

10 Steps to Setting Life Goals

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I recently read an interesting book by Garry Kasparov titled *How Life Imitates Chess*. Kasparov won his first world-championship chess match in 1985 and he dominated the chess world for several decades. In the book he shares some of the lessons he learned. Here is one of them: **“A Grandmaster makes the best moves because they are based on what he wants the board to look like ten or twenty moves in the future.”**

That’s a great picture of what **goal-setting** is all about. It is making moves now based on what you want your life to look like ten or twenty years from now.

A few years ago I began working on my personal **life goal list**. It has certainly morphed over time. And it’s always in **rough draft** form because I keep adding new goals and tweaking old ones. But one of the common denominators amongst my 100+ life goals is that **a lot of them cannot be accomplished for a long time**. I can’t pay for my grandchildren’s education until we have grandchildren. Lord willing, I want to pastor one church for 35+ years. I want to write 25 books. I want to celebrate our 50th wedding anniversary. So I’m about three or four decades away from accomplishing some of those goals. But I’m setting goals now based on what I want my life to look like in thirty or forty years.

Let me come right out and say it: **most people spend more time planning their summer vacation than they do planning their life**. Instead of living by design we live by default. I certainly don’t want to **over-spiritualize goal-setting** because **you can set goals that are absolutely unspiritual and you’d be better off spiritually if you didn’t accomplish them!** But I also believe goals can be an expression of faith if you set them the way I’m going to prescribe.

I know there are lots of different personalities. Some people are natural goal-setters and others aren’t. And I don’t think you need to set 100 life

goals like me. But I’m convinced that one of the primary reasons most of us don’t accomplish more for the kingdom of God is because we don’t have any God-ordained goals we’re going after. And whether you’re a goal-setter or not, Hebrews 11:1 defines faith this way:

Faith is being sure of what we hope for.

You know why most of us never get what we want? **Because we don’t know what we want!** We’re more sure of **what we’re afraid of** than what we’re **hoping for!** I’m convinced that **one of the greatest shortcomings in most of our lives is that we don’t know what we want**. We’re out of touch with our God-ordained dreams and desires.

Proverbs 29:18 says, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.”

The word perish refers to fruit that is past its prime. It is no longer ripening. It is rotting. **Vision is a preservative**. Goals keep us on the offensive. **Goals keep us young**. Let me say it this way: **you start dying when you have nothing worth living for. You start living when you find something worth dying for.**

One study and then we’ll jump into **ten steps to setting life goals**.

In 1995, Alvaro Pascual-Leone did a study that validated the importance of **visualization**. One group of volunteers practiced a five-finger piano exercise and neuroimaging revealed that it stimulated their motor cortex as expected. The other group of subjects didn’t physically practice the five-finger piano exercise. Researchers told them to **mentally rehearse it**. They did the exercise in their mind’s eye. And researchers discovered that **the motor cortex was just as active during mental rehearsal as it was during physical practice**. Researchers came to this conclusion: **imagined movements trigger synaptic changes at the cortical level**. In other words, the simple act of imagining something has a powerful neurological effect. How you think and what you think about actually **remaps your neuronal**

connections! Or to put it in goal-setting terms, the goals you set literally determine the shape of your mind.

Ten Steps to Goal-Setting

#1 Start With Prayer

A few years I read a little book by Catherine Marshall titled *The Adventure of Prayer* and I'll never forget one thing she wrote. She said, "**Dreaming is praying.**" I think she's right. In my experience, **the more I pray the more dream.**

Dreaming is a form of praying and praying is a form of dreaming. And as Catherine Marshall says, "**There is no limit to what this combination of dreams and prayer can achieve.**"

Let me tell you how I came up with my list of 100+ life goals. It started six years ago when National Community Church held its first **Inward Bound Retreat**. We went up to Rocky Gap Lodge and one of our breakouts was set aside for setting goals. I remember walking out to a cliff that overlooks the Cumberland valley and I **started dreaming**. But here is the key. I did it in **the context of prayer**. And I walked away from that retreat with my first life goal list. I think I came up with about **fifty life goals**.

Over the years I've worked on that list off and on, but I got really serious about it last year. We did a **ten-day Pentecost Fast**. And I decided that I would use those ten days of prayer and fasting to add, subtract, and upgrade my list. I wanted to make sure I was setting goals in the context of prayer.

Let me say upfront that if all you do is set **selfish goals** then you'd be a **better person if you don't accomplish them**. I don't want to manufacture a bunch of goals. This is not a **self-help** message about how to make your dreams come true. Goal setting is a **stewardship issue**. It is making the most of the time, talent, and resources God has given you.

A great way to jump-start the process would be to take a **personal retreat**.

I have a little formula: **Change of pace + change of place = change of perspective**. You need to get out of your routine. Get away by yourself or with your spouse. And start dreaming about what you want your life to be like in ten or twenty or fifty years.

Start with prayer!

#2 Check Your Motives

It is difficult for me to publish my life goals because they are subject to interpretation. And if you don't know the motivation behind them then some of them can come across as selfish. Let me give you an example because you really need to wrestle with your motives. You need to make sure you're going after these goals for the **right reasons**.

One of my life goals is to **own a vacation home**. Honestly, that can sound a little extravagant. Is it really necessary? No. But here is the motivation. 1) It is one way we want to **diversify our portfolio** and **prepare for retirement**. We view it as part of our nest egg. 2) The second reason is because we have had people bless us by letting us stay at their home for vacation when we couldn't afford a vacation. And we want to **return the favor**. We want the house to be a place of ministry. **We want to use it to bless others**.

Let me talk about some of my travel goals. I want to **go lots of places** and **see lots of things**. What is the motivation? Part of it is that I love to see new places and experience new things. But I honestly believe that **adding stamps to my passport** is one way I fulfill the Genesis Commission to **fill the earth**. The Creator wanted us to experience His creation! I bet God couldn't wait until people started exploring planet earth so they could see everything he had made. Just like I can't wait for my kids to open their gifts on Christmas morning, I bet God couldn't wait for them to see a massive herd of wildebeest migrating across the African plains. He couldn't wait for them to see the aurora borealis. He couldn't wait until scuba gear was

invented so people could fully appreciate the Great Barrier Reef. Travel is one way I worship God. I worship the Creator by appreciating His creation!

One of the things you'll notice on my goal list is that I don't have **accumulation goals**. But I do have **giving goals**. I want to **create a family foundation** in part because I'm a trustee on a charitable trust and I've been inspired by the man who put the trust in his will. When he died, the trust fund was created and every year we give away tens of thousands of dollars to upstart ministries. Another life goal is to **give away \$3 million lifetime**. I'm aware of the fact that we'd have to make a lot of money to give away that much. But two of my other goals are to **write 25 books** and **sell 10 million copies**. Those are big, hairy audacious goals. But that is the only way we'd ever be able to give away that kind of money. And the primary motivation is **influence**. I want to help people reach their God-given potential. That is my modus operandi. If my motives are wrong I will lose the favor of God and God won't bless my efforts. But if my motives are right, I believe I'll accomplish these goals.

So check your motives.

Here are some of the motives that I think are healthy and holy:

- 1) You can set a goal to **honor God**.
- 2) You can set a goal to **maximize your potential**. A lot of my physical goals fall into that category. It's about taking care of the Temple.
- 3) You can set a goal to **make a difference**. Most of my influence goals are motivated by the desire to make a difference. That is why I write. That is why I preach.
- 4) You can set a goal because **it will bring you joy**. There is nothing wrong with that. The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever!

#3 Get Ideas from Others

Let me share the genesis of my goal setting journey. I think it was about ten years ago that I read a story about a guy named John Goddard.

In 1940, when John Goddard was fifteen-years-old, he sat down on a rainy afternoon with a blank piece of paper. He wrote "My Life List" at the top of the page and proceeded to write down 127 goals. Here are a few of the goals he has already achieved:

Climb Mt. Kilimanjaro

Learn Jujitsu

Explore the Amazon River

Land on and take off from an aircraft carrier

Run a mile in five minutes

Go on a church missions trip

Retrace the travels of Marco Polo and Alexander the Great

Visit the Pope

Study primitive culture in Borneo

*Learn French, Spanish, and Arabic (**See I would count that as three goals**)*

Photograph Victoria Falls in Rhodesia (He got chased by a warthog, but got the pictures)

Milk a poisonous snake (He was bitten by a diamond back during one of his photo shoots)

Skin dive to 40 feet and hold breath 2 ½ minutes underwater

Play the flute and violin

Light a match with a 22 rifle

Build a telescope

Read the Bible from cover to cover

Circumnavigate the globe (He's done it four times)

Here are a few of the elusive goals he's still going after:

Visit the moon (He set that goal in 1940 before anyone had even escaped the earth's atmosphere)

Read the entire Encyclopedia Britannica

Appear in a Tarzan movie

Study dragon lizards on Komodo Island (His boat broke down twenty miles from the island)

Visit every country of the world (He has thirty left to go)
Climb Mt. Everest

Let me make a simple observation: **if John Goddard hadn't set those goals he would have never achieved those goals.** I doubt he would have done half of what he did if he hadn't set a goal in the first place. Goals create what psychologists refer to as "**structural tension**" in your brain. The brain wants to close the gap between your current reality and your goal. The brain is a **goal-seeking organism**. And if you don't set godly goals, I think you'll pursue goals of lesser importance.

So I was inspired by John Goddard and more recently Ted Leonsis, owner of the Washington Capitals. I love both of their life goal lists. And I've gotten some ideas from them.

One of the ways to get into **goal-setting mode** is by looking at other people's goals. **Don't go and just copy them.** But they will inspire you. They will help your synapses fire in new ways.

Right now I'm taking my son, Parker, through a one-year discipleship process that involves three challenges. And one of the things we're doing is **coming up with his first list of life goals.** I gave him a couple life goal lists, including my own, as a catalyst. It's ok for us to share some of the same goals.

If you want to look at any of the lists I've mentioned, you can simply **Google them** and you'll find them.

#4 Think in Categories

It is hard to pull life goals **out of thin air.** I think some of our minds **go blank** when we think about goals. Looking at other people's goals helps. So does thinking in categories.

One of the things that has worked for me is breaking my goals down into categories. And I have five of them. You can have more or less. But different categories help you set different types of goals. They add variety to your list.

Here are my five categories:

- 1) family goals**
- 2) travel goals**
- 3) physical goals**
- 4) experience goals**
- 5) influence goals.**

Did you notice that I don't have spiritual goals? The reason is simple. It's because all of them are spiritual. Some goals seem more spiritual. Like **do a forty-day fast** or **go on a mission trip to five different continents.** But **climbing a 14er with one of my kids** is spiritual too. And so was **running a triathlon last summer.** I've found that physical discipline helps me be more disciplined spiritually. Running that triathlon wasn't just good for me physically. It was good for me spiritually. And **learning to snowboard** with Parker was one of the most joyful and worshipful experiences of this past year. Singing in church is one way of worshipping God. Riding a chair lift your son is another.

Think in categories.

#5 Be Specific

Getting in shape is not a goal. That is a wish. Goals have got to be specific. You need timelines. One of the ways I've increased the specificity of my goals is by attaching ages connected to them. One of my goals is to run a triathlon. Another goal is to run a triathlon at 60+. I also think you need to **make goals measurable.** I want to **write 25 books.** I want to take a **three-month sabbatical.** I want to run a **10K.** Each of those goals is measurable.

I was challenged and convicted a few years ago by something David Yonggi Cho said: “**God doesn’t answer vague prayers.**” Let me explain why. I think vague prayers are **cop-outs**. God doesn’t answer vague prayers because they **don’t require any faith** and **God doesn’t get the glory**. Sometimes we pray in such vague terms that there is no way God can or cannot answer our prayers. I think we’re vague because **we don’t want to hold ourselves accountable**. Or we’re **afraid**.

It was incredibly difficult attaching a number to some of my goals—specially the writing goals and giving goals. It’s tough to put those numbers out there, but if you don’t do it you won’t accomplish it.

J.C. Penney said, “Give me a stock clerk **with a goal** and I will give you a man who will make history. Give me a man **without a goal** and I will give you a stock clerk.”

I recently read *The Success Principles* by Jack Canfield. He and Mark Hansen are the co-authors of the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series that has sold more than 80 million copies worldwide. They have what they call their “**2020 vision**.” Their goal is to sell **one billion books** and **give \$500 million to charity by tithing the profits** before the year 2020.

I love a lot about that vision. It is what Jim Collins calls “a big hairy audacious goal.” A billion books! That is one-seventh of planet earth! But I love the fact that their focus is on giving rather than getting. They want to give half a billion dollars to charity! And they have a timeline. They want to accomplish their goal before the year 2020.

Goals are **dreams with deadlines!**

#6 Write Down Your Goals

Habakkuk 2:2 says, “Write down the vision and make it plain on tablets.”

I am keeping a **prayer journal** this year. That isn’t a life goal, but it was **one of my New Year’s resolutions**. I used to think that writing out a prayer sounded less spiritual. But here’s the deal: most of fail to give God the

credit when he answers our prayers because we’ve forgotten what we asked for by the time God answers!

If you want to **remember it** you need to **write it down**. Go out and **buy a journal** of some sort. Call it a **goal journal**. Or create a **goal folder** on your computer. I have a file on my computer titled “goals” with the date after it. I periodically update my list.

The first step to accomplishing a goal is simply writing it down! The shortest pencil is longer than the longest memory!

#7 Include Others

About one-third of my goals are family goals. They are things I want to experience with my family. And lots of my other goals include other people. I don’t want to just accomplish lots of goals and not bring anybody else along for the ride.

One of my life goals is to **take Lora to Catalina Island**. I’ve been to Catalina. And it was amazing. I loved it. But it wasn’t the same experiencing it by myself. So one of my goals is to go back with Lora.

Some of my physical goals involve my kids. One of them is to **run a 10K with one of my kids**. I could do it by myself, but it will be so much more meaningful to run it with one of my kids.

It is about **shared experiences**. It is about **creating memories**.

And that brings us to the next step.

#8 Celebrate Along the Way

Our family has a **New Years tradition**. We go to Tony Cheng’s in Chinatown for dinner on New Year’s Eve and we celebrate the past year. We talk about our best memories from the past year. And you know what I have

discovered. **The best memories were once goals.** I accomplished several life goals this past year.

I took Summer to a Broadway play. Parker and I learned to snowboard. Lora and I celebrated an anniversary in Italy. And I ran my first triathlon. Those are incredible memories. But they started out as goals.

One of my favorite Hebrew words is *Ebenezer*. It means ***hitherto the Lord has helped me***. When you accomplish a goal, it is an Ebenezer moment. And you need to celebrate it and commemorate it. I recently accomplished one of my life goals: hiking the Grand Canyon from rim to rim. To celebrate and commemorate it, I bought a “rim to rim” t-shirt.

Celebrate everything you can as much as you can!

#9 Think Big

Michelangelo said, “The greater danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it; but that it is too low and we reach it.”

I think your goals will vary—some big, some small. Some long-term, some short-term. Some will seem very sane. And others will seem crazy. You need some goals, and they better be conceived in prayer, that are absolutely ridiculous. You have no idea how it’s going to happen. But by faith you set the goal. And then **work like it depends on you** and **pray like it depends on God**.

One of my crazy goals is to **make a movie**. I have no experience. I have no network. And I have no idea what kind of role I’d play. Maybe it is one of my books doubling as a script. Or writing a screen play. I honestly have no idea, but it is a desire. And the backstory is this. I put my faith in Christ after watching a movie called *the Hiding Place*. A movie changed my life. So I want to play some part in the making of a movie that will change lives.

As you are going after your goals, remember something Jim Rohn says, “You want to set a goal that is big enough that in the process you become someone worth becoming.”

You need a dream that is destined to fail without divine intervention because it will force you to get on your knees and seek God. Big dreams are the best thing for us spiritually. They make us pray. They make us seek God. They force us to live the way we ought to live—in complete dependence on God.

Big dreams make you into a big person!

One of my life goals is to write one *New York Times Bestseller*. That is a goal I cannot control. I can control how many books I write. I cannot control how many people buy the book. But this is one of my influence goals. And I’m cognizant that it’ll take the favor of God.

One key to goal-setting is thinking long-term. It’ll help you dream God-sized dreams. In the words of Bill Gates, we tend to overestimate what we can accomplish in two years and underestimate what we can accomplish in ten years.

Think long-term! Think big!

#10 Keep Dreaming

A few weeks ago, my uncle sent me a manuscript to a book he wrote. He has never written a book. But he wrote this manuscript and he’s trying to get it published. My uncle is in his mid-eighties! And the reality is that publishers aren’t looking for octogenarian authors. But I was so inspired by that. He is still dreaming. He is still going after goals!

We have a core value at NCC: **it’s never too late to be who you might have been**. Let me speak to those of you who think **you’re too old** or **it’s too**

late. Listen, your goal list might be a little shorter. But it's never too late to start setting goals.

One of my heroes is a woman named Harriet Doerr. Harriet had a goal: **she wanted to go to college in a day and age when most women never even thought about a college education**, but money then marriage then kids kept her from going. But the dream never died. Not only did Harriet get her bachelor's degree from **Stanford**. She graduated when she was **sixty-seven years-old**. When most people her age were "retiring" she was going after goals. But the story doesn't end there. One of her goals was **writing a novel**. Her first book, *Stones for Ibarra*, was published when she was seventy-four years of age! Listen to what Harriet Doerr said about aging. **"One of the best things about aging is being able to watch imagination overtake memory."**

That is my dream for you. May your imagination overtake your memory as you go after the goals God gives you to chase!

My Life Goals

07.01.08

Family Goals

- 1) Celebrate 50th Wedding Anniversary
- 2) Live to Meet my Great Grandchildren
- 3) Celebrate an Anniversary in Italy
- 4) Celebrate an Anniversary in the Caribbean
- 5) Celebrate an Anniversary in Hawaii
- 6) Take each of our kids on a mission trip
- 7) Coach a team for each of our kids
- 8) Own a Vacation Home
- 9) Take Summer to a Broadway Play
- 10) Take Parker to a film festival
- 11) Climb a 14er with one of my kids
- 12) Run a 10K with one of my kids
- 13) Run a triathlon with one of my kids
- 14) Take a three-month sabbatical

- 15) Send each of our kids on an all-expenses paid honeymoon
- 16) Pay for our grandchildren's college education
- 17) Take my parents on an all-expenses paid trip
- 18) Do a family reunion with kids and grandkids on a cruise ship
- 19) Go on a canoe trip with one of my kids
- 20) Go to cowboy camp with one of my kids
- 21) Drive a race car with one of my kids
- 22) Go skydiving with one of my kids
- 23) Go parasailing as a family
- 24) Go horseback riding as a family
- 25) Go skiing in Colorado as a family
- 26) Take our family on an RV vacation
- 27) Complete a one-year discipleship program with my sons
- 28) Take each of our kids on a rite of passage pilgrimage
- 29) Research our family genealogy
- 30) Design a Family Coat of Arms
- 31) Write an autobiography
- 32) Take our grandchildren to Disney World
- 33) Go on a camping trip with our grandchildren
- 34) Take our grandchildren to a State Fair
- 35) Create a charitable family foundation
- 36) Celebrate a family reunion in Alexandria, Minnesota

Travel Goals

- 37) Climb to the Cliff Churches in Lailebela, Ethiopia
- 38) Go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem
- 39) Stay in the Ahwahnee Lodge in Yosemite
- 40) Climb Half Dome
- 41) Take Lora to Catalina Island
- 42) See a dingo in the Australian Outback
- 43) Snorkel the Great Barrier Reef
- 44) Climb the Red Center in the Australian Outback
- 45) Go on an African Safari
- 46) Climb Mount Kilimanjaro
- 47) See the Aurora Borealis
- 48) Go kayaking in Alaska
- 49) Go surfing in South Africa
- 50) Retrace one of Paul's missionary journeys
- 51) Visit the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany

- 52) Take a Boat Cruise down the Rhine River
- 53) Ride a Gondola in Venice
- 54) Run with the Bulls in Spain
- 55) See the Sunrise on Cadillac Mountain
- 56) Hike the Haleakala Trail in Hawaii
- 57) Straddle the Equator
- 58) See the Blue Grotto in Italy
- 59) Visit the Parthenon in Athens, Greece
- 60) Kiss Lora on top of the Eiffel Tower
- 61) Play a round of golf at St. Andrews in Scotland
- 62) See the Stone of Destiny at Edinburgh Castle

Experience Goals

- 63) Go to a Superbowl
- 64) Go to a Packers game at Lambeau Field
- 65) Hike from rim to rim in the Grand Canyon
- 66) Ride a Mule in the Grand Canyon
- 67) Take a helicopter ride over the Grand Canyon
- 68) Raft a Class IV River with my kids
- 69) Go Cave Tubing in South America
- 70) Go Hang Gliding
- 71) Do a personal retreat at a monastery
- 72) Spend a night in a tree house hotel
- 73) Go cliff jumping
- 74) Take a Hot Air Balloon Ride
- 75) Snowboard a Black Diamond
- 76) Learn to Surf
- 77) Do a Forty Day Fast
- 78) Do a stand-up comedy routine
- 79) Take Lora to the Oscars
- 80) Take a month-long vacation

Physical Goals

- 81) Run a Half Marathon
- 82) Run a Triathlon
- 83) Swim the Escape from Alcatraz
- 84) Bike a Century
- 85) Bench Press 250 Pounds

- 86) Run a Triathlon at 60+

Influence Goals

- 87) Write 25 Books
- 88) Sell 10 million copies
- 89) Write a New York Times Bestseller
- 90) Earn a Doctoral Degree
- 91) Teach a College Class
- 92) Be Financially Independent by 55
- 93) Live off 10% and give 90%
- 94) Give away \$3 million lifetime
- 95) Pastor one church for 35+ years
- 96) Make movie
- 97) Host a radio or TV program
- 98) Plant 100 churches
- 99) Create a Leadership Conference
- 100) Speak at a college commencement
- 100) Open a chain of coffeehouses
- 101) Take a mission trip to five different continents
- 102) Lead NCC to 10,000+ in weekly attendance
- 103) Lead NCC to give \$25,000,000 to missions
- 104) Help a million dads disciples their sons