values on a project is essential. Setting deadlines creates expectations and makes planning possible with other moving pieces. Any quote that I get from a contractor, I want a timeline. How long will it take you to complete this project and what is your deadline? Think through your life. What will be needed to accomplish the dream on your heart and how long will it take. What type of education will you need and who are the people that you need to put in your path to assist you in realizing your goals. Pray...think...plan. Remember, when I was 23 years old, I set a timeline for my life that went up until age 85!
4. **Get access:** Nehemiah knew the king's authority and influence and quickly requested the proper documentation for his journey. Being a cupbearer to the king, Nehemiah observed how the king's business worked on a day-to-day basis. He asked for materials to make the project work. The king also provided letters that gave Nehemiah protection and authority. While it's great to want to do things all by yourself, nobody is truly "self-made." God will use many people to assist you on your journey. Don't be afraid to ask for assistance along the way, especially from mentors, friends, family and authorities. You need to be ready to move in boldness and declare what you need to fulfill your vision.
5. **Limit sharing the vision:** In Jerusalem, Nehemiah rose in the night to scope out the project and was careful to only tell appropriate people of his intentions. Little did he know that the seeds of obstruction were already

being sown in the hearts of two men. They would become his harassers, but also would be used to continue to mature Nehemiah into a true leader. Remember when Joseph shared his dreams to his brothers? He ended up misunderstood, despised and living in a pit. Internet social sites have emerged as quick killers to dreams and visions. Learn to limit your communications and keep a small group of confidants. Nehemiah traveled and planned by night in order to not arouse enemies. Select carefully what you post on the Internet. You may be slowly recruiting your enemies.

6. **Know the right time to speak up:** Nehemiah was bold to speak when it came time. His prophetic words of encouragement aroused a weary people and they repeated back exactly what he had said. He was now committed. There is no turning back. You can't confess a dream and raise the hopes of people if you continue to abort your vision. Hold your moment until the right time, but when it comes speak with confidence. Consider how Peter, after denying his connection with Jesus just weeks prior, on the day of Pentecost took his stand and raised his voice! Practice your speech and envision your comrades.
7. **Never give up:** When you finally find the groove of fulfillment, don't hand it off, compromise it or get talked out of it. Nehemiah had great opposition by those that first tried with words to discourage him and later with life threats. He ended up working with a tool in one hand and a weapon in the other. When his detractors tried to get him off task he said:

“I *am* doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?” (Nehemiah 6:3, NKJV).

### **Set SMART Goals**

As we see with Nehemiah, working a plan requires setting goals. While it's often easier to set goals than to reach them, most plans won't get off the ground without setting smaller goals. In the business world, I used to teach about how to set SMART goals. Created by George T. Doran, they are goals that are: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time phased. Goals give you direction. Goals keep you focused and goals help you chart your progress. SMART goals give you clarity by defining your objective and plotting the shortest and most efficient path to it.

For example, if I have a goal of becoming a doctor, I will have to activate shorter incremental goals of schooling, residency, and so forth. I create bite-size chunks that work me toward the destination. I call these goals that benefit you in this life, *role goals*. They reflect your emerging role as a husband, wife, business owner, parent, teacher, mentor, and so on. They help you achieve what is expected from others based on your response to your life's purpose and God's calling.

Role goals enhance us horizontally. They improve our horizons. They are deployed in order to increase our external realm. They are action and movement oriented and reveal what steps need to be taken in order to fulfill the responsibilities of the role. They assess how we can best serve and measure

success in terms that we can typically see and measure. The Bible says, “The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty, but those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty” (Proverbs 21:5, NKJV).

The other kind of goals, which I call “soul goals,” focus more on eternal investments, although they may include benefits here on earth as well. Soul goals can be a place of development and maturity versus a place of measured accomplishment. These are the goals that enhance your vertical and internal quality of life, such as practicing ways to experience more joy, peace, and security. While these tend to be more abstract and intangible, they can still fulfill the SMART qualities

This is not intended to be a legalistic journey. It’s about aligning yourself with Jesus through inner focus on the development of your soul. It’s a journey of desire for more of God. It has an intrinsic understanding of our need of the grace of God; otherwise it’s just a self-help mission. Soul goals are the observed intangibles. They create habits that are more Christ like. They look to the future and ask, “Am I being conformed into the image of Jesus?” Soul goals are prophetic benchmarks as opposed to natural destinations. How am I aligning myself with what God has spoken over me? They are places where you want to be in Christ.

Soul goals also address “What will the condition of my soul be in one year?” Other possible goals could be, “What fruit of the Spirit do I want shaped in me over the next year?” I use “year” in these examples because they offer a cultural measuring rod. At the beginning of a new year or on a birthday would be optimal times to create a soul goal. What would it be like to write these down and then craft a plan to create an environment of soul change? It is a plan to move in cooperation with the Holy Spirit to

improve the temple of living stones that we are being built into. It is prophetic in nature. Be careful how you build. We need to seek gold, silver and precious stones in anything that we pursue. Wood, hay and stubble are too vulnerable to fire.

### **Mastery and Mystery**

The plans of Christians, while just as SMART as anyone else's, must remain more fluid. No matter how carefully or thoughtfully we plan, we must continually rely on God and His Spirit for our direction each day. Only God is all-knowing and all-powerful. Even when we prophecy, we do so only in part while He sees the biggest picture of all. Therefore, we plan knowing He may cause our route to change.

While this process is inherently supernatural, the following diagram illustrates how we plan and how God interprets those plans. In other words, He doesn't always take the same route that we do! See the arrow to the left. This is where you have your "aha" moment. This is where your dream is downloaded or initiated. Too often, we're trained to seek the fastest and easiest way to the concluding point at the left.

The path of the Holy Spirit is more fluid. He will take you on the ride of your life! It always reminds me of the rhythm of a washing machine: The ups and downs, backwards and forwards of motion are meant to bring cleansing. Sounds about right! Everything above the horizontal line in the chart speaks of the manifestation of fruitfulness. In that section, God speaks *through* you. It tends to be more visible and public. The curving line of the Holy Spirit has scattered

prophecies that come up in your spiritual life. They give you line of sight to your destiny. It is a faith and confidence building time. You have soaring vision, understand your call and feel that finally progress is being made. Then the roller coaster speeds downward.

Under the line is more of a hidden place. God starts to speak strongly *in you*. In times like this, you consolidate, recalibrate, take inventory on who you are and your relationship to God. It can be triggered by difficulty, crisis, or just a change in your personal or surrounding climate. Nonetheless, it's an important time. Your future depends on your response versus your reaction. Learn, be pruned, and bear greater fruit.

The bold vertical lines are goals that you set. These goals are possibly role goals and soul goals. As you see from the chart, goals may be reached at different times and places, but I still feel they are important. Goals keep you focused and continue to energize you forward toward the fulfillment of the dream.

Above the line, you acquire mastery. Below the line, you understand mystery. The Holy Spirit will shape you and mold you. When you arrive at your destination, you are changed. You will not feel the same. You are fuller, stronger, and more dependent on God.

We see this process illustrated in the way David pursued the plans of the temple with an understanding of cooperation between heaven and earth: "Then David gave his son Solomon the plans for the vestibule, its houses, its treasuries, its upper chambers, its inner chambers, and the place of the mercy seat; and the plans for all that he had by the

Spirit, of the courts of the house of the LORD” (1 Chronicles 28:11-12, NKJV). Note the “plans by the Spirit”!

You, too, are the temple of the Lord, the precious dwelling place for His Spirit. He has a plan for your life that is being created right now as you read the words on this page. So, plan as if you are a partner with the Holy Spirit—because you are!

Sample Chapter

## Your View from Here

*“Organizing is what you do before you do something, so that when you do it, it is not all mixed up.”*

A. A. Milne

1. When you consider planning your life, how do you feel? Excited? Overwhelmed? Afraid? Unsettled? Worried? Eager? Something else? Why do you think you feel this way? How would you like to feel as you look ahead and plan your life?
2. What plan are you currently following in your life? What goals have you set for this year? Just as we're likely to spend more money than we earn without a budget, we're just as likely to lose focus on where God wants to lead us without a plan. What's one goal you can set for this week to help you move forward with crafting or updating your life plan?
3. If you haven't written your eulogy yet, spend a few minutes drafting three short paragraphs that identify who you were, what you did, and what will last from the life you lived. What's the single biggest change you need to make in order to move in a direction that aligns with the eulogy you hope to have at the end of your life?

*Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit”; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.”*

James 4:13-15, NKJV