

Key #2

HOW TO ACHIEVE YOUR GOALS

Let me begin by asking you a question: When you set out on a trip, do you just load up the car and start driving? Do you go to the airport and buy a ticket on the next available flight, no matter where it's going? Probably not – There's no telling where you might end up, and it could be someplace you really don't want to be.

Your destination is your goal. If you're feeling hungry for great barbeque, you want to go Kansas City. But if you want to enjoy the view from the top of the Empire State Building, you'd best head for The Big Apple.

Success in life, spiritual and otherwise, is every bit as much a destination as is a physical place. Now if you want to reach that destination, you need to know what that destination is, and then you need to have a plan for how to get there. That is what we mean when we talk about setting and achieving goals.

In this book, *Proverbs for Life*, we are discovering what the book of Proverbs has to say about different areas of our life and how, using those Proverbs, we can change our lives for the better. One area that most of us need help is in learning how to achieve our goals. And while the word “goals” is never used in Proverbs, the concept most definitely is, as we shall see.

WHY SET GOALS AT ALL?

I have spoken to people who are opposed to the concept of goals – especially religious people, who seem to think that it is somehow unspiritual. Yet the book of Proverbs gives us some very good reasons for doing this.

My child, don't lose sight of good planning and insight. Hang on to them, for they fill you with life and bring you honor and respect. They keep you safe on your way and keep your feet from stumbling. –
Proverbs 3:21-23

It is quite obvious that God wants us to make plans for the future, and wants us to follow those plans until our goals are reached. If you are a spiritual person, I think

it is even more important to set and achieve goals than if you were not – let me give you some reasons:

1. IT'S A MATTER OF STEWARDSHIP

We are given one lifetime, and we need to make the most of it while we can. If I am going to be a good steward of the time that God has given me on earth I am going to use that time to accomplish as much as I can. When I set a goal, and then take the steps toward reaching it, I am making wise use of my time and accomplishing much more than I could have otherwise.

I'm not talking about just in the area of work, I'm talking about using time in the best possible way – this includes time for your family, relaxation, and other needs. When we set goals that are financial, spiritual, and recreational, we will find that we will be able to enjoy more of those things than we ever have before.

Take a lesson from the ants, you lazybones. Learn from their ways and be wise! Even though they have no prince, governor, or ruler to make them work, they labor hard all summer, gathering food for the winter. – Proverbs 6:6-8

If the ants know how to be good stewards of their time, surely we can too.

2. IT'S A MATTER OF MEASUREMENT

I don't know about you, but I like to be able to measure my progress. Let's say that I set a goal to read through the New Testament portion of the Bible in the next year. I count up the chapters and discover that there are 260 of them. So I divide 260 by 52 weeks in a year and find out I only need to read five chapters per week to finish the New Testament in one year – so I could read just one chapter a day, Monday – Friday and I would accomplish my goal. But each day as I read, I'm going to check off that chapter and be able to see that I am making progress toward my ultimate goal – it is very motivating.

This same principle is true if I'm investing money, or wanting to spend quality time with my family, or working toward a college degree. Because I have a set plan, and ultimate destination, I am able to measure my progress and discover that my goal is definitely reachable.

3. IT'S A MATTER OF PROSPERITY

This is true in all areas, but it is especially true if I'm setting financial or work-related goals.

Good planning and hard work lead to prosperity, but hasty shortcuts lead to poverty. – Proverbs 21:5

If you want to get ahead in life, you are going to have to set goals, and then work hard to reach them. Notice that the Proverbs writer stipulates that it is “good planning” and “hard work” together that lead to prosperity – you can't have one without the other. If you want to have a better income than you have now, you have to plan and work for it – there is nothing wrong with that, as long as we keep it all in perspective.

WHAT KIND OF GOALS SHOULD I SET?

As I said, you can set goals for work, for investing, for your family, for education, for weight loss, and just about any area of life that you need to plan for. And while I don't think there is any limit as to what kind of goals you should set, I think that as a Christian, they should at least follow these three guidelines.

1. GOALS THAT HONOR GOD

Any goal that is unethical in any way, or keeps you from following God with integrity is a goal that you need to get rid of.

Commit your work to the LORD, and then your plans will succeed. – Proverbs 16:3

Our plans and goals should be made in the context of our commitment to God. So no matter what my goal is, it needs to pass the *God Test* before I begin implementing it into my life. I need to be able to ask and answer the following questions in the affirmative:

1. Can I honestly ask God's help in striving to reach this goal?

Is there anything I'm planning that I would not be able to pray for God's assistance with? Is there anything about it that would embarrass me before God?

2. Will I be a better person for accomplishing this goal?

In the process of reaching this goal, and in the accomplishment of it, will I be a better father or mother, a better student, a better businessman, a better son or daughter? Is there something inherently good about what I am doing that will help me develop character, integrity, honesty, and those types of things?

¹ “Our greatest fear should not be of failure, but of succeeding at something that doesn't really matter.”

2. GOALS THAT ARE S.M.A.R.T.²

“The reason most people never reach their goals is that they don't define them, or ever seriously consider them as believable or achievable. Winners can tell you where they are going, what they plan to do along the way, and who will be sharing the adventure with them.” – Denis Waitly

I think he is exactly right – and if our goals fit into the S.M.A.R.T. acronym, they are ones that we will certainly be able to accomplish with God's help.

Specific – a general goal would be, “I'm going to be financially successful” – a specific goal would be, “I'm going to learn how to effectively market an educational product I've developed by taking Course 401 at the local community college next month.”

To set a specific goal you must answer the six "W" questions:

- *Who: Who is involved?
- *What: What do I want to accomplish?
- *Where: Identify a location.
- *When: Establish a time frame.
- *Which: Identify requirements and constraints.
- *Why: Specific reasons, purpose or benefits of accomplishing the goal.

Measurable – We've talked about this already, but we need to make sure that we have goals that allow us to determine whether we are making progress. You should be able to ask questions of your goal like, “How much” “How many” and “How will I know when it is going to be accomplished?” and the answers should be

¹ New Tribes Missionary (author unknown), Eternal Perspectives Newsletter (Fall 2003), p. 15

² Adapted From Paul J. Meyer's "Attitude Is Everything" and other sources.

readily available. A good thing to remember is, “If I can’t measure it, I can’t manage it.”

Attainable – When you identify goals that are most important to you, you begin to figure out ways you can make them come true. You develop the attitudes, abilities, skills, and when necessary, the financial capacity to reach them. You begin seeing previously overlooked opportunities to bring yourself closer to the achievement of your goals. You can attain most any goal you set when you plan your steps wisely and establish a time frame that allows you to carry out those steps. Goals that may have seemed far away and out of reach eventually move closer and become attainable, not because your goals shrink, but because you grow and expand to match them. When you list your goals you begin to develop the traits and personality that allows you to possess them.

Realistic – To be realistic, a goal must represent an objective toward which you are both *willing* and *able* to work. A goal can be both high and realistic; you are the only one who can decide just how high your goal should be. But be sure that every goal represents substantial progress. A high goal is frequently easier to reach than a low one because a low goal exerts low motivational force. Some of the hardest jobs you ever accomplished actually seem easy simply because they were a labor of love. Your goal is probably realistic if you truly *believe* that it can be accomplished. But if you say that your goal is to read through the Bible every single day of your life, you are not being realistic at all. And when you set unrealistic goals, you’re just setting yourself up for a letdown.

Timely – Set a timeframe for the goal: for next week, in three months, by fifth grade – whatever your goal is, it needs to have a beginning and an ending point. Putting an end point on your goal gives you a clear target to work towards. If you don't set a time, the commitment is too vague. It tends not to happen because you feel you can start at any time. Without a time limit, there's no urgency to start taking action now.

3. GOALS I’M WILLING TO PAY THE PRICE FOR

When your goals fit into the criteria we’ve mentioned so far, you will be blessed, God will be blessed, and the people around you will be blessed. But we need to understand that there is a price to be paid to these goals. If the goal is a good one, the price paid will be well worth it. If I’m going to climb up the corporate ladder, I am going to have to work very hard, improve myself in any number of areas, and

consistently gain new skills and abilities. If my goal is further education, I am going to have to study hard, pay for my tuition, and be willing to devote a large portion of my life to school.

Those are good goals that cost a lot, but the benefits are usually worth it if we keep God as the director of all that we say and do. But then there are those all-important spiritual goals that we should be setting. The Apostle Paul set some goals for his life that were of a spiritual nature:

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. – Philippians 3:10-11 (NRSV)

Now the first part of Paul's goal is something many people could align themselves with – “to know Christ and the power of His resurrection.” But another part of his goal was “the sharing of (Jesus’) sufferings by becoming like him in his death.” Paul felt that to fully identify with Christ, he needed not only to share in His power and glory, but also share in His suffering. And that is exactly what he did throughout his ministry – share in the sufferings of Christ. That was the price he was willing to pay.

-Some of life's goals lead us to share in that same type of price, and for others, it is a cost not quite so great – but there is always a cost. If we are going to be achievers in any area of life, we must be willing to do, say, and experience whatever is necessary to reach our goals. Sometimes the experience of paying the price shapes us more than the reaching of the goal.

I hope that you've decided to set some goals today. Perhaps you've decided to learn how to be a better parent, and you're going to take the steps necessary to reach that goal. Or maybe you're going to make a decision to go back to school and finish what you've started. Or perhaps you've decided that your prayer life isn't what it should be, and you're going to begin spending at least 15 minutes in prayer every day beginning today. Whatever your goal, make sure to allow God to be the main motivation for whatever you decide to do, and you can't go wrong.