



10 STEPS TO SETTING LIFE GOALS BY MARK BATTERSON

I 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 10 or 20 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 of my more than 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 more than 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 30 or 40 years.

Let me come right out and say it: *Most people spend more time planning their summer vacations than they do planning their lives.* Instead of living by design we live by default. I certainly don’t want to over-spiritualize goal-setting because we can set goals that are absolutely unspiritual and we’d be better off spiritually if we didn’t accomplish them! But I

also believe goals can be an expression of faith if set the way I’m going to prescribe.

I know people have varied personalities. Some 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 people don’t accomplish more for the kingdom of God is that they don’t have any God-ordained goals they’re going after. And whether you’re a goal-setter or not, Hebrews 11:1 defines faith this way: “Faith is the reality of what is hoped 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! We’re out of touch with our God-ordained dreams and desires. *Proverbs 29:18 says, “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (KJVS).*

The word “perish” refers to fruit that is past its prime. It’s no longer ripening; it’s rotting. Vision is preservative. Goals keep you on the offensive. Goals keep you young. I’ll put it this way: You start dying when you have nothing worth living for. You start living when you find something worth dying for.

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 put in goal-setting terms the goals you set literally determine the shape of your mind. Here are some tips to get you started:

1). START WITH PRAYER.

A few years ago, I read a little book by Catherine Marshall titled *Adventures in Prayer*, and I’ll never forget one thing she wrote: “Dreaming is praying.” I think she’s right. In my experience, the more I pray the more I 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 more than 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 list of about 50.

Over the years, I’ve worked on that list off and on, but I got really serious about it in 2008. We did a 10-day Pentecost fast at NCC, and I decided that I would use those 10 days of prayer and fasting to add, subtract, and upgrade my list. I wanted to make sure I set goals in the context of prayer.

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



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make your dreams come true. Goal setting is a stewardship issue. It's 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 10, 20, or 50 years.

2). CHECK YOUR MOTIVES.

It's 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. First, it's one way we want to diversify our portfolio and prepare for retirement. We view it as part of our nest egg. The second reason is because my family has 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.

I also want to go lots of places and see lots of things. What is the motivation? 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 made. Just like I can't wait for my kids to open their gifts on Christmas morning, I bet God couldn't wait for His children to see a massive herd of wildebeest migrating across the African plains. He couldn't wait for people to see the aurora borealis. He couldn't wait until scuba gear was invented so the Great Barrier Reef could be fully appreciated. Travel is one way I worship God.

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 in my lifetime. I'm aware of the fact that I'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 what Jim Collins calls "big, hairy, audacious goals." But that is the only way my family would 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.

HEALTHY AND HOLY MOTIVES:

- 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 and why I preach.

- 4). You can set a goal because it will bring you joy. There's 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. Several years ago I read a story about a guy named John Goddard.

In 1940, when Goddard was 15 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's already achieved:

Learn Jujitsu.

Land on and take off from an aircraft carrier.

Study primitive culture in Borneo.

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

Light a match with a 22 rifle.

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 escaped the earth's atmosphere.)

Appear in a Tarzan movie.

Study dragon lizards on Komodo Island. (His boat broke down 20 miles from the island.)

Visit every country of the world. (He has 30 left.)

Climb Mount Everest.

Let me make a simple observation: If 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



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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.

I was inspired by 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 let them 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 of 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 either of the lists I've mentioned, you can find them online at johngoddard.info and tedstake.com.

4). THINK IN CATEGORIES.

It's 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 thing that has worked for me is breaking my goals down into categories. And I have five of them: family, travel, physical, experience, and influence. Categories help you set different types of goals. They add variety to your list.

Did you notice that I don't have spiritual goals? The reason is simple: All of them are spiritual. Some goals seem more spiritual, like doing a 40-day fast or going on a mission trip to five different continents. But climbing a 14er (a mountain that exceeds an altitude of 14,000

feet) 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 to worship God. Riding a chair lift with your son is another.

5). BE SPECIFIC.

Getting in shape is not a goal. That's a wish. Goals have to be specific. You need timelines. One of the ways I've increased the specificity of my goals is by attaching ages to them. One of my goals is to run a triathlon. Another goal is to run a triathlon at 60 plus. I also think goals should be measurable. I want to write 25 books. I want to take a three-month sabbatical. I want to run a 10k. These are all measurable.

A few years ago, I heard pastor David Yonggi Cho say that God doesn't answer vague prayers. I was convicted and challenged by that. 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—especially the writing and giving goals. It's tough to put those numbers out there, but if you don't do it you won't accomplish it.

I recently read *The Success Principles* by Jack Canfield. He and Mark Hansen co-authored the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series

that has sold more than 112 million copies worldwide. Their "2020 vision" goal is to sell one billion books and give \$500 million to charity by tithing a portion of the profits before the year 2020.

I love a lot of things about that vision. A billion books is one-seventh of planet earth! That's a lofty goal. 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.

6). WRITE DOWN YOUR GOALS.

Habakkuk 2:2 says, "Write down this vision; clearly inscribe it 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 us 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.

7). INCLUDE OTHERS.

About one-third of my goals are family goals. They're things I want to experience with my family. Lots of my other goals include other people. I don't want to accomplish goals and not bring anybody else along for the ride. One of my life goals is to take my wife, Lora, to Catalina Island. I've been to Catalina, and it was amazing. But it wasn't the same experiencing it by myself,



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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 together. It's about shared experiences and creating memories.

8). CELEBRATE ALONG THE WAY.

Our family has a New Year's 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 my daughter 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" (1 Samuel 7:12). 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.

9). THINK BIG.

Michelangelo said, "The greater danger for most of us lies not in setting our aim too high and falling short; but in setting our aim too low, and achieving our mark."

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 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 and no network. I also have no idea what kind of role I'd play. Maybe one of my books will double as a script. Or maybe I'll write a screenplay. I honestly have no idea, but it's a desire. 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 making a movie that will change others' 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 of achieving it 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 you spiritually. They make you pray. They make you seek God. They force you to live the way you ought to live—in complete dependence on God. Big dreams make you into a big person!

One of my goals is to write one *New York Times* bestseller. That is a goal I can't control. I can control how many books I write. I can't 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 10.

10). KEEP DREAMING

A while back, my uncle sent me the manuscript of a book he wrote. He's never written a book, but he wrote this manuscript and is trying to get it published. My uncle is in his mid-80s! The reality is that publishers aren't looking for octogenarian authors, but I was so inspired by that. He's still dreaming and 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 to go to college in a day and age when most women never even thought about a college education. 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 67 years old. When most people her age were retiring, she was going after her goals. But the story doesn't end there. One of her goals was to write a novel. Her first book, *Stones for Ibarra*, was published when she was 73. 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.

GO TO THE NEXT PAGE FOR THE COMPLETE LIST OF MARK'S LIFE GOALS.



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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 the Cliff Churches in Lalibela, 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 Centre 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 Super Bowl.

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 40-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 plus.

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 percent and give 90 percent.

94). Give away \$3 million in my lifetime.

95). Pastor one church for 35-plus years.

96). Make a movie.

97). Host a radio or TV program.

98). Plant 100 churches.

99). Create a leadership conference.

100). Speak at a college commencement.

101). Take a mission trip to five different continents.

102). Lead NCC to 10,000 plus in weekly attendance.

103). Lead NCC to give \$25,000,000 to missions.

104). Help a million dads disciple their sons.