

INFLUENCERS

IN HIS SERVICE

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1) PROVIDENCE *Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. – Psalms 139:16*

God's providence is the care and governance of His creation in order to fulfill His purposes for His glory. God has orchestrated your relationships, career, growth, gifting and opportunities to bring about both your transformation and your usefulness to Him.

2) PURPOSE *Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity. – 2 Timothy 1:8-9*

Salvation was not only a rescue mission, but a launch mission. We became part of His grand plan, in which we will have a part in fulfilling His purposes in His way and His time.

3) PREPARATION *If you have run with footmen and they have tired you out, then how can you compete with horses? If you fall down in a land of peace, how will you do in the thicket of the Jordan? – Jeremiah 12:5*

When God called Jeremiah to speak to Israel on His behalf, he needed more than his human abilities and strength to accomplish God's assignment. God is actively molding, teaching and equipping us for His tasks to be done His way. You may run well with men, but are you prepared to run with the "horses?"

4) PLANS *The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps. – Proverbs 16:9*

Making plans and asking for a blessing is a design for disaster. We must discern the difference between God's detours and Satan's resistance. Develop the next steps. It will require you to pray, plan, test, network, wait, and act.

5) PRODUCTION *Behold, these are the fringes of His ways; and how faint a word we hear of Him! But His mighty thunder, who can understand?" – Job 26:14*

In Job 26, Job described an amazing visual account of creation to his skeptical friends. He concluded, "What you see in the incredible creation is just the fringes of what He does." Be encouraged. God will often multiply what we do in His service, but He may only reveal to us the fringes of how He uses it.

6) PERILS *You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? – Galatians 5:7*

There are inherent dangers in His service: legalism, pride, discouragement, neglected priorities and failure. Are you aware of your personal tendencies in His service? How will you stand guard against them?

INTRODUCTION

Most of us grew up as kids dreaming of doing great things. We imagined life as Superman, firemen, inventors, astronauts, explorers or doctors. We would rescue people, cure illnesses and divert nature's disasters. We would change the world.

In time we quit dreaming. We got busy with life: raising a family, building careers, making ends meet and fulfilling responsibilities.

When Christ entered our lives, we entered a new dimension that changed both our lives and our eternity. Our residence shifted to heaven and we became both alien and ambassador on earth. We became agents through which God would accomplish much of His work. Consider the Biblical words used to describe Jesus' followers: ambassador, servant, disciple-maker and fellow-worker. They all carry responsibilities and roles in building His Kingdom.

God has use for us. In His providence, God has been shaping, building and restoring us throughout our lives to be useful in His plans. If He is so purposeful in His intentions, we can assume He is willing to reveal and guide us in His service.

Most believers want to serve God. They often ask Him what He has in store for them, who to speak to, and where to go. Some are considering a career change; others want to utilize their experience and gifts in retirement. Others sense there are more opportunities for ministry connected to their profession or their workplace. Many desire to expand the influence of their God-given platform — through their relationships, in a neighborhood or among their peers.

The purpose of these studies is to create a process by which you can pursue some answers as to how God might use you. This process begins by engaging with Him in the Scriptures on several topics. Beyond seeing answers from the Lord, you will discover a greater awareness of His presence, a deeper level of relationship with Him and a renewed conviction about His call on your life.

God's leading is not so much a scribbled message on a wall or an audible word from heaven. This is a process of discerning God's hand on your life as He has prepared you for an active role in His service. Coming to conclusions may be more like raising the dimmer switch, increasing the light, than it is flipping the light switch on. God often uses a combination of study, prayer, reflection and counsel to guide us in life and ministry.

Avoid telling yourself you have read these passages before. Ask God for new insights as you are now coming to Him with a new set of circumstances, questions or opportunities. Take the passages apart, define words and identify elements (promises, commands, warnings, invitations, issues of faith and grace...).

The six topics are logically ordered, but they are not meant to be a rigid process. You may find it helpful to move back and forth between topics, noting the connections as you study. Make this process your own. Use it as a personal journal to record your questions, insights and discoveries.

The studies begin with God's providence. He has shaped you for His service.

1) PROVIDENCE

Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. – Psalms 139:16

When we ask questions about God's intentions for our lives, it is helpful to begin with the providence of God. Consumed with our own lives, we are often unaware of what He is up to. What seems like the invisible hand of God is not so invisible when you scan the Scriptures for evidence of His activity. We typically move from event to event, circumstance to circumstance, relationship to relationship without connecting it to the bigger picture in life.

The Scriptures point to a God who has His eye upon us, orchestrating events, circumstances and relationships for our good and His glory. What He has worked in us in the past has connection to what He will work through us in the future.

God had plans for all of His creation. He not only set the universe in motion, He continues to sustain it in order to fulfill His purposes for His glory. The Psalmist says the same is true of us. When He formed each of us in our mother's womb, He had plans for every one of our days. He sustains us, shapes us, prepares us and positions us to fulfill His purposes for His glory.

WHAT IS PROVIDENCE?

Providence is more than God providing for us. It involves His constant sustaining work in the world to bring about His purposes in us and through us.

The topic of the providence of God will most likely raise a lot of questions. We want to understand the compatibility of God's sovereign actions and our real choices. You will find a broader development of this doctrine in a good systematic theology textbook. (See Chapter 16 in *Systematic Theology*, by Wayne Grudem.)

Theologians clearly conclude that in our finite minds we will not fully comprehend the compatibility of His providence and our choices. The Scriptures teach both.

"The providence of God combines with human freedom that, though the ways of God are sure, it is in no sense fatalism. Likewise, the providence of God is the opposite of chance. The divine care reaches to the least detail of life as well as to its greater aspects." (*Systematic Theology*, Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, Dallas Seminary Press, Vol. 1, Divine Decrees pp. 255-256.)

Wayne Grudem writes: "It seems better to affirm that God causes all things that happen, but that he does so in such a way that he somehow upholds our ability to make *willing, responsible choices*, choices that have *real and eternal results*, and for which we are *held accountable*. Exactly how God combines his providential control with our willing and significant choices, Scripture does not explain to us. But rather than deny one aspect or the other (simply because we cannot explain how both can be true), we should accept both in an attempt to be faithful to the reading of all Scripture." (*Systematic Theology*, p. 321, Zondervan 1994, by Wayne Grudem.)

The Scriptures overwhelmingly attribute the occurrence of all events and circumstances to God's doing. At the same time the reality of our decisions and actions are significant in bringing about results in the world. Assorted passages reveal both God's actions and our actions: 2 Samuel 10:12; Acts 2:23; 27:22-26; 1 Peter 2:8; Genesis 50:20; Isaiah 66:3-4.

Providence implies that the circumstances and course of your life have been neither accidental nor haphazard. God has not been scrambling to make things work out from what the world describes as good or bad in your life. God has had His hand in forming your life for His purposes. It plays a part in how, when and where He will use you in His service, for His glory, in the coming years.

PASSAGES ON THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD:

Make some notes: identify the phrases and words that describe His hand on everything in the universe. Summarize the main point in each passage.

- Nehemiah 9:6

- 1 Chronicles 29:10-16

- Acts 17:24-28

- Psalm 104:1-35

- Proverbs 21:1

- Daniel 4:34-36

- Job 37:6-13

- Hebrews 1:1-3

- Colossians 1:15-17

- Psalm 139:1-18

- Ephesians 1:11-12

- Isaiah 45:1-13; 64:8

- Isaiah 55:8-11

- Isaiah 14:27

- 2 Kings 19:25

- Lamentations 3:22-24; 37-38

- John 9:1-7

- James 1:2-14

- Romans 8:26-28

- Proverbs 16:1, 9

- Psalm 33:13-15

- 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

REFLECTIONS ON THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD:

1. Summarize your conclusions about God's providence. (How inclusive, extensive, timeless?)
2. Make a couple lists on another sheet of paper. First, a list of the highlights of your life—then answer how they have shaped your life, convictions, interests. Secondly, make a list of what you viewed as negative, disruptive, or difficult—describe how have they have influenced your convictions, focus and spiritual growth. How have they resulted in good for you and others? (The second list will be easier to identify.)
3. We easily attribute our current condition, abilities, position or influence to our parents, upbringing, schooling, relationships and career. After studying the passages above, how do you see God's hand in who you are today?

CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD:

The actions of an infinitely wise and sovereign God have shaped your life and set you on course to be uniquely useable in His service. Your gifts, experiences, convictions, and opportunities are related to God's providence. He is intentional and purposeful in all that He does. He has designed you to be an influencer.

A NOTE FROM ROMANS 8:28–

John MacArthur comments on Romans 8:28, a verse so commonly embraced by believers in difficulty:

God causes – It is His doing.

All things – It is comprehensive, without exclusion or limits; all, from good to evil circumstances.

To work together – This phrase translates *sunergeo*, from which is derived the English term *synergism*, the working together to create an effect greater than, or different than the sum of the elements acting separately. (i.e., table salt, made up of two poisons, sodium and chlorine)

Those who love God; those who are called – These are two terms or phrases used to denote Christians. Paul is not stating it will work out the more you love God; he is referring to a category of people. He will work all things out for our good. (The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Romans 1-8, p. 473)

Romans 8:28 is not limited to an encouragement to persist in tough times; it is a statement of God's providence in our lives. When all the puzzle pieces of our lives are aligned, we will see that God used all of them to prepare us to fulfill His purposes in our lives, direct us in His service and prepare us for heaven.

“A HEARTY BELIEF IN GOD'S PROVIDENCE IS NOT A DISCOURAGEMENT,
BUT A SPUR TO ACTION.” (Wayne Grudem)

FURTHER READING:

Systematic Theology, Chapter 16 – God's Providence, by Wayne Grudem.

Genesis 37-46 - Providence displayed throughout the life of Joseph.

God Built, by Steve Farrar.

Trusting God, by Jerry Bridges.

2) PURPOSE

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity. –2 Timothy 1:8-9

Rick Warren's book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, hit the bookstores across America in 2002. Despite some mixed reviews from the Christian community, it was on the *New York Times* Best Seller list for advice books for one of the longest periods in history. Over 30 million copies were sold in five years.

Rick Warren revealed the nagging questions in the minds of the masses. Why am I here? Does my life really matter? Can I make a difference in the world?

Long before Rick Warren, Mark Twain weighed in on purpose: "The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why." Most of us could find another day or two to add to Twain's list of "most important," but knowing why we're still earthbound ranks pretty high. It affects everything from our perspectives to our priorities.

A friend who endured a fruitless year in ministry once remarked, "I drive home at night not really sure *how* I am doing. I have to admit I often don't know *what* I am doing. But, I do know why I am doing and it keeps me going." Knowing why we do something is empowering.

In His sovereignty, God did whatever He pleased. He created majestic snow-capped mountains, strange looking fish and intricate strands of DNA. He spoke millions of stars into existence. He created brain cells that have the ability to recall smells, sounds and sights from

50 years ago. He created our bodies with a circulatory system to nourish countless miniscule cells. Each a tiny engine capable of processing the nutrients, they go about their designated purpose in our bodies.

Whether God is displaying His omnipotence or His majesty, there is a purpose behind everything He does in both creation and providence. If the millions of the smallest parts of our bodies were designed with specific purpose, certainly He designed our lives with purpose in the universe. Simply having been made in His image, we have purpose. The issue in this section is this—how do God's purposes unfold in and through me? How do His overall purposes translate into a specific course of action for me?

In a survey of the passages that deal with purpose, two general aspects emerge. One, God calls us His people, His possession. He is in the process of transforming His possession (sanctification) so that we might be increasingly Christ-like. We are the objects of His purposes. Secondly, He fulfills His purposes through us. We are the agents of His purposes. We are an influence in the world because of His transformation and His ministry assignments.

Consider these two aspects of God's purposes. Spend some extended time in these passages, noting words that state or imply His purposes. Note the key words used for showing purpose: so that, in order that, that.

WE ARE THE OBJECTS OF HIS PURPOSE:

2 Timothy 1:8-9

Ephesians 1:7-14

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

Psalm 57:1-2

1 Thessalonians 4:1-7

Romans 12:1-2

WE ARE THE AGENTS OF HIS PURPOSE:

- Proverbs 16:4

- 1 Peter 2:9-10

- Matthew 5:13-16

- Romans 9:14-24

- 1 Corinthians 3:4-9

- 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

- Acts 20:24-28

- 2 Timothy 2:1-7

- 2 Timothy 4:1-8

- Matthew 28:18-20

REFLECTIONS ON GOD'S PURPOSE:

1. As you consider these verses on God's purposes, what is your response?
2. Some people will interpret these verses on purpose as a burden, others experience them as opportunity and empowerment. What makes the difference in how we see it?
3. As you studied these passages, you may have been reminded of ways that God has equipped you to be an influence in the world. What is the "why" of your life?
4. If I hope for a particular life summary on my tombstone, what do I need to begin to pursue now?

CONCLUSIONS ABOUT GOD'S PURPOSE:

Ephesians 2:10 ties God's providence and God's purpose together. *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

Workmanship is *poiema* in the Greek, from which we get the English word *poem*. You are crafted by the Master Craftsman for good works. You are God's work of art. Race, gender, skills, and sufferings are all ways that God has crafted you for things that only you can do. (Tim Keller, message at Cru Staff Conference.)

You are His workmanship in order that (purpose) you might walk in the good works He has planned in ages past. You may not have the full picture of how God will use you for His purposes, but His Spirit has most likely brought to mind opportunities unique to your position, influence and equipping.

Most men are not satisfied with the permanent output of their lives. Nothing can wholly satisfy the life of Christ within his followers except the adoption of Christ's purpose toward the world he came to redeem. Fame, pleasure and riches are but husks and ashes in contrast with the boundless and abiding joy of working with God for the fulfillment of his eternal plans. The men who are putting everything into Christ's undertaking are getting out of life its sweetest and most priceless rewards.

(John Piper quoting J. Campbell White (1909), p. 188, *Desiring God*.)

WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT GOD HAS CALLED YOU TO DO,
YOU WILL TRY TO DO EVERYTHING. (ALISTAIR BEGG)

FURTHER READING:

Twelve Ordinary Men, by John MacArthur.

The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life, by Os Guinness.

Halftime, by Bob Buford

3) PREPARATION

[God speaks to Jeremiah] If you have run with footmen and they have tired you out, then how can you compete with horses? If you fall down in a land of peace, how will you do in the thicket of the Jordan?
–Jeremiah 12:5

Facing discouragement, persecution and rejection, Jeremiah was impatiently complaining to God. God was the one in charge; so why was He so slow to intervene?

God responded to Jeremiah's complaints (12:5) with a bit of a rebuke, "If you got tired against the lesser resistance (footmen), how will you do in a larger crisis and against more powerful enemies (horses)? If you stumble on well-paved roads, how will you do in the thicket of the Jordan?" Thick woods lined the Jordan and were known to be the haunt of lions.

God rarely works through us without working in us. No matter how long we have walked with Christ, new ventures in His service prompt new levels of God's equipping and shaping us for service. His focus is on both the messenger and the message. Whether He changes us as a preparation to be an influencer, or changes us in the course of serving, He is often up to more than we recognize. Years later we look back and see clearly how we have changed and grown through it all.

Examine the lives of the Biblical characters that God called into His service. Their commitment to Him was tested, their perseverance stretched and their strength consumed. God's preparation varied with the man. He sent Moses off to tend sheep for 40 years—a good primer for 40 years in the wilderness with a cantankerous people. As for Jonah, he just needed a Mediterranean cruise and a few days with the fish to ponder his assignment.

Max Lucado uses the image of a blacksmith to describe God's work in us: *To melt down the old and recast it as new is a disrupting process. Yet the metal remains on the anvil, allowing the toolmaker to remove the scars, repair the cracks, refill the voids and purge the impurities.*

And with time, a change occurs: What was dull becomes sharpened, what was crooked becomes straight, what was weak becomes strong, and what was useless becomes valuable...Now the smith enters the final stage of his task. He plunges the metal into a nearby bucket of water...the pliable, soft mineral becomes an unbending useful tool. (On The Anvil, pp. 42-43.)

Why is preparation so severe? The stakes are higher for those in the arena of influence on the Lord's behalf. If we choose to represent Him, He desires we represent Him accurately. Following His lead does more than add new time commitments to our schedules; it adds a weight. Life in His service requires more faith, patience, wisdom, commitment, conflict-resolution and problem-solving. Our resolve is tested.

Oswald Chambers describes the change once we know His call: *It is easier to serve God without a vision, easier to work for God without a call, because then you are not bothered by what God requires; common sense is your guide, veneered over with Christian sentiment. You will be more prosperous and successful, more leisure-hearted, if you never realize the call of God. But if once you receive a commission from Jesus Christ, the memory of what God wants will always come like a goad; you will no longer be able to work for Him on the common-sense basis...Never consider whether you are of use; but ever consider that you are not your own but His. (My Utmost For His Highest, March 4.)*

Each of the following passages is meant to be an individual study. It would be easy to scan the text, pick off the obvious nuggets of truth and move on. Instead, read the text several times during the course of a week. Return to the passage for several consecutive days, re-reading the account to grasp what God is doing. Take it apart and put it together enough times that you are convinced how it fits into your life.

GOD'S PREPARATION AS SEEN IN JUDGES 6

It would be easy to view Judges 6 as a few incidental accounts that introduce the reader to Gideon. Instead, they are better understood as preparation for being used of God. Most people are more familiar with the story of Gideon's defeat of the Midianites and Amalekites in the following chapter. His army of 32,000 men drew up for battle against 135,000, yet God methodically whittled Gideon's force down to 300 men. The sights and sounds of 300 men rushing into battle in the middle of the night sent their enemies on the run. Call it a miraculous, ingenious victory. The victory really begins in Judges 6.

Note three things in Judges 6 that God dealt with in Gideon's life:

- Fear (6:1-24)
- Failure/sin (6:25-32)
- Faith (6:33-40)

Review the historical background of Gideon. If you don't have an Old Testament commentary, use the resources of Biblehub.com. Put yourself in Gideon's shoes for a few periods of study. Some questions to help probe the text:

- Why did God address the issues of fear, failure and faith of Gideon before the battle?

- What stands out about Gideon and his responses?

- What is the negative result when fear, failure and faith are unresolved issues in our lives?

- What positive effect do courage, godliness and faith have on those who desire to be influencers?

- What ministry principles would you draw from Judges 6?

REFLECTIONS ON GOD'S PREPARATION:

- When you look at the things that God did in the course of using His people in His service, what resonates with you?

- How do the elements of these studies affect your expectations of serving Christ?

- What convicts you in these passages?

- What specifics do you recognize as having been God's hand of preparation in your life for new or expanded ministry?

CONCLUSIONS ABOUT GOD'S PREPARATION:

When God prepares us for His service, sometimes it is a process of restoration, sometimes it is teaching, sometimes it is purifying and sometimes it is equipping. In His providence He knows what we need and what will prevent us from stumbling. He desires messengers who will clearly represent Him in the process.

These principles are encouraging. God is fully vested in preparing us for the opportunities of influence that He leads us to undertake.

YOU CAN'T PUT MORE IN THE SHOWROOM THAN YOU'VE GOT IN THE WAREHOUSE.
(Ron Dunn)

FURTHER STUDIES:

2 Peter 1:1-11 – character/effectiveness.
Ephesians 4:11-16 ; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 – spiritual gifts.
John 12:24-26 – servanthood.
John 15 – pruning for fruitfulness.

FURTHER READING:

Finishing Strong, by Steve Farrar.
In a Pit With a Lion on a Snowy Day, by Mark Batterson.

4) PLANS

The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps. – Proverbs 16:9

The Scriptures speak of a combination of our planning and His directing. The phrases in Proverbs 16:1-3, 9 show our action, yet God's intervention: *The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD. All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, but the LORD weighs the motives. Commit your works to the LORD, and your plans will be established...The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps.*

In Psalm 37:3-5, David sorts out this two-sided planning. He describes man's responsibility as trusting God, cultivating faithfulness and delighting in God. Verse 4 reads: *Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.* The word "delight" in the NASB means to be pliable or moldable. A requirement of knowing God's leading is being moldable, changeable and responsive.

A friend once declared his frustration over the slowness of others to develop ministry plans, "Just make your plans and ask God to bless them." Too often that is a better formula for failure than success.

The advice that golf instructors drill into their students applies to God-directed planning: Hold your golf club loosely. If you grip the club too loosely, it will fly from your hands. If you grip the club too tightly, your swing will be off-line and you will miss your target. The same principle applies to planning. If we fail to hold the course that God has convicted us to take, we will lose the opportunities. If we bind God to do things in our way and our time, we will miss accomplishing what He desires.

Over the years of a person's life, God often establishes a pattern in the way that He leads. We learn to recognize the difference between fear and caution, the difference between being patient and being stopped and the

difference between Satan's meddling and God's detours.

God's assignments are often linked to a combination of our gifts, our experiences and His providence. They connect to fulfill His purposes. A friend in Chicago spent his career in business, holding executive positions in several large companies. He recently completed a five-year stint as an administrator in a large church. Throughout his life he spent time with his pastors in many cities, and intentionally encouraged them. He not only was a preacher's son and understood a pastor's life, he had the gift of encouragement. It is no surprise that his present work "in retirement" is building a ministry of coaching and encouraging pastors across the country.

Many find it helpful to start a file or label a folder in their desk that is dedicated to this planning process. It provides one place to jot down an idea, a contact, or a new insight. The file provides a record of key Scriptures, convictions, conclusions and wise counsel.

The following is a suggested process of moving from thinking and praying to engaging and doing. Planning is divided into four elements:

INVESTIGATE: List ideas, opportunities, resources, gifts, ministries and roles that catch your attention.

EVALUATE: Assess how these things fit your career, heart, family and convictions.

FORMULATE: Begin to put some structure to your thoughts. Narrow your objectives and propose some steps.

ACTIVATE: Put some of your plans into action. Establish a foothold, step out in faith.

INVESTIGATE

- What ministry opportunities came to mind as you worked through God's providence and purpose?

- What kind of impact do you lay awake at night thinking about? What are you motivated to do to bring about some change, relief, resolution, justice or development in this area of need?

- When spending time in the Word and prayer, what do you sense God is nudging you to do?

- What do you recognize as your two or three primary spiritual gifts? (I Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4)

- What areas of ministry leadership are you most drawn to? Where are you most experienced and productive?

- What resources do you have that can make an impact on the Great Commission? Expertise, experience, finances, time?

- What ministry or organization has a gap that you can fill that could make them more effective, or enable them to focus on what they do best?

- What roles are the best fit for you? Leading, building, creating, supporting, implementing?

EVALUATE

- As you look at opportunities, what are the recurring themes that get your attention? What opportunities or convictions are difficult to drop or walk away from?

- What counsel have you received from mature believers? (Positive, negative, reasons?)

- What happens when you persistently pray about your opportunities? (Peace, turmoil, ideas...?)

- What is God already doing in the area of influence and opportunity that has your attention?

- If you pursue this conviction, how will it affect your wife, children, work? How do others perceive the sacrifices needed to serve Christ?

- What similar ministries can you observe or utilize?

- What do you need to develop in order to proceed? (Training, experience, resources, connections, partners, platform, plans?)

- What are the reasons for your hesitations? (Unknowns, inadequacy, details, advice, questionable outcomes?)

- What will it require of you to resolve existing barriers or hurdles?

- What will you need to adjust in your present involvements or activities in order to pursue this opportunity?

FORMULATE

- Define your objective.
Describe your objective In 3-4 sentences.

State your objective in 4-5 words.

What are the boundaries or limits that you have for this opportunity?

- Establish a progression.
What are your first steps?

In what stages can this be developed?

What do you see as potential for expansion?

- Develop your network.
Partnerships with other ministries.

Advisors – legal, ministry leaders, administrator.

Ministry team, board, accountability partners.

- Secure needed resources.
Training, education.

Funding sources.

ACTIVATE

Put your plans into action. Part of responding to God's leading and conviction is a willingness to take some steps even if the grand plan is not in focus. God confirms in Psalm 32:8 – *I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you.*

Watch for the doors that God opens. Ask Jesus for people and opportunities in the arena in which you believe that He is leading you. Expect to see God surprise you.

There are two things that often happen in ministry when you decide to activate your plans.

1. **A PERIOD OF QUESTIONING.** Doubts begin to overrun your anticipation of seeing God's hand in your work. You wonder if you really heard from God, or chased some crazy dreams or relented to someone's persistent requests. Most of the negative thoughts and comments of the past will make their grand entrance into your mind. The details that you carefully planned now seem so insurmountable. You question if you have the faith to follow through with no promise of results.

Don't panic. No matter how clearly you believe that you heard from God, a period of questioning is pretty normal in ministry ventures. This is the time that God will reveal to you where your faith lies. You will be pushed back into the Scriptures and prayer to review your commitment to trust and obey. This is a period of time that significant passages will reinforce God's leading.

2. **A PERIOD OF WAITING.** When you are finally ready to activate something that seems to have God's fingerprints all over it, He says, "Wait a minute." You are not sure why He wants you to wait, or how long you will wait. Everything grinds to a halt – no leads, no movement, no response. While it can stretch our patience, waiting is a vital aspect of God's leading.

Waiting is a productive phase for an influencer. There is something more important than my assignment that God desires to do. Waiting gives God space to confirm and prepare us. He uses it to see if we are prone to be impulsive and self-willed. Men who are influencers tend to be driven once the plans are set. God needs men who respond to "move," "turn," "stop" and "wait."

In the book *God Built*, Steve Farrar describes a contrast between Saul and David. In 1 Samuel 15 Saul would not wait and paid a price for it. When David could have killed Saul and gained the throne (1 Samuel 24), he instead waited for God to promote him. *When God looks for a man after His own heart, the test of a man's heart is his willingness to wait.* (p.140)

When you find yourself in a holding pattern, consider doing a word study on "wait" in the Book of Psalms. Use a concordance to find the verses containing the word "wait." You will find that the word is active, not passive in its use. Begin with Psalm 27:13-14; 31:15; 25:1-5; 130:5-6. As you compile your conclusions, God will reveal His purposes for a period of waiting.

YOU SHOULD MAKE ALL YOUR SIGNIFICANT DECISIONS IN A CEMETERY.
(George McGovern, Chaplain/NY Yankees, NY Giants)

FURTHER READING:

Applied Imagination, by Alex F. Osborn.

Life On Mission, by Dustin Willis and Aaron Coe.

The Externally Focused Church, by Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson.

5) PRODUCTION

Behold, these are the fringes of His ways; and how faint a word we hear of Him! But His mighty thunder, who can understand?" - Job 26:14

Job's friends had their personal explanations for his litany of hardships. In Job 26, Job responded to his friend Bildad by describing God's majestic act of creation. Job's closing words were, "Behold, these are the fringes of His ways." Job made a point that the incredible visible elements of creation are just the edges, or the fringes of what God does.

We cannot begin to see or know all that Jesus does with our service, but His work is characterized by words like *more*, *greater*, *exceeding* and *beyond*. He MULTIPLIED five loaves and two fish into a meal for 5,000 (Luke 6). He prunes us so we will bear MORE fruit (John 15). Jesus told His followers that they would do GREATER works than they had seen Him perform.

Serving Christ will inevitably result in dry times when we encounter disappointing results. Faithful stewardship of God's resources is no guarantee of visible results. As with leaders chronicled in the Scriptures, most people experience periods of discouragement over a lack of response in ministry situations. It is easy to begin to question the significance of our sacrificial service when there is seemingly little to show for it.

2 Corinthians 4 provides indispensable perspectives that apply to serving Christ. Paul begins the chapter with: *we do not lose heart*. He repeats his point again in verse 16. To lose heart means to lose courage. Paul persuades us to not lose heart with the following personal insights:

- Verse 7 - we are common earthly vessels, with the treasure of the Gospel empowered by the God of the universe.
- Verse 8 - we are afflicted, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing.
- Verse 16 - our outer man is decaying, but the inner man is being renewed daily.
- Verse 18 - the things which are seen are temporal, but the unseen is eternal.
- Verse 17 - affliction is producing an incomparable eternal weight of glory.

Walking by faith in the arena of influence is not so much believing God for great things as it is trusting God to produce what He desires from our service. We will see just the fringes of His work!

THEREFORE, MY BELOVED BROTHERS,
BE STEADFAST, IMMOVABLE, ALWAYS ABOUNDING IN THE WORK OF THE LORD,
KNOWING THAT IN THE LORD YOUR LABOR IS NOT IN VAIN.
- 1 Corinthians 15:58

THE POTENTIAL IMPACT YOUR MINISTRY

In Job 24:16, Job reminds us that God is up to far more than we will ever see. As believers we are often short-sighted concerning the fruitfulness of our ministry opportunities. It is His business what He does with our service, but consider the possibilities in these two scenarios:

Scenario 1. *John spends time with a couple of middle school kids in his church youth group. They catch John's heart to walk with God. They learn to trust God with their lives in their high school years. One of them leads his college roommate to Christ. This new convert gets involved in a campus ministry and joins a summer ministry internship in an Eastern European country. He leads a college student there to Christ who later becomes a pastor. (Did John even dream of an impact in Europe?)*

Scenario 2. *It is no secret around your office that you follow Christ. Driving together to a seminar, a business associate asks you about your marriage; he confides in you that he is on the brink of divorce. From your encouragement, he goes home and tells his wife that he wants to work to restore their marriage. One day over coffee, you introduce him to Christ. God changes their marriage and they make Christ the center of their home. Their oldest daughter begins to attend your church and gives her life to Christ. She meets a Christian guy in college. They get married after graduation and return to his hometown in Ohio where he coaches high school football. He starts a pregame chapel service and six of his players come to Christ. (The story continues...)*

Are you surprised or skeptical of the way these stories could unfold? It is very likely that there is a similar string of events (just different circumstances and characters) that led to you knowing and following Christ. Name the people who influenced your life. How did they influence you?

Too often we assume that significant ministry is a result of big events and big audiences. That is an addition mentality. We fail to see the impact of a single person who is committed to reproducing his life in the lives of others. Compare the two columns below on addition and multiplication.

ADDITION	MULTIPLICATION
Receive \$20,000 a day for 30 days. In 30 days you would accumulate a total of \$600,000.	Receive one penny the first day, and double it on each consecutive day for 29 days. In 30 days you would accumulate a total of \$10,737,415.23.
Make a stack of sheets of construction paper, each being .016 inches thick. Add to the stack until you have 40 sheets—it will measure .64 <u>inches</u> high.	If you could double one sheet of construction paper (.016 inches thick) 40 times, the stack of paper would be 277,606 <u>miles</u> high, passing the moon at 250,000 miles. <small>J. Scott Armstrong, <i>Long-Range Forecasting: From Crystal Ball to Computer</i>, 1985, p.102, cited in <i>Margin</i>, Richard A. Swenson, 1992, p.45.</small>
2017 world population is 7.5 billion people. Preach to 1,000 people a day. It would take <u>20,548 years</u> to reach 7.5 billion.	2017 world population is 7.5 billion people. Disciple 1 person each year who then discipled another person each year, therefore doubling the number of disciplers every year. It would take <u>35 years</u> to reach 8.5 billion.

Make some observations about addition and multiplication:

What causes the multiplication model for discipleship to break down?

Paul challenges Timothy to a ministry that will produce an impact beyond his own life. In 2 Timothy 2:1-2, list the consecutive generations of people. What is the distinguishing aspect of their lives?

This is the pattern of discipleship. Discipleship is the process of establishing new or young believers in their faith and equipping them to have the same ministry in the lives of others. When each person is faithful to continue building into other faithful people, the result is multiplication, not addition. What seems so small in the beginning eventually becomes exponential. The impact is explosive.

The church has adopted the pattern of Sunday's NFL games, not of the Book of Acts. (75,000 fans in the bleachers, and 22 exhausted men on the field). Discipleship focuses on filling the field, not the bleachers. Discipleship aims for multiplication, not addition.

Discipleship is committed to small beginnings, either one-on-one or a small group of 3-4 people. Discipleship is a commitment to reproduce yourself in the life of another, who will reproduce himself in the life of another, who will...

Jesus ministered to the masses, but He poured His life into 12 ordinary men. Eleven of them carried on His ministry in the world after His ascension into heaven. Paul ministered to crowds from Israel to Asia Minor to Greece and Italy, but he poured his life into a few like Silas, Timothy, John Mark and Titus who multiplied his ministry in the world. These men upset the world (Acts 17:6).

Getting started? Invite a new or young believer to join you in processing a foundational Bible study on growing in Christ. Each time you meet, discuss what you have discovered. Find another discipler to compare notes with as you learn to disciple others. There are excellent materials available to use:

Practical Christian Living - CRU

2:7 Series - The Navigators

The Discovery Series - www.ccbt.org

Set Your Foundation - www.catapultministries.org (free .pdf download)

**IF WE WILL INVEST IN THE LIVES OF A FEW AT A TIME...
WE WILL MAKE RIPPLES THAT WILL EXTEND BEYOND OUR LINE OF SIGHT.**

- Karl Johnson, C. S. Lewis Institute Fellow

FURTHER READING:

Master Plan of Evangelism, by Robert Coleman.

Master Plan of Discipleship, by Robert Coleman.

Miraculous Movements, by Jerry Trousdale.

6) PERILS

You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? – Galatians 5:7

The believers in Galatia were initially doing well in their new faith. Other teachers came with distortions of the Gospel and drew them off course. Some of the Galatian believers shifted from grace to works when false teachers pushed another Gospel.

In Galatians 5:7, the word “hindered” is a word that was used of a foot race when one runner cut into the path of another runner. It disrupted the runner, broke his stride and put the outcome of the race in question.

In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul warns his readers that there are things we desire in life that can lead to destruction. He concludes his examples with: *Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.* (v. 12)

Paul's words apply to every believer, but the stakes are higher when we are in positions of responsibility for people and organizations. If an opportunity has the potential to be an influence in the Kingdom, Satan will be devising his schemes to tamper with our weaknesses and tendencies. No matter how long we have been engaged in some form of ministry, we are susceptible to being hindered in our service to Christ.

Timothy was an emerging leader, the pastor of the church in Ephesus. In Paul's two letters to Timothy, he conveyed a wealth of ministry instruction from leadership qualifications to doctrinal standards to ministry methods. In his opening words, Paul strikes a personal tone with Timothy:

This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. (1 Timothy 1:18-19.)

As Paul closes the letter, he returns to the shipwreck imagery with the phrase “harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction” (6:9). The word “plunge” was a word commonly used of a capsizing ship. It is these verses in 1 Timothy 6 that seem most urgent and personal between Paul and his disciple.

The primary theme that triggers the destructive progression in 1 Timothy 6:6-9 is “what we want.” Paul speaks to the specific desire of wanting to be rich, but the progression he describes has a far broader application. Unchecked wants will be destructive in His service. Too many Christian leaders have been drawn into the same downward spiral as they pursued their “wants” of reputation, position, recognition or security.

Paul challenges Timothy to take four actions in 1 Timothy 6:6-21 to guard against shipwreck:

1. **FLEE** (v11) Flee the “wants” that make us vulnerable to the progression of temptation, snares and destruction.
2. **PURSUE** (v11) Pursue godly traits that mark both personal life and ministry. If we are coasting, we have either lost momentum or we are going downhill.
3. **FIGHT** (v12) The Christian life is lived in the context of resistance. Passivity invites a knock-out.
4. **KEEP** (v14) Hold to the truths of the whole revealed Word of God without compromise.

The coastline of ministry is littered with shipwrecks. Many could have been avoided if the four actions described by Paul had been taken seriously. Draw some applications for your life from these actions listed in 1 Timothy 6.

DISCUSS 1 TIMOTHY 6:6-16

- What are you aware of in your own life that you need to flee?
- How do you pursue the things listed in verse 11?
- How does engaging in “the fight” compare to passivity in the Christian life?
- What is the difference between knowing the Word and keeping the Word?

THE LURE OF PRIDE, POWER AND SUCCESS

The issues of pride, power and success are no strangers to the arena of ministry. Even the most humble of servants will struggle with these things, especially when God chooses to make His supernatural work evident through us. Whether it involves large audiences, changed lives or impressive responses, positions of influence are fertile ground for personal gain to flourish.

Charles Colson, considered one of the most brilliant men in President Nixon’s presidency, commented on the effects of power: *Worldly power is not inherently evil, but it is inherently corrupting.* (*Who Speaks for God*, p. 38.) The driving forces of power, pride and success are most often chronicled in the world of sports, politics and business. We must recognize them in ministry where the consequences of these issues will eventually remove the ministry from the umbrella of God’s blessings.

2 Chronicles 26 records the reign of Uzziah, a king at the age of sixteen. Comments about his reign were impressive: he did right in the sight of the Lord; he continued to seek God; God prospered him; he built cities and armies; he expanded agriculture; his fame extended to Egypt. The turning point came in 26:16 – *But when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly, and he was unfaithful to the Lord.*

There is something in the heart of a man that craves greatness. When it is sought according to worldly standards, it changes most men. Being engaged in service to Christ does not make us immune to the lure of greatness. We are still vulnerable to using power and success in ministry to validate our sense of significance. Pride blossoms too easily. Jesus’ standard of greatness stands in contrast to worldly greatness: the humility of a child (Matthew 18:4); servanthood (Mark 10:43); obeying and teaching His commands (Matthew 5:19).

THE EROSION OF GOD-GIVEN PRIORITIES

Influence in His service can be impactful, exciting and consuming. Because of its nature, the expansion of ministry can easily erode our priorities, especially in regard to our families. Healthy ministry guards priorities by setting boundaries.

There are two sides to this issue:

- THE PURSUIT OF MINISTRY.** Some leaders are consumed by achieving and expanding ministry in order to make the most of their opportunities. Each added project, meeting or trip threatens to replace the time and attention that our priorities require of us. We easily justify moving our priorities to the edges of our lives because we are engaged in God’s work. Men must awaken to the fact that we will sacrifice our priorities because we are chasing something other than God’s call. If we are going to expand ministry, we must consider replacing something other than our God-given priorities, especially our walk with God and engagement with family.

- THE DEMANDS OF MINISTRY.** Some people are overwhelmed by unending needs in the arena in which they are called to minister. We may justify neglecting our families by feeling there is no one else but us to go. Elijah went from courageously confronting an evil king to running for his life (1 Kings 17-19). He felt like he was the only one standing for the Lord, to which God rebuked, "Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal." (NKJV) In a world with immeasurable needs, we will do well to consider the words of a wise mentor: *the need is not the call.*

Can you say "no" to:

- Opportunities that will expand the ministry but shrink the attention my wife and children need?
- Tremendous needs that no one else seems available or willing to meet?
- Requests that you fear will put friendships, reputation or approval rating at risk?

THE HOPE OF APPLAUSE

There are few things that drive men as much as the desire for respect. We are often not even aware how readily we look for it through a paycheck, a compliment, a promotion, recognition or performance. Call it the hope of applause. We believe it is a weakness to ask for respect, but most men crave it.

The Scriptures clearly declare our value. Our significance was established at creation and demonstrated at the cross. We were made in the image of God and redeemed by the death of His Son.

But Adam's rebellion made a mess of things. The ground was cursed, so we would never be as productive as God intended. Sin left us damaged. As we moved through life we registered failures, criticism and rejection. We measured those negatives against what God had declared and doubt ruled the day. So we search for ways to reaffirm our significance. We live with the hope of applause from someone or something.

God calls us to ministry. People respond, God's hand is evident, lives are changed, sacrifices are applauded and gifts are exalted...and it makes us feel respected and valued. We are grateful that God uses us in a way that glorifies Christ. Are we aware of the subtle temptation to use the ministry, or shape the ministry, in order to gain respect and affirm our value? When does the ministry become our hope of applause?

The hope of applause is so subtle and so captivating that we will chase the lure of public success. We will sacrifice the needs of our families to either gain or preserve the rewards of applause. Applause is so coveted, we will be tempted to neglect the real call of God and shape ministry to keep the echoes of applause alive. The hope of applause may become an idol, easily demanding our attention, our sacrifices and our devotion.

The remedy: embrace the truths of Psalm 139 and the Gospel of grace. Anticipate the words of Jesus – "Well done, good and faithful servant." 1 Corinthians 3:4-15 provides a helpful study within the context of our hope of applause.

**ALL THE WAYS OF A MAN ARE CLEAN IN HIS OWN SIGHT,
BUT THE LORD WEIGHS THE MOTIVES.**

-Proverbs 16:2

FURTHER READING:

Ordering Your Private World, by Gordon MacDonald.

Finishing Strong, by Steve Farrar.

Who Speaks for God, by Charles Colson,

CONCLUSION

PROVIDENCE

In His providence God created and shaped us for His service.
He is intent on transforming us into Christ-likeness for usefulness in His Kingdom.

PURPOSE

In salvation we became part of His grand plan.
We were called to serve at His discretion for the fulfillment of His eternal purposes.

PREPARATION

God prepares us for service to effectively accomplish His purposes.
He equips us with spiritual gifts, resources, faith, courage and commitment.

PLANS

Action emerges through Divine guidance and human planning.
It is a process that involves time with God, counsel, networking and waiting.

PRODUCTION

He takes our service for Christ and multiplies it to extend His Kingdom for His glory.

PERILS

We are fallen people.
Service calls for a cautious eye towards that which will cause us to stumble.

We enjoy the privilege of being influencers in His service.
Simply amazing.

NOW TO HIM WHO IS ABLE TO DO EXCEEDING ABUNDANTLY BEYOND
ALL THAT WE ASK OR THINK,
ACCORDING TO THE POWER THAT WORKS WITHIN US,
TO HIM BE THE GLORY IN THE CHURCH
AND IN CHRIST JESUS TO ALL GENERATIONS FOREVER AND EVER. AMEN.
— Ephesians 3:20-21

- PERSONAL NOTES -